'The Essence of Evangelical Theology': Critical Introduction to Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*[1]

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(I) The Occasion of *The Trinitarian Faith*

The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church represents a constructive and contemporary account of the Trinity wherein Thomas Torrance masterfully presents the ancient catholic consensus on the doctrine of God and develops those themes with characteristic precision and acumen. Creatively working with the Greek Fathers of the time (the ancient church), Torrance follows the mind (*phronēma*) of the catholic church in constructing an account of the triune persons that, while theologically dense, is not a species of scholastic synthesis, but rather an example of dogmatic theology (catholic), where the biblical and economic witness (evangelical) take precedence over theological propositions.

Representing a watershed publication on the Trinity, *The Trinitarian Faith* moves from worship to ontology and back again in its dogmatic sweep. Or, in Torrance's more familiar terms, it moves from the evangelical level of God's revelation in

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[1] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, first published in 1988). Hereafter, *The Trinitarian Faith*.

the economy, through to a theological level of clarification (the economic Trinity), before moving to a further scientific level of theological precision (the ontological Trinity). Only then does Torrance go back to the evangelical level of experience and worship – a process Torrance called the stratification of truth in all knowing.

Torrance used the occasion of the sixteen-hundredth anniversary of the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in A.D. 381 to present a theological exposition of the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed at Princeton Theological Seminary, delivered as the Warfield Lectures for 1981. These lectures were subsequently published in 1988 as *The Trinitarian Faith* with the addition of two new chapters, the first and the last, which present the general perspective of faith and devotion within which all pro-Nicene theology must be understood. Limiting himself to the Patristic consensus as it was enshrined in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381, Torrance immerses himself and the reader in the thought of the fourth-century Fathers, especially those of the East. But this is no pure history of late antiquity, nor a species of speculative theology; it is, rather, an exercise in Christian dogmatics. *The Trinitarian Faith* is a distinctive work that uniquely models many of Torrance's most fundamental theological and evangelical commitments.

In a 2010 *Christian Century* article, George Hunsinger listed *The Trinitarian Faith* as the top book of the twentieth century, saying: 'If I could recommend only one book that explains the faith that unites the world's more than 2 billion Christians – Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox – this would be it. Learned and profound, it is perhaps Torrance's most readable work.'[2] The assertion that it is his most readable work is highly debatable; what is not is that it is among the most important theological works of the twentieth century. In terms of readability, it was always Torrance's contention that good theology should be clear

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[2] George Hunsinger, '5 Picks: Essential Theology Books of the Past 25 Years', *Christian Century* 127 no. 21 (2010): 38. Online: http://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/george-hunsinger-5-picks.

and precise. 'Too often', he wrote in a 1966 review of Beardslee's *Reformed Dogmatics*,

> the demand for 'simple' statement has only meant that people have shut their eyes to the profounder issues and have wanted to avoid the hard thinking that is demanded of us in the face of divine realities. It is easy to castigate these old 'dogmaticians' for excessive intellectualism and sterile argumentation, but they did exhibit a rational integrity and a determination for appropriate forms of thought and speech which we could do well to emulate, especially in an age where we are inundated with romantic naturalism and shallow existentialism that are too often little more than crude, psychopathic revolts from rigorous science.[3]

The Trinitarian Faith is a demanding read, with extensive citations in Greek and dense theological prose; but the demands on the reader are worth the effort. Torrance rewards diligent readers with an insight into the thinking of some of the church's greatest thinkers, and at the same time, masterfully brings the reader into the midst of Trinitarian doctrine, with all its mystery and majesty. Hunsinger's appeal to the ecumenical significance of the book was well made. According to John Morrison, *The Trinitarian Faith* 'is a work that sets forth in a new format two of Torrance's greatest concerns: the Church's need to do scientific theology, and the need for ecumenical progress through a proper understanding of the theological-confessional roots of all Christians via the ecumenical Creed'.[4]

There is an openness to Torrance's theology which invites readers into a larger conversation, one the church has been having for some considerable time. Torrance would have us read him as he believes we must read any of the Tradition, indeed, as he reads the Fathers himself – as theological siblings united to Christ, filled with his Spirit, and collectively in worship and mission, discerning the mind of Christ. Torrance makes bold statements, offers clear

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[3] The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 16, 'Review of Reformed Dogmatics, edited by John Beardslee, 1966', 8.

[4] John D. Morrison, review of *The Trinitarian Faith, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 no.1 (1992): 119.

assertions and develops careful arguments, which culminate in convincing theses. His work stimulates further interest in the areas of which he writes. This is no truer than when he wrote on the doctrine of the Trinity, for here, Torrance understood the vital connection between faith and worship. In elaborating the theology of the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed, Torrance made sure to do this within the framework of doxology, 'the general perspective of faith and devotion within which all Nicene and Constantinopolitan theology must surely be understood, and to give definite expression to the Trinitarian convictions of the church that had been implicit in its faith from the beginning'.[5] Here Torrance is representing a distinctive feature of Christian theology that he first learnt from Barth and then from the patristic theologians, that revelation equals reconciliation, 'for it is only through reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ that we may draw near to him and have access to him'.[6] This is what Torrance calls 'embodied truth' or 'embodied doctrine'.[7]

The Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed is to be understood in the same open and faith-filled way as all true theology. Creedal statements, Torrance wrote,

> are to be treated … not as complete but as incomplete statements, not as closed but as open formulations of belief, locked into Truth that exceeds their capacity adequately to express. … Creedal formulations of this kind that arise in compulsive response to the objective self-revelation of God express sure and firm convictions, for they are sustained beyond themselves; but on the other hand they have an open range which answers to the fact that, even while God condescends to make himself known within the conditions of our human existence in space and time, as he had done in the incarnation of his Word and Truth in Jesus Christ, nevertheless by his very nature he transcends the range of all human knowledge and speech.[8]

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[5] Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 2.

[6] Ibid., 3.

[7] Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Deposit of Faith', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 no. 1 (1983): 4.

[8] Ibid., 7.

The Deposit of Faith, an important concept for Torrance, acts as a guide here, with regard to the development of doctrinal orthodoxy. The way in which Torrance understands the *depositum fidei*, by means of Irenaeus especially and then the way in which it was utilized in pro-Nicene theology culminating in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed, put him closer to an Eastern Orthodox understanding of the place and role of tradition than he is to Roman Catholicism. His is a more synthetic view[9] of the Great Tradition, which seeks to think with the mind of the church (the *ekklēsiastikon phronēma*) – which is the mind of Christ.[10] As Torrance sees it:

> By clarifying the inner structure of the Gospel through subordinating its mind to the meaning (διάνοια) of the Holy Scriptures and the apostolic mind (φρόνημα), indeed the Mind (νοῦς) of Christ, which they enshrined, and by giving that structure authoritative expression in the Creed, the Nicene Council had the effect of establishing in a hitherto unprecedented way the primacy of the Holy Scriptures in the mind of the Catholic Church.[11]

As a Reformed theologian, Torrance accepts the Fathers as a subordinate standard of authority, under Holy Scripture in terms of formal authority, and like the Reformers, he identifies and adopts key figures and themes as representative of the churches thinking. Notable in this regard throughout *The Trinitarian Faith* are Irenaeus and the Deposit of Faith, Athanasius and the *homoousion*, Epiphanius of Salamis and a relational ontology, Gregory Nazianzen's teaching that the Father is not the cause

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[9] His one-time student and patristic scholar, Fr. George Dion Dragas, characterizes Torrance's reading of the Fathers as synthetic when he appropriates the principles of Patristic theology, 'The Significance for the Church of Professor Torrance's Election as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 58 no. 3–4 (1976): 216.

[10] While appreciative of his work, I think that at this point Jason Radcliff has underestimated the role the Deposit of Faith plays in Torrance's theology. Jason R. Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers: A Reformed, Evangelical, and Ecumenical Reconstruction of the Patristic Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 1–24.

[11] Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 127.

(*aitia*) of the being of the Son and Spirit (as claimed by Basil and Gregory Nyssen),[12] and Cyril of Alexandria's stress upon what we might express as Trinity in Unity, Unity in Trinity. Of course, many other figures and many other themes are at play in this work, and they are on display for all to see, but these are some of the central ones.[13] Supremely, however, it is the function of the *homoousion* that structures the entire work.

The Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed is the clearest expression, in Torrance's opinion, of the fruit of the Deposit of Faith in both form and content; in form for it is not an analytical, logico-deductive scheme (the problem Torrance identified in Tertullian's conception of the *regula fidei*) but rather a form of embodied truth or embodied doctrine; and in content, the Creed is 'a kerygmatic and charismatic declaration of the Faith once for all delivered to the saints, with a deepened understanding of its objective Christocentric yet Trinitarian ground.'[14] In both form and content then, the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed is understood by Torrance to constitute 'the controlling base with reference to which all other Conciliar Formulations of Christian doctrine were made'.[15] It is little wonder that in a 1990 interview Torrance said that of all his books to that point, *The Trinitarian Faith* was his favourite.[16]

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[12] For a critique of the views of certain Greek theologians (Cappadocians) such as John Zizioulas, that the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, see Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion. Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

[13] In a tableau of sources cited in *The Trinitarian Faith*, Radcliff lists the following: Athanasius is cited 1,197 times, Epiphanius of Salamis 382 times, Irenaeus 293 times, Gregory Nazianzen 284 times, Basil of Ceasarea 276 times, Origen 192 times, Didymus the Blind 185 times, Hilary of Poitiers 180 times, Cyril of Jerusalem 95 times. Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers*, 64.

[14] Torrance, 'The Deposit of Faith', 12.

[15] Ibid.

[16] In answer to the question: 'What do you see as your greatest achievement, or the thing that gives you the most satisfaction?' Torrance replied, 'Of my books, I am most pleased with *The Trinitarian Faith*'. Michael Bauman, *Roundtable: Conversations with European Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 117. It is pure speculation to ask what book he might say is his favourite overall, but I like to think he would say it was *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

(II) The Genre of *The Trinitarian Faith*

In a 1990 review, David Ford described *The Trinitarian Faith* as 'something of a *tour de force*'.[17] Ford notes the unique nature of the volume as neither, strictly speaking, conforming to the genre of patristic scholarship generally, nor conforming to that of the usual systematic theology as practised in Western Christianity. It is, however, in Ford's estimation, 'a well-judged way of communicating the heart of [Torrance's] theology'.[18] 'Torrance's insistence on elucidating fundamental ontological and epistemological issues, together with his unifying of the empirical in an approach that allows thorough engagement with the past over matters of truth, seems to me convincing.'[19] Ford is right. Torrance's work is unique, being a rigorous form of Christian dogmatics, not patrology on the one hand or systematic theology on the other.[20] An appreciation of this genre has not always been evident in the reception of Torrance's work – *The Trinitarian Faith* especially.

   Ford does have criticisms of the book, namely, Torrance's tendency, noted by others, to flatten the historical details of theological debate and development, which inclines towards Torrance reading history as a vast account of his own theological positions. Specifically, notes Ford, 'the ecclesiastical and imperial politics and the ominous use of state coercion in the immediate aftermath of Nicaea need to be reflected upon'.[21] In other words, Ford sees in Torrance's account a subtle but no less present form of idealizing and ideologizing, especially in regard to his treatment of Athanasius.[22] Ford is not alone in his criticisms of Torrance's use of Athanasius. John Morrison shares an opinion held by many that despite the insights and importance of Torrance's work, there are problems, perhaps most notably the impression

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[17] David F. Ford, review of *The Trinitarian Faith*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 43, no. 2 (1990), 263.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 265.

[20] Torrance made a distinction between systematic theology and dogmatics, claiming the latter as his own practice. Thomas F. Torrance, 'Reformed Dogmatics Not Dogmatism', *Theology* 70 (1967): 152–6.

[21] Ford, review of *The Trinitarian Faith*, 266.

[22] Ibid.

that 'the question increasingly arises (not just here but in other works as well) as to the extent to which the thought of Athanasius and the other prominent Greek Fathers is truly being expressed or whether they have in some measure become mere paradigms or even mouthpieces for Torrance's own program of "scientific" theology'.[23] Ford summarily states that 'the main overall problem is that the richness, complexity and ambiguities of the life and thought of the Patristic period are not represented sufficiently'.[24] Other voices demur, notably several Orthodox and Patristic scholars. George Dragas, as a case in point, has chronicled how Torrance's intuitions regarding Athanasian theology were the stimulus to his own detailed and seminal work in this area.[25]

Despite these qualms, however, Ford is insistent that even if such complexities were taken into account, they need not reverse those judgements Torrance makes. *The Trinitarian Faith* makes a considerable contribution to contemporary theology as it offers a constructive synthesis of the pro-Nicene faith and especially of the Greek Fathers of the period. And that, surely, was always the point of Torrance's theology – to present a clear conspectus of the Trinitarian faith, one informed by the Great Tradition and in line with the ecumenical creeds: a theology established in God's self-revelation through his Word, deeply nuanced in the tradition of Christian worship and belief (i.e. orthodoxy), and

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[23] Morrison, review of *The Trinitarian Faith,* 119. Cf., Colin Gunton's critical comments in 'Being and Person: T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God', in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance,* ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 115–37. For Gunton, Torrance's Athanasius was rather Barthian (116). Khaled Anatolios is of the same opinion in his work *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 207–8. According to John Behr, Torrance does not acknowledge the range of interpretations of Athanasius by Patristic scholars. John Behr, review of *Divine Meaning*, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 no. 1 (1998): 107.

[24] Ford, review of *The Trinitarian Faith*, 266. More positive but not less critical interaction with Torrance's use of Athanasius can be found in *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013), a volume devoted to T. F. Torrance and Orthodoxy; see especially Vladimir Cvetkovic, 'T. F. Torrance as an Interpreter of St. Athanasius', 59–93.

[25] 'Interview with Protopresbyter George Dion. Dragas Regarding T. F. Torrance', *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013): 30–46, especially 32–5. See his *Saint Athanasius of Alexandria: Original Research and New Perspectives* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2005).

one that is relevant to contemporary culture only because it is true – God's truth.

Since the publication of *The Trinitarian Faith* there has been a resurgence of Patristic scholarship around what we now call pro-Nicene theology and its developments.[26] Lewis Ayres and Khaled Anatolios, to name but two of the most significant historians of dogma, have offered detailed historical accounts of the period that Torrance has focused upon, and, to be sure, their accounts contain the kind of nuance and complexity David Ford appealed to in his review of the *The Trinitarian Faith*.[27] But, and this would, I believe, be Torrance's point, to what end? When the work of the historian is submitted and duly considered, the dogmatic synthesis is still required, and *The Trinitarian Faith*, I think Torrance would argue, still holds its own in this regard.

This is the opinion of at least one recent work on Torrance and Patristic theology, that of Jason Radcliff. Radcliff has noted John Behr's contention that problems plague modern studies of the Fathers primarily because they either seek to limit themselves to a form of 'pure' history or *use* the Fathers in inappropriate ways as proof-texts for their own systematic theology. In Behr's terms, study of the Fathers has become a study of Late Antiquity rather than theology.[28] By not being a historian of dogma on the one hand or a systematic theologian on the other, Torrance achieved, in Radcliff's words, a 'fresh insight into the Fathers by means of his imaginative connections, re-reading and resituating of The Fathers by bringing fresh questions to The Fathers and attempting to imaginatively reconstruct their answers in order to explore their relevance in his own theological context'.[29] It is this insight that

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[26] The term 'pro-Nicene' was not coined by Lewis Ayres, but is used repeatedly and usefully throughout his work *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). It is not a term that Torrance used, as he predated it, but it is one consistent with his reading of Patristic theology.

[27] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*; and Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

[28] John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 18, cited in Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers*, 56.

[29] Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers*, 56.

makes *The Trinitarian Faith* 'a truly unique work'.[30] Morwenna Ludlow notes the tendency to mistake the genre of Torrance's work, commenting that '[his historical work] is carried out on partly textual grounds, but also in response to broader questions being discussed between systematic theologians'.[31]

As a work of Christian dogmatics informed by the Tradition, Torrance modelled what today is called a theology of retrieval.[32] But, in Torrance's hands, the Tradition is not a static monolithic 'thing' to be reckoned with. Rather, Tradition is one aspect of the church universal, as together, under the Spirit and in the Word, the people of God discern the mind of Christ. It is on this basis that Torrance could place so much confidence in the ecumenical creeds and the theology they have bequeathed to the later church, such as the *homoousion*, *perichoresis*, and such like. This method, if we may call it such, has not gone unchallenged, however. Many historians still believe they can do history in the abstract, in a vacuum as it were, shielded from genuinely theological questions and commitments. Certain systematic theologians, likewise, operate on the assumption that it is legitimate to move from a reading of biblical texts to their immediate systemization, as if the Bible were a badly conceived book of doctrine requiring human help to make it coherent, and rendering the history of Christian thought to a footnote in failed interpretation. Torrance, of course, is neither a 'detached' historian nor a 'pure' systematician. Ludlow has described Torrance's method as follows: 'Torrance constructs a line of what one might call Trinitarian heroes extending from the earliest discussions of the idea of a triune God via Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus to Calvin, and thence to Barth. He thus … supports his argument … by placing Nazianzen in a tradition or family of theological antecedents and descendants of whom Torrance approves'.[33] Ludlow is correct; Torrance creates a theological lineage and lines up his representatives on either side of that divide. Torrance is not

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25.

[32] See W. David Buschart and Kent D. Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015).

[33] Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 33.

alone in this method; in fact, he stands with a great host of church voices. This is nowhere more evident than in the way he uses the *homoousion* throughout *The Trinitarian Faith*.

(III) The When of *The Trinitarian Faith*

Torrance's interest in ecumenism and in the East especially came early, from his upbringing in China on the mission field with his parents, to being a 'missionary kid' at University and mixing with the various Christian student unions, to his interest at University in the early church 'especially as reflected in the Greek literature of the first four centuries of the Church which seemed to me much closer to the teaching of the New Testament'.[34] He then travelled through the Middle East, Greece, and Israel in 1936 on a John Stuart Blackie travelling fellowship. On this trip he studied biblical languages, archaeology and culture.[35] He joined the archaeological investigations of Constantine's Palace and St Mary's Church in Istanbul. After his studies, a decade-long period in pastoral ministry, and then following the War, Torrance became a university professor. Originally employed to tutor in Christian history, Torrance was appointed Professor of Christian Dogmatics at Edinburgh University, New College, in 1952, but, due to internal politics, was not to lecture on the doctrine of God, hence on the Trinity (although to postgraduate students he was unrestricted and did teach on the doctrine of the Trinity). It was after his retirement from New College in 1979 that he published major works on the Trinity, including *The Trinitarian Faith* (1988), *Trinitarian Perspectives* (1994) and *The Christian Doctrine of God*

[34] The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10, 'T.F. Torrance, '*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*: My Theological Development', 7.

[35] Matthew Baker notes Torrance's long interest in Eastern theology in 'Introduction', *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013): 3–4. He notes the long-standing relationships Torrance had with, among others, Georges Florovsky and Chrysostom Constantinides through the Faith and Order movement of the WCC; and his friendship with Methodius Fouyas, then Metropolitan of Axum (Ethiopia) and later Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Great Britain.

(1996). Torrance went on to become one of, if not the, foremost Trinitarian theologian of the twentieth century. He was also a unique figure in Reformed and evangelical theological scholarship in his return to the sources, especially the Greek Fathers, while maintaining his Reformed theological commitments.

From the middle of the twentieth century there was a phenomenon among evangelical churches to either reject tradition on the one hand (partly based upon a misunderstood notion of *sola scriptura*), or to return to it and reject Protestantism in the process (the flight to Rome or to the East) on the other. Jason Radcliff has nicely set the scene in this regard and placed Torrance within such a context, in his work on Torrance and the Church Fathers.[36] Radcliff chronicled various Evangelical figures and groups who 'converted' to Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, in search of a return to the sources and to some 'Golden Era' of church history – here he specifically mentions Thomas Howard and Peter Gilquist, or those who uncritically and thus unhelpfully appropriated aspects of patristic theology, such as the Emerging Church and paleo-orthodoxy. Outside of evangelicalism John Henry Newman (from Anglican to Roman Catholic) and Jaroslav Pelikan (from Lutheran to Eastern Orthodox) were well-known precursors to such movements. Radcliff makes the case that amidst such 'conversions' and 'transitions', Torrance cuts a distinct figure; he was neither ignorant of the Fathers nor did he believe that there was some Golden Era of the church to which we should all return, a form of restorationism. Rather, in Radcliff's terms, Torrance attempted a 'Reformed, evangelical, and ecumenical reconstruction' of the Patristic tradition. It is a 'reconstruction' because Torrance 'allowed The Fathers and his own Reformed evangelical tradition to dynamically inform and reform one another'.[37] Radcliff rightly believes that out of all Torrance's works *The Trinitarian Faith* is 'the clearest statement of Torrance's vision of the consensual patristic tradition'.[38]

A different but equally helpful way to situate *The Trinitarian Faith* is to place him within what Sarah Coakley has called the

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[36] Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers*, 25–53.
[37] Ibid., 52.
[38] Ibid., 51.

three waves of Trinitarian renewal.[39] While she does not name such waves we are justified in describing them as, one, the late-modern development; two, a reactionary imaginative phase; and three, a further reactionary but corrective phase. According to her narrative, the first wave was initiated by Vladimir Lossky, who introduced into the literature a perceived split between Eastern and Western ways of thinking of God. By propagating the so-called de Régnon thesis (a false reading according to Coakley) of a disjunction between Augustine and the Cappadocians on the Trinity such that '"Relationality" and "personhood" – themes at the heart of classical Patristic trinitarianism – had become a newly polemical matter in Lossky's account'.[40] Together with Barth and Rahner, Lossky put the doctrine of the Trinity at the forefront of the theological task and spoke of an East–West divide. What these three otherwise diverse theologians represent in Coakley's thinking is a united opposition to an Enlightenment dismissal of theological metaphysics. First-wave trinitarianism can thus be located somewhere between the 1930s and the 1960s, but persists today.

The second wave of twentieth-century trinitarianism is said to be represented by John Zizioulas and could be described, according to Coakley's account, as an imaginative trinitarianism. Responding to an anthropological emphasis on individualism and atomism, Zizioulas countered with the claim that, according to Cappadocian theology (and Eastern theology more generally), a person's relationality is more fundamental than their individualization. In the words of Zizioulas, being-is-communion. Western theologians adopted this paradigm with gusto, and applied it to a vast array of situations, and, in the process, argued that the Western focus on the unity of God, or his substance, was a radical distortion. Augustine became the object of critique for such second-wave trinitarians.[41] Further, 'according to this view there is a natural and significant correlation between intra-divine relationality of this Trinitarian

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[39] Sarah Coakley, 'Afterword: "Relational Ontology," Trinity, and Science', in *The Trinity in an Entangled Word: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology,* ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 184–99.

[40] Ibid., 187. Coakley includes Barth and Rahner in this first wave and connects them together in their rejection of the Enlightenment resistance to theological metaphysics (189).

[41] Colin Gunton and John Polkinghorne are included in Coakley's account of second-wave trinitarianism.

form and the relationality that physicists may glimpse, in a variety of ways, in the basic structures of the created universe'.[42] Second-wave trinitarianism can thus be located from the mid-1990s and continues in many quarters today.

Finally, Coakley would have us understand that there is now a third wave of Trinitarian thought that is a response to the second wave and thus also to the first. We might call this phase the apophatic turn. Coakley includes herself in this phase, along with Lewis Ayres and others,[43] and characterizes this as a return to the Patristic sources in a more mature and informed way, in order to see the common trinitarian theology of the church, a 'pro-Nicene theology', and recover a chastened and more modest doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps most significantly for this phase is the limited 'use' a 'traditional' doctrine of the Trinity has, other than as the least problematic way of naming the God who is beyond all knowing. So critical are these third-wavers that some call into question the validity of any of the first two waves at all to represent anything like a biblical or orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. The last line of Stephen Holmes's book provocatively states: 'We called what we were doing a "trinitarian revival"; future historians might want to ask us why.'[44] This third wave is thus a rejection of first- and second-wave trinitarianism. Third-wave trinitarianism can thus be located from 2000 and persists even today.

How useful Coakley's historical taxonomy is can be debated, and the nuances of her argument need not concern us here, other than to ask where the work of Thomas Torrance fits into this schema.[45] Written in 1988, *The Trinitarian Faith* might be thought to expound second-wave trinitarianism: with a polemical disjunction between East and West, with various forms of

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[42] Coakley, 'Afterword: "Relational Ontology," Trinity, and Science', 191.

[43] Namely Kallistos Ware, John Behr, Rowan Williams, and Michel Barnes. If written later, she would clearly include Karen Kilby and Stephen Holmes.

[44] Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 200.

[45] In a lengthy and profound essay, Christoph Schwöbel offers his own narrative of Trinitarian revival, and in the process offers far more nuance and more constructive insights than Coakley's account, in 'Where Do We Stand in Trinitarian Theology?', in *Recent Developments in Trinitarian Theology: An International Symposium,* ed. Christophe Chalamet and Marc Vial (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 9–71.

'applications' of divine relationality to the created order (with all its concomitant projectionism) and with a naïve reading of the Patristic sources. Torrance does advance the relationship between theology and science in many of his works – he might even be considered the father of the modern theology–science dialogue; he is a Western theologian reading the Eastern Fathers, and while appreciative of Augustine, he did accuse him of introducing certain dualisms (the 'Latin Heresy' in his terms) into the mind of the Western theological guild.[46] So on the surface, we might be tempted to say Torrance's *The Trinitarian Faith* is a species of second-wave trinitarianism; this certainly appears to be the unstated implications of third-wavers. If that were the case, however, then we might also expect third-wave trinitarians to take Torrance to task, as they have attempted to do with Colin Gunton, John Zizioulas and others. That, however, is not the case.

In fact, Torrance's work on patristic theology has been largely ignored by third-wave Trinitarians like Coakley, Ayres, and Holmes. It is absent in the sweeping historical account of Stephen Holmes; it does not make its way into the indexes of the works of Ayres or Anatolios, and certainly Torrance is not in Coakley's sights.[47] One wonders why? It is not that his work is lightweight; it is not. Nor is it that his work was published at a time when theologians were not confronted by the sorts of issues Torrance

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[46] Torrance's critique of Augustine does not sink to the dizzying lows of Colin Gunton. For instance, he writes of Augustine's *De Trinitate* as 'surely one of the greatest works on theology ever written', Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Towards Doctrinal Agreement* (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 22.

[47] Holmes only refers to Torrance once in his work on Trinitarian theology, and it is a reference to John Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity; Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 169. The omission of Torrance has been addressed by Jason Radcliff, 'T. F. Torrance in Light of Stephen Holmes's Critique of Contemporary Trinitarian Thought', *Evangelical Quarterly* 86 no.1 (2014): 21–38; and it has been part of a sustained critical interaction with Holmes's work. See the comments made by Robert Letham and Kevin Giles in *The Holy Trinity Revisited: Essays in Response to Stephen R. Holmes,* ed. Thomas A. Noble and Jason S. Sexton (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), 35–6 and 47–8, respectively, where Letham calls this 'the case of the missing theologian'. More extensive comments are given by Jason Radcliff, 'T.F. Torrance and the Patristic Consensus on the Doctrine of the Trinity', 68–81 (a reprint of his *EQ* article); and Graham J. Watts, 'Does the Emperor Have New Clothes? Is Modern Trinitarian Theology a Revival or a Repudiation of Fourth-Century Settlements?', 120–34. In response, Holmes acknowledges the error of the omission of Torrance in his account, stating that 'Torrance does not … fit the story I tell concerning the twentieth-century Trinitarian revival …' 'Response: In Praise of Being Criticized', 151.

was addressing; as we have seen, they were. One can only conclude that Torrance's work does not fit the narrative of Coakley's three waves, for it does not uncritically accept an East–West divide; it does not divide theology from the wider conversation with science (the 'hard' and 'soft' sciences); and it does not proof-text a Church Father here and there to prove some prior point, project that onto God and then apply it to human social constructions. Even in his lengthy elaboration of *perichoresis*, that much abused doctrine,[48] Torrance does not confuse divine and human being or relating. In short, Torrance's work fits none of Coakley's three waves; rather, it is a work of Christian dogmatics, informed by the tradition, from one who was intimately aware of the patristic sources, and was acutely attuned to the context of Christian worship, devotion and piety, which are required to do good theology. 'Trinitarian worship and Trinitarian faith thus provided the implicit controlling ground both for a faithful restructuring of the life of the Church and for a godly renewing of its understanding in the Mind of Christ'.[49] Where Coakley speaks of waves we might think of Torrance's theology as a great ocean current undeterred by the surface issues that are constantly in flux.

This should not suggest that the surface issues have no effect upon the undercurrents of theological thought. They do. One can further discuss the context of Torrance's work here as a reflection of a debate he was having throughout the 1980s with John Zizioulas, for example.[50] While deeply appreciative of Zizioulas's learning and devotion, Torrance was critical of several theological moves he made, notably his insistence on the *monarchy* of the person of the

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[48] See Karen Kilby, '*Perichoresis* and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', *New Blackfriars*, 81 (2000): 432–45.

[49] Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 46.

[50] John Zizioulas was a teaching assistant of Torrance's at Edinburgh in the years 1970–73, before Zizioulas went on to Glasgow and then to King's College, London. Interestingly, following Zizioulas, Torrance had George Dragas as his teaching assistant in the years 1973–74. Dragas completed several theological degrees under Torrance (one in Edinburgh and another in Princeton Theological Seminary), began his PhD under his supervision, and continued to work with Torrance on a number of projects, most notably the Agreed Statement on the Trinity brokered between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and a pan-Orthodox consultation. See Torrance, 'The Agreed Statement on the Trinity', in *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985, 1993), 2: 219–22.

Father and the causation of the Son and the Spirit.[51] Zizioluas argued his case from his reading of the Cappadocians, and thus Torrance, it would appear, was by the 1980s, retrieving Cappadocian theology as a way to combat what he saw as an Origenist subordinationism evident in the work of Zizioulas.[52] Torrance turns in *The Trinitarian Faith*, to several key thinkers and themes to argue that the *monarchy* lies in the being of God and not simply in the will of the person of the Father. To achieve this argument Torrance pits Gregory of Nazianzus against Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. The *homoousion* combined with a doctrine of *perichoresis* results in a rejection of casual relations within the Trinity, as far as Torrance is concerned, and he takes up this anti-Zizioulas challenge with an interpretation of the Cappadocians, which, while not unique, is still something of an original contribution to patristic studies.[53] The details of the argument can be found in *The Trinitarian Faith* (although Zizioulas is nowhere mentioned) and the reader can follow the argument and come to their own conclusions; what is of interest here is why and how Torrance conducted his study of the Fathers. Examples of such disputes and challenges of Torrance's own day being read into the early church could be amplified, but enough has been given to illustrate the point: Torrance comes to Patristic theology as a theologian, and not as a disinterested and 'objective' historian. This does not call into question his ability as a historical theologian; it does, however, ask the reader to exert critical discernment when reading his (or any) work as Torrance comes to his sources with theological interests and for dogmatic ends. As Thomas Noble has aptly stated:

> If one approaches Torrance's writings with the mind-set of a historian, it is easy to think that he is reading his own theology, or that of Calvin or Barth, into the Fathers. But of course as a theologian, he is not so much interested in the contextual differences as in the great correspondences. The context and culture of the Fathers may

[51] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

[52] An account of the debate between Torrance and Ziziouals is detailed in Nikolaos Asproulis, 'T. F. Torrance and John Zizioulas on the Divine *Monarchia*: The Cappadocian Background and the Neo-Cappadocian Solution', *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013): 162–89.

[53] For further discussion, see Christopher Beeley, 'Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus', *Harvard Theological Review* 100 no. 2 (2007): 199–214.

be different from ours, but they are writing about the same God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.[54]

(IV) Central Themes of *The Trinitarian Faith*

Throughout *The Trinitarian Faith* at least six distinctive features of patristic theology are most clearly evident. First, an emphasis and development of the vicarious humanity of Christ as an all-encompassing concept is presented. Second, what Torrance calls the *kata physin* method of theology is used, whereby the object under investigation dictates the mode of study. This is why Torrance added chapters on faith and devotion as the context for theological reflection. Third, the theological principle, evident in the Fathers, that genuine revelation results in reconciliation, or is received only by those reconciled to God is developed: that is, worship, piety, and godliness are conditions for dogmatics. Fourth, Torrance moves beyond the essence–energies distinction of later Byzantine theology to show that the Fathers did not separate God's being from his act. Fifth, there is an emphasis upon the fallen humanity of Christ throughout *The Trinitarian Faith*, as Torrance explicates how 'the unassumed is the unhealed'. Finally, Torrance shows how the *homoousion* should be used as a heuristic device.[55]

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[54] Thomas A. Noble, 'T. F. Torrance on the Centenary of his Birth: A Biographical and Theological Synopsis with Some Personal Reminiscences', *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013): 23.

[55] Gary Deddo summarizes the central convictions evident throughout Torrance's theology, but they are also pertinent especially to *The Trinitarian Faith*, when, in a 2001 essay on Torrance's theology of the Holy Spirit, he presents seven interconnected themes that form the foundation of his trinitarian theology.

(1) a clear and profound understanding of the *homoousios* applying to the Trinity as a whole, (2) the *hyposaseies* considered as being *enhypostatic*, (3) the unity of action (*energeia*) of the one God considered *enousios*, (4) the personal subsisting relations grasped in such a way that the perichoretic quality of them applies to the whole God (5) such that the Holy Spirit is seen to be the union and communion of the Father and the Son, and that (6) the relations then must not be construed in terms of causation but in terms of that perichoretic communion of the Spirit, it should then be concluded that (7) the unity of Trinity must not be located in the person of the Father, but in the perichoretic Triunity of the being of God.

Gary W. Deddo, 'The Holy Spirit in T. F. Torrance's Theology', in *The Promise of Trinitarian theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 89–90.

Each of these six points (and others) are interrelated, such that one touches upon the other, informing it and clarifying each other. It is Torrance's use of the *homoousion,* however, that structures his reading of the Fathers and of the many interrelated concepts he explores throughout the book.

In this work Torrance presents what he sees as the radical revolution brought about by the Greek Fathers of the fourth century, as they thought from within the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit: that of a relational ontology. This resulted in a cosmology and epistemology commensurate with such an ontology, which is revealed by and seen in the atoning exchange wrought by Christ in his incarnate life. In the mighty act of God raising Jesus from the dead, the early church saw the grounds for a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and so from Christology they derived their cosmology. Pro-Nicene theology sought to theologically articulate the church's understanding of the Son of God as the eternal Logos, now made flesh, the focal rationality of being. Being is not static nor is it in flux, it is dynamic and relational, thus tri-personal as the Nicene theologians would explicate: one being in three persons, each *homoousios* and each in reciprocal communion, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 'To be' is thus 'to be in communion.' In the incarnation, the Logos brings creation into the orbit of radical relationality: in the incarnate Son's communion with the world, the world communes with God. This is God's creative and redemptive goal.

Paul Achtemeier reminds us of a critical feature of Torrance's work: 'Union with Christ involves not simply a participation in the life of Christ, but also a sharing in the *mind* of Christ.'[56] Sharing in the mind of Christ takes on a heuristic force in Torrance's work, pointing the reader back to Jesus Christ himself whose life, thoughts, prayers and worship become ours in a trinitarian event of transposition.[57] Drawing heavily on John McLeod Campbell's theology, Torrance contends that the believer is brought 'within

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[56] Paul M. Achtemeier, 'The *Union with Christ* Doctrine in Renewal: Movements of the Presbyterian Church (USA)', in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity,* ed. W. M. Alston and M. Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 340.

[57] This Torrancean theme is developed in the work of Christian D. Kettler, *The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

the circle of the life of Christ',[58] to know, love and worship God. Throughout *The Trinitarian* Faith, these themes are read out of the Greek Fathers. In similar vein, Jenson reminds us:

> With respect to the knowledge of God, East and West are often thought to disagree drastically, but there is no disagreement on our present fundamental point. God, East and West have agreed, is not known because he is amenable to the exercise of our cognitive powers. He is known by us in that he grants us what we could never reach, or even know we could or should reach: he takes us into his own knowledge of himself.[59]

Given Torrance's theological method of cognitive stratification,[60] he contends that this allows us to affirm simultaneously the knowability of God in the incarnate Son through the Holy Spirit and at the same time to stand with our hands over our mouths and fall on our knees to worship and adore that which will forever be beyond our comprehension.[61] Torrance attempts to provide a balance, then, between a radical apophaticism whereby nothing, or almost nothing, can be known of God,[62] and an over-familiarity with God common among the radical mystics.[63] The Greek Fathers Torrance approves of – Athanasius, Cyril, Didymus, Gregory Nazianzen and Epiphanius, for starters – are sure guides in how

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[58] Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 139. Torrance also notes that in addition to McLeod Campbell, he could have taken the same idea from H. R. Mackintosh.

[59] Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1: *The Triune God (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 227, cited in Achtemeier, 'The *Union with Christ* Doctrine in Renewal', 341.

[60] See a discussion of the various levels of theology in Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Stratification of Truth', in *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 131–59; and *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 88–111. See a discussion on these levels in Myk Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T.F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 27–65.

[61] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 110–1.

[62] Here one finds a not-so-subtle rejection of the much later Palamite essence–energies distinction.

[63] In Torrance's language this is the ability to apprehend God but not to comprehend him. See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 53, for instance.

to rightly think of the triune God without saying too much … or too little.

Due to the heuristic force of the *homoousion*, in terms of both the Son *and* the Holy Spirit, Torrance can identify the economic Trinity with the God, who is the same in his very nature, in the ontological Trinity.[64]

> In this way the *homoousion* is found to have a critical significance in regard to 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. It does tell us that what God is antecedently, eternally and inherently in himself he is indeed toward us in the incarnate economy of his saving action in Jesus Christ on our behalf, but it relates that economy ontologically to God in the ineffable Mystery of his Being who remains transcendent over all space and time, so that a significant distinction and delimitation between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity must be recognised as well as their essential oneness.[65]

As a result of the *homoousion,* we meet with the immanent Trinity (*theologia*) when we encounter Jesus Christ and the Spirit in space-time (*oikonomia*). Neither God nor human nature is changed by this fellowship (*koinōnia*): however, as the one Person of Christ remains the same in the incarnation despite the union of the two natures (*henōsis hypostatikē*), so in the union (*henōsis*) of humanity and God in salvation neither is changed ontologically but each relates to the other in a 'real' way.[66] For human persons this means they become more fully 'personed' through participation in the divine nature.

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[64] For an analysis of the economic and ontological Trinity in recent thought, specifically Torrance's work, see Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), especially 167–96; 317–30 and Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 200–15.

[65] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 97.

[66] Thomas F. Torrance, 'Incarnation and Atonement: Theosis and Henosis in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism', *Society of Ordained Scientists,* Bulletin No. 7 (Edgeware, Middlesex, 1992), 8–20.

As a dogmatician, Torrance reads the Tradition with a clearly articulated framework. As far as Torrance is concerned, there are various streams within the Great Tradition that can be discerned by means of identifying common theological commitments and ways of thinking. Torrance is guilty at times of anachronism and of flattening out the actual historical complexities within which debates were conducted and decisions were made. He reads later theological commitments back into earlier personalities and on that basis develops theological genealogies and trajectories within which he then re-reads the tradition. This is not to suggest he does violence to the history; rather, his eye was trained to see the theological issues first and foremost, and not simply the historical complexities. We see evidence of this in the way in which he attempted to 'place' Athanasius and those in his theological genealogy. It is just this theological method that allowed Torrance to read the Father afresh, finding connections between their diverse works, and present a coherent account of doctrinal development faithful to Holy Scripture.

According to standard text-book accounts, two 'schools' of thought emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries with differing proposals on how to explain the precise nature of the divinity of Jesus Christ: the Alexandrian and the Antiochene.[67] While the 'two-school' theory is now thought to be radically simplistic, it does draw attention to some of the general positions inherent in the early church. On the one hand, the Antiochene 'school' with its so-called 'Logos-anthropos' Christology found its most radical exponents articulating Nestorianism – the view that Jesus Christ is actually two beings residing in one. The other school of thought, the Alexandrian, and its so-called 'Logos-sarx' Christology found its most radical exponents articulating Apollinarianism

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[67] Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J. Bowden (London: Mowbrays, 1975), in particular, popularized the *Logos-sarx/Logos-anthropos* distinction. It is unwise to take the classic accounts of either 'school' too far. While two *streams* of theology did exist, they were by no means separate or so well defined. Recent scholarship, especially on Athanasius, has challenged the readings of Grillmeier, Kelly and others on the *Logos-sarx* model of Alexandrian Christology. See Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 70–3; 138–46, especially, who argues that Athanasius writes in a context of Stoicism and Hellenism but does so in a distinctly apologetic way that actually subverts Hellenistic assumptions (70).

or Eutychianism. Apollinaris and his followers claimed that the soul of Jesus was replaced by the *Logos,* something which the pro-Nicene tradition refuted. Eutychianism held that Christ had only one nature; hence this tended to be Docetic, something which the Chalcedonian Formula and its theology rejected.

Rejecting a simplistic two-school approach to the issues, Torrance's theology, like Barth's, reflects both christologies.[68] According to some commentators, Torrance adopts a synthesis between the Antiochene and Alexandrian paths, or he maintains a dialogical relation between these two traditions.[69] While a dialogical relation to the 'two schools' appears to many to be the most natural reading of Torrance's method, it is not the way he sees it himself. Because the 'two schools' typology often creates an artificial distinction between Antiochene and Alexandrian thought, there was, Torrance argues, a third 'school' of thought operative in the early church: one that gave priority to the vicarious humanity of Jesus and emphasized the deity and lordship of Christ.[70] According to Torrance, patristic thought plotted this middle path between the other two 'schools', and, as indicated, Athanasius is held up as the supreme model. Athanasius understood the incarnation to be God *as* man in Jesus Christ. Understanding God *as* man meant for

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[68] Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (Amsterdam: Mouton, 1984), argues that Barth's Christology has some Antiochene elements, but most of them can also be explained in an Alexandrian framework. George Hunsinger, 'Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth,* ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127–42, argues Waldrop is unable to see Barth's real allegiance to Chalcedonian christology due to his insistence upon holding to only two options (132). With this contribution Hunsinger continues the compelling argument initiated in his earlier work, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), of reading Barth dialogically and seeing recurring patterns throughout the *Church Dogmatics* rather than a single unifying motif. If Barth's theology is inherently Chalcedonian, Torrance's is inherently Nicene.

[69] J. Hing-Kau Yeung, *Being and Knowing: An Examination of T.F. Torrance's Christological Science* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1996), 139.

[70] Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Place of the Humanity of Christ in the Sacramental Life of the Church', *Church Service Society Annual* 26 (1956), 3–10. Graham Redding assesses this claim in *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), 34–40. Torrance's proposal of a 'third school' highlights the growing unease among contemporary thinkers over the 'two-school' hypothesis of Grillmeier *et al.* Clearly, theology was more fluid than the 'two-school' hypothesis suggests.

Athanasius that he had to understand the humanity of Jesus in a profoundly vicarious manner. From this came his advocacy of the doctrine of *theōsis*, the exchange wrought by Jesus Christ for men and women.[71] Though the issue underscores the over-simplification of the 'two schools' account in general, the supposition of a 'third school' is improbable. Rather than enlightening the somewhat fluid categories in which the early church worked, this suggestion merely posits another artificial 'school' of thought into which each thinker is made to fit. However, it does explain how Torrance reads patristic theology by adopting an Athanasian Christology as his own, along with the rudiments of that theology.

It is more correct to describe Torrance's theology as neither strictly Alexandrian nor Antiochene, but as what we would today describe as pro-Nicene and pro-Chalcedonian, or, in James Torrance's categorization, a 'Nicene Incarnational Model'.[72] While this was not a discrete 'school', it was an approach to the issues of the day that Torrance adopts in his own work. Torrance thus consistently describes his own theology as Nicene, by which he means in faithful continuity with pro-Nicene theology centred on the *homoousion* and enshrined in '"the Great and Holy Synod" or "the Great Ecumenical Synod", to which all subsequent Ecumenical Councils looked back as their normative basis'.[73] Due to the faithfulness of the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed to Holy Scripture, it was increasingly honoured 'as "an unalterable determination (*imperturbata constitutio*) of the Church" … second only to the one foundation which Christ himself had laid in the apostles and prophets, but serving it, building on it, and in some sense sharing in its unrepeatable character'.[74] As such, Torrance also styles his an 'evangelical theology'. The preeminent upholders of this pro-Nicene and evangelical theology in the early church

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[71] On *theōsis* and Torrance, see Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

[72] James B. Torrance, 'The Vicarious Humanity of Christ', in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381,* ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 135–7.

[73] Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 13.

[74] Ibid., 14.

include, first and foremost, Athanasius, but also Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria.[75]

The champion of the Eastern Church for Torrance is without doubt Athanasius of Alexandria. Torrance understood Athanasius to be located within the 'Episcopal tradition' of Alexandrian biblical theology, one which had a distinct biblical hermeneutic and a scientific methodology.[76] The Alexandrian scientific tradition of heuristic method was adopted by Torrance and not only was this used in his own constructive dogmatics but was also applied to the Fathers themselves in order for Torrance to mine the patristic sources for more meaning than even they discerned.[77] This is vividly exemplified in his use of the *an/en-hypostasis* couplet, the theological formula 'the unassumed is the unhealed', and the extensive meaning of the *homoousion*.

(V) Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this critical introduction is how Torrance reads the tradition and utilizes it for dogmatic ends. His theology attempts to read theology with the mind of the church in order to apprehend the mind of Christ and, as such, witness to the truth of God in Christ. His work must not be seen as a study of Late Antiquity, nor should it be passed off as a series of patristic proof-texts. Rather, in Torrance's hand, the tradition is read critically and dogmatically; it is reinterpreted and reapplied, and in that process, according to Torrance, we are carried along with the church in its worship and reflection upon the triune God of grace.

[75] Other figures are also important: Irenaeus, Epiphanius of Salamis, Didymus the Blind, Hilary of Poitiers for example. Outside of the Fathers, Torrance includes in his stable of 'pro-Nicene and evangelical' thinkers the likes of John Calvin, Karl Barth and John McLeod Campbell. He also included scientists that contributed to the foundations of true knowledge or who applied such knowledge in practical ways – here we could include John Philoponos, James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein for instance. Notably absent from Torrance's 'approved sources' are Gregory Nyssen, Augustine, Aquinas and Gregory Palamas, for instance.

[76] Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 215.

[77] Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (London: T&T Clark, 1995), 235–7; and Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 216.

When read together with *The Christian Doctrine of God*, *The Trinitarian Faith* provides one of the best introductions to the evangelical theology of the ancient catholic church. If one wants to know what Christians have believed about the doctrine of the Trinity from the beginning, then Torrance is a sure guide and a profound pleasure to read.