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One Being Three Persons

THOMAS F. TORRANCE

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One Being Three Persons

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The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons

Thomas F. Torrance

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To

Thomas Spear Torrance,

Economist and Philosopher of Science

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Introduction to the Second Edition
of Thomas F. Torrance's
*The Christian Doctrine of God,
One Being Three Persons*¹

To say that this important book is a classic is an understatement for many reasons, all of which demonstrate why it is being reissued in the T&T Clark Cornerstones Series. First, however, we will note some of the many accolades that *The Christian Doctrine of God* has justifiably received since its original publication in 1996. Gerald Bray's 1997 review mentioned several ways in which this book broke new ground, and wrote that 'it is more comprehensive and systematic than most of what he has written before, and thus the reader can follow the fullness of his thought more easily'.² Among other things Bray spoke rightly about how important the *homoousion* was in revolutionising the way Christians thought about God as 'a self-revealing God who wants us to know him in a personal way' rather than as 'a supreme being' who might be conceptualised philosophically in a theist perspective and who therefore could be conceived as an 'ultimate reality' with little or no involvement with us.³ Torrance, he said, relied above all on his study of the Bible to show that the early church Fathers were led to understand the Trinity through 'the evidence of Scripture' and 'their own encounter with Christ' so that they were compelled by the reality of the triune God to transform 'the Greek understanding of reality' and make it 'something infinitely more subtle and powerful'. Bray noted that while this book is not an easy read, it is 'always worthwhile trying to get to grips with great minds, and in this book we have a veritable feast of them'.⁴

Thomas F. Weinandy noted that what makes this book 'worthwhile' is the fact that Torrance 'seems to be a theologian who actually knows the Trinity

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*, hereafter: *Christian Doctrine of God*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

² Gerald Bray, review of *Christian Doctrine of God*, *Churchman*, vol. 111, no. 4 (1997), p. 378.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 378–9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

itself and writes out of his life with God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁵ He concluded that Torrance ‘masterfully develops his own insights—doctrinal, spiritual and practical—concerning the one God in three persons’ from his understanding of the ‘biblical revelation’ and ‘the Fathers of the Church and the early councils.’⁶ And in his review of the book, Elmer Colyer concluded: ‘This is clearly Torrance’s most important work and will undoubtedly be one of the most significant treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity well into the twenty-first century.’⁷

Certainly, this is a book that merits more than one reading, and the readers are in for a deep learning experience each time. While it is impossible here to deal with all that this book undertakes, we may note that there truly is a wealth of important theological insight on many crucial issues. These include how to understand divine passibility and impassibility; time and eternity; the relation between God’s time and our time; how incarnation, atonement and resurrection must be rightly understood; why it is important to maintain the priority of the Father–Son relation over the Creator–creature relation; the nature of revelation, faith, theological method; how one might understand the divine monarchy in a way that avoids the traditional pitfalls associated with the *filioque* controversy; and perhaps most significantly, why it is so important that all human knowledge of God be governed by who God is in himself in his internal relations, that is, by the immanent or ontological Trinity. Without such knowledge all theology becomes little more than projection or mythology. And when that happens, one engages in what Torrance called unscientific thinking which is no longer dictated by reality and so one is no longer speaking realistically about God or about our relations with God in the economy (history). What difference does that make? The answer for Torrance is that if we do not know God in his internal relations then we cannot know what God has done for us in the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ and what he is doing now in his Spirit as the ascended and advent Lord.

Regarding atonement, Torrance carefully considers the understanding of the Eastern church. He offers his own powerful and important insights on the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity and on the Holy Spirit in union with the Father and Son in eternity and in history. The development of thought in this book is borne of deep learning and engagement not only with the God of Christian faith, but with many of the great theologians of history whose thinking about God has shaped the Christian tradition over the centuries, even

⁵ Thomas F. Weinandy, review of *Christian Doctrine of God*, *Expository Times*, vol. 107, no. 11, (1996), p. 345.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Elmer Colyer, review of *Christian Doctrine of God*, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 50, no. 3, (1997), p. 391.

to the present day. It is no secret that one of his favourite modern theologians was his own mentor, Karl Barth, whom he counted among the great theologians of the church, on the same level as Athanasius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin.⁸

Since its publication in 1996, this book, which appeared eight years after his groundbreaking work, *The Trinitarian Faith* (1988),⁹ has been cited on numerous occasions. While Torrance is not without his critics, even they acknowledge the depth of knowledge and the importance of the issues discussed with great precision and nuance in this book. We will consider some of the criticisms before concluding this introduction. Here, however, I would like to mention several additional reactions to the book that indicate just how influential it has been among contemporary theologians. In his important book on Torrance, Elmer Colyer relies very heavily on this book for his chapter on the Trinity and does an excellent job presenting the main themes. Colyer asserts that this book ‘is really a capstone to [Torrance’s] illustrious career as a theologian and author’,¹⁰ and indeed ‘arguably Torrance’s magnum opus’.¹¹

In his survey of contemporary trinitarian theology, Stanley Grenz discusses Torrance’s thinking in a chapter entitled ‘The Return of the Immanent Trinity’ and concludes that ‘the most influential Barth-oriented trinitarian theologian and the partisan to whom many others appeal’ was Thomas F. Torrance.¹² In presenting Torrance’s thinking on the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, which Grenz properly noted, could only be understood from God’s own self-revelation because God could only be known ‘out of himself’,¹³ Grenz concluded that *The Christian Doctrine of God* ‘catapulted him into the trinitarian theological

⁸ See Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), p. 124. Torrance noted that Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* II/1, which he heard as lectures in Basel in 1937–38 ‘left an indelible print on [his] mind’, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 4, especially his key ideas that God’s being and act are one and that God is the one who loves in freedom.

⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988). Jason Robert Radcliff notes that ‘*Trinitarian Faith* is absolutely distinctive among his works inasmuch as in it Torrance explores the patristic theological tradition as it was put forward in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed’ with a view toward introducing an ecumenical and evangelical theology, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers: A Reformed, Evangelical, and Ecumenical Reconstruction of the Patristic Tradition* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), p. 58. Torrance’s *Christian Doctrine of God* builds upon what was established and discussed in this previous influential work.

¹⁰ Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 285.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 201.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

limelight¹⁴ because many considered this his most important work to date. Grenz reckoned that for Torrance the ultimate ground of our theological knowledge is to be found in the doctrine of the Trinity; indeed this very concern, Grenz says, led 'him to invest ultimate theological primacy in the immanent Trinity in the process of developing his scientific theology'.¹⁵

It is no accident then that one of Torrance's most valuable and wide-ranging insights was that the doctrine of the Trinity, when rightly understood, was the 'ground and grammar' of theology. It constrains theologians to think from a centre in God provided in the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord who is coming again to complete the redemption. Any attempt to think from a centre in ourselves simply misses the fact that we have already been justified and sanctified in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the One Mediator. Thinking from a centre in ourselves, Torrance rightly maintained, always leads either to deistic separation of us from the love of God revealed and active in his Word and Spirit, or to panentheistic/pantheistic ideas that confuse God's decisive actions for us in his Word and Spirit with ourselves or with the ongoing processes embedded in history. From early in the book until the very end Torrance was adamant that one could not suggest or even imply that 'God is constituted in his Being or in the personal nature of his Being through the relations of his love toward us, any more than he is constituted in his Being through relation to the universe which in his ungrudging love he has created out of nothing'.¹⁶

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in his recent book on Torrance's trinitarian soteriology Dick O. Eugenio relies quite heavily on Torrance's book, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, noting that Torrance is rightly considered a 'theologian of the Trinity' because 'The doctrine of the Trinity not only permeates Torrance's large theological corpus, but is the consistent "ground and grammar" of his theology'.¹⁷ Eugenio contends: 'It is not an exaggeration to say that as a *Christian theologian*, the doctrine of the Trinity is the *canon* by which Torrance

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 211. In his recent book, *The Trinitarian Theology of Stanley J. Grenz*, (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2013), Jason Sexton notes that Grenz cited Torrance's *Christian Doctrine of God* to support the primacy of the immanent Trinity for knowledge of the triune God, p. 99.

¹⁶ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 4. Torrance therefore regularly insisted that 'The incarnation was not necessary for God to be God and live as God: it flowed freely, unreservedly and unconditionally from the eternal movement of Love in God, the very Love which God is and in which God lives his Life as God', *ibid.*, p. 108. Hence, one could never think that 'the ontological Trinity' was 'constituted by or dependent on the economic Trinity', pp. 108–9. Perceptively, Torrance observed that 'the idea held by Origen that God's relation to the created universe is necessary to his own Being was comprehensively destroyed by Athanasius', (*ibid.*, p. 4).

¹⁷ Dick O. Eugenio, *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T. F. Torrance*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), pp. xix–xx. See also Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

engages theological traditions (including his own), and approaches and formulates his whole theological program.¹⁸ Torrance certainly held that

it is not just that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity must be accorded primacy over all the other doctrines, but that properly understood it is the nerve and centre of them all, configures them all, and is so deeply integrated with them that when they are held apart from the doctrine of the Trinity they are seriously defective in truth and become malformed.¹⁹

Still, he would never have wanted to see the doctrine of the Trinity placed on a par with scripture, which he saw as the unique testimony to God's self-revelation in his incarnate Word and through his Spirit, which for him is the ultimate enabling condition of our knowledge of the Trinity. At this point, I would like to discuss briefly some of the reasons why I think this magisterial work is and will remain a majestic contribution to contemporary theology.

The Centrality of Christ's Divinity

When thinking about God as the basis upon which all theology rests, Torrance repeatedly insisted upon several crucial points: 1) that there is no God behind the back of Jesus Christ; 2) for that reason we cannot know God truly apart from our own personal union with Christ that takes place through the Spirit; 3) that what God is toward us in Christ and for us in his Spirit he is eternally in himself so that 'if he were not Love in his innermost Being, his love toward us in Christ and the Holy Spirit would be ontologically groundless';²⁰ 4) that it is in the cross of Christ that God's love is revealed 'for in refusing to spare his own Son whom he delivered up for us all, God has revealed that he loves us more than he loves himself';²¹ and 5) that soteriology is intimately connected with the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, the very message of God's love in his Word and Spirit, on the basis of which we are enabled to share in the communion of love that God is in himself, constitutes the heart of the Gospel as indicated in Jn. 3:16: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'²² This is a crucial point for Torrance because on the one hand these 'evangelical events are empty if they are sundered from their roots in history' as they necessarily are in the thinking of those who would detach revelation, reconciliation and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. xx.

¹⁹ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 31. See also Molnar, *Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, Chapter Two.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 6.

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redemption from the historical events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. On the other hand these events, Torrance repeatedly and rightly insists, 'have saving import for us only if the historical presentations of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit flow from and direct us back to personal realities inside the divine Life.'²³

Having made these statements, it is easy to see that for Torrance any suggestion that we may know God's unity without knowing his Trinity would mean that we did not know the Christian God at all. He therefore opposed the medieval tendency to separate knowledge of the one God from knowledge of the triune God, with the idea that the former could be known naturally and the latter only through revelation. Torrance considered it a 'biblically grounded principle' that '*without God, God cannot be known*' and claimed that this was already formulated in the second century by Irenaeus who, relying on Matt. 11:27 and Lk. 10:22 wrote: 'The Lord has taught us that no one can know God unless God himself is the Teacher, that is to say, without God, God is not to be known.'²⁴ Hilary held a similar view, while Athanasius's statement that 'it would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name him from his works alone and call him Unoriginate' provided additional support for this thesis.²⁵ Torrance maintains that Calvin too held that 'since God alone knows himself, he may not be known by us except through himself and his own self-witness or testimony'.²⁶ Karl Barth also insisted that God could be known only through God.

The point of all this is that according to Matt. 11:27 and Lk. 10:22, there is an exclusive relation of knowing between the Father and Son and we are drawn into that relation through the Spirit as is taught in 1 Cor. 2:9-12, such that it is only by receiving the Spirit of God from Christ that we can share in the Son's knowledge of the Father and the Father's knowledge of the Son which would otherwise be closed to us. This is what was embodied in Jesus himself in the incarnation. Hence,

The actualisation of that unique revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ and its mediation to us in the Holy Spirit sent by the Father in the name of the Son, tell us that God may not now be known by us in

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 13, n. 1, citing Irenaeus's work *Against Heresies*, book 4.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 117. From this Torrance concludes that 'to know God in himself through the relation of the Son and the Father in the Godhead, that is, in his internal relations, makes the doctrine of the Trinity essential to the Christian understanding of God', *ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 11.

his undifferentiated and unnameable oneness, behind the back of Jesus Christ, or without the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁷

The incarnation therefore is the place within history where we may know God in himself because, if our thinking begins with Jesus Christ as the revelation of God the Son in his unique relation with the Father and the Spirit, then we are in fact thinking from a centre in God and not from a centre in ourselves. This can only happen, Torrance believes, if we indwell the scriptures and hear the Word of God speak to us through their witness. In this connection Torrance makes the interesting and important point that 'nowhere in the gospels or epistles of the New Testament do the eye-witnesses tell us anything of what Jesus looked like, for the divine reality they speak of was one which they knew primarily through hearing.'²⁸ Torrance believes that the disciples and apostles had their thinking reorganised 'under the impact of divine revelation through the Word made flesh' so that there was 'a shift away from optical forms of thought to *auditive* forms of thought arising from direct acts of cognition in hearing God.'²⁹

Since it was in the resurrection of Jesus that he was disclosed as the Lord, Torrance therefore insists that when we read the New Testament and hear the Word of revelation we cannot simply stop at the historical figure of Jesus but must realise that 'the Deity of Christ is the supreme truth of the Gospel, the key to the bewildering enigma of Jesus, for it provides it with a central point of reference consistent with the whole sequence of events leading up to and beyond the crucifixion.'³⁰ For this reason the resurrection does not undermine the historical facts of Jesus' life but enables them to be interpreted in light of their own intrinsic significance so that 'the historical Jesus comes to his own within the dimensions of the risen Jesus, and the risen Jesus is discerned to have no

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also *ibid.*, pp. 205–6. Torrance does not hold that the revelation of God in Christ means that God has not actually made himself known to people from the beginning of creation. Nor does he hold that this unique revelation 'extinguishes the light of the creation or the contingent intelligibility which God has imposed upon it through his Word' (*ibid.*, p. 25). He thinks faithful Christian proclamation of the Gospel 'must reckon with the refracted lights and distorted conceptions of God in other religions' (*ibid.*) But he also indicates that in light of the 'familiar personal way' that God revealed himself in Christ, all other approaches to worship and knowledge of God are indeed called into question because the fact that we are justified by grace alone means we cannot rely on our own knowledge or goodness but only upon the grace revealed in Christ to be in the truth.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46. This is the focal point of the Nicene emphasis on the *homoousion* as a 'faithful distillation of the fundamental sense of the New Testament Scriptures' in order 'to give unequivocal expression to the Deity of Christ, the incarnate Lord and Saviour' (*ibid.*, p. 94).

other fabric than that in the life and mission of the historical Jesus.³¹ Because Torrance sees the resurrection as the fulfilment of the mission of the incarnate Son to unite us to God and to enable us to know God as he truly is, he can even say in another context that ‘the resurrection is therefore our pledge that statements about God in Jesus Christ have an objective reference in God, and are not just projections out of the human heart and imagination.’³² Projections merely represent symbolic attempts to speak of an unknowable deity far removed from us instead of allowing our thought and speech to be shaped by the reality of God we meet in the physical existence of Jesus Christ.

Homoousion

Torrance is well known for his reliance on the theology of Athanasius. And it was Athanasius who strongly opposed Arian thinking for failing to respect the oneness in being between the Father and Son. Such failure led to the further failure to respect the oneness in being between the Son and the Spirit in their equality of being with the Father. While the New Testament is not explicit about trinitarian doctrine, the doctrine does indeed arise as a faithful interpretation of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. And it does so exactly because Jesus, as the Son begotten of the Father before all ages, is truly *homoousios* with the Father. What is more, ‘the Deity of the Holy Spirit stands or falls with belief in the Deity of Christ’ so that ‘to be “in the Spirit” is to be “in Christ” To have to do with the Holy Spirit is to have to do directly with Christ and with God himself.’³³ Torrance famously held that the *homoousion* was ‘the ontological and epistemological linchpin of Christian theology.’³⁴ It enabled theologians to assert forcefully and clearly that by the self-revelation of God experienced on the evangelical or doxological level we come to know the Father, Son and Spirit in such a way that we also move from the economic Trinity to what he calls the third level of knowledge which is knowledge of God as he is in himself.³⁵ Torrance always insisted that we can never comprehend God because that would mean that we had attempted to know God as God knows himself. But we can apprehend God

³¹ Ibid., p. 47.

³² Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 72–3.

³³ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 61.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁵ See Myk Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T. F. Torrance*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), pp. 29–39 for a helpful discussion of how Torrance moves from and through the three levels of theological knowledge, that is, from the evangelical or doxological (experiential), to the theological as related to the economic Trinity and finally to the higher level of the immanent or ontological Trinity. There is a stratified relation in our experience of and knowledge of God such that it is the higher level that must inform our understanding of the other levels in order to engage in scientific theology.

as God enables us to know him through our concepts in such a way that our thinking does not stop at the conceptual level but pushes through to the level of reality as it is disclosed to us from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. This of course introduces a question that was already touched upon briefly but is repeatedly raised and answered in this book with care and precision: How do we know that our human concepts of Father and Son really speak of God as he is, and are not simply projections of our own experiences onto the reality of God? This was indeed the problem the church faced in the fourth century when Arius projected his sensual images into God and failed to realise that there was not only a oneness of being between the incarnate Son and the Father, but that the Father–Son relation had priority over the Creator–creature relation.

The Priority of the Father/Son relation over the Creator/creature relation

One of the major issues still confronting theologians today concerns the extent to which we are permitted to read back elements of our experience of and knowledge of God in the economy into the being and action of God in eternity. Torrance deals with this frequently in this book and contemporary theologians could learn a great deal from how he does so. First, Torrance is meticulously careful to avoid any rationalistic attempt to intrude into the divine mystery by trying to explain *how* God can be one being and three persons in a *perichoretic* unity of being which yet preserves and upholds the distinction of the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are fully divine in an eternal mutual co-inherence of love and freedom. The persons are, as Torrance regularly asserts, who and what they are as substantive relations or onto-relations within the one being of God. In other words, there is no Unity of God without Trinity and no Trinity without Unity. Thus, he insists that we must think of the economic and immanent Trinity in a spiritual way: ‘The *homoousion* of the Spirit with God who, as our Lord taught, *is* Spirit [Jn. 4:14], and the *homoousion* of the Son together mean that we must think of the relation between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity in an essentially spiritual way appropriate to the Nature of the Holy Spirit and the Nature of the incarnate Son.’³⁶

Second, this suggests that the *homoousion* is critically important in helping theologians to discern ‘what may and what may not be read back from God’s revealing and saving activity in history to what he is antecedently, eternally and inherently in himself’.³⁷ We know for sure that what God is toward us, he is

³⁶ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 97.

³⁷ Ibid. For Torrance ‘the *homoousion* does not allow us indiscriminately to read back into God what is human and finite—far from it’ (ibid., p. 99). It is precisely the task of scientific theology to help prevent us from reading back our ‘subjective notions or fantasies into the object or reality we seek to know’ (ibid.).

eternally and antecedently in himself. But since God is and remains an ineffable mystery and transcendent over creation and thus over all of created space and time, we must be careful not to ‘read back into the eternal Life and Being of God the kind of temporal and causal connections that obtain in our creaturely existence in time and space.’³⁸ What is required therefore is a ‘repentant rethinking of what we have already claimed to know and a profound reorganisation of our consciousness . . . in knowing God.’³⁹ So while Torrance repeatedly and rightly insisted that the incarnate life of Jesus falls within the life of the eternal God,⁴⁰ he always maintained that one could never collapse the eternal processions within the Trinity into God’s actions within history (the missions) without confusing and reversing the activities of the Creator and creatures.

Torrance’s stress on the priority of the Father–Son relation over the Creator–creature relation has wide-ranging implications. It means that true knowledge of God can only occur through God, as already stressed; it means that while God was always Father and not always Creator and while God was always Son but not always incarnate, we must therefore recognise that these are free new acts of grace, new even for God such that the world and God are in no sense co-eternal. It means that we must maintain a distinction without separation of the immanent and economic Trinity, so that any attempt to historicise the being of the Son with the idea that history somehow constitutes him as the second person of the Trinity, is a destructive idea because it allows history and not God to determine who God is as the one who loves.⁴¹ It means that if Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one being by virtue of their *perichoretic* relations, then the Spirit proceeds from the being of the Father and not just from the person of the Father, as Athanasius argued.⁴² This could be the basis for agreement between East and West over the *filioque*, as Torrance has suggested. Since this will be an issue that will be discussed below in relation to Torrance’s critics, it is important here to offer a brief explanation of Torrance’s groundbreaking proposal here.

Torrance offered a way out of the impasse that led to the perceived need for the *filioque* in the first instance because he accentuated Athanasius’ argument that the Son does not proceed from the *person* of the Father but from the *being* of the Father and then also applied this to the Spirit so that one could say ‘the Spirit is also of one Being with the Father’ and that ‘the procession of the Spirit is from

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 100. This Torrance says was made clear by Jesus when he called for his disciples to ‘renounce themselves and take up their cross in following him’ (ibid.).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., ibid., p. 144.

⁴¹ For a discussion of these issues in detail see Molnar, *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

⁴² Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 188.

the *Being* of the Father, and not from the *Person* . . . of the Father.⁴³ This would eliminate at root any idea that the deity of the Son and Spirit could be conceived as derived from or caused by the Father. Such ideas would have to suggest some sort of subordinationism. And that was why the *filioque* was perceived to be necessary in the first instance. Procession from the being of the Father would also eliminate ‘the idea that the Spirit derives from the *Being* of the Son’ since ‘the Son and Spirit are both *of the Being* of the Father.’⁴⁴ Unfortunately, however, when the idea that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*ex Patre filioque*) was introduced unecumenically into the creed by Western theologians, Eastern theologians understood that to suggest that there were indeed two ultimate principles in God. That indeed would imply that God is not ultimately one.

So Torrance argued that ‘when considered absolutely God the eternal Father is the one Principle of Godhead . . . or the Monarchy’ because, considered absolutely, the term Father referred to God or the one being of God. When considered ‘relatively,’ that is, in relation to the Son and Spirit, ‘he is thought of as the Father of the Son’ and thus as the person of the Father.⁴⁵ While these two senses overlap, they should not be confused because, absorbing the *ousia* of the Father into ‘the *hypostasis* of the Father’ and then speaking of ‘the three divine Persons as having the same being or nature they [the Cappadocians] tended to give *ousia* an abstract generic sense which had the effect of making them treat *ousia* or *physis* [nature] as impersonal.’⁴⁶ Moreover, ‘when the Father is considered in his inseparable oneness in Being with the Son and the Spirit, as One Being . . . then the Monarchy . . . is to be thought of as identical with the Holy Trinity, for it is not limited to one Person, since each divine Person is the whole God.’⁴⁷ Torrance notes that the Council of Nicaea referred to the Son as proceeding from the being of the Father and not the person of the Father and that if that idea had not been disrupted by introducing the notion of causality into the picture as the Cappadocians did when they argued that the Son and the Holy Spirit ‘derive their being . . . and indeed their Deity . . . from the Father

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 140–1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 141. For a full discussion of this issue see Paul D. Molnar, ‘Theological Issues Involved in the *Filioque*’, *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the 21st Century*, (ed.) Myk Habets, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 20–39.

[considered as *Person*] by way of a unique causation,'⁴⁸ then the whole issue of the 'double procession' of the Spirit never would have arisen.⁴⁹

While many more implications follow from recognising the priority of the Father–Son relation over the Creator–creature relation, it is worth noting just one more important one here: this is what allows Torrance to argue that God's Fatherhood is utterly unique and not at all defined by our experience of human fatherhood; it is not defined at all by our prior experience or knowledge. For that reason he insists that no gender can be read into God with the suggestion that we might think of God as mother and father in order to think more inclusively about God. Since gender is part of human being and experience, we simply cannot read that back into God with the idea that we must think of God as mother and not just as Father. It is not a matter of what we think about God but about what God has revealed of himself in his Son and through his Spirit. No one is excluded from the love of God revealed in Christ and through his Spirit. So it would be misguided in the extreme to think that for women to have equality in the church, we need to reconceptualise God for example as mother or using the pronoun 'she'. The question is who defines who God is. And the answer for Torrance is that only God the eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit does that. Hence, these are not optional terms that we use from our experiences to refer symbolically to God. Rather, our terms must be transformed by an encounter with God who knows us in Christ and empowers us to think of him imagelessly. That does not mean abandoning our images and concepts. It does mean thinking of God *through* them in a 'see through' fashion 'without the intrusion of creaturely forms or sensual images into God'.⁵⁰ It means also that our images or concepts must be transformed through union with Christ to point beyond themselves to God as he exists in an utterly unique way as Father of his Son.

Union of Word and Spirit

Torrance adamantly and regularly insists that

the Holy Spirit is the creative Agent in mediating knowledge of God to us in himself and the creative Agent in our reception and understanding of that revelation, although he is not himself the Word (λόγος) of that

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 158. Thus, Torrance insists 'we may not think of God as having gender nor think of the Father as begetting the Son or of the Son as begotten after the analogy of generation or giving birth with which we are familiar among creaturely beings', *ibid.* See also, *ibid.*, p. 107.

revelation or the Form . . . which that revelation assumes in Jesus Christ as it comes from the Father and is appropriated by us.⁵¹

It is important here to note the distinction in union between the Word and Spirit. In Jesus Christ, and thus in the hypostatic union (incarnation) we have the epistemological and ontological centre of all knowledge of God because in him we have ‘an epistemic bridge . . . between man and God that is grounded in the Being of God and anchored in the being of man.’⁵² Notice, that for Torrance it is grounded in *this* man and not in us *per se*. So he will never be looking at us as those who are justified and sanctified in Christ for the meaning of revelation and of who God is in eternity. This is in marked contrast to those theologians who think our analogies for the divine being should be developed by negating our experiences of fatherhood or motherhood at its best in this world. Torrance wants none of that, because for him our knowledge is objectively grounded in Christ and subjectively in the Holy Spirit. Therefore he asserts that

it is through holding constantly in our thought the inseparable unity between the economic activity of God in the Spirit and the economic activity of God in the Son that we may be prevented from reading back into God himself the material or creaturely images (e.g. latent in human father-son relations) that rise out of the reciprocity he has established with us through the incarnation of his Son in space and time as one with us and one of us.⁵³

In a very real sense then it is God himself who empowers us to know him truly using our limited concepts and God himself who prevents us from reading or projecting back into his divine being our own experiences of human fathers and sons.

Christianity and Hellenism

Here we have Torrance’s decisive insight with regard to the relation between Christianity and Hellenism at work: while for Aristotelian philosophy God was an unmoved Mover who timelessly affected the world, for Christians God’s love was an incarnate act by which God the Father gave up his own Son acting in unconditional love for fallen humanity and for the cosmos. And while it was impossible to conceive of a *creatio ex nihilo* in the categories of Greek philosophy, so that whenever that was attempted the world and time itself could only

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 100–1.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 101.

be conceived as eternal, in the context of the Nicene faith the world and time were conceived relationally as wholly contingent upon the will, love and wisdom of God. The same issue is in play here in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. The Greek concepts of word, image and activity were all changed under the impact of revelation so that 'the concepts of fatherhood and sonship do not derive from any analogy or inherent likeness between the creature and Creator'.⁵⁴ In reality these concepts are used by God himself to point away from their creaturely content to the transcendent and eternal reality of God the Father 'apart from and altogether antecedent to any relation with us'.⁵⁵ In using these concepts, we must be careful not to allow their pre-theological meaning to dictate our understanding: 'We have to resist the temptation to interpret them through the spectacles of their old-established creaturely meanings, and so we have to fight against the inertial drag of their natural or secular use'.⁵⁶

Torrance sees this as an ongoing problem because we must use our creaturely terms in speaking about the triune God; but we must use them in their transformed sense and not allow the terms 'father' and 'son' to become mythological projections 'by us into God of the creaturely relations and images latent in the natural and pre-theological significance of these concepts'.⁵⁷ When thinking within revelation, Torrance says 'an *epistemological inversion* takes place in our knowing God, for what is primary is his knowing of us, not our knowing of him [Gal. 4:9]' so that 'all other fatherhood is properly to be understood from its relation to his Fatherhood and not the other way round [Eph. 3:15]'.⁵⁸

The same applies to the term "being" which too frequently but disastrously tends to be drawn back into the abstract and impersonal philosophical notion of "substance", not least when interpreted in terms of Aristotle's primary and secondary substance.⁵⁹ God is also our Father. But this is the case only because God freely loves us in his incarnate Son. Therefore human fatherhood can never be or become the standard for understanding God's Fatherhood, even by way of

⁵⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Christian Apprehension of God the Father', *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, (ed.) Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 129.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 105.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Torrance explains that based on revelation any pre-Christian impersonal view of 'being' was transformed into a profoundly personal view which was 'rooted in God's *self-revelation* and *self-naming* to Israel as "I am" which was applied by Christ to himself in his "I am" (Εγώ εἰμι) sayings' (ibid., p. 103). Nicene theologians did not use the Greek word οὐσία as in secular Greek with its impersonal meaning. But the Latin translation of that term into *substantia* or *essentia* 'did tend to give rise to an impersonal and somewhat abstract conception of God's Being that has damaged Western notions of the Trinity' (ibid., p. 104).

negation. Because we must think in a spiritual or 'imageless' way, Torrance insists we must think of God the Father 'without ever reading back descriptively into God the creaturely content or finite imagery of human fatherhood'.⁶⁰ This thinking is the practical result of Torrance's application of his key idea that we must think from a centre in God and not from a centre in ourselves if we are to think rightly about God and creatures. For Torrance 'God is not to be understood on the analogy of our finite creaturely human being'.⁶¹ Where then do we find the continuity between our knowledge of God and God as he eternally exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit? The answer is that God himself establishes and maintains our relation to him as 'an enduring ontological relation' in such a way that 'while the creature does not have any continuity in relation to God that belongs to the creature in itself, it does have a relation to God which is continuously given and unceasingly sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit' as is evident in 'reconciliation and recreation'.⁶²

Because Torrance holds the immanent and economic Trinity together without making any claims that would exhaust God's eternal self-sufficient being and action as the one who loves in his actions for us in history, he insists that we must distinguish without separating the immanent and economic Trinity. Hence, for Torrance the fact that God is one being, three persons means, as Athanasius stressed, that in God there are three co-equal persons existing within the 'simple, uncompounded and undivided nature of the Being of God, in sharp opposition to the Arian separation of the Son from the Father, and to the semi-Arian separation of the Spirit from the Godhead'.⁶³ Importantly, however, Athanasius thought of God's *ousia* as 'the Being of God in the inner reality and unity of his coinherent trinitarian relations . . . [as] three distinct but undivided Persons, Subsistences or ὑποστάσεις in the one Being of God'.⁶⁴ And, in accordance with the important concept of perichoresis, Athanasius preferred to use verbs instead of nouns when referring to God's being and action because 'the three divine persons are inseparably interrelated in being and act through a mutual indwelling and a mutual movement toward and for one another in the homoousial Communion of the Holy Trinity which they constitute'.⁶⁵

This of course is fully in accord with his emphasis on the *homoousion* as discussed above which effectively eliminated at root any sort of modalism or tritheism in a way that enabled theologians to realise that God is a being for

⁶⁰ Torrance, 'The Christian Apprehension of God the Father', p. 130. See also *Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 105–11 and 157.

⁶¹ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 236.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

others within himself as Father, Son and Spirit and thus can be a being for others outside himself in his love of us as creator, reconciler and redeemer. Whereas modalism brought its dualistic conceptuality to bear by assuming that the three persons of the Trinity were only the way God appeared in the economy but not who God is eternally in himself, tritheism operating in a similar way conceptualising the three persons as three different people having a common nature. Torrance brilliantly develops his positive ideas against such false views by explaining that the Father, the Son and the Spirit may each be considered God absolutely and relatively. That means that each is fully God considered absolutely (with no implication of tritheism because each is fully God coinherently and not in abstraction from the other persons). But at the same time each person of the Trinity is who he is only in relation to the others. So, as noted above in connection with the *filioque*, the Father considered relatively refers to the Father existing in relation to the Son. The same holds for the Son and Spirit each in their distinctive relations to the Father, the one as begotten, the other as proceeding. And Torrance maintains consistently that while God does not choose to live alone in himself because it is clear that he chose to become incarnate to seek and save us and to bring us into communion with himself, still all that God does in history is grounded in his transcendent and free existence as the triune God in himself.

I have spent a good deal of time introducing this important book by focusing on how and why Torrance's understanding of the expression that, what God is toward us in history he is eternally in himself, led him to express the classical doctrine of the Trinity in a way that makes his ideas valuable, necessary and even revolutionary for twenty-first century theologians as they reflect on the implications of the Nicene faith today. This was only meant to whet the appetite of anyone who is interested in serious theology. It is not exhaustive. But it is hoped that it will draw theologians to Torrance's important work so that they may experience for themselves the power of the Gospel of grace as it came to expression in the doctrine of the Trinity and still comes alive today when that doctrine is rightly understood and expressed. In the remainder of this introduction I would like to address several criticisms raised in relation to this book so that readers will see how some of the key ideas discussed above relate to differing approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity. Here I am restricting what I have to say only to criticisms of this book.

Criticisms

After noting that this was a tour de force, Brad Kallenberg offered a few criticisms as well. For example, he claimed that 'after establishing that intra-trinitarian *relations* belong to the *nature* of each Person and thus to the Being of the whole Godhead (surely a form of idealism), it becomes very difficult to imagine on what grounds Torrance can assert that the relations of God *ad extra* do not

belong to God's nature'.⁶⁶ Given the fact that the entire book is an effort at what Torrance called scientific theology, that is, theology that allows the unique reality or object of faith to determine what is said, this is indeed a strange criticism that seems to miss the very point Torrance laboured to express and did express with great clarity and consistency. Torrance's point, as seen above, is that unless we really know God as he eternally exists in his internal relations by knowing the Father through the Son as empowered by the Holy Spirit, then our thinking is shaped by us (our ideas perhaps) and not by the reality of God. This book is an argument for the objectivity of revelation and the objectivity of God's eternal being as one who loves us in a freedom which is his alone.

Beyond that, it is easy to see why Kallenberg might claim that he found it difficult to understand how God's actions *ad extra* would not belong to God's nature, given his assumptions about Torrance's supposed 'idealism'. In reality, it is quite easy for Torrance to assert and to maintain, as he does with precision, that God's relations with us do not belong to God's nature. He does so by insisting that they arise as a result of God's grace which can never be separated from the Giver of grace, namely, Christ himself or from his Spirit who actualises the reconciliation accomplished objectively in Christ within us here and now. That is why, as we have seen, Torrance insists upon the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity and argues that we must never think that God's eternal being and actions are in any way constituted by his relations with us. Torrance not only says this many times in this book, but his thinking consistently bears this out as he never embraces any idea of mutual conditioning between God and us (a hallmark supposition of idealism), but always asserts the priority of grace and revelation over all that takes place in our relations with God in Christ and through his Spirit. Kallenberg asks, 'How can it be that Pentecost manifested a change in God's relations with creation, but *not* a change in God's "nature"?' He thinks this assertion creates an inconsistency that 'renders ambiguous the cash value of his [Torrance's] notion of "onto-personal" Being'.⁶⁷ The inconsistency, he thinks, is that if Father, Son and Spirit are who they are in God's eternal being, then if God does something new in relation to us, that would have to imply that God's nature also changes. Here Kallenberg has missed a very important point Torrance was trying to make, namely, that God's actions *ad extra* in creating, becoming incarnate and sending his Spirit at Pentecost are new actions, new even for God. God does not change from being the eternal triune God he always was and is when doing something entirely new because God is a living God. This is why Torrance insisted that God was always

⁶⁶ Brad J. Kallenberg, review of *Christian Doctrine of God*, Andrews University Seminary studies, vol. 36, no. 2, (1998), p. 315.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Kallenberg is referring to p. 238.

Father but not always creator and always Son but not always incarnate. These events fall within the life of the eternal God. But they do not change who God was and is. Rather they illustrate God's freedom to love in new ways. In connection with the Spirit, Torrance wanted to stress that while God was always present sustaining creation in relation to himself through the Spirit, at Pentecost, when the Father sent his Spirit into the world, he did so 'to make himself present to his creatures in such a way as to open himself to direct personal access through the mediation of Christ'.⁶⁸ Thus, there was a change in the 'mode of [God's] immanence' within history. But, again, that does not change who God is in himself and for us.

Kallenberg also claims that Torrance ignores the social character of theological language with the result that he therefore ignores the role that our participation in the believing community plays in the way we do theology. Once again, however, such a criticism does not pay due attention to Torrance's insistence that on the doxological level (the first level of theological inquiry) all Christians come to experience and to know the truth of the Gospel only within the community of faith.⁶⁹ Perhaps the real problem here, however, is that Kallenberg wants Torrance to hold that there must be some 'way in which *the church* is the foundation of doctrinal truth (1 Tim. 3:15), not the other way around'.⁷⁰ Of course, if Torrance were to admit that the church is the foundation of doctrinal truth, then his thinking would have been in conflict with his most basic assumptions. This, because for Torrance the only proper foundation both for doctrinal truth *and* for the church is the truth that is and remains identical with God himself as he establishes and maintains the existence of the church in his Word and Spirit. Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life. This is what proper doctrine seeks to explicate in the church. But when that occurs, it is Christ himself, and neither the church nor doctrine, who is recognised as the source and foundation for doctrinal truth. This is one of the reasons why Torrance firmly maintained that all technical theological terms such as '*homoousion*'; 'hypostatic union', '*perichoresis*' and even the terms 'Unity' and 'Trinity' would be mishandled if we focused on the concepts instead of the 'realities denoted by them'. That would be to 'lapse into some static mode of thought' which would allow these technical terms to 'acquire an independent authority in themselves in virtue of which they tend to

⁶⁸ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 238.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 88ff. Grenz also thought that Kallenberg missed the mark here, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, pp. 214–15.

⁷⁰ Kallenberg, p. 316.

exercise a determinative and formative function over the truth, as if that only is true which can be reduced to conceptual expression.⁷¹

As he often did, here Torrance insisted that truth could only be understood ‘under the formative impact of divine revelation’ in such a way that our concepts must point beyond themselves to the ‘realities which may shine through them but which are to be known apart from them and independent of them’. In other words, we cannot ‘think the concepts themselves, thereby identifying them with the truth, but [we must] think through them of the realities or truths which they are meant to intend beyond themselves.’⁷² This did not mean, for instance, that the term *homoousion* was ‘somehow sacrosanct and beyond reconsideration’ since ‘all authentic theological terms and concepts fall short of the realities they intend’. Like all theological concepts, this too must be continually tested in light of the truth of the Gospel, the truth of revelation itself. Does it serve ‘our understanding of the Gospel of God’s redeeming Love, in giving decisive expression to the unbroken oneness in Being and Act between Jesus Christ, the incarnate Saviour, and God the Father, upon which the very essence of the Gospel rests’?⁷³ For Torrance the answer was a definite yes especially because it serves to hold the economic and immanent Trinity together and thus binds our ‘evangelical or doxological experience’ together with the ‘theological articulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity’.⁷⁴

In another review, Paul Copan, stated that Torrance’s ‘erudite book repays careful reading’ and is an ‘excellent exposition and defense of the classical doctrine of the divine Trinity’.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, he also concluded that ‘Torrance’s viewing the entire Trinity as Monarchy in an attempt to avoid subordinationism is an unnecessary move. One does not buy into subordinationism by maintaining a ranking within the Godhead’.⁷⁶ Copan simply assumes that it is correct to claim that ‘the Monarchy is derived from the *person* of the Father’.⁷⁷ But Torrance’s argument is that any idea whatsoever of a ‘ranking’ within the Godhead inevitably introduces subordinationism with notions of causality and of relations of ‘superiority and inferiority’ as well as ‘degrees of Deity’ into the relations of the trinitarian persons.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, it seems that Copan missed the revolutionary nature of Torrance’s proposal to move beyond the impasse created by the Western church unecumenically adding the *filioque* to the

⁷¹ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 194.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Paul Copan, review of *Christian Doctrine of God*, *Trinity Journal*, (fall 1997), 18, 2, p. 249.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 179.

creed of Nicaea.⁷⁹ Torrance maintained that there was indeed a Monarchy with respect to the order of the persons within the Trinity but not with respect to their being. Thus, the Father is first in the sense that he begets the Son and is not begotten by the Son.⁸⁰ But Torrance also insisted that one could not confuse the order of the persons with their being without opening the door to some type of subordinationism. Hence, as seen above, he maintained that Son is from the being of the Father and not simply from the person of the Father because the latter notion would lead to the idea of a derived deity and that in itself, as noted above, would deny the co-equality in being of the persons of the Trinity, as would the idea of ‘ranking’ within the Godhead. Thus, Torrance could say that

the inner trinitarian order is not to be understood in an ontologically differential way, for it does not apply to the Being or the Deity of the divine Persons which each individually and all together have absolutely in common, but only to the mysterious “disposition or economy” which they have among themselves within the unity of the Godhead, distinguished by position and not status, by form and not being, by sequence and not power, for they are fully and perfectly equal.⁸¹

So, while Copan thinks there is no good reason to reject the ‘distinctions in ranking in the Godhead as implying subordinationism,’⁸² I believe Torrance was correct to argue that the order of the persons did not imply any higher rank among the persons and that such a view is only possible when one mistakenly confuses the order of the persons with their being.

In a more sustained and substantive analysis Colin Gunton offers what could reasonably be considered some of the most challenging criticisms.⁸³ We will focus on only one of those here. Gunton does affirm the positive contributions of Torrance’s emphasis on the *homoousion*, especially since it ‘prevents us from reading up into God the kind of causal connections that are characteristic of the created world’ and it obviates ‘any hint of subordinationism in the relation of the persons of the Trinity.’⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Gunton thinks Torrance’s emphasis on the *homoousion* ‘downplays what came to be called the monarchy of the

⁷⁹ For a full discussion of Torrance on the *filioque*, see Molnar, ‘Theological Issues Involved in the *Filioque*’.

⁸⁰ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 176.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Copan, pp. 248–9.

⁸³ For a full discussion of these, see Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, pp. 338–49.

⁸⁴ Colin Gunton, ‘Being and Person: T. F. Torrance’s Doctrine of God,’ *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, (ed.) Elmer M. Colyer, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 120.

Father.⁸⁵ He, too, thinks there is a problem with Torrance's view that the monarchy should not be assigned to the Father, but rather to the whole being of the Trinity. Gunton approves Torrance's emphasis on the full equality of the persons of the Trinity. But, he thinks Torrance's emphasis on this causes him to 'minimise' the distinction of persons. And he offers an interesting comparison of Torrance and Barth to make his point.

Gunton notes that for Barth 'there is an element of subordination in the economy, in the sense that the Father commands and the Son obeys'.⁸⁶ And he also observes that Barth reads this 'up into the eternal Trinity, where the economic subordination becomes, without being taken away, also and at once an immanent equality of being' such that 'there are within the being of God elements of commanding and obeying, of superordination and subordination'.⁸⁷ Gunton thinks Torrance's emphasis on the *homoousion* leads him to minimise such insights by stressing the complete equality of the persons. Yet, unlike Barth, Torrance refuses to read back elements of the economy into the immanent Trinity because for Torrance we must always speak of a Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. Hence, 'the subjection of Christ to the Father in his incarnate economy as the suffering and obedient Servant cannot be read back into the eternal hypostatic relations and distinctions subsisting in the Holy Trinity'.⁸⁸ Torrance himself responded sharply to Colin Gunton's statements in this regard as follows:

In relation to what Gunton says about the economic subordination of the Son, that is, I believe, properly to be understood of the incarnate Son, but may not be read back into the eternal godhead unless one operates with the altogether dubious idea that the Father is the "cause" of the being of the Son, as both Basil and Gregory Nyssen held, a notion which Gregory Nazianzus rightly rejected in line with the teaching of Athanasius.⁸⁹

Torrance's response was based on his belief that there really is no unity in God without the three persons and the divine persons so indwell each other that one cannot be known without the others just as one does not exist without the others. Consequently, while Torrance and Barth agree that the Son

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 180.

⁸⁹ 'Thomas Torrance Responds', *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 316. Colin Gunton's preference for the thinking of John Zizioulas could explain the disagreement between Gunton and Torrance here since Zizioulas and Gunton stressed that person is the root of all reality in a way that may replicate elements of the thinking in the Cappadocians that Torrance is here contesting.