

Introduction

ELMER COLYER AND ALISTER MCGRATH EXTOL THOMAS FORSYTH Torrance as one of the premier theologians of the twentieth century, particularly in the light of his voluminous works and contributions on the relationship between science and theology, ecumenism, and trinitarian theology.² Torrance was born in West China on August 30, 1913 to missionary parents, which explains his heart for evangelism and evangelizing theology. In 1927, around the time recession hit the world, the family returned to Scotland and Torrance pursued his education in Scotland. At New College, Edinburgh, while doing his Bachelor of Divinity, he studied under Hugh Ross Mackintosh, who introduced him to Karl Barth's theology. In 1937 he won a scholarship that provided him the opportunity to be under Barth's supervision while writing his thesis, later published as *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (1946). It is not an exaggeration to conclude that the lifelong and prominent themes of Torrance's theological *oeuvre*, namely: Trinitarian theology, engagement with science and emphasis on scientific theology, and commitment to patristic theology, were fuelled by his engagement with Barth. In some areas, however, Torrance has surpassed Barth, such as his engagement with the natural sciences, which won him the Templeton Prize for the Progress in Religion in 1978. Torrance died on December 2, 2007, eighteen years after his retirement from New College as the Professor of Christian Dogmatics.³

Among Torrance's accomplishments as theologian, philosopher of science, and churchman is his consistent trinitarian theology. As such, he deserves Paul Molnar's assessment of him as a "theologian of the Trinity."⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity not only permeates Torrance's large theological

2. Colyer, *How To Read*, 11; McGrath, *An Intellectual Biography*, xi.

3. For Torrance's biography and introduction, see McGrath, *An Intellectual Biography*; Hesselink, "A Pilgrimage in the School of Christ," 49–64; and Noble, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance," 823–24. See also the several eulogies and recollections in *Participatio* 1 (2009) 6–48.

4. Molnar, *Theologian of the Trinity* (2009).

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corpus, but is the consistent “ground and grammar” of his theology.⁵ Even his ecumenical engagement with other theological traditions is fuelled by this biblical and patristic doctrine, particularly evident in the two volumes of the *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*. It is not an exaggeration to say that as a *Christian theologian*, the doctrine of the Trinity is the *canon* by which Torrance engages theological traditions (including his own), and approaches and formulates his whole theological program. As Eric Flett writes, “no particular feature of Torrance’s theological project can be understood apart from a deep appreciation of [the truth of the Trinity].”⁶ Consequently, presentation of any aspect of Torrance’s theology should be evaluated through Torrance’s own hermeneutical dictum that the Trinity is “the ground and grammar of theology.”

The primary interest of this book is Torrance’s soteriology, but it could not but be a trinitarian soteriology. For Torrance, the doctrine of the Trinity is always soteriological and soteriology is always trinitarian. To isolate one from the other means to separate the being of God from his act, and *vice versa*. Elmer Colyer’s *How to Read T. F. Torrance* and Paul Molnar’s *Theologian of the Trinity* are excellent publications offering a comprehensive presentation of Torrance’s doctrine of the Trinity.⁷ But although there are sections in these books where soteriology is discussed, there is a discernible lack of *explicit* connection between Torrance’s doctrines of the Trinity and salvation that Torrance himself asserts. The distinct contribution of this book, therefore, is that, building on Colyer’s and Molnar’s fine works, it consciously presents Torrance’s soteriological Trinity and trinitarian soteriology at the same time. In this book, *soteriological Trinity* refers to the fact that Torrance’s doctrine of the Triune God is always a God *with* and *for* us. The being of God is inseparable from his acts. As such, even presentations of each of the Persons of the Triune God require a soteriological outlook: there is no Christology which is not soteriological Christology, there is no Pateriology which is not a soteriological Pateriology, and there is no Pneumatology which is not soteriological Pneumatology. Reciprocally, *trinitarian soteriology* here means that (1) salvation is the work of the Persons of the Triune God, and that (2) because, in addition to (1), salvation is grounded in the being of the Triune God, (3) the ultimate *telos* of salvation is relationship with the Triune God. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present the works of each of the Triune Persons, arguing

5. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology* (1980).

6. Flett, “Persons, Powers and Pluralities,” 220.

7. Colyer, *How to Read* (2001); and Molnar, *Theologian of the Trinity* (2009).

that all three Persons are soteriologically involved in the mediation of reconciliation. In these chapters, it will be argued that Torrance employs a *kath hypostasin* trinitarian soteriology, or that the Persons of the Trinity fulfil distinct agencies in the salvific economy in strict accordance with their hypostases as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It will also be argued that the distinct works of the three Persons are the works of the whole Triune God, and thus the *telos* of their specific salvific agencies find culmination in humanity's participation in the life and love of God's communion. Secondly, chapter 5 presents the being and work of the communion of love that God is, and it will be argued that Torrance employs a *kat'ousian* trinitarian soteriology, or that the origin and *telos* of salvation are in strict accordance with the being of God as personal communion.

Inasmuch as Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity is soteriological, this work also argues that his soteriology is a *Trinitarian soteriology* and nothing else. As such, presentations of Torrance's soteriology that fail to be fully trinitarian should be revised and reformulated in order to do adequate justice to Torrance. Most of the studies of Torrance's soteriology focus on Christ, and to a certain degree, these works faithfully depict Torrance's christocentric theology. It is beyond doubt that one of the many contributions of Torrance to contemporary theology is the recovery of the Irenaeus-Athanasius axis of incarnational redemption. Kye Won Lee's *Living in Union with Christ* and Peter Cass's *Christ Condemned in the Flesh* are examples of the fascination with this significant Torrance soteriological distinctive.⁸ The question, however, is whether or not these studies do sufficient justice to Torrance's more holistic and trinitarian orientation. The danger that lurks in this microscopic analysis, especially owing to Torrance's integrative approach, is that it can lead to serious misinterpretations. Man Kei Ho's *A Critical Study on Torrance's Theology of Incarnation*, for instance, is an unfortunate cornucopia of awkward theological critiques because it only looks at one aspect of Torrance's thought while evaluating it from many sides.⁹ If Ho had approached the incarnation primarily in the light of Torrance's trinitarian soteriology, his conclusions would have been different. The study closest to Torrance's trinitarian soteriology is Myk Habets's *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance*.¹⁰ Habets rightly discerns that the origin and *telos* of salvation is participation in the life and love of the Triune God. He also takes on board the works of the incarnate

8. Lee, *Living in Union* (2003); and Cass, *Christ Condemned Sin in the Flesh* (2009).

9. Ho, *A Critical Study* (2008).

10. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (2009).

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Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. In terms of a robust trinitarian soteriology, however, its weakness lies in the absence of a fuller treatment of the Person and work of the Father, which this book provides. Ultimately, this book is a contribution to the increasing number of interpretations of Torrance's soteriology. It is not intended to stand on its own, and because it seeks to address certain elements which I deem neglected in other writings, it has its specific foci—foci which the author hopes to have important bearings in Torrance scholarship.

Torrance's trinitarian soteriology could be explored and elaborated from various angles. This book, however, is concerned mainly with two things, namely (1) the specific works of the Persons of the Triune God in Torrance's trinitarian soteriology, and (2) the *telos* of being saved by the Triune God, respectively. On the first, Torrance's trinitarian soteriology is informed by his insistence on a *kataphysic* and Gospel/revelation-founded theology. This book insists that Torrance's theological methodology could not but affect his soteriological formulation. Chapter 1 thus discusses the interrelation of Torrance's scientific theology, evangelical theology, and trinitarian soteriology. Then, following Torrance's gospel-oriented starting point, chapter 2 begins to explore the Person and work of Christ in the economy of salvation, followed by two chapters on the Persons and works of the Father and the Holy Spirit, respectively. This sketch follows the Pauline benediction formula "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14), which for Torrance "constitute[s] the Trinitarian structure of all Christian faith and life."¹¹ This is what makes Torrance's theology *evangelical*: it considers the whole Triune God revealed in the salvific economy and follows the revealed trinitarian *taxis* of the salvific economy. Finally, chapter 5 articulates the nature and shape of our salvation in light of the being of God as communion mediating reconciliation in the world. It will be argued that just as the origin of salvation is a communion of love, so the *telos* of salvation is participation in the life and love of the Triune God.

11. Torrance, "Crisis in the Kirk," 21–22; and *School of Faith*, xxi.