

# Trinity – Worship and Wonder

Conversations along the way

Don Priest



# Trinity – Worship and Wonder

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Self-published March 2025, March 2026.

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ISBN: 978-0-6456752-5-2

A catalogue record for this work is available from the National Library of Australia

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## Introduction

*Trinity – Worship and Wonder* shares some of my understanding of and appreciation for the trinitarian theologies of nine theologians. I respond to outlines of their theologies with the help of reviews of their books and articles. *Trinity – Worship and Wonder* considers a range of resources that I have found helpful as I have tried to be more aware of the faith, social and cultural dynamics associated with trinitarian theology.

I have found this long-term personal learning journey a far from purely conceptual one. The personal and relational themes, the confronting life-style challenges, the emotional and cognitive impacts, and the enriching and encouraging beliefs about core values, have repeatedly slowed down my reading and led to times of meaningful meditation and renewing reflection.

I have gathered trinitarian theological resources in two categories. I read the first group while involved in a variety of evangelical contexts.<sup>1</sup> They form the essence of this current book. The second are from Roman Catholic authors and were initially read as part of my Master of Theological Studies course.

My reflections are an autoethnographic ethno-theological biography – a portrayal of inter-related explorations from a variety of experiences in and beyond Christian communities over at least five decades. This framework is in continuity with those I have previously used and determines both its limitations and its delimitations, and hopefully helps identify its strengths as well as its many inadequacies.<sup>2</sup> I have understated the triumphs and troubles that are hinted at and sometimes made somewhat clear in the writings of various authors I have referenced.

*Trinity – Worship and Wonder*, like my other books, is a lay-person's working journal, written and shared in the hope that it will encourage growth in love and understanding as we care for one another in this beautiful but troubled world. It is published as a thanksgiving for the communities in which we lived and for the opportunities I was given to share in their gatherings for worship. I hope that reading this book helps motivate further exploration of biblical themes and passages in their historical and theological settings, and that, in so doing, readers find peace, joy and hope. I hope that, as this book is read, worship is deepened, relationships are encouraged and application to everyday life is enriched.

Don Priest  
March 2025

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word *evangelical* as it was generally understood in the second half of last century.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Don Priest, *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry* (2023); *Learning to Love Wisdom* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2019).

## Reflections on a personal journey

### Background

*Trinity – Worship and Wonder* tells the story of some aspects of my study of trinitarian theology and worship as I have transitioned from my early beliefs to ones that are more biblically and theologically informed. As my already published anthology profiles, I have explored and shared as a layperson what I saw as trinitarian, incarnational and atonement theologies. I hoped to see the benefits of these theologies applied in the practical, everyday personal lives of those with whom we spent time in families, communities, schools and churches.<sup>3</sup>

The views of God I grew up hearing seem to me to have been mostly modalist and barely trinitarian. References to any awareness of God's presence were ascribed to the Holy Spirit, messages about gospel, new birth and salvation were aligned with Jesus saving us, and God as heavenly Father was usually associated with the Lord's Prayer or used as a title for the 'immortal, invisible, God only wise' depicted in hymns including this one by a 19<sup>th</sup> century hymnwriter, Walter C. Smith.

I engaged with the Jesus and charismatic movements as a leader of an evangelical university Christian group in the early 1970s. Both movements emphasised encountering a personal God. The former mainly focused on Jesus as Saviour and Lord and did little to distinguish between Jesus' own spirit and the Holy Spirit, while the latter emphasised that experiencing the Holy Spirit was experiencing the God seen in Jesus with a somewhat detached emphasis on Jesus. There was a considerable silence about biblical references to God as Father in these contexts.<sup>4</sup>

References to God as Father in mainstream groups saw God's fatherhood as descriptive and contradictory – descriptive in the sense that God was everyone's parent and that vicarious atonement was either unnecessary or universal, and contradictory as it privileged maleness and marginalised and/or excluded women.

Geoffrey Bingham's teaching for the university group was the first substantially trinitarian theology I encountered. He emphasised the tri-personal nature of God with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit complementing each other in harmonious

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<sup>3</sup> *In Triune Community* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2019); *Learning to Love Wisdom; Living in Love and Freedom* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2017); *Living Love* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022); *Meditations on Hope and Peace* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022); *Meditations on Resilience and Renewal*, vol. 1, (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022); *ibid.*, 2; *Priest, Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry, Towards Eternity* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022); *Travelling Together* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Leon Morris, *Lord from Heaven, The* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974); *Spirit of the Living God* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960).

actions in different ways. J. I. Packer's *Knowing God* also provided a welcome theological overview of conservative, evangelical theology.<sup>5</sup>

Along with reading and learning from a range of authors including Leon Morris, John Stott, C. S. Lewis and Jacques Ellul, Thomas Smail's *Reflected Glory* and Samuel Chadwick's *The Way to Pentecost* helped move my thinking into a more relational tri-personal trinitarianism.<sup>6</sup> Samuel Chadwick wrote in detail of his 'second blessing' experience. While I do not share his labelling, I have sensed God's presence at times while reading and reflecting on the resources I have accessed.<sup>7</sup>

By the early 1980s, several of our peer group were missionaries in the Middle East. Their newsletters included helpful insights into the trinitarian and christological beliefs of ancient churches closer to the cultural and ethnic origins of Christianity. I also briefly explored Lutheran and non-evangelical Anglican theologies while working as an educational leader in a small rural community.

I had contact with Geoffrey Bingham for over three decades and read many of his books and papers. He wrote a doctoral thesis on *The Glory of God and Human Relationships – A Study in Trinitarian and Human Relationships* in the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> His thesis built on his earlier work (including *The Day of the Spirit*) and provided the basis for much of his subsequent teaching.<sup>9</sup>

I was encouraged to read books by James Denney, Peter Taylor Forsyth and James Orr during those years.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas A. Smail, *Reflected Glory* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975); Samuel Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The* (Bungay, Suffolk, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935).

See Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom*, 58, 65 and my other books including *In Triune Community*.

<sup>7</sup> Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, 35, 36.

<sup>8</sup> 'New Creation Teaching Ministry Resource Library,' New Creation Publications Inc., <https://www.newcreationlibrary.org.au>; Geoffrey Bingham, 'Glory of God and Human Relationships, The: A Study in Trinitarian and Human Relationships' (Pacific College of Graduate Studies, 1990). Parts of his unpublished thesis can be accessed from his other work.

<sup>9</sup> *Day of the Spirit, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1985).

Also, Don Priest, *Geoffrey Bingham – Theologian and Troubadour* (2025). I reviewed *The Role and Purpose of Man and Woman in Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*, 52–59, 70-75.

<sup>10</sup> James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895); *Death of Christ, The* (New Canaan, Connecticut, USA: Keats Publishing, 1981); P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London, UK: Independent Press, 1909); *Work of Christ, The* (London, UK: Independent Press, 1938); *Cruciality of the Cross, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1984); *God the Holy Father* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1987); *Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1987); James Orr, *Christian View of the World* (New York, USA: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/orr/view.html>, 1908).

James Torrance visited Adelaide in the late 1990s after publishing *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*. I found his focus on worship and intercession encouraging, informative and helpful. It provided different emphases and perspectives to those I was hearing at that time.<sup>11</sup>

I studied Denis Edwards' God the Trinity topic during my Master of Theological Studies course in 2013 and valued his insights and references as one of several highly regarded Roman Catholic theologians lecturing for that course. I have also valued learning more of the history of the church from authors of different backgrounds. These studies enriched my knowledge of trinitarian theology and encouraged further reading.

### Overview

I profile books written by J. I. Packer, Samuel Chadwick and Thomas Smal in the first section of this book on *Early Explorations*.

Books by Donald Macleod, Colin Gunton and Robert Letham form the second section of this book on *Further Learning*.

Colin Gunton's *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* and *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* helped clarify many concerns about trinitarian relations and have enriched, deepened and broadened my understandings on a range of related areas of interest.<sup>12</sup>

Donald Macleod includes concise and carefully expressed perspectives in his books, They add many valuable insights to trinitarian, incarnational and atonement theologies.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Letham's *The Holy Trinity* provides comprehensive insights into biblical foundations, historical developments, contemporary perspectives and several significant issues before commenting negatively on Kevin Giles' writings.<sup>14</sup>

The final section on *Related Readings* looks at Kevin Giles' concerns about hierarchical trinitarian theologies, James Torrance's understandings of triune intercessory grace, and Adam Johnson's trinitarian perspectives on the atonement. Each of these books provides helpful insights into social, relational and personal theologies that have helped me navigate a range of diverse, difficult situations.

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<sup>11</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2003); *Promise of Trinitarian Theology, The* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Donald Macleod, *Behold Your God* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1995), cf. *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 49–65.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, USA: P&R Publishing, 2004).

I did not realise until late 2024 when I read Philip Jenkins' *The Nicene Myth: The Da Vinci Code* that May 2025 marked 1700 years since the Council of Nicea. His article reminded me of one reason I was writing this book.<sup>15</sup> *Arianism Revisited: An Introduction to Non-Nicene Theologies* is a helpful profile of the various Non-Nicene theologies, as its title suggests.<sup>16</sup>

In writing *Trinity – Worship and Wonder*, I have focused on books I had at least partially read before starting this project. I have not included trinitarian theologies by Roman Catholic scholars and have not referenced Eastern Orthodox trinitarian theologies, only very briefly mentioning John Zizioulas' theology. I have excluded books that I value from the late 19th and early 20th centuries by James Denney, Peter Taylor Forsyth and James Orr.<sup>17</sup>

I have included few details of the history of early development of trinitarian theology. Along with Robert Letham's extensive coverage in *The Holy Trinity*, Donald Macleod, for example, gives a brief overview in *Shared Life*.<sup>18</sup>

Additional reviews of Colin Gunton's, Kevin Giles' and James Torrance's theology are listed without comment in the relevant *Responses* sections.

I included a review of Donald Baillie's *God Was in Christ* in my first version of *Trinity – Worship and Wonder*. I mentioned that Baillie's book is academic and relational and that it is relevant to current theological emphases, even though it was written about seven decades ago. He wrote that he was often reasoning with himself, and that he had many unanswered questions.<sup>19</sup> I have excluded my review of, and planned response to Baillie's incarnational Christology.

Similarly, I have not explored aspects of what I have learnt from reading Ruben Angelici's *Richard of Saint Victor on the Trinity*, Daniel L. Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Gerald O'Collins' *Tripersonal God*, Anne Hunt's *Trinity, The:*

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Jenkins, 'Nicene Myth, The: The Da Vinci Code is but One of the Council's Many Misrepresentations,' <https://modernagejournal.com/article-author/philip-jenkins/>. Also, *Lost History of Christianity, The* (New York, New York, USA: Harper Collins, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Brendan N. Wolfe, Mattias Philip Gassman, and Oliver Langworthy, *Arianism Revisited: An Introduction to Non-Nicene Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Thomas A. Noble and Jason S. (Eds.) Sexton, *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century – an Enduring Legacy* (London, England: Apollos (an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press), 2022) includes Orr, Denney and Forsyth as its earliest three theologians (of twelve), as well as Packer, Gunton, Stott and Lloyd Jones. Smail and Macleod are mentioned as 'could have been included', 24. Also, see Jason Goroncy, 'P. T. Forsyth,' <https://jasongoroncy.com/p-t-forsyth/>.

<sup>18</sup> Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*; Donald Macleod, *Shared Life: The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's People – 30th Anniversary Edition* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2024).

<sup>19</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1968), 8.

*Insights from the Mystics* and Gilles Emery's *Trinity, The: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*.<sup>20</sup>

### **Worship and wonder**

The heart of true trinitarian theologies for me is in the mysteries of knowing and not knowing God, of God as one essence (*homoousios*) and three distinct persons (*hypostates*) who mutually indwell (*perichoresis*) and commune (*koinonia*), and of non-hierarchical order among the triune persons (*monarchia, autotheos, taxis*). These mysteries come to me as doxological rather than dogmatic, as delightful rather than dreary, and as reasons for worship and wonder rather than sources for abstract and academic logic.

Writing this book has been refreshing, renewing, strengthening and settling. I share it in the hope that readers may revisit insights they have learned, gain new perspectives and deepen their love and worship of the triune God in whom we live and have our being as God's offspring, add to their participation in the diverse family of God, and develop their care for this amazing creation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ruben Angelici and Richard of Saint Victor, *Richard of Saint Victor on the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2011); Gilles Emery, *Trinity, The: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011); Anne Hunt, *Trinity, The: Insights from the Mystics* (Collegeville, Minnesota, USA: ATF Press, 2010); Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); Gerald O'Collins, *Tripersonal God, The* (Mahwah, New Jersey, USA: Paulist Press, 1999). Cf. Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action* (Hindmarsh, SA: ATF Press, 2010).

# Early Explorations

## **Snapshots of some significant themes**

## J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*<sup>21</sup>

### God incarnate

The incarnation is the ‘supreme mystery’ in Christian theology. The mystery concerning ‘the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus’ opens up the mystery of ‘the plurality of persons within the unity of God’. This mystery ‘makes sense of everything else that the New Testament contains’.<sup>22</sup>

John’s Gospel uses Word terminology to answer questions about Jesus’ deity. The eternal, divine and personal Word creates, animates, reveals God, and is incarnate in Jesus Christ. Jesus was not ‘God *minus*’ aspects of his deity, but ‘God *plus*’ everything that is involved in God being human.<sup>23</sup>

The atonement is central to the purpose and meaning of the incarnation, with Packer not seeing the incarnation as an original idea ‘intended for the perfecting of the created order’.<sup>24</sup>

The kenosis theory states that the Son of God put aside some attributes and powers to become human whereas the Pauline focus is on not asserting ‘divine glory and dignity’.<sup>25</sup> The Gospels indicate that Jesus lived on the basis of restraining rather than reducing his divinity. This restraint correlates with his submission to and dependence on God the Father and the eternal triune relations where the Father plans and initiates and the Spirit does the will of God.

### He shall testify

The doctrine of the Trinity, God’s ‘three-ness’ and ‘tri-personality’, is essential to Christianity. The Gospel of John opens by introducing ‘the mystery of two distinct persons within the unity of the Godhead’.<sup>26</sup> The Word of God is personal and with God as God the Father’s unique divine Son. This disclosure is necessary in understanding who Jesus was and what he said and did.

The final discourse of Jesus with his disciples later in this Gospel reveals more about divine plurality. Jesus spoke of his return to his Father and of his promise that he would send the Holy Spirit from God the Father – and whom God the Father would send in his name – as another divine person who would care for their welfare by providing comfort, counsel, assistance, advocacy, friendship,

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<sup>21</sup> Packer, *Knowing God; Knowing God – 50th Anniversary Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973, 2005, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> *Knowing God*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 68.

encouragement and support. This profile of the Holy Spirit indicates something of Jesus' perception of his own ministry.

The Old Testament mentions the Word of God and the Spirit of God as being the means by which God speaks and breaths when creating and relating to his creation. The message in the Gospel of John is that the Word and the Spirit are personal and divine, and that they work together to achieve one divine will and purpose in harmony with God the Father. In particular,

- the Son of God is sent by God the Father and is subject to him.
- the Spirit of God is subject to God the Father since the Spirit of God is sent by God the Father in the Son's name.
- the Spirit of God is subject to God the Father *and* God the Son.

The 'mystery of the Trinity' is 'three persons, and one God, the Son doing the will of the Father and the Spirit doing the will of the Father and the Son'.<sup>27</sup>

Trinitarian theology emphasises both the incarnation and atonement *and* the current ministry of the Holy Spirit – a ministry without which there would be no gospel, church or New Testament.

### **The heart of the gospel**

The Bible subverts and reframes pagan notions of appeasing unpredictable, bad-tempered, volatile, capricious and hostile deities by insisting both on God's personal opposition to evil and God's actions to address the impacts of wickedness. The language of wrath and mercy is frequently found in the biblical writers' efforts to describe God's refusal to accommodate evil and to bring restoration where it has impacted on people and the creation.

The four New Testament references to *propitiation* explore the love of God, the incarnation, the meaning of the cross and salvation, and Jesus' current intercessions. Their contexts cover more than transactional expiation and include God's initiatives to address God's implacable dis-endorsement of evil – God's wrath. This divine action is not Jesus as a 'kind Son' calming 'his unkind Father' but is God acting in the death of Jesus where 'the innocent [takes] the place of the guilty'. Far from being an act of hostility or injustice, the death of Jesus revealed God's redemptive, justifying grace, mercy and righteousness.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 70. Packer contrasts the theologies of Leon Morris and John Murray with that of C. H. Dodd. See John Murray, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1973); Leon Morris, *Atonement, The: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983); *Cross in the New Testament, The* (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster Press, 1979); *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, The* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965).

It was this gospel that motivated Jesus, that provides our only salvific hope, that brings God's peace and reconciliation, that reveals the unsurpassable love of Jesus Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit, and gives meaning to the triune glory revealed in the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

### **Sons and daughters of God**

What is a Christian? ... [T]he richest answer I know is that a Christian ... has God as Father.<sup>29</sup>

'Sonship to God' is a 'supernatural gift' of grace rather than a default 'universal status'. This revelation of 'the Fatherhood of the holy Creator' sums up 'the whole of the New Testament' and climaxes the biblical witness about God.<sup>30</sup> This new identification of God is a development of the Old Testament covenant emphasis on holiness. It is defined and revealed by Jesus Christ's relationship with God.

The profile presented about God's fatherhood and Jesus' sonship in John's Gospel nominates authority, affection, fellowship, honour and glory. Jesus' relationship is described as Son of God the Father and indicates the essence of what it means for us to be God's adopted children.

Whereas justification is a '*primary ... and fundamental blessing*', adoption 'is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves'.<sup>31</sup> Adoption means being in God's family, and experiencing the proximity, love and abundance of God's fatherhood in an ongoing secure relationship.

Adoption into God's family shapes our lives by informing and enabling us to imitate God's fatherhood and to glorify and delight God as our heavenly Father – as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. It provides the basis and context for prayer and faith amidst life's crises and blessings.

Understandings of *propitiation* and *adoption* are the New Testament's 'nucleus and focal point' of our awareness of the 'saving work of Christ' in the gospel and of our lives as God's family, even though *propitiation* 'appears verbally only four times in the New Testament' and *adoption* refers to our 'present relation to God in Christ' only in Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5 and Ephesians 1:5.

These two concepts, indeed, link together; were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be *adoption through propitiation*, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 223.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, 224.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

Adoption reveals the abundance of God's love for God's family and the certainty of our hope in inheriting a participation in Christ's glory as risen, ascended and reigning Lord. The presence and action of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of this adoption:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:14–17).

The Holy Spirit acts to increase our awareness of our adoption, to encourage us to address God as Father and to shape us into what it means to be God's family. This ministry of the Holy Spirit involves sanctification, holiness and assurance in anticipation of the ultimate gathering of God's family in adoration and worship of the Father, the Lamb and the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 257.

## Samuel Chadwick, *The Way to Pentecost*<sup>34</sup>

### Do we believe in the Holy Spirit?

The neglect of theologies of the Holy Spirit mirrors the lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the Apostles' Creed. There is a big difference between recognising the *person* of the Holy Spirit and identifying spiritual *atmospherics*. Theologies and experiences are like faith and works, one is worthless without the other.

### The church without the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the church as 'the active, administrative Agent of the glorified Son'. The Holy Spirit's goal is to glorify Jesus Christ in Christ's body 'by perpetuating [Christ's] character, establishing [Christ's] Kingdom, and accomplishing [Christ's] redeeming purpose in the world'.<sup>35</sup>

Churches are to minister this ministry of the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit enables, guides and inspires. God's people are to grow in love, strength and joy by being informed and affirmed about the Holy Spirit's ministry. The abundant and diverse riches of the Spirit accomplish more than worldliness can ever achieve.

### 'The Spirit of promise'

The Spirit of God is the promised Holy Spirit, is given as promised and guarantees God's sovereign, saving promises. Jesus identified the Holy Spirit as the Father's promise, and Peter, at Pentecost, spoke of receiving the promised Holy Spirit from God the Father. Pentecost confirmed and affirmed Jesus as God's Holy Spirit Anointed One – God's Christ and Messiah. It was a fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and an anticipation of new experiences and future realities.

The Holy Spirit is an 'active Agent' and a 'Living Person' filled with God's wisdom and power, and not a mere divine influence. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for his ministry and taught that spiritual thirst would be quenched by the Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

The Father's promises became the Son's promises, with their promises outlined in more detail towards the end of Jesus' pre-crucifixion ministry and then again after his resurrection. Jesus indicated to his disciples that

- the same Holy Spirit Jesus had received would be given to them.
- the Holy Spirit would be to them everything the Holy Spirit was to Jesus.
- the Holy Spirit would be to them even more than Jesus had been to them.
- the Holy Spirit would dwell in them just as Jesus had been beside them.

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<sup>34</sup> Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

- the benefits of the Holy Spirit's presence would outweigh their losses from Jesus going to the Father.
- Jesus would live in them through the Holy Spirit since the Holy Spirit would be the Paraclete, or Jesus' 'Other Self'.
- the Holy Spirit would glorify Jesus by making available to them the 'things of Christ'.<sup>37</sup>

The Holy Spirit would advocate for them in the context of advocating for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit would represent, interpret, validate, vindicate and administer Jesus for Jesus in Jesus' church and Jesus' Father's kingdom. The Father's and the Son's promises of the Holy Spirit become the promises of the Holy Spirit and all of God's promises become possible by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit knows the depths of God's being and teaches us the essence of prayer, cares for us in our needs, equips us for life's circumstances and confirms to us the eternal destiny God intends for us. We can be confident about the certainty, power and joy of the Holy Spirit's ministry and purposes. The 'gift of the Spirit always sets the heart singing' because the 'Coronation gift [of the Holy Spirit] always comes when the King is crowned'.<sup>38</sup>

### **At Pentecost: The gift of the Holy Spirit**

Something fundamental changed in creation with God's gift of the Holy Spirit to God's Son and the post-ascension Pentecostal gift of God's Son to humanity by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit as Christ's advocate and administrator is 'redemptive and regenerative'. Just as God 'gained new experience of humanity in Jesus Christ' as our great high priest and just as God's throne is one of grace because of the sufferings of Jesus as our great high priest, so now the Holy Spirit is the 'crowning gift of redemption through Jesus Christ'.<sup>39</sup>

Pentecost unites us with Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit just as Jesus was one with the Father by the Holy Spirit. Pentecost established the 'Community of the Spirit of Jesus' by giving the Holy Spirit for everyone's benefit with a view to the renewal of God's creation. The Holy Spirit is the way God gives his Son to the church.

Jesus, as Son of God, 'emptied Himself of the prerogatives of His Divine status' in being human and in achieving God's redemptive and restorative goals. He received the Holy Spirit from the Father for his self-giving life and ministry. He was exalted above everything and everyone and sent the Holy Spirit to accomplish

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 22, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 26, 27.

God's goals for creation and humanity by filling all things. 'Pentecost is the sequel of the Son's [coronation and] investiture' (cf. Ephesians 3:11; Philippians 2:5ff).<sup>40</sup>

### **The indwelling Holy Spirit**

#### *The Holy Spirit in the Son*

The Holy Spirit 'is the key' to Jesus' person and work. God gave to his incarnate self-emptying Son the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' 'body was prepared for Him by the Spirit', and he matured, taught and worked miracles by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life and death were self-offerings to God by the Holy Spirit and he was raised from death by the Holy Spirit. Jesus 'is the Spirit's unit of measurement' in determining the Holy Spirit's actions and presence in sanctified humanity.<sup>41</sup>

#### *The Holy Spirit in the Believer*

Jesus' incarnation left nothing in reserve. His gift of the Holy Spirit to us 'includes all His inheritance just as the Father gave all in His Son'. The Holy Spirit abides in us just as the Holy Spirit dwelt in the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is for us everything the Holy Spirit was to Jesus. Our relationship with God is as secure as Jesus' relationship was with the Father. God's gift of the Holy Spirit is God's 'most personal act'.<sup>42</sup>

#### *The Incarnation of the Holy Spirit*

The miracle of the incarnation was the Holy Spirit clothing the Spirit's-self with humanity in Jesus, and in Jesus' humanity being filled with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit-clothing was as essential to the Holy Spirit in achieving God's purposes as it was to the Son of God. The Son of God made his human body available for the Holy Spirit – and then established the church as the 'body of Christ' by and for the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

The Holy Spirit does not change us into different people but 'awakens the dormant and develops the latent' using what is already inherent in ourselves. The Holy Spirit makes alive, empowers and strengthens us, and gives us the fullness of life of which Jesus spoke. This ministry of the Holy Spirit is in the present and not only 'at the final resurrection'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 29–31.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>43</sup> 'We are the body of Christ [the Father's family]. His Spirit is with us'. *An Australian Prayer Book*, (Sydney, NSW: Anglican Information Office, 1978), 145.

<sup>44</sup> Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, 50.

## **The communion of the Holy Spirit**

Communion between persons includes communication and collaboration. Being *present* together leads to *participating* in shared activities, and this *participation* results in vocational *partnership*. Each *participant* in this process invests resources, time, expertise and energy in order to achieve negotiated outcomes. The communion of the Holy Spirit admits ‘us into His Mission and [places] at our disposal all the resources of His Person and Power’.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Our fellowship and the Holy Spirit’s fellowship***

The ‘communion of the Holy Spirit’ *with us* contrasts our communion *with* ‘the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (2 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 1:3). The mentions of the Holy Spirit’s *initiatives* in communing with us contrast the lack of biblical emphasis on our sharing *with* the Holy Spirit.

The *outcomes* of God’s regenerative action in Jesus Christ are highlighted in mentioning our relationship with God the Father and God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The distinctions between the triune persons and their unity of being, will and purpose are evident in our relationship with God.

The Holy Spirit welcomes us into the triune communion of Father, Son and Spirit by first establishing ‘communion with us’, having negotiated our ‘cooperation’ and ‘consent’.<sup>46</sup> This trinitarian movement is expressed in the Pauline benediction:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you (2 Corinthians 13:13).

### ***The fellowship of the Spirit in the church and in the believer***

The church, as the body of Christ, has been established by the Holy Spirit and now the Holy Spirit lives in the church as a temple-sanctuary, working to supply resources of ‘grace, wisdom and power’.<sup>47</sup> The Holy Spirit always works as the Spirit of communion and acts without coercive strength or force. The Holy Spirit and the church are united in Jesus Christ. Every abundance of Jesus Christ is available by and in the Holy Spirit according to the gifts God provides for every believer however high profile or seemingly insignificant: ‘The Spirit of God is not the monopoly of any particular class’.<sup>48</sup>

## **The Spirit of Christ**

The Gospels indicate that Jesus saw himself fulfilling Old Testament prophecies concerning God’s Spirit. Jesus was described as being anointed by the same Holy

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 55.

Spirit who created and sustained everything and who was present with God's people, especially in their Temple worship. The Holy Spirit is linked with Jesus as the Son of God and with the Father. The Holy Spirit is identified by many names in the New Testament including the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:7; Philippians 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11).

### *The indwelling Spirit and the indwelling Christ*

We might ask whether Christ Jesus or the Holy Spirit indwells us (e.g. Galatians 2:20; Corinthians 6:19). 'Personality in the Trinity is not exclusive but inclusive, not divisive but inherent. ... In each is All, and in All is each'.<sup>49</sup> The indwelling Holy Spirit brings and discloses the abiding presence of Jesus Christ, and the abiding presence of Jesus Christ reveals the Holy Spirit. Even more than that, we are 'to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' (Ephesians 3:19; cf. Colossians 1:15ff).

This unity of presence and purpose does not dissolve the distinctiveness of each triune person. They are not modes of being with the Spirit of God replacing the Son of God now that Jesus has ascended. One divine presence is with us as three distinct divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### *The Spirit in the earthly ministry of our Lord*

After being mainly quiet about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus outlined in detail prior to his crucifixion who the Holy Spirit was and what the Holy Spirit had done and would do. The Holy Spirit would come and be with them as Jesus' advocate after Jesus' ascension to his Father. They had, in reality, known the Holy Spirit by being with Jesus just as they had 'seen the Father' by seeing Jesus (John 5:37, 38, 6:46, 8:38, 14:6–9, 15:24; cf. 1 John 1:1–4). The fullness of God was in Christ revealing God the Father and the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

The *kenosis* described in Philippians 2:5–7 indicates that Jesus' humanity was of the same kind as every other human person. In emphasising his *kenosis*, his *pleroma* can be overlooked. God the Father gave to God's 'self-emptied Son the fullness of [God's Holy] Spirit'.<sup>51</sup> Jesus continued to be divine *and* became fully human. Jesus received the Holy Spirit as a human person. The presence of the Holy Spirit empowered him at every point and in every part of his life.

### *'The Spirit of counsel and might'*

Jesus came to do God's will. The will of the Father, Son and Spirit was singular. It was revealed and disclosed to Jesus by the Holy Spirit and learned and fulfilled by Jesus in harmony with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus' wisdom matured

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 59, 60.

and his dependency on the Holy Spirit remained as the Holy Spirit strengthened and empowered him.

Everything Jesus said and did as Messiah-Christ (Anointed One) was in the context of being prepared, called, equipped and sent by the promised Holy Spirit:

He did nothing of Himself any more than for Himself.<sup>52</sup>

The Holy Spirit empowered and accompanied Jesus from his incarnation, throughout his ministry, and in his death, resurrection and ascension. The Holy Spirit of God the Father and God the Son is the Spirit of the human person Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God's incarnate Word.

The Holy Spirit given at and since Pentecost is this Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the same Spirit who was present with him throughout his earthly life. Such was Jesus' unity with the Spirit and the Spirit's oneness with Jesus that Jesus' human spirit and the Spirit of Jesus Christ are inseparable and indistinguishable. Just as 'all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' bodily in Messiah Jesus, so fullness in Jesus Christ comes by being enlivened and matured by the Holy Spirit (e.g. Ephesians 3:14–21; Colossians 1:19, 2:9ff):

The Spirit is the all-inclusive gift of the Father to His Son, and the crowning gift of the Son to His people.<sup>53</sup>

The Holy Spirit makes God's presence with us evident. The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is in continuity with Jesus as risen, ascended and enthroned sovereign, reigning with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. His life is shared with in us by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the church as the body of Christ and in every person set apart to be in the family of God the Father.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 61.

## Thomas Smail, *Reflected Glory*<sup>54</sup>

### Where the Spirit moves ... Christ's earthly glory is seen

#### *Where the Spirit moves*

The Holy Spirit wants us to know that neither the experiences we have of the Holy Spirit nor our awareness that they come from the Holy Spirit are primary, but that their deeper origin and context is Jesus Christ and what he is doing. This movement of our focus by the Holy Spirit is consistent with the Holy Spirit's essential intra-trinitarian life where the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son.

[The Holy Spirit's] work is so dependent upon and identified with the work of Christ that [the Holy Spirit] can be regularly referred to as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9).<sup>55</sup>

This orientation highlights that the church is charismatic as well as evangelical and catholic since the Holy Spirit reveals and declares God's renewing actions in Jesus Christ.

#### *Into Christ's likeness*

2 Corinthians 3:18 outlines 'a dynamic identification and a practical coincidence of the work of the Lord and the work of the Spirit – the Lord is the Spirit'.<sup>56</sup> The Holy Spirit transforms us to image and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by actualising in us what Jesus has accomplished for us. The power and glory of the Father are mediated to humanity in and by the Son of God and then given to and revealed in us by the Holy Spirit. This 'profound' ministry of the Holy Spirit is 'the last stage in a great divine descent, involving at each stage a munificent mediation'.<sup>57</sup>

This transformation is given to those who '[turn] to the Lord' (2 Corinthians 3:16). Faith is essential to experiencing the Holy Spirit and in conforming us to Christ. Unless these biblical promises actualise as events and experiences, 'they become ... as Barth put it, soap bubbles above our heads that may charm us but never touch us'.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Many blessings – one Christ*

The 'oneness of being' in God is seen to operate by subordinated functions: 'In the Son the glory of the Father becomes incarnate among us, in the Spirit that same glory becomes experiential within us'. The power that came at Pentecost was identical with the power that was in Jesus. Understanding the Holy Spirit's

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<sup>54</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 32, 33.

‘reflected’ ministry in us requires appreciating the Holy Spirit’s work in Jesus Christ.<sup>59</sup>

### *Christ’s earthly glory*

Jesus Christ mediates the Holy Spirit to us, and the Holy Spirit mediates us to Jesus Christ in a ‘double mediation’.<sup>60</sup> The ministry of the Holy Spirit in us is shaped by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ – where *Christ* is God’s *Messiah* and *Anointed One*. And the ministry of Jesus Christ in us is shaped by the ministry of Jesus Christ in and by the Holy Spirit.

This ‘double mediation’ involves a double dependency: The Holy Spirit relies on Jesus Christ to know what we are to become like, and Jesus Christ relies on the Holy Spirit to reveal and implement in us what he had already accomplished. The finished work of the cross of Christ was confirmed on his ascension and ‘Pentecost marks his entry into this earthly glory’ with him sending the Holy Spirit so that God’s will might ‘be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6:10).<sup>61</sup>

Christ’s sending of the Spirit and the Spirit’s ministry in us makes us witnesses to the Spirit’s witness of all of Jesus’ earthly life, death, resurrection and ascension. It provides the basis and context for our responding to and sharing our new status as ‘joint heirs with Christ’ who ‘cry “Abba, Father”’ (Romans 8:15–17).

This intercessory work of the Holy Spirit as Jesus’ advocate in Jesus’ co-advocacy *with* the Father for our good, works to mature us as God’s family (Romans 8:26–28, cf. Romans 8:14–39; 1 John 2:1, 2; Galatians 5:16–6:10). Our maturation deepens our being in Jesus’ relationship in the Spirit with his Father. makes our character more Christ-like, and equips us by the Holy Spirit for our calling. Jesus explained to his disciples before his death that he would go to the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit, for this purpose (e.g. John 14:12–20, 25ff).

### **Behold the man! ... Birth and baptism in the Spirit**

#### *Behold the man!*

The Holy Spirit ‘brings us Christ’ *and* ‘Christ mediates the Spirit to us’. This christological focus emphasises that Jesus is both the receiver and the giver of the Holy Spirit. God the Father gave him the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34; cf. Romans 1:4), making him the ‘original prototype’ of which we are, in this sense, replicas.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 45, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 61, 62, also 51.

This work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and us has our shared humanity in common. The Holy Spirit does in us what the Spirit has achieved in Jesus, making Jesus prototype, archetype, ectype and promise. Jesus defines, initiates and actualises our growth towards maturity – a maturity that can be known in the community of God as the bodily fullness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:13; Col. 2:9).

‘God always works incarnationally’ and our humanity is the Holy Spirit’s ‘raw material’.<sup>63</sup> Our humanity is not only our spirits or our minds. Our *whole* humanity is our bodies and every aspect of our beings. This action of Christ and the Holy Spirit indicates that God is intent on perfecting creation. God’s concern is *wholeness* and *well-being* in creation, including humanity.

This incarnational work thankfully involved Jesus, the Son of God, regenerating and sanctifying our ‘intractable flesh’ by the Holy Spirit and making us ‘the very expression of his Father’s likeness and glory’.<sup>64</sup>

God’s triune glory is revealed precisely where worldly, fleshly and devilish goals dominate. Divine glory is embodied in humanity and expressed in the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit – in the now and not yet of our human condition. The gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ ministry were not sometimes the result of his divinity as Son of God and sometimes the consequence of his humanity. They were all expressions of a humanity identical with our humanity, except without sin. Otherwise, his humanity is not the basis of our regeneration and sanctification in and by the Holy Spirit. The humanity of Jesus Christ is the starting point for our restored and renewed humanity *and* its completion and goal.

Jesus’ divinity also means Spirit-giver as well as Spirit-fullness. Jesus ‘does not send us away’ on an errand to God to receive the Holy Spirit, but immerses us with the Holy Spirit in bringing us to himself and the Father.<sup>65</sup>

His giving of the Holy Spirit is the consequence of his life, sufferings, death, resurrection and glorification: ‘He [as ascended Lord, present and acting with his Father] has poured out this which you see and hear’ (Acts 2:33). We are more than replicas of his perfect humanity, we are participators, in the Holy Spirit, in the ‘divine life that he shares with the Father’. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is the Spirit Jesus received and sends: ‘only God can give God’ and only a human person can mediate the Holy Spirit to us as his – now redeemed by and in him – siblings.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Birth and baptism in the Spirit***

The incarnate Son of God’s divinity and humanity do not co-exist in Jesus as a

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 72, 73.

static balance of ontological forces, but in the ongoing interaction of the Son of God upon his humanity in the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

This ‘basically dynamic, charismatic and practical representation of the Person of Christ’ helps us understand the initial work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and the Holy Spirit’s current work in ourselves and the church.<sup>68</sup> This work includes Jesus’ Word-become-flesh birth as Son of God and Christ-Messiah and our initiation and regeneration. Jesus’ baptism outlined and affirmed his vocation.

His baptism unveiled his incarnate relationships with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It profiled the nature of the cross, the resurrection and Pentecost. It indicated that his messianic anointing would involve his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, and would be initially fulfilled at Pentecost.

Both Jesus’ birth and our re-birth are works of the Holy Spirit, with our rebirth evoking faith and acknowledgement of failure. This recreative act in us declares us to be members of God’s family, daughters and sons who know the Father, Son and Spirit as one God who in Christ Jesus reconciles everything to God’s-self.

### **Attack and authority, cross and Spirit**

#### ***Attack and authority***

Jesus’ temptations occurred immediately after his baptismal anointing. He was Spirit-filled and Spirit-led in the wilderness. The contrast between Spirit fullness and devilish allurements could hardly have been stronger. This dichotomy profiled what was to follow throughout his ministry and in his crucifixion, and would shape what the early Christians understood by his resurrection and ascension.

The clash was between two unequal but powerful spiritual realms, one divine and another demonic. One concerned the eschatological nature of God’s salvific purposes in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit and the other sought the deceitful and dishonest demolition of everything decent and dignified.

Spiritual holiness is about separation and deliverance from evil and not just a form of moral goodness. It is about activity as Christ’s body filled with the Spirit’s power and enabled by the Spirit’s fruit and gifts. It is about life in God’s creation under God’s authority. It is about ‘the struggle between God’s incarnate Son and Satan’.<sup>69</sup> It is about what *appears* to be and *claims* to be authentic and what *actualises* and *creates* authenticity.

Being baptised into Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit and aligned with the reign of the Father, Son and Spirit will inevitably include us in this torrent of torment

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 90.

and conflict. We will experience the realities of abusive tortuous toxicity and its inner and social consequences as well the assurances that ‘our victory’ is Jesus Christ’s victory ‘worked in us by his Spirit’.<sup>70</sup>

### *Cross and Spirit*

The relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in his birth, baptism and Galilean ministry sets the context for their relationship in his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The Holy Spirit does not ‘offer us a share in a painless and costless triumph’ by indulging in ‘dazzling’ self-glorification while ignoring Jesus’ messianic sufferings. The Holy Spirit’s focus is on disclosing the ‘full glory of Calvary’ and enabling us to participate in every blessing available to us through the death of Jesus Christ. Pentecost depends on Calvary *and* the Pentecostal Spirit ‘leads us to the cross’.<sup>71</sup>

This reciprocal process provides the basis for our lives as God’s family. We are now witnesses by the Holy Spirit to the Holy Spirit’s witness concerning Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension. We testify to the atoning and reconciling triune action in Jesus Christ, and, in so doing, reflect the glory of Jesus Christ and the authenticity and sufficiency of his accomplishments in and by his sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension.

We are changed into his likeness as we mature in him in a process that finds its fulfilment in our bodily resurrection. We are not immune from suffering as this happens, but as we share in his sufferings we also know something of the victory he has achieved. The work of the Holy Spirit in us correlates with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and leads to liberation, reconciliation and renewal. This divine action is explained by Paul as us having – including in sufferings – ‘peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand’ and of having God’s love ‘poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Romans 5:1–5). This reconciliation of the vulnerable is at the heart of God’s love and the ‘mark of the cross’ in everything done by the Holy Spirit.<sup>72</sup>

Everything we know and experience of the Holy Spirit is oriented towards the triune action of God in Jesus Christ by and in the Holy Spirit. The fruits and gifts

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 103, 104, 110: Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1996): It was only at infinite cost that Jesus Christ gained for us the gift of the Holy Spirit, receiving him in all his consuming holiness into the human nature which he took from our fallen and alienated condition ... Until he had sanctified himself and perfected in our human nature his one offering for [everyone], until he had made the once and for all sacrifice to take away sin, until he had vanquished the powers of darkness and overcome the sharpness of death, until he had ascended to present himself in propitiation before the Father, the kingdom of heaven could not be opened to believers, and the blessing of the divine Spirit could not be poured out upon human flesh or be received by sinful mortal [people].

<sup>72</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 114.

of the Holy Spirit flow into and from us in the communion and community of the Holy Spirit, in the body of Christ in which the Holy Spirit dwells. The Pentecostal-Spirit whom God the Father sends to us through the ascended Lord Jesus Messiah, the incarnate crucified and resurrected Son of God, is the Holy Spirit who, anointing and welling in us, enables us to, by God's mercies, 'present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship' (Romans 12:1).<sup>73</sup>

### **His lifegiving body**

After Jesus' suffering and death, a reconciling and redemptive ordeal in which he was always open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, his resurrection, ascension and Pentecost reinforce that humanity is renewed, fulfilled and glorified in him by the same Holy Spirit.

Paul emphasised that Christ-imparted-life is physically and spiritually embodied. Jesus' resurrection was *bodily* and shaped by incorruptibility and immortality, free of the death-inducing disasters common to sinful humanity. The Holy Spirit's resurrection priority is the full and total Christ-like 're-creation' of humanity.<sup>74</sup>

The empty tomb is testimony to the significance of Jesus' resurrection body, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Father's reign. It also prefigures the triune work in our humanity – an action that presently impacts us *and* involves our eternal destiny. This *now* and *not yet* ministry of the Holy Spirit is with us. We have the initial indicators of this resurrection harvest and know God as Father by spiritual adoption (Romans 8:23; Galatians 4:6). We also live in yet-to-be-realised hope (e.g. Romans 8:16ff, 5:3–5; 1 Corinthians 13:1ff).

Jesus' ascension was a departure that guaranteed this hope because his being with the Father means sharing divine authority as an incarnate-now-resurrected, human person (e.g. John 14–17; Acts 1:9–11). Jesus is Lord, intercessor and gift giver. His ascension ends one era and commences another. We, collectively as his body, are now the 'earthly workshop of the Holy Spirit' and witness to Jesus Christ as faith-enabled by the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup> Divine glory is mirrored and reflected in and through us and is indicative of the future glory of a renewed heavens and earth in which we will bodily live.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 126.

## Responses to these themes

## J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*

### Packer's responses to criticisms<sup>76</sup>

In his preface to the 2005 edition of *Knowing God*, James I. Packer nominates the 'two weightiest criticisms' he was aware of regarding his book. One, namely God's holiness, concerned a divine attribute, and the other was about Packer's perceived lack of emphasis on trinitarian theology. Packer's citation is from Robert Letham's Introduction and is repeated in Letham's chapter on worship and prayer.<sup>77</sup> Letham stated that 'after its seven pages on the Trinity it proceeds as if nothing has happened'. Packer saw this as implying that 'the divine Trinity remains marginal rather than becomes central in all that follows'. He added that:

With regard to the Trinity, I do not know what my critic thought I should have done after explaining that God is both *they* and *he*, and that one should never think of the singular without the plural, nor vice versa, lest one fall into Unitarianism or tritheism. What I actually do is spend the rest of the book showing how the three operate as a team, trio or threesome with a single goal, namely our salvation and the perfecting of the church, and that still seems to me the best and most scriptural way to go.<sup>78</sup>

Letham does not explain what *Knowing God* would look like with what he claimed would be a suitable trinitarian focus. Adam Johnson's book, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, might suggest a helpful approach. As partially explained earlier, Johnson discusses atonement theology under two main chapter headings, one chapter focused on *Triune atonement* and the next chapter on *Atonement and the divine attributes* before a third chapter on *The atoning life of Christ*.<sup>79</sup>

Packer's preference for restraint rather than reduction in any Philippians 2 emphasis on being other-person centred was in the context of the incarnation involving divine emptying. Packer understood that Jesus *added* humanity to deity rather than *subtracted* divine attributes from deity.<sup>80</sup>

His clarity in *Knowing God* about the Word of God and the Spirit of God and the trinitarian mystery laid foundations for his latter emphasis on propitiation and

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<sup>76</sup> Packer, *Knowing God – 50th Anniversary Edition*.

<sup>77</sup> Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 4 (also see footnote). Letham repeats his claim on 408. His reference nominates different pages to the 1973 edition I have used.

<sup>78</sup> Packer, *Knowing God – 50th Anniversary Edition*.

<sup>79</sup> Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 59ff, 89ff and 117ff.

<sup>80</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 58.

adoption as expressing triune love. God's action in Jesus' death is not that of a divided Trinity, nor is it some form of hostility or injustice, but a revelation and renewal of goodness, peace and reconciliation.

The wrath of God in Packer's view of the atonement is God's rejection of evil and God's insistence on the personal attributes of God's own tripersonal being. The extent to which Packer describes wrath as a primary attribute is unclear. Packer is clear that the Holy Spirit leads those rescued by Jesus' saving work from slavery to life as God's family – to a life where crying 'Abba, Father' is our co-witness with the Holy Spirit of our being 'joint heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:14–17).

**J. I. Packer (Alister McGrath (ed.)), *The J. I. Packer Collection*<sup>81</sup>**

*Knowing God* challenged much of the theology that was popular when his book was first published and confronted aspects of the drifts in evangelical thinking that have happened since. Several articles in *The J. I. Packer Collection*, edited by Alister McGrath, explore further some of Packer's trinitarian insights.

***What did the cross achieve? The logic of penal substitution***

McGrath nominated *What did the cross achieve? The logic of penal substitution* as 'one of Packer's finest essays'.<sup>82</sup> He saw it as constructive and insightful with a perceptive awareness of theological scholarship in the 1960s.

After highlighting the central place in traditional evangelical thinking of penal substitution and the criticisms he was aware of when writing, Packer outlined his concerns about method before considering what substitution and penal mean, and then commented on exegetical scholarship.

Packer claimed that too many Reformed theologians were 'conceding the Socinian assumption' that 'a natural theology of divine government' was an authentic rational framework for doing theology: 'Thus, in their zeal to show themselves rational, they became rationalistic'.<sup>83</sup>

His rejection of this method is relevant to trinitarian theology. He asked two questions: one concerned the kind of knowledge about the cross that is available to us and the other related to the source of our knowledge and the way we obtain it. He indicated that faith-knowledge is Spirit-given through the Word of God. Since it is God-given *and* about God, it is knowledge concerning God at work.

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<sup>81</sup> Alister E. (ed.) McGrath, *J. I. Packer Collection, The* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Wisdom recognises that we are ‘gazing into the sun, whose very brightness makes it impossible for [us] fully to see it’, and acknowledges that since there is much more to God than theories can ever contain, that it is best to humble ourselves and adore the God ‘whom [we] can never fully analyse’.<sup>84</sup>

Hence, human analogies and rationalist theories will prove inadequate since the mystery is in the eternal reality and not ultimately in our perceptions of it. Human knowledge is expressed using paradigmatic terminology and these frameworks will never finally resolve the paradoxes inherent in revelation.

These paradoxes include believing in a ‘transcendent, tri-personal Creator God’ who, as a God of love, loved us by sending ‘his Son to be the propitiation (*hilasmos*) for our sins’ (1 John 4:8–10). Theological models help us learn as ‘the Holy Spirit enables us to unify, clarify and intensify our experience’ of God.<sup>85</sup>

***On from Orr: the cultural crisis, rational realism, and incarnational ontology***

A second article in McGrath’s collection of Packer’s writings is *On from Orr: the cultural crisis, rational realism, and incarnational ontology*.<sup>86</sup> In spite of considerable opposition, Packer sought to collaborate with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox leaders who, according to McGrath, Packer believed shared a common trinitarian faith. He wanted to see a broad-based response to contemporary secularism and identified a range of beliefs expressing this faith.

Packer referred to James Orr as a ‘theologian and apologist of great distinction who contended tirelessly from great-tradition Christianity in days before the first World War’.<sup>87</sup> Despite being largely neglected since his death, Packer believed that Orr’s life and writings can ‘help us considerably as we face the incoherence of postmodern relativism and clever anti-intellectualism ... in our own day’.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to providing an all-embracing, rationally coherent, ennobling, biblical view of human existence, Packer believed that Orr’s approach had an essentially foundational ‘trinitarian theocentricity’ which was expressed in a Christocentric redemptive gospel. Orr had written that:

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a result of mere speculation ... Our faith in the Trinity does not rest even on the prooftexts which are adduced from the Scriptures in support of the Trinitarian distinction. ... The triune

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 101, 102.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 244ff.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 247ff.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 254.

conception of God is justified when it is shown to be the conception which underlies the triuned Revelation God has given of himself, and the triune activity of the work of redemption.

Either, therefore, we must ... seek an object for God's love in the finite, created world, or recognise that God has an infinitely blessed life of love within himself, and this brings us to the doctrine of an immanent Trinity.<sup>89</sup>

This awareness of Creator-God being 'essentially relational in his own being; in other words, that "he" is "they" within the unity of the Godhead' has seen a recovery through the work of significant scholars. Packer believed that this trinitarian thinking is basic to an authentic and healthy Christian life.<sup>90</sup>

Packer quotes and emphasises Orr's theology of creation in this context:

God's plan is in reality one ... God has chosen to create a universe into which it was foreseen that sin would enter; and the Incarnation is part of the plan of such a creation. This being so, it may well be conceived that the Incarnation was the pivot on which everything else in this plan of creation was made to turn. *To state my view in a sentence – God's plan is one; Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; and even creation itself is built up on Redemption lines.* ... Christ's relation to the universe cannot be thought of as something adventitious and contingent; it is vital and organic. This means that His Incarnation had a relation to the whole plan of the world, and not simply to sin.<sup>91</sup>

I have included (in italics) a sentence of Orr's not in Packer's quotation that has impressed me for many years.<sup>92</sup> It is one thing to realise that redemption acts according to the essential nature and needs of creation and its humanity, and another one to meditate on Orr's insight to its inverse.<sup>93</sup>

After highlighting Orr's focus on the 'life-changing impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ', Packer added another theme in Orr's theology which he assumed most fundamentalists would inevitably reject, namely, the participation of the 'new human race' in the world

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 258. See Orr, *Christian View of the World*, 218, 227.

<sup>90</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer Collection, The*, 258.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 261, 262. See Orr, *Christian View of the World*, 231–233.

<sup>92</sup> The late Dean Carter referred me to *Christian View of the World* and this quotation.

<sup>93</sup> Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom*, 182; *Meditations on Resilience and Renewal*, 1, 49; *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*, 4.

while anticipating the future joy of endless loving fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, and in and through God with one another.<sup>94</sup>

These two articles indicate something of the centrality of trinitarian theology in Packer's thinking. His references to P. T. Forsyth, James Denney and James Orr from the turn of the twentieth century, and then to Leon Morris and John Murray provide perspectives which might be accessed to shine light on our own thinking by reflecting on them in their original settings.<sup>95</sup>

### *An introduction to systematic spirituality*

Packer, in *An introduction to systematic spirituality*, wrote that

Sound spirituality needs to be thoroughly trinitarian. In our fellowship with God we must learn to do full justice to all three persons and the part that each plays in the team job ... of saving us from sin, restoring our ruined humanness, and bringing us finally to glory.<sup>96</sup>

Sound trinitarian spirituality, according to Packer focuses on the Son of God's mediation, atonement and intercession and so avoids legalism and 'the treadmill religion of works'. It emphasises the renewal, assurance and joy that the Holy Spirit gives in establishing fellowship with Jesus Christ and enabling us to serve God without slipping into religious 'aspiration and perspiration without either inspiration or transformation'. Centring our hearts on God the Father leads to us being better prepared for our calling and for the difficulties we might encounter. Packer cites Smail's *The Forgotten Father* in this context.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer Collection, The*, 257, 264.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 255 and 113, 121, 128.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 206, 207 fn. 14. See Thomas A. Smail, *Forgotten Father, The* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981). Also, *Giving Gift, The* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994); *Reflected Glory*.

## Samuel Chadwick, *The Way to Pentecost*

### Theologian and preacher

Chadwick was a reluctant publisher. *The Way to Pentecost* was published shortly after his death, with the Foreword describing it as a kind of ‘memorial volume’ in which Chadwick willingly shares several personal experiences.<sup>98</sup>

Chadwick wrote in A Personal Word in *Humanity and God* how several of his friends tried to convince him to publish some of his sermons.

I replied that it had been a fixed rule of my life to regard an open door as an essential element in a call, and for this I had no call.

His friends apparently thought his approach unreasonable, and he independently received an unsolicited publishing request almost immediately afterwards.<sup>99</sup>

*The Gospel of the Cross* begins with an editorial note that the book was a

response to an oft-repeated request by many of his friends, that some of the writings of Mr. Chadwick should be put into permanent form.<sup>100</sup>

Chadwick writes from a different perspective to other authors in *Trinity – Worship and Wonder*. Aspects of his theology on Christian (not sinless) perfection, the second blessing and other themes can be seen in these and his other writings.<sup>101</sup>

### George Bailey, *Wesleyan Spirit-Christology – Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick*<sup>102</sup>

George Bailey’s review of Chadwick’s theology claims that it contains ‘a Spirit Christology in a Wesleyan framework’ in contrast to ‘the more dominant *logos* Christologies of the Western theological tradition’. He examines Chadwick’s theology from this different perspective to the then prevailing *logos* Christologies that were primarily oriented towards ‘holiness and evangelism’.<sup>103</sup>

Although Chadwick ‘did not publish any significant specifically theological work in his lifetime’ we have the benefit of his religious journalism, tracts and sermons. These have been collated including in the above cited books. *The Way to Pentecost*

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<sup>98</sup> Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, v, vi.

<sup>99</sup> *Humanity and God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), vii, viii.

<sup>100</sup> *Gospel of the Cross, The* (Torquay, UK: Epworth Press, 1935), 6.

<sup>101</sup> E.g. *Call to Christian Perfection, The* (Kansas City, Mo, U.S.A.: Beacon Hill Press, 1943).

<sup>102</sup> George Bailey, “Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick,” in *Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies* (2018).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

is Chadwick's most popular book and it impacted the early charismatic movement in British Methodism.

The way Chadwick expressed his theology is regarded by Bailey to be at least as significant as Chadwick's 'spiritual and practical wisdom'. Chadwick's theology was 'constructed around the doctrine of the Holy Spirit' more significantly than other Wesleyan preachers. *The Way to Pentecost* shifted focus from theologies of perfection and sanctification to the ministry and person of the Holy Spirit. A more trinitarian theology was central to this different perspective<sup>104</sup>

Chadwick's understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit centred on the relationship of Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit. His writings highlighted the relational way the Holy Spirit ministers to humanity by exploring the life of Jesus Christ, and, reciprocally, considered the relationship between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Holy Spirit. Chadwick explored these emphases by reflecting on similarities between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation and in the lives of believers and church communities.

#### *Pentecost as central moment in the work of salvation*

Chadwick's hermeneutic divided God's salvific work into two dispensations or eras. The first era climaxed with the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection as they heralded the arrival of the second era at Pentecost, where the harvest of Jesus' life, death and resurrection were unveiled in the church as the redeemed community of God.<sup>105</sup> His approach emphasised the trinitarian nature of the work of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit where 'the Father, Son and Spirit are always distinct yet always act together'.<sup>106</sup>

#### *Preparation for Pentecost – the Holy Spirit in Christ*

The Holy Spirit, having worked in creation and Israel, enabled the incarnate Jesus to be human and divine from conception onwards. The Holy Spirit's indwelling of Jesus was evident in his life and redemptive ministry, with Jesus offering himself to God through the eternal Spirit and being resurrected 'with power according to the spirit of holiness' (Romans 1:4; Hebrews 9:14).

The Incarnation was the conjoint act of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but the Spirit is the active agent. The Body of Jesus was prepared of the Spirit, and yet Jesus is never called His Son. The Spirit prepared, the Son

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1–9.

<sup>105</sup> His dispensational framework was different to the one profiled in some covenant theologies.

<sup>106</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick.", 12.

assumed. The Spirit protected and nourished that which He had prepared, and at the Baptism in Jordan the Spirit was given to abide in Him.<sup>107</sup>

Chadwick's Spirit-Christology was not adoptionism. He taught that the incarnate Son of God's self-emptying *kenosis* and the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit's *pleroma* to Jesus Christ did not diminish Christ's divinity. Rather, it meant that he was fully human and completely filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>108</sup>

### *The Promise of the Spirit*

The core significance of the work of the Holy Spirit is in Jesus fulfilling his and his Father's promise that Jesus' atoning death would mean that the Holy Spirit would be for his disciples who the Holy Spirit has been for him.

It is the miracle of the Incarnation duplicated, multiplied, and perpetuated in Christ's believing people. For the Son a body was prepared, but the Spirit is incarnate in the believer, and dwells in the bodies of all that believe.<sup>109</sup>

Chadwick's emphasis on, and alignment of, the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus as anointed Christ-Messiah, with the Holy Spirit's work in believers and church communities, contrasts approaches that focus on Jesus with the Holy Spirit as a somewhat inconsequential and invisible something/someone extra. Bailey saw Chadwick's approach as a 'Pentecost-shaped notion' of our everyday relationship with the risen and ascended Jesus Christ.<sup>110</sup>

### *The Holy Spirit and life in Christ*

This emphasis on a Spirit-Christology impressed me on first reading Chadwick's seven points in his chapter on 'The Spirit of Promise' in *The Way to Pentecost*.<sup>111</sup>

There are distinctions as well as similarities in Chadwick's theologies of Christ's incarnation and of our new life in Christ. The Christological centre is on the Spirit representing Christ in us by advocating for him and on the Holy Spirit clothing the Holy Spirit with us. This Spirit-Christology, implicit in calling Jesus *Christ* or *Messiah* contrasts a singular Jesus centred *logos* Christology.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 13. From a sermon on *The Miracle and Mystery of Pentecost*, fn. 50. Also *ibid.*, 10 fn. 40.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 14, see Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, 60.

<sup>109</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick.", 14, see Chadwick, *Humanity and God*, 190.

<sup>110</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick.", 15.

<sup>111</sup> Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, 20ff.

<sup>112</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick.", 1, 15, 16. Also re. John Owen, 25, 26.

*The Spirit as advocate for Christ in the believer*

The advocacy of the Holy Spirit is primarily the Holy Spirit advocating *in us for* Jesus Christ rather than advocating *in God for* us. We cannot *know* Christ without this advocacy of the Holy Spirit. It is in this sense that Chadwick wrote of the Holy Spirit as being Christ's 'Other Self'.<sup>113</sup>

*The Spirit clothed with the believer*

The mystery of the Holy Spirit personally indwelling Jesus Christ heralds the mystery of the Holy Spirit personally indwelling us. A consequence of this mystery is that something of the Son of God's incarnation is being revealed when we recognise the Holy Spirit's personal presence in us. This Presence is not a dissolving of two persons but 'the mystery of the ages' wherein the grace of God in the incarnation 'is perpetuated in the Body of Christ'.<sup>114</sup>

Chadwick flips the focus from us being Spirit-filled to the enabling work of the Holy Spirit firstly in the humanity of Jesus and then in our humanity on the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice. We know the triune God on the basis of the Holy Spirit's work in humanity, firstly filling Jesus and then bring us that fullness. This work in Jesus' humanity keeps 'distinct the concepts of the two natures in one person' while affirming 'the mysterious unique reality of the incarnation'.<sup>115</sup>

Bailey concludes this section by quoting from Chadwick that 'The grandest thing I ever did was to cross out Gideon's name and put my own. The difference it made to my life is beyond my power to tell'.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, 23.

<sup>114</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick." 19, citing Chadwick, *Way to Pentecost, The*, 49.

<sup>115</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick.", 20.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. The quote is from a sermon on the Pentecostal Life.

## Thomas Smail, *Reflected Glory*

### Introduction

Smail's outlining of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ as the Son of God is a central theme in *Reflected Glory*. Smail explained that the Holy Spirit orients us to the ascended Lord Jesus Christ so that Christ's mediation with the Father transforms us. This trinitarian process reflects in and through us the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ to God the Father's glory.

This 'double mediation', as Smail calls it, where the Spirit brings Christ and Christ sends the Spirit, is central to Smail's theology, and only occurs because Jesus is fully human and God's anointed Messiah. The redemptive, atoning ministry of Jesus results from this Spirit anointed reality confronting the powers of evil.

Smail's trinitarian Spirit-Christology has a different tri-personal, relational structure to that of other attributes-centred *logos* Christologies, to use Bailey's terminology.<sup>117</sup>

Gunton cites Smail when considering the dominant Western interpretation of the added *filioque* phrase in the Nicene Creed. Gunton highlights the ministry of the Holy Spirit as more than proceeding from the Father and the Son, since the Son is 'eternally begotten of the Father *through the Spirit*'.<sup>118</sup>

Smail's article on *The Holy Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus* profiles the approach that Gunton mentions. Mellor provides some background context to Smail's writings and ministry, Reid shares some insights about Smail's New Zealand visits and Palmer's short conservative review comments on Smail's *The Giving Gift*.<sup>119</sup>

Fenwick provides a context for Smail's ministry, highlighting Smail's preference for a cross-centred rather than a triumphalist theology before exploring Smail's theology of suffering.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 1, 15, 16, 25, 26.

<sup>118</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, The, 168, 169.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas A. Smail, 'Holy Trinity and the Resurrection of Jesus, The' in *Different Gospels – the New Edition*, ed. Andrew Walker (London, United Kingdom: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1993); G Howard Mellor, 'A Theological Examination of the Non-Directive Approach to Church and Community Development with a Special Reference to the Nature of Evangelism' (Durham, 1990); Michael Andrew Reid, 'But by My Spirit: A History of the Charismatic Renewal in Christchurch 1960-1985' (, 2003); Gordon Palmer, 'Giving Gift by Tom Smail, The,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9, no. 1 (1991): 66, 67.

<sup>120</sup> James Fenwick, 'Thomas Smail and a Pneumatological Theology of Suffering,' <https://jamesfenwick.wordpress.com/2012/04/08/thomas-smail-and-a-pneumatological-theology-of-suffering/>.

Parsons' *Towards an evaluation of Tom Smail's doctrine of God the Father* delves into Smail's doctrine of God the Father and the way Smail distinguishes between immanent and economic trinitarian theologies.<sup>121</sup> Parsons focused on reviewing Smail's *The Forgotten Father* after citing Smail's *Reflected Glory* as giving the foundations to Smail's thinking. Parsons was concerned about the way Smail used his views on the eternal functional subordination of the Son to emphasise his concerns relating to ecclesiastical authority in the charismatic movement.

### **Thomas Smail, *The Holy Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus*<sup>122</sup>**

Thomas Smail wrote *Reflected Glory* during the British charismatic movement.<sup>123</sup> Evangelicalism in England was at that time significantly influenced by John Stott within the Anglican church and Martin Lloyd-Jones independent of it, while Michael Harper was a major personality in Anglicanism and the charismatic movement before joining an Eastern Orthodox church.

A list of other books by Thomas Smail (in published order) provides a trajectory of his thinking. They are somewhat bookended by two on God's fatherhood, and they include two on atonement theology, a further one on the Holy Spirit and one on power – a theme in his writings.<sup>124</sup>

This article, originally published in 1988, focuses on what can be learnt about trinitarian theology from the biblical resurrection and post-resurrection narratives. A similar account based on the birth narratives was also possible. His article says little, if anything, about his concerns relating to authority, and does little to explore the early church's distinctions between being and persons. Andrew Walker, editor of *Different Gospels*, and co-author with Thomas Smail of *Once and for All*, like Michael Harper, later joined an Eastern Orthodox church.<sup>125</sup>

### ***Modern thinking***

Smail believed that many Christians see the doctrine of the Trinity as unrelated to the biblical testimony about God in Jesus Christ. While he saw this confusion

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<sup>121</sup> Tom Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father' (Middlesex University Research Repository, 2023).

<sup>122</sup> Smail, 'Holy Trinity and the Resurrection of Jesus, The'..

<sup>123</sup> *Reflected Glory*.

<sup>124</sup> *Once and for All* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock, 1979); *Forgotten Father, The*; Tom Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, *Love of Power or Power of Love, The* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Bethany House, 1994); Smail, *Giving Gift, The*; Tom Smail, *Windows on the Cross* (United States: Cowley Publications, 1996); Thomas A. Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006)

<sup>125</sup> Andrew G. Walker, *Notes from a Wayward Son* (Eugene, Oregon, US: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

related in part to the way it had been understood and taught, his main concern was with the influence of modernity through various forms of biblical criticism.

Modernity, according to Smail, prioritises ‘reason and experience’ ahead of the biblical witness to ‘God’s self-revelation in Christ’.<sup>126</sup> Without God’s action in Jesus, God would have not be known as Father, Son and Spirit. Smail therefore aimed to explore the link between trinitarian theology and the biblical accounts of Jesus’ bodily resurrection and post-resurrection appearances. He believed that these accounts reveal God in action as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each in their own unique way and in complete harmony and unity.

### *God the Father*

Smail identified the Father as the ‘*initiating source and the ultimate goal*’ of all the resurrection and post-resurrection events. He concluded that everything described of Jesus, including the sending of the Holy Spirit, has its origin and destiny in the Father. He connected the biblical sending passages with the *filioque* clause in the amended Nicene Creed.<sup>127</sup>

Eastern Orthodox churches, in rejecting this addition, emphasise that the Father is the ultimate source and sender of the Spirit. Smail believed that this approach fails to mention the work of the risen Jesus in sending the Spirit. The Roman Catholic addition, in highlighting that the Holy Spirit is present only because of Son’s action in sending the Holy Spirit, remains silent about the Son first having received the Holy Spirit from the Father.

Smail concluded that it would not be enough to reframe the Creed to say

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father *through* the Son.<sup>128</sup>

Our understanding of who God essentially is, revealed in what God does in history, includes God being Father, Son and Spirit, with the Father sending his Son and his Spirit, and with them coming from the Father in their unique ways to glorify the Father by sharing in the Father’s purposes. This means that

within [God’s] own divine life, the Son and the Spirit are what they are not from themselves or in themselves, but from the Father.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Smail, ‘Holy Trinity and the Resurrection of Jesus, The’, 14.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 19.

### ***God the Son***

The resurrection narratives, according to Smail, declare both the ‘*primacy of the Father*’ and ‘*the derived deity of the Son*’. We learn that Jesus is human and the eternal Son of God.<sup>130</sup> This revelation is seen in the way God the Father exalts the Son and in manner by which the Jesus as Son of God made clear that who he was as Messiah and Lord.

Smail wrote that there are ‘two centres of personal being and action’ within God and that the Son ‘derives all that he is from [the Father]’, as the Nicene Creed explains. He emphasised that the Son and the Father have ‘the same being and nature’ and that the Son’s ‘being and nature’ are from his Father and not from himself as Son.<sup>131</sup>

### ***God the Holy Spirit***

Smail’s third claim is that the resurrection appearances reveal ‘*the mutual interdependence of the Son and the Holy Spirit*’.<sup>132</sup> He saw the divinity of the Holy Spirit as being stated more implicitly and that the Holy Spirit focuses attention on the Father and the Son.

Smail highlighted a reciprocal relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus, emphasising that the Holy Spirit is active in raising Jesus from the dead *and* that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to confirm who he is and what he and the Father are doing with and through the Holy Spirit.

Western trinitarian theology, in adding the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed, has not explained the mutual relationship of the Holy Spirit and the Son of God, and the primacy of God the Father. Amending the Creed to say that the Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father *through the Son*’ still lacks this reciprocity.

### ***Conclusion***

Smail concluded that if the intra-trinitarian relationships are as they are seen in the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, then the ‘mutual interdependence’ of the Son and the Spirit and their dependence on the Father need mentioning in any credal declaration.<sup>133</sup> He saw his conclusion as aligned with Irenaeus’ statement about the two hands of God and suggested that an amended Creed would say that

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 19, 20.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 23, 25.

the Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father *through the Son*’ and that the Son is ‘eternally begotten of the Father *through the Spirit*’.<sup>134</sup>

He believed this would affirm the ‘primacy of the Father, the derived deity of the Son, the mutuality of Son and Spirit’ and their sharing ‘the same being and nature, the same will and purpose in all that they do’, and so emphasise their mutual self-giving and mysterious interpenetration and indwelling.<sup>135</sup>

**G. Howard Mellor, *A theological examination of the non-directive approach to church and community development with a special reference to the nature of evangelism***<sup>136</sup>

Mellor’s thesis included his definition of evangelicalism. He defined it using John Stott’s and David Bebbington’s frameworks which focused on conversion, atonement, biblical authority, missionary activism, moral and cultural transformation and alignment, commitment to Reformation and apostolic Christianity, and to conserving what was seen as the fundamentals of faith.<sup>137</sup> Mellor’s work provides insights into evangelicalism before its current alignment with Republican United States politics.<sup>138</sup>

Mellor classified late twentieth century evangelicalism by using and modifying Gabriel Fackre’s groupings.<sup>139</sup> Mellor traced politically active fundamentalists from Francis Shaeffer’s L’Abri to the separatism that was being fostered by the binary views of many United States tele-evangelists.

Pietistic evangelicals, by contrast, were not outwardly self-promoting. They focused on conversion, personal ethics, individual witness, regular studying of the Scriptures, and a holiness derived separation from what was seen as worldliness. Although Mellor did not see Samuel Chadwick as a separatist, he saw Chadwick’s ministry oriented towards Spirit-filled living that included these aspects. He also

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>136</sup> Mellor, ‘*A Theological Examination of the Non-Directive Approach to Church and Community Development with a Special Reference to the Nature of Evangelism.*’

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 81–91. See also W. Robert Godfrey, ‘Bebbington’s Four Points of Evangelicalism,’ <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/bebbingtons-four-points-evangelicalism>

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Scot McKnight, ‘Scot’s Newsletter,’ <https://scotmcknight.substack.com>; *Kingdom Roots*, podcast audio, <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/kingdom-roots-with-scot-mcknight/id1078739516>.

<sup>139</sup> Mellor, ‘*A Theological Examination of the Non-Directive Approach to Church and Community Development with a Special Reference to the Nature of Evangelism.*’, 92–119.

nominated the early Inter-University Christian Movement as an example of pietistic evangelicalism.<sup>140</sup>

A further group focused on providing what they saw as reasonably defending orthodox beliefs. Mellor included F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer and other scholars in this category. The broader grouping sought to use their rational frameworks to encourage evangelism, apologetics, and social action. These evangelicals lacked confidence in the approach dominating the World Council of Churches, which, in turn, gave evangelicals a reputation for being pessimistic, isolationist, conceited and culturally outdated.

Evangelicals who highlighted social justice and wellbeing brought a more cohesive theology to concerns about power, economics and the environment. Their thinking replaced the individualised ones that dominated these earlier groupings.

Charismatic evangelicals were generally within or close to establish churches while Pentecostals acted independently. Mellor referenced Michael Harper's and Thomas Smail's roles in the British Fountain Trust and saw Smail's concerns about apparent excesses in the charismatic movement as motivating Smail to write *Reflected Glory* and his subsequent books.<sup>141</sup> Mellor also added what he called ecumenical evangelicals to Fackre's list.

**Michael Reid, *But by my Spirit: A history of the Charismatic Renewal in Christchurch 1960–1985*<sup>142</sup>**

Reid's thesis includes similarities to my experiences as a leader of the Adelaide University evangelical student group in the early 1970s. I have no recollection of Smail visiting Adelaide (though that does not mean he did not come here) but Reid comments on Smail visiting Christchurch and on Smail's efforts in trying to give the charismatic movement 'a firm Trinitarian basis'. His approach focused on unity, reconciliation and atonement.<sup>143</sup> Reid commented that

Trinitarian interrelationship from a sound theological platform was not an area many writers were prepared or equipped to explore, and in Smail's case, this led to increased doubts about the adequacy of the renewal in its populist expressions.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> The Intervarsity Fellowship and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students developed these themes in a mission-oriented context.

<sup>141</sup> Mellor, 'A Theological Examination of the Non-Directive Approach to Church and Community Development with a Special Reference to the Nature of Evangelism.', 108–110.

<sup>142</sup> Reid, 'But by My Spirit: A History of the Charismatic Renewal in Christchurch 1960-1985.'

<sup>143</sup> For example, Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 130, 131.

<sup>144</sup> Reid, 'But by My Spirit: A History of the Charismatic Renewal in Christchurch 1960-1985.', 255, 256, 259. See Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 12.

In discussing changes in the charismatic movement, Reid again references Smail:

Serious reflection from within started to appear in Smail's *Reflected Glory* in 1975, and four years later in Harper's, *This Is The Day*. Harper's book was less theological, but certainly candid in revealing the author's growing disenchantment. Evangelicals too, such as James Packer later examined renewal, albeit less sympathetically in *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, in 1984.<sup>145</sup>

Reid later comments on Harper's further disquiet with the charismatic movement and his different emphases to Smail's theology and approach.<sup>146</sup>

As already mentioned, Packer, in *An introduction to systematic spirituality*, cites Smail's *The Forgotten Father* when emphasising that '[sound] spirituality needs to be thoroughly trinitarian' if it is to avoid the dangers Smail outlined.<sup>147</sup>

### **Gordon Palmer, *The Giving Gift by Tom Smail*<sup>148</sup>**

Palmer's brief review of *The Giving Gift* describes the work of the Holy Spirit as being 'in the sphere of grace', and that it is dynamic, relational, personal and trinitarian. *The Giving Gift* has a non-competitive, complementary presentation of incarnational and Spirit Christologies, according to Palmer, and he believes that this balance improves on the approach Smail used in *Reflected Glory*.

Palmer is critical of Smail's prioritising the Spirit rather than Scripture as the 'final witness to Christ' but praises Smail's 'superb treatment of prayer'.

### **James Fenwick, *Smail and a pneumatological theology of suffering*<sup>149</sup>**

Smail's initial tongues-interpretation was that 'The way to Pentecost is Calvary; the Spirit comes from the cross'. It encouraged him to emphasise 'the power and the love, the failure and the triumph, the weakness and the strength, the suffering and the healing, the dying and the rising again'.

#### ***Part 1: The Spirit of the crucified one***

Smail's aim was to 'develop a theology of charismatic renewal that situates itself at the foot of the cross' and to emphasise that the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost was

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<sup>145</sup> Reid, 'But by My Spirit: A History of the Charismatic Renewal in Christchurch 1960-1985', 272. Cf. Donald Macleod, *Spirit of Promise* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1986).

<sup>146</sup> Reid, 'But by My Spirit: A History of the Charismatic Renewal in Christchurch 1960-1985', 285, 286.

<sup>147</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer Collection, The*, 206, 207 fn. 14. See Smail, *Forgotten Father, The*. Also, *Giving Gift, The, Reflected Glory*.

<sup>148</sup> Palmer, 'Giving Gift by Tom Smail, The.'

<sup>149</sup> Fenwick, 'Thomas Smail and a Pneumatological Theology of Suffering'..

the Spirit of the crucified one, ... whose power and work bear witness to the scandal of the cross – God’s power made perfect in weakness.<sup>150</sup>

He believed that the Pentecostal-charismatic movement would lose direction and theological context unless it was aware of its Reformation, Pietist and holiness Methodist origins, and recognised and responded to suffering.

A *Paschal* rather than a *Pentecostal model* would connect the cross of Jesus with the Holy Spirit’s coming and ministry rather than focus mainly on receiving the Holy Spirit. A cruciform theology, according to Smail, is much to be preferred to one that contradicts ‘the gospel of the cross’ and leads to charismatic experience becoming a triumphalist-focused ‘autonomous realm of its own’.

A triumphalist *theologia gloriae*, using Luther’s terminology, privileges *power-over-weakness* and upends the New Testament *theologia crucis* emphasis on *power-in-weakness*. Smail insisted that ‘the way of the cross and the way of the Spirit are one and the same’, and that this way leads

to glory fashioned in suffering, to victory won through defeat, to power exercised in weakness, to a throne that is the same shape as a cross.

The power of Jesus and the power of the Spirit are both evidence of the Father’s self-giving ‘Calvary love’, which leads us to the cross, rather than away from it.

### ***Part 2: A theology of suffering***

Smail based his theology of suffering on his *Paschal model of charismatic renewal*. He pointed out that the New Testament emphasises that ‘the way of the master is the way of the disciple’ and that we are not therefore immune from suffering as followers of Jesus or for any other reason. He reasoned that ‘the more we are filled with the Spirit, the more we shall share in both cross and resurrection’.<sup>151</sup>

Fenwick suggested two amendments to Smail’s approach:

- Smail, in not explicitly excluding intentional suffering as a pathway to being more Christ-like, failed to emphasise that Holy Spirit enabled participation in Christ bears ‘the imprint of the Son’, including his suffering.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., Citations from Tom Smail, “The Cross and the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Renewal” from *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, eds. Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright (SPCK, 1993) and Smail, *Reflected Glory*.

<sup>151</sup> Fenwick, ‘Thomas Smail and a Pneumatological Theology of Suffering’, Citations from Tom Smail, “The Cross and the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Renewal” from *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, eds. Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright (SPCK, 1993)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

- Smail's belief that God leads us *through* suffering rather than delivers us *from* it similarly lacked an emphasis on our 'communion with Christ, as mediated by the Holy Spirit'. This communion, according to Fenwick, is 'an indirect share in the primordial communion that obtains between the Father and the Son to all eternity', and is an experience of 'the communion of the Triune life'. Our triune participation is with God's people 'for the suffering of one is the suffering of all'. It 'is another way of arriving at Smail's conclusion, that the Spirit cannot be divorced from the cross'.<sup>153</sup>

**Tom Parsons, *Towards an evaluation of Smail's doctrine of God the Father*<sup>154</sup>**

***Introduction***

Parsons introduced his evaluation by indicating that *Reflected Glory* provided the foundations for Smail's subsequent publications on God the Father, the Holy Spirit, the atonement, and humanity imaging God, and that Smail focused on academic as well as ecclesiastical and pastoral concerns.<sup>155</sup>

Parsons' thesis on Smail's paterology provides some insights into Smail's theology. Parsons argues that Smail's belief in the eternal functional subordination of the Son fails to discern adequately the 'distinctions between the immanent and the economic Trinity and between the divine processions and the missions'. These short-comings result in a distorted over-emphasis on the Father's authority, an outcome which he thinks undermines Smail's pastoral concerns.<sup>156</sup>

Parsons first identifies Smail's Anglican and charismatic contexts and refers to the way Smail's background influenced his 'new experiential knowledge of God's Fatherhood'. Smail saw the charismatic movement focusing more on healing than repentance and concluded that it needed to consider obedience. He thought that a fresh emphasis on God the Father would highlight the works of the Spirit and the Son, focus attention on obedience as adopted children, increase awareness of 'the central concerns of the Christian faith', and correct authority problems.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.'

<sup>155</sup> Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity; Giving Gift, The; Forgotten Father, The; Once and for All*; Smail, Walker, and Wright, *Love of Power or Power of Love, The*; Smail, *Windows on the Cross*.

<sup>156</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.' Abstract, 1.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 3-10.

### *The Father of The Forgotten Father*

After a section outlining ‘possible templates’ for reviewing Smail’s book,<sup>158</sup> Parsons identifies Smail’s concerns as person-based, ecclesial and theological – with the latter relating to Smail’s theological education. God, for Smail, reveals God’s triune-self as eternal Father, Son and Spirit in and through the salvific life of Jesus.

Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer, according to Smail, highlights Jesus’ obedience and the Father’s provision (cf. Matthew 11:25–30; John 1:18). We are therefore to conform to this obedience-provision motif since it is eternally grounded in the triune community. As such, it relates to life now and to eternal life after death.

Smail saw God’s fatherhood defined by Jesus as God’s Son rather than by God creating humanity. Reciprocally, Jesus knew God as Father by revelation and was dependent on God as Father in his life and ministry. Smail developed his doctrine of the Trinity on these two beliefs.<sup>159</sup>

Smail saw this Father-Son relationship as co-dependant and so as deriving identity. There is, Parsons comments, a difference between tri-personal co-dependency and triune common operations. Smail’s trinitarian understandings, revealed in and through the incarnate life of Jesus, emphasise that *who God is precedes what God does*.<sup>160</sup> He reasoned that Jesus’ incarnational subordinated obedience reveals an eternal one, and claimed this filial subordination is functional and not ontological by referencing John 10:30 and John 14:28.

While Parsons thinks that Smail’s efforts in centring the Father-Son relationship on atonement and adoption are appropriate, he explores what he sees as weaknesses in Smail’s approach, especially regarding the ‘unity of divine agency’, the implications relating to God’s oneness of being, and an imprecision relating to God’s eternal and economic being and action. These concerns are profiled as resulting in Smail over-emphasising authority.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 11–13. Parsons’ references Lidgett and Forsyth, and debates about the universal fatherhood of God. Smail does not see *Abba* indicating Creator-God.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 19–22, 32.

*Smail and the eternal functional subordination of the Son*

Parsons mentions Smail's views on the subordination of women in marriage, church and society, including Kevin Giles' identification of Smail as a theologian who applied eternal function subordination theology to gender issues.<sup>162</sup>

*The place of eternal functional subordination in Smail's trinitarian theology*

Parsons compares Smail's *The Forgotten Father* and *Like Father, Like Son*, which were published a quarter of a century apart, and concludes that, while Smail's theology developed, influenced in part by Colin Gunton, Smail's commitment to eternal functional subordination was both 'significant' and 'structurally essential'. Parsons establishes his assessment by comparing Smail's references to Barth with quotes from Barth.<sup>163</sup>

Smail aligns his belief in this doctrine with Jesus' divinity. He thinks economic obedience references a proper rather than an appropriated obedience, and this proper obedience is necessary for the Son's incarnational freedom. Filial obedience is why the Son rather than the Spirit or the Father becomes incarnate – the Son's humility and obedience were inherent in the Son of God before the incarnation. Parsons again considers Smail's alignment with Barth in this context.<sup>164</sup>

*Smail's eternal functional subordination and the relationship between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity*

Parsons questions Smail's views on eternal functional subordination in the light of Smail's parallel belief that God's economic actions cannot constitute God's immanent being as the later precedes the former.

Having indicated that immanent and economic relate to being and action respectively, Smail references Barth and Rahner, who, according to Palmer, have different views on trinitarian immanence and economy. Barth saw an intentional distinction while Rahner identified them together. While there is consistency between the two theologians that God's revelation of God's-self is an authentic self-disclosure, Barth pointed out that the distinction preserves an understanding of God's freedom to act rather than a necessity to act. Rahner's aim, by contrast, was to emphasise that the economic Trinity fully reveals God, and that the two missions of God are proper to the Son and the Spirit. Rahner's approach can be seen to risk Barth's concern, and vice-versa.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 33. Also, Priest, *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*.

<sup>163</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.', 34–37, compares Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* with *Forgotten Father, The*.

<sup>164</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.', 37–40.

Smail's dilemma is in wanting to maintain a distinction between immanent and economic – that God's actions are not God's being – while at the same time making an ontological connection. It is one (questionable) thing to state that the obedience of the Son *reveals* a prior eternal obedience; it is something different to claim that the immanent obedience 'is constituted by the human obedience'.<sup>165</sup>

Parsons argues that although Barth modified some of his early views, Smail 'lacks some of [Barth's] nuances'.<sup>166</sup> After again referencing Kevin Giles, Parsons concludes that Smail's

lack of clarity on this point leaves him susceptible to projecting elements of human life ... directly onto the eternal Trinity.<sup>167</sup>

*The eternal functional subordination in relation to procession and mission*

Understanding God's processions and missions focuses attention on the incarnation and, reciprocally, facilitates fresh trinitarian insights. Parsons believes that Smail does not adequately differentiate processions and missions, and hence Parsons sees Smail's views on eternal functional subordination as inconsistent. This weakness leads to Smail implying the ontological subordination of the Son. It also impacts on Smail's understandings of 'divine condescension'<sup>168</sup>

*Eternal generation, the divine monarchia and ontological subordination*

While Smail emphasises that eternal generation guarantees both the oneness of being of the triune persons *and* their distinctiveness, he also repeatedly links the Son's incarnate obedience with the Son's divine procession and so directly connects *eternal generation* with *eternal subordination*.<sup>169</sup>

By interpreting John 14:28 ontologically rather than salvifically, Smail assigns the *unifying* divine *source* of authority and lordship to the Father rather than to God's triune being. The Son's and the Spirit's authority therefore result from the Father's authority. This view contrasts with one where *relations (and not authority)* are irreversibly ordered, rather than on an *ontological* prioritisation of *being*.

Smail's viewpoint is linked with his insights into the *filioque* clause in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Smail preferred stating that the Holy Spirit proceeds

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 54, 55.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 55.

from the Father *through* (rather than *and*) the Son and that the Son was eternally begotten of the Father *through* the Spirit.<sup>170</sup>

In his latter book, *Like Father, Like Son*, Smail uses Gunton's expanded notion of person to recognise distinctive attributes and characteristics and not just origins, and that these distinctions are seen in the actions of the divine persons. This view enabled Smail to strengthen his claim that we can understand the Father's and the Son's eternal and human relationships from the obedience of Jesus to the Father.<sup>171</sup>

Parsons observes a shift from Smail's earlier views about the monarchy of the Father in *The Forgotten Father* and *The Giving Gift* to those in *Like Father, Like Son*. Parsons insists that, contrary to Smail's intentions, Smail's beliefs about functional subordination, where he links the Son's mission to the Son's procession, are actually statements regarding ontological subordination and 'the Son's eternal hypostatic identity'.<sup>172</sup>

Parsons' notes that his analysis of Smail's eternal functional subordination relates to Smail's theology. He adds that eternal functional subordination is in general an unhelpful way of talking about 'the eternal Son's receptive relationship to the Father' because of God's oneness of being and will.<sup>173</sup>

#### *The drama of divine condescension*

##### *The unity of God's will*

Parsons cites Gregory Nazianzen's statement that obedience and disobedience are terms that apply to subordinates and so not to the Word of God. Nazianzen saw the language of Philippians 2 about the 'form of a slave' as indicating that Jesus' obedience related to his humanity and not to his divinity. This distinction focuses on God's redemptive purposes in the incarnation whereas Smail stated that 'The sonship of the eternal Son consists of a divine obedience.'<sup>174</sup>

Nazianzen's concerns about obedience were because he understood that obedience involves one person submitting to the will of another person, whereas God only has one will. Parsons mentions Adonis Vidu's view that Athanasius and the Cappadocians taught that God's will, like God's operations, belongs to God's essence and not to God's persons. Nazianzen is quoted saying that

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 59, 60.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 68., Smail, *Forgotten Father, The*, 146.

We have one God, because there is a single Godhead. Though there are three objects of belief, they derive from a single whole and have reference to it. They do not have degrees of being God or degrees of priority over against one another. They are not sundered in will or divided in power. You cannot find there any of the properties inherent in things divisible. To express it succinctly, the Godhead exists undivided in beings divided. ... *When we look at the Godhead, the primal cause, the sole sovereignty, we have a mental picture of the single whole, certainly. But when we look at the three in whom the Godhead exists, and at those who derive their timeless and equally glorious being from the primal cause, we have three objects of worship.*<sup>175</sup>

To us there is One God, for the Godhead is One, and all that proceeds from Him is referred to One, though we believe in Three Persons. For [O]ne is not more and another less God; nor is One before and another after; nor are They divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; ... . When then we look at the Godhead, or the First Cause, or the Monarchia, that which we conceive is One; but when we look at the Persons in Whom the Godhead dwells, and at Those Who timelessly and with equal glory have their Being from the First Cause – there are Three Whom we worship.<sup>176</sup>

Parsons points out that while the divine will belongs to God's essence, 'it is the person that wills'.<sup>177</sup> Smail's teaching on eternal functional subordination falters at this point as subordination and obedience relate to the Son's mission as a human person and not to the Son's eternal being.

### *The incarnation*

Parsons emphasises 'The Nicene concern not to pre-empt in the conditions that pertain in the incarnation by locating them in the eternal life of God' by citing Augustine. It is therefore important to note that the incarnation meant that the Son of God as a creature received a human will and lived and identified himself with a humanity with its own wills – a humanity under divine judgement.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.', 69. Parsons reference to 31.13 should read 31.14. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus – on God and Christ*, ed. John Behr, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham, vol. 12, Popular Patristic Series (Yonkers, New York, USA: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002). Parsons did not include the section in italics.

<sup>176</sup> 'Gregory of Nazianzus: Fifth Theological Oration (Oration 31),' New Advent LLC, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310231.htm> provides a different translation.

<sup>177</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.', 70.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

So, while, as Smail stated, Jesus' words and actions were authentic, Parsons sees fundamental differences between divinity and humanity. Parsons states that the Son of God's sonship, which proceeds from the Father, and which acts humbly and obediently in the Son's mission, are in 'continuity' while

this eternal procession is revealed in an obedience and humiliation that can only exist [in his humanity].<sup>179</sup>

### *Divine fatherhood*

Smail's use of an authority-obedience motif has implications for his awareness of the links between our perceptions of our own parents – especially our fathers – and God's fatherhood. Smail wanted his readers to distinguish between this reality and God revealing God's fatherhood in and through Jesus Christ. Parsons indicates that Smail again fails to differentiate 'the immanent and economic Trinities, and ... the Son's procession and his mission'.<sup>180</sup>

The incarnation impacts this revelation of God's inner being as it involves Jesus' humanity and redemptive ministry. It is important, according to Parsons, to emphasise that the fatherhood we observe in Gethsemane authentically 'reveals the processions', *and* to highlight the aspects of that situation that

only pertain to Jesus' incarnate state and soteriological role. Specifically, the Father's 'austere' demand and Jesus' submission, so fitting in this context, are not in themselves hypostatic properties of the Father and the Son respectively.<sup>181</sup>

This differentiation is relevant because it highlights that the Father is not 'the "authority figure" in the Trinity'.<sup>182</sup> While we are called to obey God, our adoption into God's family is a gift of grace and not an authoritarian demand.

### *Conclusion*

Parsons has explored Smail's paterology and expressed concern about Smail's lack of distinction between immanent and economic trinitarian theologies and also between his understanding of the theology of trinitarian processions and missions. Parsons says these weaknesses result from Smail's affirmation of the Son's eternal functional subordination and Smail's focus on the Father's authority.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 73, 74. Parsons quotes from Smail, *Forgotten Father, The*, 59.

<sup>181</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.', 75.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 79.

Parsons affirmed Smail's focus on the fatherhood of God and our adoption into God's family through Christ by the Spirit, and so our life in the reign of God. This orientation highlights central concerns in the Christian faith.

Parsons has, by contrast, criticised Smail's emphasis on the Father as an '*authority-over*', and sonship as '*obedience-to*'.<sup>183</sup> Seeing Father-God this way is, for Parsons, 'counterproductive', especially when human leaders might simply replicate this belief by exercising a predominantly authoritarian leadership.<sup>184</sup>

Parsons' alternative to Smail's authority-centred approach is to orient our thinking onto the Father 'as the unbegotten source of the Triune life'.<sup>185</sup> A focus on the Father as Giver could have affirmed strengths in the charismatic renewal. It could have centred attention on the redemptive life of the incarnate Jesus and his rejection of pride and authoritarianism. Parson concludes that while Smail's insistence on eternal functional subordination diminishes his paterology, Smail's work is

a rare offering: it brings deeply considered Trinitarian theology to bear on the life and challenges of the church.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 80.

## Further Learning

## Snapshots of some significant themes

## Donald Macleod, *Behold your God*<sup>187</sup>

### The Doctrine of the Trinity

#### *The problem*

Trinitarian theology is best studied as an act of worship which focuses on the unity of God as the unique source, creator and monarch of all creation, the deity of Jesus Christ as Son of God and Son of Man, and the Holy Spirit as a person. Denying the deity of the Son of God or that the Spirit of God is a divine person leads either to adoptionism or modalism.

#### *Persons*

The triune persons are one being with real personal distinctions within God. These distinctions are recognised as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and are evident in the biblical accounts of the life of Jesus. While God acts as ‘one single agency’, ‘divisions of function’ are evident in God’s actions which ‘point to ultimate ontological distinction’.<sup>188</sup> These distinctions are revealed in the way the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate to each other in their relationships with redeemed humanity.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit act in unity and community, with their personal distinctions unique and different to human relationships. The Son of God, as the only-begotten beloved Son of God the Father, shares a ‘witness’ with the Father that is mutually other-person oriented in love.<sup>189</sup>

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have an ‘affective and emotional ... rationality’ that is evident in God’s purposes, will and love. The Son being begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeding describe, in a divine mystery, the sole differences between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The procession of the Holy Spirit is best considered as being ‘ingenerate’.<sup>190</sup>

#### *Homoousios*

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share the same *homoousios*, being or substance. This term affirms the full deity and unity of the three divine persons. They not only have a common kind of being, they have one unique being or *ousia* that is defined by their common attributes, including their self-existence.

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<sup>187</sup> Macleod, *Behold Your God*.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

### *Autotheos*

The problem of subordination is never far away, especially in thinking of the Father as the fountain or source of deity – as *autotheos* alone. The Son and the Holy Spirit, as Calvin pointed out, must be *autotheos* or they are not *theos* since they do not self-exist.

### *Filioque*

Divine *homoousios* means *autotheos* and leads to *filioque*. Denying the Son of God's participation in the procession of the Holy Spirit reduces the divine status of the Son of God and puts aside the way God works in Jesus. Eastern concerns are seen to disappear since God is one being without an *arche* or *fans* (prior source).

### *Perichoresis*

*Perichoresis* means essences and attributes that the triune persons share. The *monarchia* or government, the *doxa* or glory and their love are firstly mutual and common. Secondly, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each indwell the others 'in a unique intensity of mutuality', an interpenetration and intimacy, and a witness and towardness that is beyond our comprehension or ability.<sup>191</sup> And thirdly, *perichoresis* means circulation of power and energy from each person to the other persons, and not just from the Father as one principle person to the other triune persons.

### *Trinitarian religion*

Trinitarian religion is worship of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit as well as the Father. This worship impacts on human society and community as it links us with God's *witness* with Jesus – a continual presence only absent during Jesus' crucifixion. It also includes sharing through worship rituals and practical giving and receiving. This love-expressing mutuality means that the redemptive life of the people of God 'is virtually the opening of the circle of trinitarian life to the church' in which the triune God indwells each person:

So we have a perichoresis which includes sharing, indwelling and circulation. ... But let us never forget the cost: that in order to secure our *witness*, God sent forth ... His own Son. He came ... to be the One without God, in order to bring us to God. That ... loss of perichoresis, is an even bigger mystery than the Trinity itself.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 206. Is there some sense in seeing Jesus' declaration of God's absence in terms of God's determination to be present where suffering is most intense?

## Donald Macleod, *The person of Christ*<sup>193</sup>

### The Christ of faith

The first part of *The person of Christ* is titled 'Very God Of Very God' – *From The Gospels To Nicea*. It approaches Christology 'from above', and in the first part considers *the Christ of faith* after looking at the virgin birth, the pre-existence of Christ, Christ as the Son of God, and the historical Jesus. The second part 'Very God, Very Man' – *To Chalcedon and Beyond* considers the incarnation, Chalcedon, *kenosis*, and the sinlessness and uniqueness of Christ.<sup>194</sup>

### *The Nicæan response to Arianism*

It is one thing to worship Jesus as God and another to begin to understand what this means. The trinitarian theology of the Council of Nicea 'that Christ, as the Son of God, was *homoousios* (consubstantial) with the Father' contradicted contemporary Arianism. Whatever nuances and complexities existed at the time about Arianism, Arius did not believe in the eternal self-existence of the Son of God or that the Son of God is equal with God.

Athanasius pointed out that revelation, redemption and worship all failed if Christ was not God. Even more significantly for Athanasius, his notion of deification failed if Christ was less than divine.

### *A distinct person*

Affirming consubstantiality required clear statements about differentiations. If the Father, Son and Spirit were not (sequential) modes of being or divine attributes, and if *homoousios* did not deny differentiations, then suitable terminologies were needed that went at least some way towards resolving these concerns.

Tertullian introduced the term *person* in his *trinitarian* theology. The Greek theologians use of *ousia* and *hypostasis* to represent God's single being and divine persons raised linguistic difficulties between Latin and Greek theologians and risked transporting external perceptions into trinitarian theology.

If we accept Karl Rahner's and Karl Barth's concerns about a tritheism resulting from each divine person having their own centre of 'consciousness and activity' or 'individuality', then the biblical testimony of the 'distinctive and unique' way each person works is at risk – especially given Rahner's view that the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are indistinguishable.<sup>195</sup> Macleod's view was that the triune persons, in acting together towards each other, are aware of the other

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<sup>193</sup> Donald Macleod, *Person of Christ, The*, Countours of Christian Theology (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 126.

persons as well as being self-aware. The divine persons work together in I-Thou relationships, and act in their own specific and unique way in creation and redemption.

The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, each looking into the other's eyes with wonder and adoration.<sup>196</sup>

### *Eternal sonship*

While the Council of Nicea affirmed their belief in the eternal sonship of Christ, his sonship was also described in terms of Jesus' human birth or the Father creating through the *Logos*. The significance of the eternal sonship centred on its relevance to the love of God, to the concept of one divine being, namely the shared essence of the Father and the Father's only begotten Son, and the accessibility and comprehension of the distinctiveness of the Father and the Son that it enables.

The *Logos* idea lacked love as essential to the eternal Father-*Logos* being and the incarnation-alone concept removed divine love as essential to God. Only the Father-Son deity made sense of the revelation that God *is* love. Only the '*witness*' of the Father-Son relationship identifies an intra-trinitarian love relationship in which 'God is never alone'.

A God-alone-with-his-*Logos* is solitary in a way that a God-alone-with-his-Son is not.<sup>197</sup>

God is love before we know God is love and before we love and trust God. This God is in God's-self what and who God is towards us – the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity in such a way that they are truthful and transparent. God *is Abba*, the Son of God *is* God's *beloved Son* and the Spirit of God *is* the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

The alternative enacts redemption without the revelation that the triunity of God is Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### *Eternal generation*

The revelation of eternal sonship raises a further and deeper mystery concerning the notion of eternal generation, a concept that was more readily described by what it did not mean.

- Human generation has parents existing before children. Eternal generation does not since God would otherwise fundamentally change at some point.
- Human generation has children originating. Eternal generation does not.

If eternal generation is accepted then

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 130.

The Father was not becoming Father nor the Son becoming Son. The Father simply is and the Son simply is, without any hint of becoming.<sup>198</sup>

An additional mystery related to the *procession* of the Holy Spirit in comparison to the *generation* of the eternal Son. The inexplicable and unresolvable differences are best explored in what the Son and the Spirit *do*. Procession and sonship involve something more than consubstantiality or *homoousios*. Procession is just as unique to the Spirit as generation is to the Son, and vice-versa.

Focusing on *homoousios* in this context emphasises that generation and creation are different – what is made does not need to have the same essence as its maker.

Additional points regarding eternal sonship and eternal generation include:

- While the Father and Son are willingly who they are, the Father did not decide to have a Son: the Son relates to their essence or being. Creation, including human creation, was and is, by contrast, God's choice.
- Since the Father is ingenerate and the Son is generate *and* the Father and the Son have the same nature or essence, the 'properties *begotten* and *unbegotten* belong not to the essence but to the persons'.<sup>199</sup>
- Divine sonship is the primary archetype, the ultimate perfect, final and complete reality of which human offspring are authentic ectypes or images. Divine fatherhood and sonship involve 'total consubstantiality, absolute equality and perfect correspondence'. The imaging and fulness of the Father-Son relationship in their shared inter-personal 'love, intimacy and interaction' is fundamentally different to human relationships.<sup>200</sup>

### *Identical in being*

If the *homoousion* identifies the Father and the Son as distinct persons with an identical essence, then the Son is as divine as the Father and so, as the Father's image, is fully equal with the Father *and* has the same attributes as the Father.

The Father and the Son are indistinguishable in terms of nature and similarity *and* different only in terms of generation or begottenness. John of Damascus explained the concepts of generation and procession:

For the Father is without cause and unborn: for he is derived from nothing, but derives from himself his being, nor does he derive a single quality from another ... But the Son is derived from the Father after the manner of generation, and the Holy Spirit likewise is derived from the Father, yet not after the manner of generation, but after that of procession ... For in these

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 135.

hypostatic or personal properties alone do the three holy subsistences differ from each other, being indivisibly divided not by essence but by the distinguishing mark of their proper and peculiar subsistence.<sup>201</sup>

Yet, as has been mentioned, we are basically ignorant of what generation and begotten mean *apart from what is revealed of the person and work of the triune God in the salvific and redemptive life and ministry of Jesus Christ*. The Father, Son and Spirit share themselves with humanity in their own unique and specific ways. They reveal the oneness of God's essence when revealing themselves as persons.

### ***Numerical identity***

The oneness of the Father and the Son relates to their *ousia* or being while *hypostasis* (or *prosopa*) names their identities. The Latin *essentia* distinguished their being from their *persona*. Within the Trinity the *one* mutual essence is fully present in each of the *three* triune persons who each have their own relations. Basil explained that 'we do not count [this mystery] by way of addition'.

Fundamental to this view of essence and person is the belief already discussed that eternal generation and sonship does not make God three beings. Although the 'Son was begotten of the essence', being begotten constitutes a property and not a second essence or being. 'God exists as triune; indeed, can only exist as triune. Yet his triuneness does not make him three'.<sup>202</sup>

### ***Perichoresis***

*Perichoresis* is an attempt to help resolve the paradox that the singular essence of God's triune persons means their beings would be identical and yet they are differentiated by their ingenerateness, generateness and procession. This dilemma leads to the concept of coinherence and that the one deity has 'three persons [who] co-inhere in each other and interpenetrate each other'.<sup>203</sup>

John of Damascus explained the idea of *perichoresis*:

The subsistences dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate course within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but cleaving to each other. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is no coalescence or commingling or confusion. And there is one and the same

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 137. From Hilary of Poitiers and John of Damascus, *Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, NPNF2-09 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209.html>, 1898), 564, 565.

<sup>202</sup> Macleod, *Person of Christ, The*, 139, 140.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 140: Greek *enperichoresis*, Latin *circumincessio* or *circuminsessio*.

motion: for there is one impulse and one motion of the three subsistences, which is not to be observed in any created nature.<sup>204</sup>

This means that we know God as one God and that this one God is present to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We know the tri-personal one God as three distinct ways. We know the Father as *Abba Father*, the Son as *the Lord Jesus Christ* and the Holy Spirit as *the coming One*. We have no relationship with one person without being in relationship to the other persons since the ‘three co-inhere in a single being’. Everything one triune person is and does involves the being and actions of the other persons with each person working in their own specific way.<sup>205</sup>

### *The Son and the Spirit: Filioque*

After John of Damascus’ death (c. 750) the Eastern church also spoke of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son to emphasise that the Father alone is the one from whom the Spirit proceeds. Their approach implied either the absence of any participation by the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit or suggested the Son’s participation was subordinate to that of the Father. More significantly it raised ideas of cause and source of being that, in wanting to affirm the Father, contradicted their strong views on God’s one *ousia* and three *hypostases*.

The Western church, by contrast, emphasised that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (Latin, *filioque*), highlighting the full equality and participation of the Father and the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern church interpreted this as indicating two divine sources.

The language of sources was problematic as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share one essence, so the Father’s essence could not be underived and the same essence of the Son and Spirit derived. Terminology identifying the Father as divine primary cause, fountain or beginning in reference to origin and being compromises ‘the consubstantiality and co-eternity of the persons’. Derivation and causation should not be used when referring to the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit.<sup>206</sup>

The *filioque* debate suggests a related enquiry. If the triune persons have one being and are identical in nature or essence, is there ‘some kind of “procession” of the Son from the Father and the Spirit?’ Is the Holy Spirit ‘always a recipient and never a donor’ in the Trinity?<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 141. From Poitiers and Damascus, *Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, 582.

<sup>205</sup> Macleod, *Person of Christ, The*, 142.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 147.

Begetting and procession describe relationships and are not about essence and do not involve origin, creation or source since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all the one essence and so are all equally unoriginate.

The subsistences (distinctions within the essence) are as eternal as the essence itself. By the very necessity of his being, God is triune. He has never been, and can never be, except as triune.<sup>208</sup>

Being God means being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence the Father is who the Father is because of the Son and Holy Spirit, the Son is who the Son is because of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is who the Holy Spirit is because of the Father and the Son. No one is more or less important, no one is prior or after the others and no one is more or less dependent on the other persons.

Macleod concludes this section by emphasising that

The Father begets the Son. The Father and the Son breathe the Spirit. The Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son.<sup>209</sup>

***God in his own right: Autotheos***

Calvin, faced with the ‘stubborn residue of subordinationism’, sought to reject any thoughts about the Father being ‘the *deificator* (“god-maker”) of the Son’. He insisted that the Son does not receive his being or divinity from the Father. The Son is from the Father relationally while the essence of the Son and the Father and the Holy Spirit is one and is ingenerate and unbegotten. The essence of the Son and the Spirit cannot be subordinate to the Father since it is ‘generically but numerically identical’ with the Father.<sup>210</sup>

The divinity of the Son meant ‘that he had the divine essence and nothing was more fundamental to that essence than that it was self-existent’. What is true of God is true of each divine person and so no divine person can be subordinate to any other divine person. *Being begotten* and *proceeding from* refer to persons and not their essence or else ‘subordinationism implies tritheism’.<sup>211</sup>

The claim that the Son is *autotheos* and that his deity as Son is from Son’s own self does not mean the Son is the cause or source of his own being, or that his being arises from the Son’s self since God has no ground or cause or source. The Son – and the Father and the Holy Spirit – is the Being One: the One who was, is and will be eternally, open-endedly and necessarily. He is God in his own right, but God only and always with the Father and the Holy Spirit.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 152.

Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*<sup>213</sup>

**Preface**

We can only adequately learn who we are and what creation is by appreciating who God is in actualising creation, redemption and restoration. This appreciation is more than cognitive understanding or evocative romanticism. Both Western rationalism and Eastern tendencies to disconnect God's immanence from God's economy suggest that revisiting the reasonings of the Cappadocians is beneficial.

**Trinitarian theology today**

*Where we stand: the situation of trinitarian theology*

One viewpoint, in welcoming dialogue between Eastern and Western theologies, is wary of Western theism and its insistence on the *filioque* doctrine, and the current dilemmas relating to culture and Christian beliefs. A second perspective is adverse to trinitarian thought and sees it as irrelevant to critical studies. These approaches are linked with a discarding of christological questions in favour of research into the first century foundations of Christianity and the historical evidence concerning Jesus.

Trinitarian theology has often been presented as an abstract doctrine to be accepted unconditionally rather than as a 'living focus of life and thought'. Conceptualisations using analogies can easily reinforce this problem with their inherent weaknesses concerning what Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit accomplish in redeeming and restoring humanity. They usually tend to focus on divine unity and to minimise the distinctive ways the tripersonal God works in history, and so 'treat God *unipersonally*'.<sup>214</sup>

*Where we stand: the basis of trinitarian theology*

Worship of God in the Son of God through the Spirit of God is the appropriate basis for doing trinitarian theology.<sup>215</sup> Central to this worship is the mediation of Jesus Christ and his and the Holy Spirit's intercessions, by which the people of God know the presence of God.

This worship shapes what it means to be human and defines the living experiences of the community of God with its central focus on the incarnation and atonement. Trinitarian theology describes the faith of this community of believers and assists them in their daily living and interactions with the wider community.

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<sup>213</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, *The*.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

<sup>215</sup> *Viz.*, Nicene trinitarian theology and thought.

*Where we stand: the contribution of history*

Since trinitarian theology includes the Son and Spirit of God being active in creating everything according to a triune will and in unity with God the Father, this thinking identifies that there is a divine participation inherent in all things and every being. Trinitarian theology establishes the being of God as essentially relational, that ‘God is being in communion’, and that no part of God is apart from this relationality.<sup>216</sup> The Cappadocians taught that God’s unity is God’s inseparable relations as Father, Son and Spirit and their mutual reciprocity in love.

This understanding of being and communion includes insights into the meanings of ‘person, relation, otherness and freedom’, with relations being defined in terms of a mutuality which enables freedom and identity and a full participation in community and creation.<sup>217</sup>

*Where we stand: the possibilities of trinitarian theology*

These possibilities are based on the belief that the divine persons are who they are because of their mutual relations, with their distinctiveness determined by these relations. Each possibility derives from insights developed by considering that all things – including every creature and each person – are created through the Son of God and by the Spirit of God according to the divine will and purpose, ‘by persons who freely relate themselves to that which is not themselves’.<sup>218</sup>

The household of God, the church, in this context, is a community living in mutual relations with God and each other and so brings something of that life into and to the world. Social and personal responsibilities, expressed personally and/or collectively, are enriched by this same perspective. Each person’s identity is essential and is neither dissolved nor isolated from the whole community.

Similarly, the creation itself, including humanity and all plants and animals, does not exist as a mechanical or organic self-operating object. Creation has a goal, however invisible it appears to be and contested it actually is.

**The question of God in modernity: trinitarian possibilities**

Exploring trinitarian theology in contemporary Western settings often involves engaging with views about God’s transcendent otherness including whether God’s sovereignty is dehumanising by denying human autonomy. It may also be confronted by concerns about the nature of God given human evil and violence.

Trinitarian theology centres on salvific worshiping of Jesus Christ as understood by reflecting on tradition and discerning the way God works from the testimonies

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<sup>216</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology, The*, 9.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

of biblical revelation. The church's core belief that through and in Christ Jesus we have access in one Holy Spirit to God the Father is experiential and relational as it expresses a triune movement of reconciliation and restoration.

Beliefs, by contrast, in a solo theistic God, can easily translate into ecclesiastical tyrannies which exacerbate oppression and abuse. Neither a mechanical deism or a romantic pantheism can properly establish an authentic theology of freedom and personal agency. Trinitarian theologies have the potential to centre ourselves on who we essential are and on our place in creation. They can create fresh insights into the nature of community in the church, in society and as part of creation – insights personally and corporately aware of the redeeming love of the triune God.

### **Augustine, the Trinity and the theological crisis of the West**

Christianity, faced with atheism and agnosticism, has seen itself dominated by intellectual dilemmas rather than glorifying God as being in triune communion. Augustine based his theology on divine unity rather than on God's tripersonal presence in Jesus Christ as the world's Saviour. A focus on Jesus' humanity highlights the nature and significance of creation, redemption and restoration, and acts to ensure trinitarian thought is not merely abstract conceptualisation.

In minimising or bypassing the mediation of Jesus Christ as the Word of God and the intercessions of the Word and the Spirit, beliefs about God can readily see God disconnected from creation and humanity. This separation overlooks the immanent and economic relations of God with God's-self and with creation and humanity. It then leads to concepts of a divine oneness based on an impersonal abstraction rather than a tripersonal deity engaged with creation and humanity.

Augustine's trinitarian analogies highlight these ontological crises. They focus on a philosophical conception of three-ness that connects the divine persons in impersonal ways requiring intellectual and individualistic consent. They tend to suggest divine hierarchies, abstractions and disengagement.

Differentiating the ministries of the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Son of God needs clarity about the love and gifts of the triune God. There is more to the Holy Spirit than being the love of God the Father and the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is also not some other-worldly spirituality. The initial work of the Holy Spirit in creating the universe is foundational to all that the Spirit continues to do.

These ongoing actions have eschatological goals in that the Holy Spirit works with the risen Jesus Christ to ensure creation reaches its destiny. Triune love and gifts work in and through the incarnate humanity of Jesus in a participation by which the 'economy of salvation' highlights the uniqueness not only of the Holy Spirit but of God the Father and the Son of God.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 49, cf. 40, 41, 51, 52.

Since God's being, according to the Cappadocians, is understood ontologically as being in communion, the essence of creation and humanity is to be conceived relationally, with core values expressing those inherent to God's-self and disclosed in God's creative, redemptive and restorative actions. Augustine's analogies tell a different story in which the Son and Spirit of God derive their being not from God the Father but from some unseen divine source. This differentiation is significant in that everything is therefore ultimately impersonal and unknowable. The Cappadocian understanding, by contrast, is that we know God as God is since God's otherness is ontologically and economically personal.

### **The community: the Trinity and the being of the church**

#### *The drive towards monism*

An adequate grounding of a theology of the church in an understanding of the triune being of God involves discerning the different ways God the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit act as one God. The alternative results in a hierarchical monism that inevitably fails from its subordinatist consequences.

Just as early Christology considered who Jesus Christ was in relation to God the Father and the Holy Spirit as well as to humanity and all of creation, an adequate ecclesiology would examine similar relationships. It was hard for early theologians to see church communities from a Christological or trinitarian perspective given that these formulations rejected prevailing neoplatonist and other hierarchical structures. It remains difficult at times to discern whether Christian institutions operate with any belief other than that the clergy are the true church with *other* participants as *outsiders* or useful and expendable *near-siders*.<sup>220</sup> This deficient ecclesiology maintains a form of order and cohesion by legislative compliance.

#### *The 'heretical' contribution*

Those who threaten the power-structures of these ecclesiastical institutions may be disclosing and rejecting toxic cultures and abusive behaviours. They may be implicitly or overtly wanting to experience faith communities that are based on voluntary association and trinitarian-derived giving and receiving.

Healthy communities prioritising personal being and mutual togetherness will be more than binary salvation agents rescuing people from this world for a spiritual one beyond this life. They will see their communities as gatherings which are experiencing tomorrow today and so as people-groups living in a partially realised eschatology and its associated *telos*.

The personal presence of the Holy Spirit as the active agent of God's presence leads this participation and reveals the persons of the ascended Christ Jesus and God the Father, so unveiling a future reality with and in the triune community.

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<sup>220</sup> Sometimes staff paid by 'Christian' organisations are included as *insiders*.

*Christ, the Spirit and the church*

The church was instituted by Jesus and his life provides indications concerning its life. Seeing the appointment of the disciples as directly relevant for ordination structures is unhelpful. Priority is better given to the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus as a human person in his historical context. His relationships with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and with humanity and creation, provide beneficial understandings of the goal and purpose of the church.

Notions of hierarchy, structure and empire, with requirements of subordinated compliance to a ‘real church’ of ordained ministers, can be distractions from viewing the church as expressing something of ‘God as a triune community’.<sup>221</sup> The connections between seeing the church as the voluntary gathering of faithful communities rather than legal-political graded hierarchies follow from trinitarian derived understandings of its essential reality.

Institutional emphases can diminish the way the Holy Spirit brings aspects of God’s ultimate goal for creation to our present situations. The church can, by contrast, have a ‘christomorphic direction’ by emphasising that the incarnation was the work of the Spirit, with the eternal Son of God assuming human nature into himself. This awareness highlights that Jesus’ humanity was enabled and operational by the transcendent Spirit, rather than simply by the immanent Word of God.<sup>222</sup> It establishes a basis for understanding Jesus’ freedom, uniqueness and dependence, and provides a christological and pneumatological context for a theology of the church.

*Towards an ontology of the church*

Since God’s being is the communion of persons, the essence of the church is in it as a community of persons in mutual relationships with each other, the wider creation, and God as triune. Its life is inescapably perichoretic, finding itself dependent on its historical and cultural settings, with the limitations and opportunities that these provide.

Generating clergy-laity and gender-based hierarchies orients the church away from trinitarian understandings and towards modalist and monadic belief systems. Trinitarian theology teaches that the church is essentially a community of persons in mutual relations, living freely together in love and in anticipation of the yet to be realised goals of the Spirit of God and the risen and ascended Jesus Christ. This perspective orients ‘towards an ecclesiology of perichoresis’ with emphasis on gifts and graces and away from pre-determined controlling structures.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology, The*, 61.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

## **The concept of the person: the one, the three and the many**

### *Persons and individuals*

Who we are substantially results from the actions of other people and the organisations and communities in which we participate. The Western traditional individualistic view of a person is however shaped by a Cartesian emphasis on our minds rather than on our whole persons. One outcome of this dualist approach is a reduced focus on relationships. This decrease impacts on social and community behaviours and beliefs through a weaker concept of the person and a stronger view of society as an aggregation of discrete entities.

### *The alternative tradition*

If, alternatively, notions of persons are shaped by relations, then communities are contexts in which people find and express themselves meaningfully and purposefully. Richard of St Victor described God using ideas of persons relating to each other. His approach contrasted Augustine's emphasis on psychological metaphors. Richard believed that authentic love is directed to another person and that, since mutual love between two persons is self-absorbing, love is only fulfilling when shared with a third person.

### *Theology and anthropology*

Rather than Cartesian individualism and related collectivism, this alternative relational approach points from its theological trinitarian understanding to seeing people voluntarily associate in dynamic communities. This relational perspective contrasts those of Augustine and Boethius where persons are viewed primarily as rational individuals.

### *Person and relation*

This alternative approach resolves ideas that a monotheistic God is isolated and alone. It provides a perspective on 'the particularity of the persons in God' that aligns with the biblical testimony to unity and identity, namely that there is identity in unity and unity in identity.<sup>224</sup> This insight that divine being gives and receives in communion resolves contradictions about unity and plurality, and inconsistent notions of one and many.

The divine persons are who they are in their unique and unalterable perichoretic relations. Every particular detail about a divine person is understood in relation to the whole triune deity and cannot be broken into something separate. Each triune person affirms every aspect of each other's person and relations.

The incarnation is best considered in terms of Jesus Christ as both one and many – as fully human and, through the Holy Spirit, the 'basis from all eternity of a

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 95.

personal and communal relationship with God'.<sup>225</sup> Jesus' self-giving, other persons-centred life, lived in harmony with God the Father and reliant on the Holy Spirit emphasises that creation and re-creation flow from God's trinitarian life.

### **The human creation: towards a renewal of the doctrine of the *imago dei***

#### ***Some problems of theological anthropology***

Theological anthropology involves understanding human *being* and comprehending human *differentiations* from God and the rest of creation. Focusing on a Cartesian mind-body duality dissociates people into non-relational individuals and disconnects them not only from each other but from the physical universe in which we live and move and have our being. Distinguishing between image and likeness can result in similar dualities. These alternatives risk making trinitarian theology irrelevant. Understanding the image of God in terms of embodiment helps develop a theological anthropology that explores integrated views of human community and of human relatedness to God and creation.

#### ***Cosmologies and anthropologies***

Hebrew cosmologies contrasted Ancient-Near-Eastern beliefs about creation by distinguishing between God and God's creation, while their later cosmologies rejected Greek ones which saw matter as evil infused with deity derived souls and/or spirits. Dissolving separation between God and creation, as in pantheism, deprives humanity and creation of any form of freedom.

The essence of understanding the human image involves space, as in distinction, and relation, as between persons and with the nonhuman creations. To be the image of God is to be *related* to and *other* than those with whom we connect.

#### ***Space to be human: the Trinity***

Concepts of space between God and the universe, God and humanity, different people, and people and creation, impact our understandings of freedom. Human freedom ceases if there is no space between God and the universe, as in pantheism. Wrongly locating space between our minds and bodies or in assuming too much space between people negatively impacts understandings of persons and freedom. A relational trinitarian theology provides for persons, relations and freedom.

#### ***In the image of God***

Understanding humanity as the image of God in terms of a theology of 'God as a communion of persons, each distinct but inseparable from the others, whose being consists in their relations with one another' involves notions of relatedness, space,

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 99.

particularity and freedom.<sup>226</sup> Creation, including humanity, images these divine realities. The non-personal creation needs persons to be itself. Humanity's calling to live in mutually beneficial harmony with creation is shared by men and women. The biblical narrative of the image of God as male and female is reflective of divine triune communion rather than of a Father-Son binary.

A valid theological anthropology explores notions of persons in relating humanity to the rest of creation and in understanding relationships between people. These dimensions have their context in humanity as the image of God personally and as communities gathered by creation and redemption in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Being the image of God is accomplished by the triune God and involves our whole embodied persons not just our cognitive or emotional selves, or ourselves as disembodied spiritual beings.

The present reality of being the image of God has *protological* and *eschatological* dimensions. Its ontological and comparative specifics flow from a relational, understanding of human persons derived from appreciating God as divine being-in-communion.

### **Immanence and otherness: divine sovereignty and human freedom**

#### ***Freedom in the Reformation tradition***

Jesus Christ liberates people into being other-person oriented and service minded as a royal priesthood. This freedom is God's sovereign gift and is spiritually and socially realised through redeemed humanity. The Holy Spirit creates this renewed community and works to embody renewal in its physical and social dimensions. Rather than solely focusing on spiritualised views of salvation from sin, freedom has its basis in understanding humanity as created in the image of God and so of being set free as creatures who relate to God and fulfil God's purposes.

#### ***God, otherness and freedom***

The divine persons relate freely by being who they are in relation to each other and in the space each one has by being distinct and differentiated from each other. Otherness in this trinitarian perichoresis is freedom for each other and with each other for what and who is not themselves. Their being is in giving and receiving.

Creation is ontologically other than and dependent on God with its existential reliance on God not being reciprocal. This relational ordering establishes the context for human otherness and freedom with creation and God, and for space for each person as a gift created in the image of God to share in community. The 'essentially trinitarian notion that freedom and the distinctness of particularity mutually require one another' finds expression in creation and humanity.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 133.

The gospel message is that this freedom is neither chaotic, random or goalless but is to be understood eschatologically (cf. Romans 8:18ff). Creation's purpose is initiated and realised by the will of the triune God, of the Father, Son and Spirit, who bring humanity into an inseparable love relationship with God. God's love establishes and renews community and removes futility from creation, setting it on a sure trajectory of being the realm where the family of God is fully revealed.

The intercessions of Christ Jesus 'at the right hand of God' and the Spirit of God who, before, after and while indwelling, searching and helping 'intercedes with sighs too deep for words' is central to this realisation (Romans 8:26ff). This understanding of the intercessions of Messiah Jesus and the Holy Spirit relate to us being adopted children who address God as 'Abba, Father' (Romans 8:14–16).

Paul bases much of his reasoning on the work of the Holy Spirit in raising Jesus from the dead and – given the full humanity of Jesus – in every aspect of Jesus' life (Romans 8:9ff, cf. 1:1ff). This view of the Holy Spirit identifies the Spirit as a 'free and personal other' distinct from Jesus but present with him. It is one that upends the *filioque* definition in the Western version of the Nicene Creed and points to an intra-trinitarian mutuality of Spirit-Son relations. Jesus sends and pours out the Spirit after his resurrection and ascension having been the recipient of prior Spirit giving and leading in incarnation, life and death, and in ministry.

These revelations of the economic Trinity disclose truths of God's immanent being as freely related persons. The being of God transcends physical time and space and identifies these dimensions through the divine *perichoresis* operating for salvation with its eschatological intent.

## **Relation and relativity. The Trinity and the created world**

### ***Words and the world***

Discussing the relationship of the world to God involves historical as well as philosophical awareness, both of which set transcendental questions in various forms of subjectivism. The non-human creation images God in impersonal ways which differ from the person-defining description of humanity as the image of God. Distinguishing between these perspectives invites rather than precludes understandings of the way trinitarian beliefs inform views of creation.

### ***Outlines of a trinitarian theology of creation***

A trinitarian theology of creation including humanity inevitably includes beliefs in the essential goodness and value of all creation, and in it having its own identity and reality. These views of creation and humanity derive from believing that God created all things by and through the Son and Spirit of God. Understanding God as being-in-communion establishes a loving and relational precedence and order which seamlessly includes creation, reconciliation and redemption in God's purposes. It recognises God's freedom to create, sustain and recreate a universe

with its own inherent freedom in being other than God and dependent upon God as the gift of God.

*Some trinitarian concepts*

- The relations of God the Father, Son and Spirit are described using notions of divine begetting and spiration or breathing which involve mutual giving and receiving. This love-communion is the totality of God's own being: there is no other essence.
- Inner freedom is essential to these relations, especially as they are evident in creating, relating to and achieving God's purposes for all things. This liberty is evident in Jesus' relationships with God the Father and the Holy Spirit in his incarnation and work of atonement. It also informs appreciations of the ways God, humanity and the non-human creation relate to the other.
- These free relations to others are active, intentional and ongoing rather than detached and static. Creation is not destined to return to its original state but has a future goal realised by reconciliation and redemption.

*Contingency, relation and energy*

Freedom is redefined as contingency when considering the non-personal creation. Creation is dependent on God for its existence, sustenance and destiny without being constrained into absolute causality and logical necessity. It has reliability and stability while operating in its own seemingly chaotic and indeterminate ways. Its inter- and intra-relatedness are forms of active systemic *perichoresis*.

Persons are who they are because of their mutually constituted relationships. They are not independent objects who become relationally linked to other persons and to the creation around them. They participate in various ways as creatures in a creation in which Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are purposefully present and active. These theological considerations supplement purely phenomenological considerations of the material universe.

**Being and concept. Concluding theological postscript**

*On speaking of the unknowable God*

Theologically imagining who God is can involve self-projection that is partially based on our own experiences even when we are attempting to focus on the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Recognising the unknowability of God can unhelpfully affirm distorted views of ourselves in relation to God. It can also be an avoidance and an escape from knowing the ultimately unknowable God. This paradox is present to us in various ways in all our relationships.

Trinitarian theology invites a life of embodied worship as related persons aware of our creational contexts and constraints. This way of living is not constricted by a

static trinitarian framework and fixed formulaic rationale but is creatively explored and expressed in ever-changing social and non-personal environments.

*Some theological decisions*

Trinitarian theology provides a context for cultivating insights into God as ‘the basis of the priority of the personal’ by being personal active in creation and redemption. God is personal ‘in what Father, Son and Holy Spirit give to and receive from each other in the freedom of their unknowable eternity’.<sup>228</sup> God is personal not by being three separate individuals but by being one whose being consists in mutual relations.

Perspectives on whether God the Father is the cause of triune communion or whether triune communion is inherent in the mutual relations of all three divine persons arise from and impact on readings of selected biblical passages. The trinitarian relations are reciprocal and determine the identity of each person, just as the Spirit is to the Father-Son relation, the Son is to the Father-Spirit relation and the Father is to the Son-Spirit relation.

While care and caution are essential in not presuming to know the unknowable about the mystery of divine relatedness and essence of being, the way we consider God to be and to act impacts on our beliefs about creation and redemption. Understandings concerning the priority of God the Father in the divine being, or, alternatively, about divine mutuality and reciprocity, influence ecclesiastical, social and familial practices.

The term God in the New Testament usually refers to God the Father with the Son and Spirit as the two hands of God, as Irenaeus indicated. This economic functioning implies some immanent ordering that excludes deity or status: ‘Only by virtue of the particularity and relatedness of all three is God God’.<sup>229</sup>

The *homoousion* concept ensures there is no trinitarian hierarchy of being and no underlying or overlaying impersonal substance to the Trinity. Economically subordinate functions do not imply ontological levels of being. The *homoousion perichoresis* identifies distinct actions while emphasising ‘that all that is done is indeed the act of all three’, so avoiding a social tritheism with three separate wills and an undifferentiated modalist monotheism.<sup>230</sup>

Expressing the relations of the Son and Spirit of God to each other and to God the Father within the biblical revelation is both helped and hindered by the *filioque* clause in the Western Nicene Creed, as well as by its original absence. The Western

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 166, 167: Also see note re Gregory of Nazianzus about God the Father not being greater than the Son or Spirit since from the Father ‘flows both the equality and being of the equals’.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 167.

approach describes the Father then Son and the Father-Son then Spirit sequences while the original and Eastern formulation provides no sequence connecting the Son and the Spirit of God in stating their relations with God the Father.

Thomas Smal proposed modifying the Nicene Creed to state that the Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father *through the Son*’ and that the Son is ‘eternally begotten of the Father *through the Spirit*’.<sup>231</sup> Smal’s proposal more closely reflects the New Testament sequences – including the tri-personal references to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This emphasises

that God *simpliciter* is God the Father, the fount and goal of our being [and that] ... we neither receive our being in the first place apart from Christ, the mediator of creation and salvation, nor are [we] directed to our goal apart from the Spirit, the perfecting cause.<sup>232</sup>

Since these understandings focus on *relations* between *persons*, and of God’s unity in *perichoretic* communion of *persons*, the best approach to describing what is meant by the fundamental consideration of *persons* is by the ways they be and do.

### ***Otherness and Relation***

Otherness and relation work together in providing an understanding of trinitarian theology. Authentic relations involve others and persons affirming others relate honourably. The reciprocal reality that person-honouring otherness involves genuine relations is edifying and not detrimental.

God is other than the impersonal creation and humanity, and relates to it and to us, and God’s otherness includes God’s ‘personal freedom and “space”’, and provides these for the impersonal creation and for humanity.<sup>233</sup>

These considerations reinforce beliefs in the unique significance of human beings, each of whom has their own sense of personal identity and integrity – including within the intimacy of marriage. This trinitarian theology avoids diminishing persons by aggregating and merging them into complicit communities or by separating and isolating them from interpersonal relations. Otherness and relation, in the context explored, facilitate diversity and coherence, with churches called to profile the redemptive and restorative possibilities identified.

The same contrasts between separation and undifferentiated homogeneity are relevant when considering the intra-relatedness of the impersonal creation, humanity’s relation with it, and God’s relation to it as creator, sustainer, and re-creator. Deism and pantheism involve separation and union respectively. Otherness and relation in an ongoing ‘perichoretic and dynamic interplay’ are

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 168, 169.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 171.

evident in heterogenous diversity and variety if creation is the free act of a creator whose being is a communion of persons in free relations.<sup>234</sup>

### *An Ontology of Sacrifice*

Trinitarian theology enables a focus on humanity and creation as they are, as dependent and spatially and temporarily limited entities created and redeemed for an eternal destiny fulfilled in relation to God. The initial creative actions of the Son and Spirit of God are realised by and in the Son and Spirit of God, all to their glory with God the Father.

The sacrificial death of Jesus is central to God's triune redemptive work. The Holy Spirit and God the Father accomplish this dynamic action in and with Jesus by their triune mutual giving and receiving. The cross of Jesus Christ and his life of suffering are not merely expediencies to meet necessary contingencies; they are expressions of the ontological reality of the triune one God in the relation and otherness of their perichoretic communion as Father, Son and Spirit.

Sacrifice is central to the triune action that began with creation and is realised in the renewal of all things. It is God's ultimate act of self-giving, given in the hope that humanity becomes reconciled to God, each other and all creation. Its harvest is humanity self-giving to others with whom they have relation – self-giving that inevitably also includes suffering in a creation engulfed by torrents of evil.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 172.

Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*<sup>235</sup>

Part One: The Triune God of Christian Confession

**Preface**

Any trinitarian theology properly embracing the biblical economy must reference the Son *and* the Spirit, and link God's being with God's action in Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. It needs an understanding of the immanent Trinity and the nature of God's unity if it is to do this successfully.

This perspective is vital when identifying God's sovereignty either with God the Father or the whole Trinity. It is also central to linking a theology of the eternal Son with an understanding of the humanity of Jesus and an awareness of the Holy Spirit as a person.

These frameworks concern the incarnation and the atonement, and impact on worship theologies and practice, on views and actions regarding creation and our environments, and on ecclesial practices. If creation enables everything to be itself by being both external to God and always in some form of relation to God, then the work of the Holy Spirit and the humanity of Jesus are vital.

Living in Christ as the wisdom of God means developing an awareness of 'our kinship with the divine' and accepting our filial relation as a divine gift.<sup>236</sup> This wisdom is Christ centred and cruciform. It informs our views of God's actions in creation and redemption, and shapes sacramental practices by emphasising their relevance to church, humanity and creation. We worship and live 'through Christ and the Spirit with God the Father'.<sup>237</sup>

**The forgotten Trinity**

*Remembering and forgetting*

Being aware of the nature of God includes considering the levels at which devotion and worship in Western Christianity 'never had its piety and worship deeply enough embedded in trinitarian categories', and whether it ever had a trinitarian framework.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, xv, xvi.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: 'Karl Rahner asserted that in Roman Catholic manuals of dogmatics interest was effectively so concentrated on the one God that everything we need to know about God seems to have been decided before the reader comes to the Son and the Spirit'.

### *Thinking trinitarianly*

The early Christians believed that the God they worshipped through Jesus in and by the Holy Spirit was the God revealed in the Hebrew-Jewish Scriptures. This worship-centred awareness of God as triune is crucial to understanding ourselves as persons and our place in humanity and creation.

Calvin's theology profiles thinking trinitarianly. The way Basil of Caesarea used trinitarian theology to address pastoral concerns is a further illustration, as is Irenaeus' emphasis on God caring for creation enough to become a part of it through God's Son and by God's Spirit. Irenaeus' understanding was that we, as God's creatures, are to live redemptively in this world as whole persons.

Humanity is reduced to being materialistically absorbed where this trinitarian approach is diminished. By recovering an appreciation of Irenaeus' two-hands-of-God metaphor, of who God is and what God does in loving this world through the Son of God's crucifixion, we know and share God's love in human community in creation. The Spirit's importance in this outflowing of love is in relating us to God the Father through Christ and is evident in our ethical actions and environmental concerns.

### *A doctrine of the Trinity?*

These significant themes profile this one God whom the early church recognised as Father, Son and Spirit:

- God the Son, who became human in Jesus, and God the Spirit are as truly God as God the Father.
- God as Father, Son and Spirit together as one God comprise the completeness of God's being.
- God is one being and three persons, different to any human grouping of three persons.
- God the Father, Son and Spirit are one together love in essence and in relation with each other.

Understanding God's unity and plurality uses the concept of person. God's unity does not cancel God's plurality and so avoids modalism, and God's plurality does not negate God's unity and so avoids tritheism.

Being whole persons means we are not imprisoned in dreadful bodies, we express a sense of belonging through giving and receiving, and we are from, for and with God, other people and the creation.

Our relational identity and our awareness of others define us as unique and different to everyone else. Fullness flows from rich relationships with God, other people and creation. Exploitation and domination deprive us of authentic

relationships and impact us in too much of the social order and disorder in which we participate.

God's being is in God's own communion:

- The three triune persons have their being in relation to each other, with their mutual giving and receiving defining their persons. Each triune person enables the other persons to be who they are, with each one accepting their reliance on the others to be authentically and fully themselves. Their mutual communion asserts and affirms rather than dissolves each person's identity. Human persons are related as created beings with different kinds of relationships to those in God, relationships which differ depending on the context in which they occur.
- Humanity needs a revelation and realisation of divine personhood for its redemption and restoration. Just as the universe was created through God's Son, so his incarnation and ascended reign ensure the redemption and reforming of personal being through the gifts of the Spirit of God. This divine action is central to God's care and destiny for creation.

These themes highlight Basil of Caesarea's emphasis that trinitarian doctrine teaches God is love in God's own triune being as well as in love towards us.

## The God of Jesus Christ

### *Recent theologies: promise and danger*

A twentieth century 'renaissance of trinitarian theology' has been influenced by interactions between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western theology, the growth of Pentecostalism, and its relevance to human relationships.<sup>239</sup> It has included a wide variety of literature, some of which is mutually incompatible. It has also led to fresh insights within a diverse range of different topics. Dangers have arisen from seeking relevance and by lacking depth and detail.

One concern relates to understanding the immanent or ontological Trinity, and so to appreciating *perichoresis* (*mutual indwelling together*) in God's eternal being and its implications for human relationships. God is self-revealed in Jesus Christ, and recognising human freedom depends on differentiating these divine and human realities. Creation, including humanity, is what it is because God was 'a communion of love' before creation and now continues to be this love-communion.<sup>240</sup> There is no creation in its own right unless God is personally both other and present to it.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 24.

Another concern relates to the ways trinitarian theology is used to rationalise and explain particular points of view. Reasoning which transfers insights from the immanent Trinity to human society and its relationship with all of creation ‘are not obvious, and are fraught with dangers of idealizing and projection’.<sup>241</sup>

### *The centrality of Christology*

The term, *the God of Jesus Christ*, identifies Jesus with God *and* as God. Central to trinitarian thought is the way it links God and Jesus. Jesus is God *and* relates to God the Father by, in and through the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian theology is needed to develop a proper understanding of the humanity of Jesus.

This appreciation shapes our beliefs regarding atonement and incarnation, including our views about divine impassibility and divine suffering, and our views about whether God punished Jesus for humanity’s sins. Calvin’s belief that the Father is the source of all things, the Son is their wisdom, and the Spirit their power, ability and value sheds some light on these thoughts.

Correlating the person and work of Jesus with God’s eternal being includes differentiating God’s eternal being from Jesus’ humanity. Analogies linking God’s being to ours therefore require careful consideration.

### *The Gospel and the triune God*

Christianity is gospel before theology, with theology focusing on the being of God acting in Jesus Christ. Irenaeus’ recapitulation theology identifies God working by the Spirit and in Christ as creator and redeemer. The incarnation in this thinking requires the work of the Spirit. Basil of Caesarea’s view of the triune unity emphasises God the Father as original cause, God the Son as creative cause, and God the Spirit as perfecting cause.

1 Corinthians 15 is more than economic trinitarianism as it differentiates God and the world. The world can be redeemed and recreated without losing its own being – and be enriched and enhanced – because God is persons in love communion. A ‘free and loving [triune] God’ of this gospel gives us insights into who this God is who relates to us in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.<sup>242</sup>

## **Eastern and Western Trinities: Being and person. T. F. Torrance’s doctrine of God**

### *Something on the sources*

Torrance believed God’s truth is objective since it precedes our understanding of it. Jesus’ incarnation and death involves Jesus in human circumstances and reveals God’s self-giving nature and actions.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 31.

These themes integrate God's being with God's doing and refute notions of a hidden God behind Christ Jesus while acknowledging an inexpressibility and mystery concerning God in Christ. The *homoousion* (*same in being and essence*) concept is essential to this integration as it indicates that the incarnation occurs 'within the Life of God' and ensures that any theology of God involves the gospel of Jesus Christ and the worship of the people of God.<sup>243</sup>

Dualism distorts and incapacitates Christian understandings by dividing the senses and the intellect (matter and mind), so draining beliefs of their material contexts. It is evident in various views of the being and actions of God.

These dualisms are resolved by understanding the way God makes God's-self known in incarnation and redemption. This revelatory framework 'transformed the whole of culture' even though it was crippled by Newtonian dualism.<sup>244</sup>

### *The triune economy*

Torrance's three-layered epistemology is everyday religious worship, followed by basic and deeper conceptual understandings. Basic insights provide a theological narrative of gospel experiences, and so of God making God's-self known in Jesus Christ. This divine self-revelation necessitates the idea of *homoousion*, of God the Father and God the Son being of one essence, and that God the Son is one with the God the Father. Arianism is perilous as it breaks this nexus.

The *homoousion* of the Holy Spirit is essential for 'God's contingent historical freedom to be fully present to the world in Christ' and also for 'the doctrine of the immanent Trinity' since it emphasises that God is Spirit and other than creation, and so other than humanity. This focus warns of the dangers of inferring that 'causal connections' between creation and God apply within God.<sup>245</sup>

The *homoousion* in Torrance's trinitarian theology reduces any thoughts of subordination among the triune persons that might be seen in economic trinitarianism. While the Son of God and the Holy Spirit mediate God the Father's reign and action, their apparent economic subordination reveals the ontological and immanent *homoousion*. This perspective indicates that the sovereignty of the Father, Son and Spirit is internally identical, and has its economic expression in the mediations of Jesus and the Spirit.

Highlighting triune deity at the economic level assists in moving from this discourse to that of the immanent Trinity. Perceptions of subordination at the economic level may be better understood using language about humility and exaltation and that all three persons self-give in reconciliation and revelation. This

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 38.

approach centres on God-in-Christ referencing the whole triune God and so on redeemed humanity accessing God the Father, Son and Spirit as essentially divine and co-equal rather than ontologically hierarchical.

### *The eternal Trinity*

#### *Moving from economy to theology*

This transition enriches and validates our awareness of God's self-revelation. It relates to our belief that God is who God reveals God's-self to be.

#### *The function of the distinction between economy and theology*

It also informs us that God is free and willing to do what God chooses to do, as well as to be who God eternally is.

#### *Being and person*

Moving from God's unity to God's diversity and/or from God's diversity to God's unity is a matter of emphasis and priority. If God is essentially personal and relational, and is understood using *homoousion* and *perichoresis*, then God's identity, action and presence are integrated and lead to clearer insights into God's *person and being*.

This understanding rejects notions of ontological hierarchy and leads to God's persons being named not simply for the way they exist but for their relations with other triune persons. Clear particularity regarding the divine persons helps reduce the dangers in over-emphasising the undivided nature of God's actions in history.

The doctrine of the Cappadocians became expressed by *ousia* referring to the oneness of the being of God and *hypostasis* to the particular persons, namely the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who comprise the *ousia*. Both terms relate to the economic and immanent Trinity.

#### *The particular persons and their relations*

God is eternally Father but not eternally creator since creation is the initial act of the Father's sovereignty and freedom. The eternal Father-Son relation is apophatic and takes us beyond analogies and language since it comes from the being of the Father and involves the whole of the Godhead.

### *Through Western eyes*

Notions of 'the one and the many' ask whether focusing on God's being – a Western perspective – lessens understandings of God's persons – an Eastern approach. Several areas for reflection include whether Torrance's theology:

- is more patristic than biblical.
- is appropriate in prioritising the monarchy of the whole Trinity over that of God the Father.

- effectively expresses the trinitarian and ethical implications of persons as beings in *relations to others*.
- adequately addresses problems in adding the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed.

This last point relates to two concerns.

Firstly, Western theology of the Holy Spirit is notoriously weak. The *filioque* clause may be seen as implying that the Spirit is subordinate to the Son and does little more than apply Christ's work to the people of God. This interpretation in turn leads to reactive narratives that over-emphasise the person and work of the Spirit. Marginalising the Spirit aligns with an inadequate appreciation of Jesus' humanity and the incarnation, and an under-emphasis on the priesthood of Jesus as ascended Messiah. These two issues are closely linked and have christological and trinitarian significance.

Secondly, the *filioque* clause can lead to modalism, another problem with Western theology and ministry. This clause points to a double procession – the Son from the Father and the Spirit from the Son (and the Father) – and so as to whether the single and double processions imply some reality (as in modalism) other than being and persons. One impact of this dual procession is in the naming of God moving seamlessly from title to title.

**'And in one Lord Jesus Christ ... begotten not made'**

***The perennial problem: Arianism***

Arianism, like Gnosticism, provides some appealing solutions to intrinsic theological dilemmas. Arianism's theological reduction of the Son of God's eternal being by denying the Son's eternal generation impacts on perceptions of the Son of God's ontological reality and atoning work. Understanding that the Son of God is eternally begotten of God the Father is fundamentally different to believing in God as creator. The logic of Arianism leaves humanity on a self-saving trajectory of which Jesus was only a leading mortal example.

Developing an understanding of the eternal generation of the Son of God means being alert to the perils of depersonalising the divine Father-Son relationship using *logos* terminology. This approach substantially disconnects conceptions of God from God's historic actions and impacts understandings of the uniqueness of the Son of God and of creation as a space-time reality.

There are fundamental differences between Jesus being eternally begotten of the Father and being born of Mary in history. Aligned with this differentiation are the contrasts between unbegotten and begotten, as referencing the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, and uncreated and created, as with God and the universe. There is a vast difference between begotten and created, as the Nicene Creed emphasises.

Being alert to these concerns helps affirm that the Son of God is uniquely eternally begotten and as such substantially defines the eternal love of God in relation to God the Father's eternal love.

*The biblical centre*

Hermeneutical concerns quickly emerge in any biblical interpretation. Jesus' baptism and transfiguration are crucial episodes in any trinitarian discourse about God's eternal being and persons. Seeing Jesus as true humanity and in his Jewish context is vital in understanding his relationship with God the Father – a relationship of God with God as well as of humanity with God – one taking place in time and involving the removal of sin and evil and the renewal and restoration of humanity and all creation.

*From economy to theology*

Theological understandings include asking whether Jesus' divinity was essential to his being and actions, whether discussing eternal issues is ever appropriate and so whether any theology of the immanent Trinity is needed.

Athanasius' answers to these questions centred on Jesus Christ as mediator of the original *and* the restored creation. This mediation meant that the eternal Son must be divine *and* eternally begotten of God the Father. The birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are the actions of the one through whom the universe was made and who sustains it continually. Human failure results in an emptiness which can only be replenished by acts of grace from creation's creator. For both Athanasius and Irenaeus, 'the Son of God is mediator not only of redemption but of creation also'.<sup>246</sup>

Athanasius' emphasis on contrasting creation as an act of God's free will with who God essentially is derived from his understanding of Jesus being human *and* God-in-action. Identifying Jesus as a fully and uniquely created man *and* as its creator affirms the place of the creation in God's purposes and priorities.

This mystery centres on the Son of God being Son apart from and prior to being Jesus of Nazareth *and* 'yet he is not Son apart from being Jesus'.<sup>247</sup> It also necessitates neither minimising or divinising Jesus' humanity and so on not dissolving any distinction between creation and eternity.

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 69, 70.

*Something on the point of it all*

Differentiating and distinguishing the intra-trinitarian relations of God from Jesus' relationship with God as a human person is crucial in understanding atonement theology as well as trinitarian theology:<sup>248</sup>

- *The persons of the Father and Son.*

The eternal generation of the Son of God differentiates the Son of God from God the Father and helps identify the ways God acts in history. Discerning God's triune actions as Father, Son and Spirit increases understandings of the Son of God as being sent and given by God the Father, whom he willingly obeys at the cost of his own life. This approach emphasises God's triune unity and highlights the freedom of the Spirit of God in being with Jesus in his willing obedience.

- *The relationship of the Father and Son*

Biblical texts with subordinationist themes relate to Jesus' humanity rather than to his eternal begottenness. They do not validate an intra-trinitarian subordinationist ontological hierarchy:

His proper human autonomy derives ... from the freedom, given by the Spirit, to be the kind of subordinate Son that he is.<sup>249</sup>

- *The relationships of the Spirit with the Son and the Father*

Understanding eternal begottenness involves a theology of the Spirit. It includes examining the limitations of the *filioque* statement that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The

Son is also the gift of the Spirit, who is the one by whose agency the Father begets Jesus in time, empowers his ministry and raises him from the dead.<sup>250</sup>

It is more than reasonable to think of the Spirit as the agent of the Son's eternal begottenness and that this sonship is shaped by the way the Spirit relates the Son and the Father to each other in God's triune eternal love.

- *A trinitarian perichoresis*

The unique personhood of each divine person flows from the eternal initiative of the Father and the eternal responses of the Son and the Spirit. This *perichoresis* is one of unity and orients the divine persons outwards together as well as towards each other. It is not ontologically hierarchical [as

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<sup>248</sup> Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement, The* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1994).

<sup>249</sup> *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 72.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

with God and Jesus] since God would not be God and the Father would not be Father without the Son and the Spirit.

God's mutuality and reciprocity are evident in different ways in each divine person and together reveal God as one God of eternal love. The Father is monarch in this context without there being any ontological subordination. As such, the triune being of God is similarly monarchical as Father, Son and Spirit without having a hierarchy of being.

### **The Holy Spirit who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified**

#### *Divine being and action*

While the divinity of the Spirit of God might seem obvious from Scripture, especially since God is a God of action in history by God's Spirit, this affirmation in the creeds did not occur quickly. The Spirit of God is described in the Bible as raising Jesus from the dead and working towards the fulfillment of God's purposes with God's people for creation's liberation. These actions might seem to profile the Spirit as divine more easily than those of Jesus of Nazareth being crucified. Yet credal assent to the full divinity of the Son of God preceded that of the Holy Spirit. One aspect in this process concerned whether the Holy Spirit was a distinct person within God's being while another related to the differentiations evident in the Spirit's actions.

Concerning this first aspect, a hierarchical view of God might assign full divinity to God the Father and lesser divinity to God the Son, with the Spirit of God of lower rank. This perspective might note that the New Testament often refers to God as God the Father and seems to subordinate the Son and the Spirit. While this approach appears to prioritise divine unity, it can imply either modalism or merging and dissolving differences.

Since the gospel concerns *God* acting in *God's* world *by God's Son* and *God's Spirit*, we may depersonalise and neglect the Spirit's action or over-emphasise the Spirit in ways that depict a fractured divine unity. Irenaeus' two hands metaphor suggests mediation as God's action, as God acting in Christ Jesus as God's Son by God's Holy Spirit *and* as God acting through God's Holy Spirit by Christ Jesus.

Secondly, there is a different self-emphasis by Jesus and the Spirit in their mediations. Jesus, in directing attention to the Father, witnesses to himself as well as to God the Father in different ways to the testimony of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. The Spirit's testimony, as Basil of Caesarea highlighted, concerns the direction and destiny God has for humanity and all creation. This witness enables personal and community liberty and ultimately the liberation of creation itself. It is because of this majestic and sovereign action – accompanied by 'sighs too deep for words' – that the people of God can have confidence that the inseparable love

of God will ultimately overcome decay and enable our adoption into a glorious triune community (Romans 8:1–39; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17).

*The problem in historical context*

If subordination is better understood as active humility, as serving and honouring, then rather than perceiving an ontological hierarchy of being, a revelation of humility is unveiled that prioritises the welfare of others. The divinity of the Spirit and the Son is essential since those the Spirit makes holy were first Spirit-breathed into being. By God the Father being made known in and by God the Son by God the Spirit we have a ‘unified activity’ of divine persons in which the Son and the Spirit, in this sense, are subordinate.<sup>251</sup>

Our benedictions can include ones used by Basil of Caesarea: ‘Glory to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit’ and ‘Glory to the Father with the Son and together with the Holy Spirit’. It is authentic, true and good to worship the Holy Spirit through whom we worship God the Father and God the Son.<sup>252</sup> While distinguishing the divine persons by their ‘originating and mediating activities’, they are not differentiated as being worthy of worship.<sup>253</sup>

*The point of it all*

*God’s being – we worship God the Spirit with the Father and the Son*

To worship God for who God essentially is and to love our neighbours as ourselves means worshipping God the Son and God the Spirit as being as fully God as God the Father. This worship includes the Spirit revealing that God is complete in God’s-self with the Spirit perfecting the divine communion *and* orienting God’s communion of God’s-self outwards – with this divine movement focused in the Son of God who loves us and gave himself for us.

Richard of St. Victor emphasised that ‘the Spirit is the focus of a love beyond the duality of Father and Son, of a love outwards towards the other’.<sup>254</sup> This outward, other-person orientation perfects the inner divine communion *and* God’s love for creation and in redemption, with their eschatological focus:

The doctrine of the Trinity is the Church’s resource against idolatry, against worshipping anything other than the one who by the eternal Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 87.

*God's action – we worship God the Father through the Son and in the Spirit*

God is not infused into us or the creation, but comes to us in God's Son and by God's Spirit to transform us into a worshipping community, thankful to God the Father. Just as the Holy Spirit focuses God's action on God's creation, so God's Spirit focuses us beyond ourselves and beyond the immediate community of God's people to all humanity and to the world in which we live and function.

***Conclusion***

The Holy Spirit brings the gifts of God to the people and family of God the Father through the Son of God who became human and lived among us. The Holy Spirit, active in the initial and ongoing creation, is now completing and perfecting God's plans for creation by enabling and enriching human life through the ascended Son of God who lived with us and gave himself for us.

## Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*<sup>256</sup>

### Introduction

Loneragan remarked that the Trinity involves ‘five notions or properties, four relations, three persons, two processions, one substance or nature, and no understanding’.<sup>257</sup> Most Christians see trinitarian thought as obscure and remote, and saturated with jargon and conundrums. Various distortions including tritheism, modalism and subordinationism have developed while no analogies satisfactorily explain the Trinity.

Recovering trinitarian thought might

- help in worship, especially given that we have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father (cf. Ephesians 2:18).
- enrich and refine our understanding of the unity and diversity of creation and our attitude towards our physical environment.
- affect the way we act towards each other as persons and communities.
- improve the way we relate to those of different faiths and worldviews.

### Part One: Biblical Foundations

#### *Old Testament background*

The Hebrew scriptures provide a context for differentiating and bringing together insights into understanding the Son of God in terms of Wisdom and Word and the Spirit of God as the person of the Holy Spirit. These scriptures proclaim something of God the Father while the New Testament reveals what was previously obscure and suggests the deity of the Spirit.<sup>258</sup>

#### *Jesus and the Father*

The mutual relationship of Jesus and God the Father is unique in the Bible and cannot be induced from human fatherhood as it is within the being of God and is not sexual. Toon’s view is that Father is a name and not a simile or metaphor, unlike mother, which is not used of God in the New Testament.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 1. I assume Lonergan’s four relations refer to three between pairs of persons plus another involving all three. I also assume his five properties are those inherent to the persons, namely Father – Son, Son – Father, Father – Spirit, Son – Spirit and Spirit – Father & Son (according to Roman Catholic *filioque* doctrine).

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 27, 28 and 32 have references to O’Collins, *Tripersonal God, The*.

<sup>259</sup> Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 35, 36, 40 refers to Toon. Priest, *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*, 119–123.

Jesus' sonship is personal and intimate and is characterized by 'full and willing obedience'.<sup>260</sup> His relationship with God the Father indicates a communion of distinct persons within God and is the basis for salvation. As Hurtado indicates, Paul's use of Lord is close to the ways the Hebrew name of God is used and suggests it was common for early churches to assign full deity to Jesus Christ. Witherington provides similar thoughts about the Gospel of John.<sup>261</sup> The New Testament describes Jesus as creator, judge and saviour, and focuses on his death and resurrection. These themes are in passages outlining worship and prayer.

Hurtado thought that belief in Christ's pre-existence was evident in the churches where Paul had ministry as well as in the letters attributed to him (and also Hebrews and the Johannine writings) which were most likely written later.

### *The Holy Spirit and triadic patterns*

While worship in the early churches fits a binitarian pattern – focusing on God the Father and Jesus Christ as Lord – it also has an awareness of the personal divinity of the Spirit of God. Toon thinks that the frequent references to the Spirit of God in the New Testament are evidence of the impact of Pentecost on their belief in the person and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospels emphasise the active work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' personal life and ministry. The book of Acts, and the accompanying writings, mention that community and communion with God the Father and God the Son is in, by, with and through the Holy Spirit. Passages such as John 14 to 16 provide insights into early perceptions of the deity of the Holy Spirit. The ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit, coming from God the Father to be with them as Jesus had been, and the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus' death and resurrection, point to the Spirit's deity.

Many insights about the presence and deity of the Holy Spirit carry eschatological significance and link with God the Father and Jesus Christ as Lord. Emphasis on the deity of the Spirit was initially minimal probably because of a focus on God's unity, a resistance to polytheism, an implicit awareness of the other-person centeredness of the Holy Spirit, and views about the nature of persons.

A variety of triadic patterns are evident in the New Testament including '*from the Father through the Son in or by the Holy Spirit*'. Several other sequences are Son – Father – Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit – Son – Father and Father – Holy Spirit – Son.<sup>262</sup> These triadic texts relate to salvific experiences rather than infer a deep conceptual analysis. They point to divine being and identity, as well as to one triune God who

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<sup>260</sup> Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 39.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 40, 43, 48, 50.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

harmoniously relates, communicates and acts as Father, Son and Spirit in history in and through Jesus Christ.<sup>263</sup>

#### Part Four: Critical Issues

##### *The Trinity and the incarnation*

###### *Toward a resolution of the problems of East and West*

While Eastern Orthodoxy focuses on trinitarian worship, its doctrine that God's essence is unknowable compared to God's uncreated energies affects the way they understand knowing God. Their views on the centrality and monarchy of God the Father can lead to beliefs in the subordination of the Son and the Spirit.

Western Christianity since Augustine has emphasised God's oneness rather than God's persons, an approach that can lead to impersonal modalism. Reactions to this way of thinking include tritheism and pantheism, with trinitarian views becoming confused by conundrums and philosophies.

T. F. Torrance thought that Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen saw the monarchy of God as triune rather than specifically identified with God the Father, since they identified it with *homoousios* and *perichoresis*. Gregory Nazianzen wrote of seeing three divine and distinct persons in unity, having equal substances and natures, and with each one God in themselves as well as one God together 'because of the *monarchia*'. He added that

No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one.<sup>264</sup>

This approach balances 'unity and diversity, identity and difference [and] equality and order'.<sup>265</sup>

###### *Vital parameters*

God is three '*irreducibly different*' persons and one being (*homoousios*), with the three persons together no more God than any one person. There is no hierarchy of deity since the three persons '*mutually indwell one another in a dynamic communion*' (*perichoresis*) which expresses their different identities.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 85. Letham's excursus on 'Ternary Patterns in Ephesians' highlights that Paul's emphasis on unity profiles 'a threefold pattern of personal activity' and is central to his theology.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 378. Italics added. Gregory Nazianzen. 1989. *Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen*. Vol. 7 of NPNE, 40.41. Cf. Photons act as both particles and waves.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 382.

There are non-hierarchical orders among them, all which confirm their unity and equality. These orders are evident in the biadic and triadic patterns which describe their persons and actions.

*Note on eternal generation and eternal procession*

The eternal generation and procession of the Son and the Spirit of God respectively indicate the way they relate as persons rather than point to any form of subordinated deity.

*How does the incarnation impinge on the Trinity?*

The union of human nature and the divine sonship involves the whole Trinity working inseparably but differently. Only the Son of God becomes incarnate in an irreversible union with human nature which is essential for God's salvific purposes. Jesus reveals God the Father and is empowered by the Holy Spirit *and* reveals his mutual relational communion with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' acts in his humanity and as the eternal Son of God. His actions are aligned with the will of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and indicate that his obedience was one of complete freedom. His filial relationship was of a human person with God, and has eternal significance since he is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is one person with two inseparable natures centred in the Son of God. His divine and human wills work as one will.

Everything involved in Jesus' humanity correlates with the *eternal* Son of God *being* the Son of God *incarnate*. Humanity was created to receive the Son of God and the Son of God must *be* appropriate for incarnation as the Son of God. The hymnodic narrative of Philippians 2 and passages in Hebrews about Jesus' priesthood describe something immanent *and* economic about God. The divine Son's *homoousia* is authentically aligned with his incarnate humanity – who the Son of God is as a human person is who the Son of God is as God. The incarnation reveals the depths of God's own being without the Son of God being subordinate, inferior, or less divine.

Sequences in trinitarian relations such as God the Father sending God the Son and both the Father and the Son co-sending the Holy Spirit indicate their mutual essence and do not define either God the Son or the Holy Spirit as ontologically subordinated to the Father.

*The Trinity and the work of Christ*

God the Father, Son and Spirit act intimately in harmony and in different ways in every aspect of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and ministry. The triune God was in Christ reconciling everything to God's-self (2 Corinthians 5:19). In addition to the sending sequences, Jesus is described as being conceived and born by the Holy Spirit, and that he lived, died and was raised from death under the oversight and by the power of the Holy Spirit. He lives forever in

intimate union and communion with God the Father without any separation of his deity from his humanity that impacts his incarnational integrity and identity.

*The Trinity, worship, and prayer*

*The neglect of the Trinity in the Western church*

The lack of emphasis on trinitarian belief in the Western church is evident in its theological and worship resources, including its music.

*Only God can make God known and determine how we relate to [God]*

God's self-revelation reveals God's sovereignty and gives humanity knowledge of God's triune-self as Father, in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. This revelation was progressively developed in God's earlier covenants.

*Christian worship is distinctively trinitarian*

*The basis and ground of worship*

Christian worship flows from these triune revelations (e.g. John 5, 10 and 17; Romans 8; Galatians 4). Worship responds in the Holy Spirit through the Son of God to God the Father for God's actions from God the Father through God the Son by the Holy Spirit.

*Our response*

Trinitarian prayer is motivated by and is in the Holy Spirit with our access to God the Father through Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who intercedes for us as our great High Priest with the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:6; Hebrews 10:19, 20, 4:14ff; Romans 8:26, 27).

This worship is God's action and God's initiative. It is God's triune communion with God's people and reveals God's saving grace in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. He is the one true worshiper, and our worship is a participation in his worship of God the Father by and in the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation is essential to this worship. It was more than God indwelling a human being. It was an irreversible and complete divine-human union vicariously and continually effective as sacrifice and intercessor. The incarnation adds to the distinctions of the Son of God by eternal generation and Spirit of God by eternal procession. Only the Son of God is incarnate, only the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and only the Father sends the Son of God.<sup>267</sup>

Our worship is a unified adoration of the economic and ontological actions of the three distinct divine persons and their perichoretic relations (cf. John 1).

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 418.

Some specific matters

Trinitarian worship will impact our relationships with each other. It will have a balanced, perichoretic emphasis on each of the triune persons and on the oneness of God. It will be evident in worship hymnodies, liturgies and preaching as well as in the Lord's Supper and baptism, and will impact what we believe, teach and share with other people.

*The Trinity, creation and mission*

Biblical basis

The first Genesis account of God creating everything describes God as sovereign and other than creation, with creation suitable for human habitation. God's action formed and filled creation by God's word, by God's works, and by God utilising already created entities. This threefold action 'shows diversity in its unity and unity in its diversity'.<sup>268</sup>

God is described as relational and as having distinctions, as One who creates, speaks and breathes. This singular God has plurality and relates to women and men as image-bearers.

The Genesis account is developed in other Old Testament documents.

Basic principles

Colin Gunton claimed that *ex nihilo* creation was a significant development in the history of ideas.<sup>269</sup> *Ex nihilo* creation by God has a space-time beginning and establishes divine sovereignty and creational identity as two ultimate realities.

Trinitarian creation is an intentional, purposeful expression of divine love that gives creation and humanity freedom to be themselves *and* becomes incarnate and recreates and redeems through resurrection. In short, 'matter matters'.<sup>270</sup>

Gunton believed that we need a holistic '*theological* interpretation of creation' with a trinitarian foundation centred in the incarnation that recognizes the goodness of creation and the action of God as Father through God the Son and the Holy Spirit without any third intermediary beings.<sup>271</sup> One divine will, power and love acts to unveil God's eternal tri-personal union and communion.

Space-time and eternal being intersect and interact in Jesus Christ as mediator of creation and redemption. The eternal generation of the Son of God and the procession of the Holy Spirit are essential to God's creativity and purposes. God

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 430. Cf. Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 65–66.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 430. Cf. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 45–50, 57–61.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 431. Cf. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 62–64.

the Father initiates creation through God the Son in the Holy Spirit so that creation – and humanity – can respond in the Holy Spirit through the Son of God to God the Father.<sup>272</sup>

*Vestigia trinitatis?*

Even though creation declares divine glory, trinitarian theology cannot be proved directly from creation since its hints readily also lead to distorted conclusions.

*Icons and general revelation: creation as an icon*

The unity and diversity evident in creation is an *icon* of its relational Creator.

*Unity in diversity and diversity in unity*

Diverse unity and unified diversity is especially evident in human unity of being and personal distinction.

*Trinity and incarnation*

The incarnation reveals the triune love of God as being supremely ‘manipulation-free [and] self-giving’. God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit *are* God and their love is holy and good and other-person centred. Their unity is their triunity and their triunity is their unity.

The persons are distinct, and the union is undivided. There is no conquest of unity by diversity, nor of diversity by unity.<sup>273</sup>

This revelation of divine persons and purpose is to inform us as God’s image.

***The Trinity and persons***

Affirming God as a singular deity makes understanding *love* and describing *persons* problematic since ‘love exists between persons’ and the ‘essence of the person ... is indefinable’.<sup>274</sup> Since love flourishes where persons are valued, and vice-versa, persons are in an ongoing dynamic, self-creative awareness of relational becoming. This growing awareness involves diversity and differentiation. It includes understanding creation as the action of a personal God whose own being and dynamic involves ‘an intimate dialogue between persons [which] is of its very essence the negation of solitude’.<sup>275</sup>

The incomprehensibility of humanity about humanity is guaranteed not only by our being inside humanity but by humanity itself imaging the incomprehensible God. Our comprehension of the incomprehensible God is to be informed by Jesus Christ who as incarnate Son of God is God’s revelation of divine *and* human

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 456.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 459.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 459.

persons. He ‘is the archetype, the epitome of human personhood, of what it is to be a true human being’.<sup>276</sup>

*The Trinity as persons in union and communion*

The incarnation is way we have any understanding of the transcendent trinitarian relations. These divine relations reveal something of the nature of the trinitarian persons and cannot be extrapolated from or reduced to descriptions of human familial or gender relationships.

We know about God as Father and Son from Jesus’ relationships as incarnate Son of God with God as Father and we therefore have insights that inform us about human relationships from this divine self-revelation in and by Jesus Christ. We can understand something of the nature of being a person from God’s trinity of persons in mutual communion as revealed in the humanity of Jesus.

Focusing on God’s oneness means considering God’s trinity and focusing on God’s trinity means considering God’s oneness. God is essentially and completely one *and* personal in a way that transcends anything known in humanity as it involves more than reaching out to another beyond one’s-self.

Our understanding of persons flows from the oneness of the divine persons *and* from the triune divine persons who are one. This awareness excludes modalism and tritheism, and centres on the tri-personal one-God revelation of God as Father in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.<sup>277</sup>

*Union with God as the Goal of our salvation*

This divine self-revelation of persons-in-communion reaches both its *fulness and destiny* in Jesus Christ. Rebirth, renewal and resurrection as the fruit of Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection do more than purge us of sins and redeem us from being enslaved and powerless against evil. God’s grace releases us to be God’s adopted family and to serve God in God’s creation as God’s covenant people – a people anticipating and living in God’s appointed future.

*Union with God in theological context*

God and humanity are united in the union of the incarnate Word of God in the one-person humanity of Jesus Christ. This unity is confirmed by the unity of Christ Jesus with the church and flows from the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to Grosseteste, appointed bishop of Lincoln in 1235,

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 460.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 463: Cf. Gregory Nazianzen *Orations* 40.41: ‘No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light’.

To this conformity and Deiformity we are led by the mediator, Christ, God and man, with whom we form one Christ.<sup>278</sup>

This eternal divine trinity is indivisibly one personal God affirmed as the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is this Son of God who is incarnate in Jesus Christ, and who is more than the divine Son indwelling the human Jesus. The incarnation establishes a permanent union between the Son of God and ‘assumed humanity’ that is ‘*without division, without separation*’ and ‘*without confusion, without mixture*’.<sup>279</sup>

Jesus Christ is not a blending of divinity and humanity in which their distinctions are lost, just as the triune persons are each distinct in their unity. Our union with Christ through Christ’s salvific union with us *personally* takes us indivisibly into the indivisible *personal* relationship of the Son of God with God the Father.<sup>280</sup>

This union affirms our creaturely humanity and *personal* identity just as the *persons* of the triune God are mutually affirmed within their trinity and through and in the incarnation.

#### *The biblical teaching on union with God*

The triune presence of God in the people of God is, according to Peter’s second letter, a ‘participation in the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:3, 4). This tri-personal divine residency is unbreakable and is more intimate than transient human relationships. We are now God’s family as a consequence of the incarnation and atonement (cf. 1 John 3:1–3). We are now being conformed and transformed to the likeness and image of the Son of God by the triune action of God in Christ. Our humanity, our persons, are to be understood and known in terms of this participation and communion.

#### *Incarnation, Pentecost, and union with God*

The Son of God ‘takes into personal union a single human nature’ in the incarnation, and the Holy Spirit at and since Pentecost indwells a multitude of people. One human nature is united with the Son of God in a personal union, whereas the Spirit of God indwells and brings to unity the whole family of God.<sup>281</sup>

Jesus was completely human and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as Messiah. It is our salvific anointing that realises and fulfils our humanity as persons.

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 465. Robert Grosseteste, *On the Six Days of Creation: A Translation of the Hexaëmeron*, trans. C. F. J. Martin, Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1996), 47-48.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 466, 467.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 470, 471.

*The Trinity, sharing God's nature, and how we treat others*

A monadic God is impersonal as such a deity would have no essential relatedness. The triune God is other-person centred within and beyond God's-self, and has created and redeemed us to live in a communion of love, goodness and joy with God and other people. This communion is the harvest of the tri-personal purpose of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and by the Holy Spirit in us.

This love-communion is centred in and flows from the eternal love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It enables us to be 'partakers of the divine nature' and to be 'changed from glory to glory' together as the family of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 3:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:35ff).

Leaders who see themselves having God on their side as against the community they lead fundamentally contradict the self-emptying of Jesus Christ in serving God, humanity and creation by becoming 'obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:5ff).

## Appendices

### *Gilbert Bilezikian and bungee jumping*

The triune order helps us understand the human relationships, including those between men and women. This triune order is irreversible since God the Father sends God the Son *and* both are divine and equal. Order is a 'suitable disposition', and the terms hierarchy, subordination or rank are unacceptable.

God is one being and three persons. The three are of the identical essence and indwell each other. None is more God, or less God, than the others.<sup>282</sup>

Their intra-trinitarian or immanent relationships are the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal spiration or procession of the Holy Spirit and are irreversible. The extra-trinitarian or economic relations are God the Father sending God the Son (with the Holy Spirit) and the Holy Spirit (with God the Son). The Trinity is not 'split-level', there is no 'boss-servant relation' or superiority and inferiority.<sup>283</sup>

Any subjection or oppression of women by men is (therefore) contrary to their shared equality as the image of God. Human relationships are to be compatible with, and to align with 'ontological equality'.<sup>284</sup> Reciprocally, inferences about triune relations cannot be induced or deduced from human relations.

Notions of rank in the Trinity are to be rejected since there is no inferiority of persons. Each one is fully divine and completely God with the three persons not

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 480.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 480, 481.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 482. Cf. Robert Letham, 'Man-Woman Debate, The: Theological Comment,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 65–78..

more than any one person. The divine order does not diminish deity, nor does it fracture unity or identity. The redemptive submission in Jesus' life reflects eternal realities without undermining them, as affirmed differently in the Eastern and Western church's view on the procession of the Holy Spirit. Human nature is permanently united with the eternal Son of God in the incarnation, and Jesus' submission does not cease once this redemptive task is completed.

### *Kevin Giles on Subordinationism*

Giles is seen as correctly claiming that references to the eternal *subordination* – not eternal *generation* – of the Son are *not* aligned with traditional trinitarian beliefs. In questioning his hermeneutics, however, Giles is said to shape texts without regard for what the original authors intended. He is also profiled as appealing to the future rather than creation for insights into social issues, and is described as wrongly claiming that Jesus is never mentioned obeying his Father.

Giles is said to be selective about the ordering of trinitarian relationships, specifically God the Father begetting God the Son and spirating the Holy Spirit with God the Son. He is acknowledged as emphasising divine consubstantiality correctly while it is claimed that he incorrectly minimises divine distinctions. Letham affirms his earlier claims that the Son of God's submission or obedience refers to divine order and is fully compatible with divine unity and equality.

Giles is criticised for his lack of distinctiveness in relation to the triune persons, along with Augustine, Aquinas, Rahner and T. F. Torrance, and as having little interest in Eastern Orthodoxy because of its emphasis on God the Father. Much contemporary writing is said to have 'ecumenical, ecological [and] egalitarian' agendas which are frequently panentheistic.<sup>285</sup>

Giles apparently sees the incarnation as temporary and seemingly is at fault in Augustine's view of what we learn of God's immanent relations from the incarnation. Giles' reasoning is then said to collapse completely:

Giles misses the point that if the Son submits to the Father in eternity, his submission could hardly have been imposed on him, for he is coequal with the Father, of the identical divine being.<sup>286</sup>

Appendix 2 ends by claiming that males' physical inability to become pregnant correlates with women's social exclusion from particular leadership responsibilities. Women's subordination is said to be based on Paul's claim that all sinned in Adam and that therefore Eve was under his headship. This critique of Giles supplements earlier disparaging references to feminism and feminists.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 493.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 495

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 11, 40, 137, 297, 305, 311–312, 322, 392, 399–400, 410. Cf. 481

## Responses to these themes

## Donald Macleod, *Behold your God* and *The Person of Christ*

### Doorway

Macleod's introduction to trinitarian theology in *Behold your God* gives a doorway into the concerns that led to the creeds formulated at Nicaea and Constantinople. It provides a brief outline of the subsequent debates about the procession of the Holy Spirit which eventually contributed to the separation of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions.

It also connects with some of the trinitarian thinking that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. Robert Letham's criticism of Packer's *Knowing God*, that 'after its seven pages on the Trinity it proceeds as if nothing has happened',<sup>288</sup> could be applied to Macleod's waiting until chapter twenty out of twenty-three before outlining his trinitarian theology.<sup>289</sup>

Macleod differs from Packer in the way he explores triune distinctions and relationships by introducing and using terminology to identify significant aspects of trinitarian thinking that arise from reading the New Testament. He uses these terms to emphasise that the unity and community of the divine persons is described as the Son of God being eternally begotten and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding without generation.

Macleod references person terminology in affirming the deity of the triune persons and their unity of being – their *homoousios* – in this context. He recognises some of the problems associated with subordination and whether the Father alone is the source of deity – of *theos* – and concludes that all triune persons are *autotheos*. He reasons that divine *homoousios* means *autotheos* and leads to *filioque*, while *perichoresis* means shared essences and attributes with their *monarchia*, *doxa* and love mutual and common.

After introducing this terminology and headlining these ideas, he affirms that true trinitarian religion is worship centred and atonement oriented, and that it is expressed in the love and life of the people of God.

### Survey

A brief survey of several of Macleod's other publications confirms and enlarges on these perspectives.<sup>290</sup> He is commended for combining 'a profound grasp of the

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 4 (also see footnote). Letham repeats his claim on 408. His reference nominates different pages to the 1973 edition I have used.

<sup>289</sup> Macleod, *Behold Your God*.

<sup>290</sup> *From Glory to Golgotha: Controversial Issues in the Life of Christ* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2002); *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine; Jesus Is Lord: Christology Yesterday and Today* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000); *Person of Christ, The, Shared Life: The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's People – 30th Anniversary Edition*.

language of Scripture and the history of Christian doctrine with a penetrating understanding of the dilemmas of life', of having 'the gift of being able to explain complex theological doctrines in a way which can be understood by everyone who truly wants to know more about the Christian faith', and of writing 'with lucid and sparkling clarity, without sacrifice of detail and definition'.<sup>291</sup>

*From glory to Golgotha: Controversial issues in the life of Christ*<sup>292</sup>

Macleod commences this book with a reflection on the first chapter of John's Gospel. He nominates Jesus as eternal, creator and divine, and then explores the way the Creeds use trinitarian thinking to clarify Jesus' relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

He proceeds to consider the incarnation as *enfleshment*, emphasising that Jesus was and continued to be God, and that the incarnation was intimately and completely divine and human. This meant full bodied total humanity: affections, emotions, choice and intellect, and that Jesus' two natures are permanent:

Christ has the form of God and the form of a servant; a human mind and a divine mind; human affections and divine affections; human emotions and divine emotions; a human will and a divine will; human limitedness and divine un-limitedness.<sup>293</sup>

As such, Jesus shared our sufferings, temptations and dying *and* revealed God's grace- and truth-filled glory. Jesus was without *actual* or *inherent* sin, and his human nature, according to Macleod, was unfallen and open to temptation.<sup>294</sup>

While it is beyond the scope of this book to review Macleod's substitutionary atonement theology, and to note many helpful insights, his views about Jesus being 'the Damned Thing on which God could not look' are concerning. Macleod adds that

He would be repulsive to his Father and become the Great Reject from whom all the goodness of God would recoil.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine*. Commentations.

'Donald Macleod Thanksgiving Service,' St. Columba's Free Church, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CU5Yaqf9Ue0&t=1122s>, also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUi0zIKGfj8>.

<sup>292</sup> Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha: Controversial Issues in the Life of Christ*.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 28.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Macleod mixes references to the Father and God and uses language which Stuart Townend included in his popular hymn.<sup>296</sup> Malcolm Gordon critiques this hymn – and so, by default, Macleod’s theology – on the basis that ‘it misunderstands the holiness of God, and it does violence to the Trinity’. He reasons that it is ‘not just a little off the mark – but abhorrent and despicable, because [it makes] us love Jesus at the expense of the Father. And [it fractures] (ideologically) the only community in all creation to never be fractured – the place Jesus goes to prepare for us is nowhere other than *within* the Trinity. ... That’s serious’.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Stuart Townend, ‘In Christ Alone,’ <https://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/in-christ-alone/>. Cf. Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom*, 192.

<sup>297</sup> Malcolm Gordon, ‘What’s Wrong with the Father Turning His Face Away?’, <https://www.onevoice.org.nz/2014/03/11/whats-wrong-with-the-father-turning-his-face-away/>:

The issue with ... Stuart Townend’s, ‘The Father turns his face away’ in the somewhat ironically named, ‘How deep the Father’s love for us’ is that it misunderstands the holiness of God, and it does violence to the Trinity.

It misunderstands holiness because it takes holiness to mean, ‘separateness’ or ‘otherness’, which is part but not all of the truth. ... God’s holiness is better understood as ‘other-seeking-Otherness’. God is the other who by nature, shares life with others. Initially and eternally that’s the Trinity. If we don’t have this more relational grounding for holiness, we end up with an understanding of holiness that puts God’s nature at odds with being in relationship with us – as if his holiness somehow means he can’t share the same room as anyone who is different. ...

If we misunderstand this ..., we end up thinking that God’s holiness is at odds with his love. So we give holiness to the Father, and love to Jesus, so that they don’t have to share – because (since we’re in the habit of creating them in our image) we figure they aren’t very good at sharing anyway. So the Father is distant, otherness, unapproachable glory. And Jesus gets to come close and be our companion. The Father gets to be angry, but Jesus gets to be forgiving. So the damage is well and truly done before we even get to the offending lyric in the otherwise wonderful song. It’s that damage that has some Christian’s believing that Jesus has saved them *from* the Father, rather than *for* the Father. God’s wrath becomes something that is uncreative, something that vanquishes, rather than part of the redemptive, salvific direction of all God’s working and making, reworking and remaking in the cosmos. God’s wrath becomes antithetical to God’s nature. Now I’m not doubting or denying God’s wrath, I’m simply asking that it be understood as *God’s* wrath, and not in the category of human rage or anger. It is human to get blind with anger and take our rage out on innocent victims. This is not the way of God. God’s wrath is holy. It is of a different kind to ours. God’s wrath is *for* us – as much as God’s forgiveness is. In fact, without wrath, forgiveness is cruelty. It pronounces us guiltless without dealing with the root of our brokenness. In this way God’s wrath is the painful side of sanctification. The process of dying and rising with Jesus. Every Christian meets the wrath of God, we are not spared it. We must not be spared it. But it is *for* us – and so we are not destroyed, instead we are remade. Changed from glory into glory. ...

St Paul tell us where the Father is when Jesus is dying on the cross: ‘For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation’ (2 Corinthians 5:19).

There is no fracture between Father and Son. If there was, how could Jesus pretend to be the remedy for our own fracture with the Father? Instead he invites us to *share in his intimacy* with the Father – our participation in Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being. The notion that Jesus got himself into a state that meant he was too horrible and sin-riddled to even be looked upon by God the Father fails to realise the way this family works. ... How can we trust this Father who turns away from his beloved son, is this the same father Jesus tells us about in the Prodigal – who rushes forward to welcome

*A faith to live by: Understanding Christian doctrine*<sup>298</sup>

Whereas *Behold your God* profiled trinitarian theology late in the book, *A faith to live by* outlines it early, just after considering the inspiration and humanness of Scripture, and the deity of Jesus Christ.

Macleod emphasises that Christ's deity is 'a religious matter' involving worship, and that this worship is idolatrous if Jesus is not divine. Arianism is heretical because the Son of God and the Father are *homoousios* ('one and the same in being') not *homoiousios* ('similar in substance'). In addition, Calvin reinforced these early Creeds by insisting that 'there was no place for any essential subordination between God the Father and God the Son' involving

the Father as the source or font of deity and the Son as deriving His being from Him. Calvin's answer came to be expressed in another great Greek word, *autotheos*.<sup>299</sup>

After examining biblical indications of trinitarian theology, Macleod mentions that 'the New Testament does not use ... highly specialised terms as *essence*, *being*, *substance*, *nature* and *person*. Even the word *trinity* itself is non-biblical'.<sup>300</sup> Macleod summarises 'church doctrine' along the same lines as already outlined:

- God is one in *being*, *essence* and *substance*. The Father, Son and Spirit are 'co-essential and ... co-equal'.
- '... in this one Being, there are three *persons*', a reality better understood from multiplication than addition.

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home the scheming thief? The truth is the Father doesn't turn away. It's not scriptural. It's not sound theology. Jesus dies, and the Father and Spirit go with him into death. The New Testament is utterly singular on one key point, that Jesus didn't raise himself from the grave. God did, the Father and the Spirit. How? I guess we have to assume that they were down there with him. 'All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell with him' – wherever he was dwelling (Psalm 139). ...

Of course, many will quote Jesus' own quoting of Psalm 22 from the cross as proof that the Father looked away, or abandoned him. Wrong again. Jesus quotes the first line, well known Jewish practice for bringing to mind ... Psalm 22:22–24.

So Jesus is saying, 'Abba I can't see you. Spirit I can't feel you. But I know you. And this is who you are, and who you will be, for me and all those I'm bringing with me. You do not turn from the needy.' Jesus' prayer speaks of a profound depth of love, not an absence of it. A father who did turn from his needy children would not be worthy of such love.

So these songs are not just wrong, they're not just a little off the mark – but abhorrent and despicable, because they make us love Jesus at the expense of the Father. And they fracture (ideologically) the only community in all creation to never be fractured – the place Jesus goes to prepare for us is nowhere other than *within* the Trinity. ... These songs are doing real damage to people's ability to trust the goodness of God, and to allow themselves to be loved by God. That's serious.

<sup>298</sup> Macleod, *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine*.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 46, 47.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

- The persons ‘are not merely different phases or faces of the one God or just different names for the same Agent’.
- ‘They are *with* [and] *for* each other’ [and] *speak* to each other’.
- They are not three individuals but are one – *person* language ‘can take us far, but only so far’.
- The Greek word *perichoresis* – *peri* as in around and *choreo* as in dwell – indicates that ‘the three persons occupy the same space. . . . They co-inhere in each other. They live in and around and through each other. They move together.’
- The Latin *filioque* emphasises the equality of the Father and Son, and that the Father is not ‘the font of deity’. It does not imply the inferiority of the Holy Spirit as ‘the relation between the Spirit and the Son is one of mutual superiority and mutual inferiority’.
- The Son of God is ‘God in his own right’ – he is *autotheos*. ‘The Son, no less than the Father, is self-existent’. Likewise, the Spirit is self-existent.
- Lastly, ‘each divine person is God in his own way’.<sup>301</sup>

*The shared life: The Trinity and the fellowship of God’s people*<sup>302</sup>

This aptly titled short book begins by exploring biblical evidence for trinitarian theology after noting terminology concerns and its centrality for learning healthy ways for the people of God to live.

Trinitarian theology is revealed by and assumed in what God does in saving and redeeming us. Understanding it requires language not in the New Testament and yet these terms also introduce their own complexities. The theologians in the early church affirmed that

- There is one God and God is one.
- Salvation comes from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus Christ is divine.
- The Holy Spirit is a personal advocate and comforter.
- The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

**Tertullian** affirmed God’s unity *and* the distinction of the Father and the Son. He introduced the word *Trinity* to signify three-in-one, used *essence* or *being* to indicate triune unity and *person* to refer to the Father, Son and Spirit as three *persons* who are one in *essence* or *being*. His use of *person* was not individualistic and not a reference to a theatrical mask. Macleod notes that

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 59–65.

<sup>302</sup> Macleod, *Shared Life: The Trinity and the Fellowship of God’s People – 30th Anniversary Edition*.

While it is easy enough to see the difficulties with Tertullian's language, it is not so easy to improve on it.<sup>303</sup>

**Athanasius** contradicted Arius' claim that Jesus was not eternal and less than the Father, insisting this led to idolatry and false worship. Compromises were sought, including the use of *homoiousios* (like or similar) rather than *homoousios* (same as):

Christ is the eternal Son of God; he possesses everything that constitutes God-ness; and we are to offer to him exactly the same worship as we offer to God the Father.

The latter form of the Nicene Creed came after Basil the Great, his brother, Gregory Nyssa, and their friend, Gregory of Nazianzen emphasised that *homoousios* needed to mention the Holy Spirit.<sup>304</sup>

**John of Damascus** taught that each of the three divine persons has a unique 'distinguishing personal property: the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds'.<sup>305</sup>

**The Council of Toledo** affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, an affirmation that eventually split the Orthodox and Catholic communions. This dispute was about the Son rather than the Spirit and was seen as emphasising the equality of the Father and the Son.

**John Calvin** emphasised that there could be no subordination in God:

Christ, if he were God, could not owe his being to any superior divinity. He must be God 'from his very self'. In respect of eternity, status and independence he must be fully the Father's equal.

... The Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same in nature with God the Father. Each Person, therefore, is God in his own right.<sup>306</sup>

The second part of *Shared Life* explores aspects of *Trinitarian Religion* including that God is a mystery revealed as love by his Son and Spirit. God's trinity affirms God's independence and completeness. It also informs our understanding of creation and *our* creation as God's image. Triune imaging means all humanity is of equal value and that we are all unique persons called to live in community. Order and authority are different as 'the Bible never appears to ground the order it insists on for human life in relations between the persons of the Trinity'.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 27 (Kindle page numbering).

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 31. See Nazianzus, 'Gregory of Nazianzus: Fifth Theological Oration (Oration 31)'.

<sup>305</sup> Macleod, *Shared Life: The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's People – 30th Anniversary Edition*, 32.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 48.

Our unity as the church is to image God's unity as a community of life engaged in ministry together. The life of the people of God is to reveal the divine *perichoresis* in its fellowship or *koinonia* and in the diverse expression of God's gifting seen in its service and worship.

The triune divine persons indwell the people of God; we are not orphans, having been adopted into God's family. We have security and power as God's people to live Christ-shaped and Spirit-enabled lives sharing with others and worshipping and serving God.

### *Spirit of Promise*<sup>308</sup>

Macleod's response to the Pentecostal and charismatic movements included his rejection of Martin Lloyd-Jones' views on 'the sealing of the Spirit' in *Joy Unspeakable* and R. A. Torrey's 'seven easy steps' in his *The Holy Spirit: Who He Is and What He Does*. He focused on experiential and phenomenological considerations and mainly explores them by exegeting biblical texts.

A central concern is on whether Holy Spirit baptism is distinct from regeneration and conversion. To dissociate these two phenomenon

is to separate these two persons in a way that is quite inconsistent with historic trinitarian theology. The Son and the Spirit are, with the Father, one God. So close is the union that each is in the other (John 14:10), so that the mission of the Comforter is equally the mission of the Son (John 14:18) and Paul can even say, 'The Lord (Jesus Christ) is the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:17). ...

If this doctrine of the coinherence is true, as it surely is, there can be no relation with the one Person that is not equally and symmetrically a relation with the others. To be fully in the Son is to be fully in the Spirit. To have Christ dwell in our hearts by faith is simultaneously to have His Spirit in our inner man and to be filled with all the fulness of God.<sup>309</sup>

The church is therefore best understood as charismatic as well as catholic and orthodox. A charismatic minister possesses spiritual gifts and relies on the Holy Spirit rather than is sacerdotal ('a Christian witch-doctor') and/or professional. A charismatic community includes 'every believer' and with person relating to everyone else. Thirdly, the fruit of the Spirit describes a charismatic Christian's authentic character.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Macleod, *Spirit of Promise*.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 46.

This perspective is a rejection of ‘the theology of *plus*’, of ‘the whole concept of *plus*’: either/or Christ plus circumcision, sacraments, sinless perfection, an earthly millennium or Holy Spirit baptism.<sup>311</sup>

Guidance – being led by the Spirit – involves correctly understanding biblical revelation, in particular discerning the mind of Christ (as in Philippians 2:5–11), and being prudent.<sup>312</sup> We are to accept that our decisions lack ‘the force of divine revelation’, that their outcome is best not judged by what happens, and that our ‘mistakes are not signs that we are reprobates’.<sup>313</sup>

Since the Holy Spirit indwells us, the Spirit will convict us, lead us, help us, including in crises, witness to and through us that we are members of God’s family, and be the source and agent of the gifts we need for ministry. This Spirit-given presence helps us understand the Scriptures and motivates us to do God’s will.

Although Macleod’s stresses that wisdom-centred guidance differs from biblical prophecy, the extent of any distinctions between charismatic prophecy and wisdom-based guidance may be worth further reflection. Macleod’s injunction, from Ephesians 5:18, to go on being Spirit-filled affirms something of their common ground.

His final chapter reflects his ecclesiastical and cultural Free Church background and adds a further emphasis on the place of Scripture and faith.<sup>314</sup>

### *Jesus is Lord: Christology Yesterday and Today*<sup>315</sup>

*Jesus is Lord* is something of a sequel to *The Person of Christ*, with the first three chapters of *Jesus is Lord* left out of *The Person of Christ* because of a lack of space.<sup>316</sup> Macleod covered the virgin birth, Christ’s pre-existence, Christ as the Son of God, and the historical Jesus in the first section of *The Person of Christ*.

### *God over all*

Macleod ends the first chapter of *Jesus is Lord* by concluding that the New Testament identifies Jesus as *God*, and so provides the basis for worshipping him as Lord and Saviour.

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<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 59ff. Prudence includes aligning with biblical principles, being guided ‘by the lights of nature’ and using our minds. Thinking carefully includes considering our inclinations, seeking advice, discerning our gifts, weighing up the impact on our families, and identifying the possible benefits (and risks) for the church.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 92ff.

<sup>315</sup> Macleod, *Jesus Is Lord: Christology Yesterday and Today*.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

These biblical affirmations also inform us about God as they ‘predicate Jesus-ness or Christ-likeness of deity [and that in] God, there is no un-Christ-likeness’.<sup>317</sup>

Jesus Christ reveals God’s essence. He is God’s self-definition and self-explanation.

The God revealed by and in Jesus upends notions that God is primarily powerful and majestic. Jesus’ glory is filled with grace and truth, goes the way of the cross, and is focused on the welfare of other people. This revelation

comes from deep within God himself, is fully consonant with his nature and gives supreme and definitive expression to his essence.<sup>318</sup>

The depth of divine being is revealed in Jesus’ foot-washing, redeeming love. The cross is both

the final self-emptying and the final self-obscuring of God. Yet here, too, is the final revelation and the final self-fulfilment of God.<sup>319</sup>

It is where the love of God is revealed and declared, and where God is both seen and known, and unseen and unknown. It is there more than ever that Jesus’ unique oneness with God is disclosed (cf. Matthew 11:27).<sup>320</sup>

### *Jesus is Lord*

The second chapter of *Jesus is Lord* finishes with a similar refrain. The early Christians regarded Jesus as Lord and worshipped and served him as such, so applying their views of God to Jesus. This adoration worked both ways: ‘The wonder was not only the lordship of Jesus but also the Jesus-hood of the Lord’.<sup>321</sup>

That God would save God’s people was one thing,

[b]ut that his coming should be in the form of Jesus was something else. That the Being One should take our nature, share our experiences and bear our sins was a monumental re-definition of [*the LORD God of the Old Testament*]. No wonder that the church should ‘stand and gaze in wonder’:

Nailed to a tree, the great Creator suffered  
When that dread weight of foulest sin He bore  
Lo! Satan flees! the Lord of glory triumphs!  
Nothing can with this mighty love compare.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 54.

*The Son of Man*

A similar refrain exists about the use of Son of Man at the end of the third chapter of *Jesus is Lord*, terminology that references a divine, pre-existent who is revealed in Jesus' humanity. It was more than a *Messianic Secret* in that the biblical evidence suggests that those who heard Jesus refer to himself as the Son of man were clear that he was disclosing something significant about how he saw himself. Its associations with its use in Daniel were implied, albeit not too far removed from Jesus' references to himself as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

*God or God? Arianism Ancient and Modern*

Arianism is the theme of chapter four in *Jesus is Lord*. After outlining several uncertainties relating to Arius and what he and others taught, as well as noting questions about Athanasius' character, Macleod claimed much early fourth century theology saw Jesus as a unique creature existing prior to creation, and 'indwelt by the Logos in a unique way. As far as his nature went, he was utterly different from God'.<sup>323</sup> While those views were rejected by the end of that century 'this school of opinion ... has never been totally extinguished'.<sup>324</sup>

Macleod looks at English and Scottish strands of Arianism and saw them linked with an aversion to being constrained by the Creeds and with the rise of 'cold rationalism introduced into English religion by John Locke'.<sup>325</sup> Watts and Doddridge are two foci for Macleod who distinguishes between subscribing 'to all the sentiments of such men as Athanasius and the Cappadocians' and subscribing to the Creeds'.<sup>326</sup> The importance of rejecting Arianism and Unitarianism for Macleod is that they illegitimate the worship of Christ:

Arianism is fatal to Christianity. We cannot call a creature, however glorious, *Lord!* For this reason, Arianism falls out with the range of theological pluralism tolerable within the church.<sup>327</sup>

*Christ, the Son of God (from The Person of Christ)*<sup>328</sup>

*The Son of God in John*

The uniqueness of Jesus in John's Gospel is linked with him being God's beloved Son rather than with reference to his origin since the Word of God was already eternal. Mentions of eternal sonship were later differentiated between the Son of God being *begotten* and not being *made* or *created*. The Son of God therefore has

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<sup>323</sup> *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>324</sup> *ibid.*, 89.

<sup>325</sup> *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>326</sup> *ibid.*, 100.

<sup>327</sup> *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>328</sup> Macleod, *Person of Christ, The*, 71–107.

all the Father's nature, is eternal and not adopted, and uniquely reveals his Father by being his image and likeness.

Mentions of the Son's subordination in Johannine writings need be to consider:

- the references which affirm the Son of God's equality with the Father.
- the Father not being seen as the source, beginning or origin of the godhead.
- the Son being *sent* by the Father as *not* referencing any eternal subordination of the Son, since that would cancel any notion that the Son and the Father were working as one in the incarnation and sacrificial death of Jesus.
- the exaltation of the Son.

### *The Son of God in Hebrews*

Mentions of Jesus' divine sonship occur from the first verse of the first chapter. The implications of this sonship are brought out in Hebrews 1:3 where the thought is that the Son of God is the exact radiance, impression or duplicate of the *nature* of God, of God's *essential being*. The Son is distinguished from the Father as Son since the Son is begotten and the Father unbegotten.

Rather than thinking in adoptionist terms about what the Son is described as becoming in Hebrews, it is better to consider these references in terms of the Son of God's incarnate life and ministry – of *the eternal Son's enfleshment*. The writer's references to Christ's uniqueness emphasise his full and exalted humanity in the context of his deity.

### *The Son of God in Paul*

Paul's relatively few uses of Son of God focus on redemption, sacrifice and exaltation, delving ever deeper into Christ's person and actions.

The subjection of the Son in 1 Corinthians 15:28 seems to indicate a form of subordinationism. The current and final – eschatological – sovereignty of Jesus in and over creation relates to his humanity, with the final glory belonging to the Father. This reign of Christ is one in which the Father is totally active, as in Colossians 1:12ff, for example. There is one sovereignty – that of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, suggesting that the *handing over* by the ascended Christ is an affirmation of an intra-trinitarian oneness of the Father and Son, and Holy Spirit (though not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28).

Paul's reference to Jesus being declared Son of God because of his resurrection was not adoptionist. The focus in Paul's letters is on Christ's incarnation and sacrifice, on the 'scandal of the cross', and on what Christ accomplished. His resurrection did not *make him Son*. It occurred *because he was Son*.

The appropriate comparison is between weakness and power rather than Christ not being Son and being adopted as Son. His resurrection primarily references his victory over sin and death *and that he already was Son*.

*The Son of God in the synoptics*

Jesus frequently called God ‘*Father*’, suggesting that Matthew 11:25–30 and Luke 10:21–24 are not insertions in these Gospels of a Johannine narrative – ‘a meteor from the Johannine sky’ – but consistent with these synoptics themselves.

Here is a clear window into Jesus’ soul. Not even in the Gospel of John is there a stronger reflection of the divine self-consciousness of Jesus.

It is better seen, for example, in the context of why Jesus was crucified (Matthew 26:63; cf. Mark 13:32). Such an affirmation aligns with the worship Jesus received as Lord and God within the early Christian community.

Further significant references to Jesus as Son of God relate to his baptism, temptations and transfiguration. The affirmations of the heavenly voice were for Jesus as well as for those present with him, and those who learn of them later. They anticipate Jesus’ exaltation and are set in the context of his as yet unrevealed eternal divine sonship. They also indicate our destiny as God’s family, albeit after we, too, experience life in the valleys of evil, destruction and death.

**Reflection**

There is a consistent clarity and harmony in Macleod’s writing that displays a strong focus on and deep warmth of triune worship. His concerns about various forms of Arianism seem apt, concerns that he sees diminishing a worship-centred approach to Christology and theology in general. He avoids seeking to develop a relational anthropology that encourages role subordination. In the only place I noticed him mention functional subordination,<sup>329</sup> he emphatically distinguishes between incarnational and ontological subordination, affirming the former and rejecting the latter. The perspective is also evident in his views about 1 Corinthians 15:24–28.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 76, 89.

## Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology and Father, Son and Holy Spirit – 1*

This section is in two parts. It begins with shorter snapshots of Gunton's *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* and *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. I have then included an overview of Gunton's article on *The Spirit as Lord – Christianity, modernity and freedom*. His article identifies many of his core perspectives.<sup>331</sup>

The second part references the perspectives of several other authors.

Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*

*Trinitarian theology ... and the theological crisis of the West*

*A snapshot summary*

Trinitarian theology, rather than being merely theoretical, informs us of who we are and our relationships with other people and the creation. It values who God is and what God is doing in creation, redemption and restoration. The tripersonal God evokes our worship and wonder by working in history in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. The mediation of Jesus Christ and his and the Holy Spirit's intercessions reveal the presence of God to and in the people of God.

This trinitarian theology profiles a singular triune will and the oneness of the Son of God and the Spirit of God with God the Father, so emphasising that God is who God is in tripersonal relational communion. This divine revelation of God's own mutual relations informs us of their distinctiveness. Beliefs, by contrast, in a solo theistic God can easily lead to oppressive and abusive tyrannies which cancel freedom and personal agency and ignore reconciliation and restoration.

Trinitarian theology highlights Jesus' humanity and differentiates the ministries of the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Son of God. There is more to the Holy Spirit than being the love of God the Father and the Son of God!

These ongoing triune actions have eschatological goals in that the Holy Spirit works with the risen Jesus Christ to ensure creation reaches its destiny. Triune love and gifts work in and through the incarnate humanity of Jesus in a participation which highlights the uniqueness not only of the Holy Spirit but of God the Father and the Son of God.

Since God's being is known ontologically as being in communion, the essence of creation and humanity is to be conceived relationally, with core values expressing

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<sup>331</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*; 'Spirit as Lord, The: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom' in *Different Gospels – the New Edition*, ed. Andrew Walker (London, United Kingdom: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1993); *Promise of Trinitarian Theology, The*.

those inherent to God's-self and disclosed in God's creative, redemptive and restorative actions.

*A brief reflection*

Gunton's sensitivity to the cultural and ecclesiastical relevance of trinitarian theology shows a significant awareness of the dangers, dilemmas and difficulties facing organised Western Christianity. These problems have led many experiencing various forms of spiritual and physical abuse to deconstruct their beliefs and distrust Christian leaders.<sup>332</sup>

Gunton's creational and eschatological focus helpfully highlights the centrality of the depths of triune revelation involved in the incarnational life of the Son of God and the related ministries of the Holy Spirit.

*The Trinity and the being of the church*

*A snapshot summary*

Two alternative theologies of the church include one which values the triune differentiations in God's actions, and another which leads to various forms of subordinating, hierarchical domination. This latter alternative creates institutions where ordained ministers act as though they are the genuine church and everyone else involved in churches is treated as dispensable observers. Coercion and control replace inclusion and acceptance, and aggressive forms of authoritarian leadership oppose and exclude those articulating the destructive nature of this culture. Such patterns of behaviour are contrary to ones which encourage voluntary association and trinitarian-derived giving and receiving.

A Christ-centred and Spirit-aware theology of the church sees the household of God as evidence of God being a triune community, and of the divine purposes revealed in and by Jesus Christ. It reveals the church as having a Christ-formed orientation which emphasises that the incarnation was the work of the Spirit, with the eternal Son of God assuming human nature into himself. It highlights Jesus' humanity and the agency of the Spirit and builds its theology of the church on this foundation.

The church, in this context, is best known as a voluntary community of people relating with a mutuality that anticipates the current and ultimate goals that the Spirit of God and the risen and ascended Jesus Christ have in oneness with God the Father. This 'ecclesiology of perichoresis' emphasises gifts and graces, and orients away from pre-determined controlling structures.

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<sup>332</sup> *Promise of Trinitarian Theology, The*, 58. Cf. Priest, *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*.

*A brief reflection*

As already mentioned, Gunton's concerns about dual-layer hierarchies where those involved are either essential *near-siders* or disposable *outsiders* are serious warnings.<sup>333</sup> His view of the church offers more than ideological niceties. It is an invitation for revitalising churches and renewing the trust of those disenfranchised by various ecclesiastical elites.

*Persons and the image of God*

*A snapshot summary*

Two prevailing approaches to an understanding of persons include one based on Augustine's use of psychological metaphors and another derived from Cartesian worldviews. 'The alternative tradition' has continuity through Richard of St Victor who based his theology on his beliefs about God's persons being in relationship with each other. Richard's view was that authentic love included two people sharing with another person.

Richard's relational perspective was neither individualistic psychology nor intellectual rationalism. He derived it from his biblically sourced understanding of God as triune, and of God giving and receiving in a trinity where each divine person has their identity in the oneness of their mutual relations.

Beliefs that humanity images God's triunity by creation and that God renews and reconciles this image in redemption lead to questions concerning theology and anthropology. A valid theological anthropology considers humanity's essential nature, including its diversity and its relationships with God and creation. It expresses the image of God as embodiment, relatedness and community rather than by a disconnected, individualistic, mind-body paradigm.

Human identity and relatedness, in this perspective, considers the space between persons, the distinctions that define their personhood, and their relatedness to other people. Trinitarian theology describes space between God, the universe and humanity, with its diversity, and enriches our concepts of freedom. Denials of space, as in pantheism, or false ideas of space, as in Cartesian worldviews, warp our views of persons, relations and freedom.

These perspectives on imaging God, derived from beliefs in God as an inseparable communion of persons, view the impersonal creation as needing persons to be what it essentially and functionally is. Underpinning this relationship is an inclusive harmonic mutuality which images God's triunity rather than a Father-Son duality.

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<sup>333</sup> Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, *The*, 59, 60.

*A brief reflection*

These understandings enhance notions of community, including ones which validate our integrated and embodied selves rather than act to reduce us to disembodied spiritual beings. They orient our thinking in terms of the communal nature of the cycles of life and its *protological* and *eschatological* dimensions.

*Immanence and otherness, sovereignty and freedom, humanity and creation*

Divine freedom is being one and many in mutual relation, each with space and differentiation. This *perichoresis* is for and with each other triune person and is expressed in giving and receiving. It impacts the nature of creation as other than and dependent on God without God reciprocally dependant on it. This relational ordering is the environment in which humanity's otherness from and relation with God and creation creates space for each person as a unique gift created in the image of God to share in community.

The biblical gospel envisions an eschatological purpose, initiated and achieved by the will and love of the Father, Son and Spirit. This triune goal is evident in the intercessions of Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit as they action and achieve our (restorative) adoption into the family of God, as daughters and sons of God who address God as 'Abba, Father' (Romans 8:14–16). Paul's view of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life, death and resurrection (e.g. Romans 1:1ff, 8:9ff) upends the *filioque* definition in the Western version of the Nicene Creed and points to an intra-trinitarian mutuality of Spirit-Son relations. Jesus is receiver *and* sender of the Spirit, indicating that the triune being of God, working through *perichoresis* in creation and salvation, is rich in freedom and unity as triune persons.

The essential goodness of God means humanity and creation are essentially good and valuable, and that they have their being in an ordered and loving relational context. It means God is free to create, sustain and recreate a cosmos with its own inherent freedom in being other than and dependent upon God as the gift of God. It means creation and humanity are the result of a divine love-communion which is the totality of God's own being. It means creation and humanity reflect the inner freedom of these triune relations, and that this freedom is revealed in Jesus' relationships with God the Father and the Holy Spirit in his incarnation and work of atonement, and so informs us of the ways God, humanity and the non-human creation relate to the other. These free relations are dynamic and continual rather than detached and static. They have a future goal which will be realised by reconciliation and redemption.

The dependency of creation on God for its existence, sustenance and destiny excludes it being limited by absolute causality and logical necessity. Creation has its own inter- and intra-related forms of active systemic *perichoresis*. Humanity, as an integral and essential part of creation, participates in this connectedness and is drawn into the pleasures and purposes of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, even

in the midst of suffering and evil. These theological considerations supplement purely phenomenological considerations of the material universe.

*A brief reflection*

Freedom, space, relation and person interact to express identity and community, and to differentiate between God, humanity and creation. These insights derive from God's essential goodness and God's intra- and extra-trinitarian relatedness. They create purpose-oriented and meaning-focused views of human existence amid life's frailties and fragilities.

*A theological postscript*

Avoiding as much self-projection as possible and simultaneously not abdicating a meaningful awareness of the God revealed in Jesus Christ is an ongoing paradox. It is a reality in which embodied worship includes our creational vulnerabilities and explores relationships without being limited by dogmatic, reductionist frameworks and formulae.

One dilemma relates to whether God the Father is in some sense the source of triune communion or whether this communion arises from reciprocal triune relations. Views on this issue impact our beliefs about each divine person.

The economic nature of the persons and works of the Son and Spirit of God suggests some form of divine ordering which excludes divine being, hierarchy or status, especially related to any trinitarian impersonal nature. The '*homoousion perichoresis*' identifies the actions of each divine person while emphasising that what any of them do is the shared action of all three persons, so avoiding there being either three separate wills or an undifferentiated modalist monotheism.

The problematic concerns about including or excluding the *filioque* clause point to the Creed's silence about the eternal Son of God being eternally begotten of the Father *through, with* or *and* the Spirit in harmony with the Spirit proceeding *through, with* or *and* the Son. Both statements emphasise 'that God *simpliciter* is God the Father, the fount and goal of our being' and that we receive our being from Christ, the mediator of creation and salvation, and are oriented to our goal in the Spirit.

Emphasising triune and creational otherness and relation enhances our insights into trinitarian theology and avoids reductionist tendencies which readily separate and isolate persons from each other. This focus highlights that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ reveal and disclose the essential nature of who God is in God's triune being, and of God's purposes in reconciling creation by a process of intentional self-giving in the midst of overwhelming evil.

*A brief concluding reflection*

Gunton has provided a rich trinitarian tapestry using understandings of person, being, relation, freedom, otherness and community. He has woven these insights together in ways that ensure the distinctiveness of both triune and human persons and the differentiations between God, creation and humanity.

**Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology***

*Preface, the forgotten Trinity and the God of Jesus Christ*

*Preface*

Trinitarian theologies will recognise God's being and action, especially relating to economy and immanence, and sovereignty and incarnation, if they are to helpfully inform worship and practice.

*The forgotten Trinity*

Worship-oriented trinitarian thinking informs us of our true selves and orients our lives in community and creation. This awareness of who God is and what God does flows from insights into the cross of Christ, the ministries of the Holy Spirit, and our lives as the family of God the Father.

A tripersonal belief in God recognises that the Son of God, the Holy Spirit and God the Father are one God and three persons in a different oneness of being and relation of persons to humanity. Our created and redeemed identity is fulfilled by giving and receiving as we relate to God, other people and creation. This belief and these behaviours exclude violating, manipulating and damaging other people, social contexts and our physical environment.

Since God's essence is in God's communion, each triune person is themselves in relation to the other persons. God created us with contextual rather than eternal relations and we find meaning in ever-changing social and physical environments. We grow in awareness of these realities as we mature in understanding God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ through and by the Holy Spirit.

*The God of Jesus Christ*

Dangers identified by Gunton relate to some of the ways triune unity and relationships are described by different sources as shaping human relationships and society. A valid Christology recognises Jesus' divinity and so his trinitarian and human life in and by the Holy Spirit. Working on this basis enhances our insights into the incarnation and atonement which then reciprocally enrich our understanding and awareness of who God is in God's-self.

The pre-eminence of the gospel is central to this approach and reflects Irenaeus' recapitulation theology of God working by the Spirit and in Christ as creator and

redeemer. Highlighting the ministry of the Spirit in Jesus Christ and the ministry of Jesus Christ in and through the Spirit emphasises the person and work of God the Father and the nature of creation and humanity. God's freedom and love as triune persons in communion enhances this gospel-conversation and clarifies the divine goal to fulfil and renew creation.

### ***Being and person***

#### *Something on the sources*

A trinitarian theology centred in God's self-giving in Jesus Christ recognises a divine mystery and a divine revelation. God the Father and the Son of God incarnate in Jesus Christ are one being and we worship them as one God, two persons. The incarnation ends dualism of our intellects or spirits with our bodies.

#### *The triune economy*

T. F. Torrance's epistemology is a taxonomy developing insights from experiences into basic and deeper conceptual frameworks. The idea of God's triune oneness of being is central in understanding God's inner person and free action in Jesus Christ. It identifies that God is Spirit and separate to creation, and so to humanity and cancels thoughts of fixed causality between creation, humanity and God. It rejects views that there is ontological subordination between triune persons and recognises that God's sovereignty is a triune unity revealed in the mediations of Jesus and the Spirit. Economic subordination is better understood as humility and exaltation, with all three persons self-giving in Christ Jesus. The reference point is then focused on God-in-Christ reconciling the world to God's-self.

#### *The eternal Trinity*

Our beliefs about the eternal Trinity are possible because of our awareness of God's self-revelation. They arise from God's self-disclosure of God's unity and diversity. God's *homoousion* and *perichoresis* lead to insights into God's *person and being*. God's persons are who they are because of their relations and not because of any ontological hierarchy. The Cappadocian theology used *ousia* for the oneness of the being of God and *hypostasis* for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are the *ousia*.

God is eternally Father-Son-Spirit but not eternally creator since creation has a beginning. The triune relations, while revealed, are beyond our comprehension. Some questions, including about T. F. Torrance's theology, are

- the relationship between patristic and biblical theologies.
- the natures of triune monarchy and the monarchy of God the Father.
- the trinitarian and ethical implications of persons in relations to others.
- the consequences of adding the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed.

Views that the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father and the Son can lead to under- and over-emphasising the Holy Spirit's ministries. They can distort understandings of Jesus' incarnate and ascended humanity as anointed Messiah and Lord. The clause can also suggest modalism: Father, Son then Spirit.

*'And in one Lord Jesus Christ ... begotten not made'*

*The perennial problem: Arianism*

The Son of God's eternal being and generation fundamentally distinguishes the Son of God from any thoughts of the Son of God as created and subordinate. This rejection of Arianism ensures the ontological divine reality of the Son of God and that humanity's salvation is a triune action in Jesus Christ.

The personal Father-Son relation differs from an impersonal God-*Logos* one and informs the understandings of the incarnation in Mary's womb. It shapes God's person as eternal love and God's purposes as those of creative, restorative and recreative love.

*The biblical centre*

Seeing Jesus in his Jewish setting *and* in his relationship with God – including at his baptism and transfiguration – helps reveal trinitarian insights into who God is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These perspectives inform, and are informed by, Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

*From economy to theology*

Understanding Jesus' divinity, according to Athanasius, is essential in making sense of Jesus' mediatorial actions in creation and redemption. Jesus' ongoing mediation requires Jesus being eternally begotten of the Father *and* fully human, with God's freedom evident in God's creative and restorative actions. While the Son of God was Son prior to the incarnation, we can never appreciate the Son of God's sonship apart from Jesus.

*Something on the point of it all*

Differentiating and distinguishing the intra-trinitarian relations of God from Jesus' relationship with God as a human person is crucial in understanding both atonement and trinitarian theologies:

- The revelation of the Father, Son and Spirit in Jesus Christ emphasises God's triune unity and highlights the freedom of the Spirit of God in being with Jesus in his willing sacrificial obedience.
- The economic relationship of the Father and Son is described in the New Testament using subordinationist language without validating any intra-

trinitarian subordinationist ontological hierarchy. Jesus was free to be who he was in and by the Spirit as a human person.

- The relationships of the Spirit with the Son and the Father are essential to making sense of the eternal begottenness of the Son. The *filioque* statement that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son is limited since the Creed does not mention that the Son is also the gift of the Spirit, who is the one by whose agency the Father begets Jesus in time, empowers his ministry and raises him from the dead. The Spirit, as the agent of the Son's eternal begottenness, shapes the relation of the Son and the Father in God's triune eternal love.
- The unique personhood of each divine person flows from the eternal initiative of the Father and the eternal responses of the Son and the Spirit. This *perichoresis* is one of unity and orients the divine persons outwards together as well as towards each other. It is not ontologically hierarchical since God would not be God and the Father would not be Father without the Son and the Spirit.

God's mutuality and reciprocity are evident in different ways in each divine person and together reveal God as one God of eternal love. The Father is monarch in this context without there being any ontological subordination. As such, the triune being of God is similarly monarchical as Father, Son and Spirit without having a hierarchy of being.

***The Holy Spirit who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified***

*Divine being and action*

This affirmation of triune essence and tripersonal relations from the Nicene Creed assumes 'the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*'. Emphasising the divinity and personhood of the Spirit has its biblical context in the work that the Spirit does in Jesus and that this work is distinguished from that of the Father and the Son.

This differentiation is not one of divine essence nor is it a form of modalism. It is evidence of one gospel from one God proclaimed and revealed by one Lord Jesus Christ empowered by one Holy Spirit. It is an expression of divine love by which the Father, Son and Spirit give a unified testimony to each other's persons and works. And as such it involves the different mediations of Jesus and the Spirit as the triune God overcomes the consequences of evil and secures the adoption of God's family and community and the restoration of creation.

*The problem in historical context*

A revelation of divine humility in Jesus serving and honouring God and in doing God the Father's – and so God's – will, and in the Spirit being sent by the Father

(and the Son), describes subordinationist actions without requiring subordination of divine being. The works of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit in creation and redemption both require and assume the divinity of their persons. The triune nature of this ‘unified activity’ is evident in the worship ascribed to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit because of their ‘originating and mediating activities’.<sup>334</sup>

*The point of it all*

*God’s being – we worship God the Spirit with the Father and the Son*

Loving God as God and our neighbours as ourselves means worshipping God as Father, Son and Spirit. It involves acknowledging both the completeness of God in God’s-self and God’s movement towards God’s creation and humanity in the sacrificial love of the Son of God. It means a divine ‘love outwards towards the other’ as Richard of St. Victor emphasised.<sup>335</sup>

*God’s action – we worship God the Father through the Son and in the Spirit*

This action of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God transforms humanity into a worshipping community which looks beyond itself, so imaging the God in whom we live and move.

*Conclusion*

The Holy Spirit brings the gifts of God to the people and family of God the Father through the Son of God who became human and lived among us. The Holy Spirit, active in the initial and ongoing creation, is now completing and perfecting God’s plans for creation by enabling and enriching human life through the ascended Son of God who lived with us and gave himself for us.

**Colin E. Gunton, *The Spirit as Lord – Christianity, modernity and freedom*<sup>336</sup>**

*Modernity and freedom*

Anthropocentrism has ‘claimed a kind of divinity for the human race’ and simultaneously converted us to ‘mere consumers, knowing the price of everything and the value of very little’.<sup>337</sup> Modern regimes have produced vicious tyrannies, killed more people and been at least as horrid as those of previous eras.

Modernity is in part a social, political and cultural response to the contradiction inherent between Christendom’s severity and the Lord it claimed to serve. Freedom has been demanded and understood in terms of owning rather than sharing. It has been thought of as an individual right with few external constraints.

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<sup>334</sup> *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 82, 83, 85.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>336</sup> Gunton, ‘Spirit as Lord, The: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom’..

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

Humanity ends up acting as an ‘absolute lord, arrogating divine powers in an abstract way, grasping at divinity’.<sup>338</sup>

Gunton explained that Hegel did not look back nostalgically, but reinterpreted prevailing Christian beliefs by replacing notions of divine otherness with ones of divine immanence. Hegel internalised Spirit and incarnation within humanity rather than understood them as God’s actions in God’s creation. Kierkegaard believed that Hegel and his successors used Christianity to initiate the ‘emerging liberal society’. The Enlightenment replaced previous authoritarian paradigms but resulted in ‘a deeper slavery’ rather than bringing greater freedom.<sup>339</sup>

### *The Spirit and freedom*

The freedom which the gospel promises and the Spirit gives involves replacing the past with something better. It means recognising that modern humanity is no different from its predecessors and so not assuming that we, by default, have a better understanding of reality than that of our predecessors.<sup>340</sup>

It involves rejecting the notion that God ‘must be conceived immanently’ and includes accepting an understanding of God, who as creator and redeemer, is the source of human freedom rather than its enemy. Freedom is not freedom from the *Other*. Freedom is not located in trying to be an ‘autonomous individual, the creator of one’s destiny and the decider of one’s ethics’. This kind of freedom, as has been indicated previously, readily leads to an unquestioning acceptance of current worldviews which ‘collapse into new forms of authoritarianism’.<sup>341</sup>

The appropriate response considers the person and work of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17). It does not adopt Christendom’s approaches which tended to reduce the Spirit to a moral force, an ecclesiastical impartation or a ‘distinct divine *hypostasis*’. And it does not endorse modernity’s view that the spirit is somehow automatically part of the life of individuals and their cultures. A theology that involves authentic freedom and autonomy must be trinitarian. It must recognise that the Spirit ‘is the Spirit of the Lord, the distinct but inseparable person of the Trinity ... who proceeds in eternity from the Father’. The Spirit, as one of God’s two hands, is other than creation and so other than humanity and culture.<sup>342</sup>

The paradoxes of time and eternity, and of humanity and divinity, centre in the otherness and humanity of Jesus Christ and the ‘eschatological transcendence’ of the Holy Spirit. Humanity is free only in relation Christ as redeemer and restorer, and the Spirit as divine. The alternative is individualism with its inherent denial

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 77, 78.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 81.

of community, with its rejection of the perspective that we are defined by what we give, that we are what we are in relation to others, and that any view of autonomy must ‘embrace ... our sociality’ as God’s humanity living in God’s world.<sup>343</sup>

If God is who God is ‘as a communion of persons’ and the three persons are what they are as persons and as one God because of what they give and receive, then divine autonomy is to be found in God’s ‘inner orderedness in free relations’.<sup>344</sup>

Gunton concluded this paper by firstly noting that our freedom is our free sharing ‘in the constituting of each other as *particular* persons’, and that this mutual participation is analogous to God’s own life and being. Secondly, true freedom is a divine gift, an outflowing of God’s otherness in the Holy Spirit who realises every day something of the life awaiting us in the coming age. ‘The paradox of freedom’ is that finite, self-imagined autonomy is slavery and that freedom is living in relation to God as triune other.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 85.

## Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology and Father, Son and Holy Spirit – 2*

This section provides a brief survey of aspects of several books and articles that focus on themes in Colin Gunton's theology.

Uche Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity – an Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton*<sup>346</sup>

### Preface

One central challenge in responding to Gunton's trinitarian theology is where to start. Uche Anizor's experience of reading Gunton and becoming 'increasingly enamoured' with his theology and gaining 'a taste of the excitement and possibilities of theology' reflects something of my own much lesser journey with reading Gunton and those reflecting on Gunton's person and writings.

### Theology and the theologian: an introduction

Anizor's first chapter includes an insightful essay on Gunton's views on systematic theology and scripture, dogma and tradition, and philosophy and culture. Anizor believed that Gunton 'lived and worked consistent with his own principles', especially 'that theology is ultimately eschatological'.<sup>347</sup>

Gunton embraced the past and anticipated the future, and worked in partnership and conversation with other theologians. Barth, Coleridge, Irenaeus, Owen, Irving and Polanyi were positive influences on Gunton's theology while Gunton was critical of Augustine.

### Three motifs on reading Gunton

Anizor nominated three main themes he distilled from Gunton's writings.

- Conversations about God's works and being focused on the *particular* things God does in creation and redemption. We can only be properly understood from our *particulars* – *our unique circumstances and personalities*. God's immanent being has *particularity* and *oneness*, with the Son of God's humanity defined by his unique *particularity*. *Particularity* is 'the means by which we access and experience reality'.<sup>348</sup>
- Since God is *triune being in communion*, reality is properly understood as *relational*. Creation and humanity correlate with God's immanent triunity in various ways. Humanity is itself in its relationships with each other,

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<sup>346</sup> Uche Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity – an Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 2016). Kindle loc 377.

<sup>347</sup> Gunton believed that election 'takes place in history as the Spirit gathers together a community'. loc 188.

<sup>348</sup> Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity – an Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton*, loc 496.

creation and God. The atonement is the way God acts to renew these *relationships* with the Holy Spirit acting as the agent of this restoration.

- God acts in creation and with humanity through God's Son and God's Spirit. God's 'two hands' *mediation* is central and essential to realistically comprehending creation, atonement, eschatology and revelation.

*Persons in communion: the triune God and the divine attributes*

God is the personal God who the Son and the Spirit reveal in the story of salvation – the God whose one being derives from the Father. The alternative is an unknown, unknowable and impersonal God.

*Towards a fully trinitarian theology*

Criteria relevant to Gunton's trinitarian theology include

- maintaining a theology of freedom, especially freedom to love.
- describing God's presence to creation.
- integrating from 'the economy of salvation' to a doctrine of God.
- awareness of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus was not divine and God's singularity is over-emphasised then any trinitarian theology is redundant, illogical and irrelevant, with worship and life fundamentally fractured.

Gunton's trinitarian theology emphasised that

- the Father, Son and Spirit are equally God.
- God reveals God's-self through the Son and the Spirit
- the relation of the one and the three is understood using *personhood*
- the Father, Son and Spirit are all there is to God, ruling out modalism and tritheism.
- God's acts are undivided but distinct between the persons.
- the divine relations are love.
- the doctrines of economic and immanent Trinity are related but distinct.

*On persons and particularity*

Gunton wanted a better definition of *person* and so he could better describe who each person of the Trinity was and what they did. He claimed that persons are either individuals with characteristics who enter relationships or persons are who they are because of their relationships. This second view was used by the Cappadocians when they defined *ousia* and *hypostasis*, being and persons. *Perichoresis* emphasised the primacy of relatedness of persons over individuality, of

being in communion over separate beings. *Particularity* establishes space and otherness, and hence freedom to be who they are by giving and receiving.<sup>349</sup>

Anizor cites Schwobel's view that Gunton's trinitarian theology uniquely emphasises the primacy of personhood and particularity, along with highlighting the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Gunton's approach, according to Anizor, transform our grasp of even the divine attributes.<sup>350</sup>

*'The difference the Trinity makes'*

Anizor outlines Gunton's views on analogical and univocal language concerning God and that it is only by the actions of Christ and the Spirit that our articulations have any alignment with who God is and what God does. God's trinitarian actions as Father, Son and Spirit impact 'the creaturely realm and through creaturely mediums'.<sup>351</sup> This mediation reveals the immanent being of God through the incarnation of Jesus and the otherness of the Holy Spirit.

Irenaeus, Gregory of Nazianzus and Duns Scotus are cited as examples of those who described God's attributes using this understanding rather than an abstract metaphysical one. They began with an outward looking divine triunity of love that is inherently from God's-self and which establishes creation and humanity with their own freedoms and integrities.

While we transition from knowable realities to unknowable ones, God moves from his otherwise unknowable self to God's self-revealed presence. It is God's trinitarian self-disclosure that orients us to God, creation, humanity and ourselves.

Gunton also considered ways in which we can differentiate the divine persons given that God's external works are undivided but not homogenous. Any differentiation is properly based on God's tri-personal initiatives and mediation. These descriptions seem to be inevitably deficient as all three divine persons share in the one action:

If we are to define personhood by agency, or the kinds of actions performed (as Gunton does), then the Father is to be known in terms of loving action, the Son in terms of self-giving, and the Spirit in terms of the eschatological perfecting of communion.<sup>352</sup>

*Conclusion*

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<sup>349</sup> Anizor cites Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 16.

<sup>350</sup> Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity – an Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton*, loc. 854. See Lincoln (ed.) Harvey, *Theology of Colin Gunton*, The (London, United Kingdom: T&T Clark International, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/theology-of-colin-gunton-9780567558626/>, 2010), 196.

<sup>351</sup> Anizor, *Trinity and Humanity – an Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton*, loc. 920.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 953.

Anizor describes some criticisms of Gunton's theology including

- whether his concepts of persons and relations arise more from human experience than divine revelation.
- whether he connects *hypostasis* too closely with modern sociological understandings of person.
- whether his use of *perichoresis* excessively diminishes the differences between divine and human persons, including that God is one being whereas humans each have unique bodies.
- whether his view of God is too tritheistic and involves the kind of unhelpful projectionism that Gunton resisted.
- whether he sustains an adequate sense of divine mystery concerning God's person/s and actions.

#### *A concluding commendation*

Anizor proceeds to explore Gunton's thinking on creation, providence and human personhood, and reason, revelation and Scripture before considering the person and work of Christ. He then considers Gunton's thoughts on the Church, pneumatology and eschatology. Having 'ended each doctrinal chapter ... with some questions and criticisms of Gunton's proposals', Anizor's concluding chapter highlights what he sees as major strengths in Gunton's theology.

#### *Theology as conversational and creative*

Citing Rowan Williams, Anizor builds on his Introductory comment that Gunton saw his theology as an unfinished conversation which was open for correction. This approach, for Anizor, is evident in Gunton's interactions with Zizioulas on persons and relations, Coleridge on the Trinity as the basis for all being and on Irving's focus on Jesus' humanity. Gunton's conversational disposition created a broad-spectrum of dialogue and increased his creativity and consistency.

#### *Theological high points*

Anizor identified these emphases as high points in Gunton's theology:

- Our knowledge of God is solely based on God's self-revelation through what God does. The immanent Trinity is theologically important as it highlights our relative independence and freedom. The indivisibility of the works of the Trinity should not ignore the particular actions of each of the triune persons.
- Creation has an eschatological orientation which is realised by the Son and the Spirit, through who God relates to creation from within creation. Our actions are significant because of our relative independence and freedom. Humanity, as God's image, has a relational character. Creation displays

God's glory even though these disclosures are somewhat beyond our comprehension.

- We know God 'through the agency of the incarnate Son and revealing Spirit, and mediated by the Christian community'.<sup>353</sup> The humanity of Jesus and the work of the Spirit in Jesus is crucial to our knowledge of God, to our understanding of the atonement, and to our appreciation of God's purposes for the whole creation.
- A healthy view of church is one that has 'a pneumatic Christology and a Christocentric pneumatology',<sup>354</sup> or, more simply, the church as the body of Christ depends on the Spirit for its life and the Spirit and conformed to the likeness of Christ by the Spirit.
- Theologies of the Holy Spirit are to recognise the Spirit as transcendent rather than seeing the Spirit as internalised or inherent. The eschatological orientation of the Spirit's work related to God's purposes for creation.

**John E. Colwell, in *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century – An Enduring Legacy*<sup>355</sup>**

*Introduction and Coda*

Gunton is the twelfth and last theologian in this book, climaxing a list that commenced with James Orr, James Denney and P. T. Forsyth, and centred on Martin Lloyd Jones, John Stott and J. I. Packer before moving on to T. F. Torrance and Lesslie Newbigin.

Thomas A. Noble's introduction notes the influences of the Wesleys and Charles Simeon but largely bypasses the strand in which Samuel Chadwick moved with only a glance at the Keswick movement. It mentions Finney and Moody but is silent about Asahel Nettleton.<sup>356</sup> Noble traces the descent from Billy Graham to the religious right movement in the United States without acknowledging the plurality of evangelical theology there or in the United Kingdom.

Jason S. Sexton's coda provides a perspective on cultural context and mentions a issues including gender, colonising and race and noting that the twelve theologians are privileged white males. He sees the need for evangelical theologians to do more than rehearse the past and to benefit from learning lessons that can help reshape biblical theology for its current and future contexts.

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., loc. 3458.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., loc. 3488.

<sup>355</sup> Noble and Sexton, *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century – an Enduring Legacy*.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Bennet Tyler and Andrew Bonar, *Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton, The* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1975); J. F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival* (Darlington, Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1988).

*John E. Colwell on Colin Gunton*

Two of Colwell's insights into Gunton's theology stand out for me as significant. The first is an overview of Gunton's trinitarian theology and the other one a perspective on Gunton's theology of revelation.

I have already noted Gunton's emphasis that the triune persons are constituted by their relations, or his 'notion of relationally established particularity', as Colwell called it.<sup>357</sup> Colwell comments that this theme is basic to Gunton's trinitarian theology and to his views of freedom, persons and creation:

Just as the Spirit, as the love between the Father and the Son, thereby establishes the distinctive particularity of the Father and Son, so the Spirit establishes the distinct particularity of creation and of the distinct particulars within creation. The freedom of creation in relation to God and the freedom of human persons is Spirit-given.

Creation is ... distinct from God, [with] its distinct particularity (and the distinct particularity of particulars within creation) being an outcome of the continuing presence and action of the Spirit. If the Cappadocians are the inspiration ... for Gunton's understanding of the Trinity, then Irenaeus ... becomes the inspiration ... for Gunton's understanding of creation.<sup>358</sup>

Colwell also cites Gunton's *A Brief Theology of Revelation* as 'his best work (although this probably says as much about me and my interests as it does about the book itself)'. Gunton is cited in it as emphasising that we should not read Scripture directly 'without the mediation of a tradition of interpretation'. Colwell highlights this as 'a trinitarian dynamic of mediation' and quotes Gunton:

If Christ is the mediator of creation, then he is the basis of created rationality and therefore of human knowledge, wherever and whatever, we might say, of all human culture. But that point must be developed pneumatologically also, so that all rationality, truth and beauty are seen to be realised through the perfecting agency of God the Spirit, who enables things to be known by human minds and made by human hands. Christ is indeed the Truth, but the truth becomes truth in all the different ways in which it is mediated by the Spirit. Pneumatology is thus the key to any adequate theology of revelation and of its mediation.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Noble and Sexton, *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century – an Enduring Legacy*, 312; Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, The, 156.

<sup>358</sup> Noble and Sexton, *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century – an Enduring Legacy*, 313.

<sup>359</sup> *ibid.*, 319, 320; Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, T&T Clark, 2005), 125.

Lincoln Harvey (Ed.), *The theology of Colin Gunton*<sup>360</sup>

Douglas Farrow writes in his Foreword of Gunton's prominence as a theologian, and that 'People interested him, not merely ideas'. Farrow claimed that Gunton sought to bring out 'in fresh ways the specificity of the persons of the Trinity and of the incarnate Son as the proper basis for grasping the specificity or concreteness of creaturely reality itself'.<sup>361</sup>

Lincoln Harvey introduces the collection by indicating that Gunton saw theology as a response to God's self-disclosure in Christ and the Spirit. This revelation involves God mediating God's-self 'freely in relation to the world he has made', so valuing the creature as something ontologically other than God's-self. Gunton was connecting triune unity and communion with 'economic mediation', and so centring his theology on 'the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology and creation'.<sup>362</sup>

*Robert W. Jenson, A Decision Tree of Colin Gunton's Thinking*

Gunton believed that only a triune God could create a humanity that enables relational intimacy and otherness without defining it by a form of supernatural hierarchy. Jenson developed this theme in Gunton's theology by profiling Augustine's, Cappadocians' and Irenaeus' ways of thinking about the Trinity.

Gunton claimed that Augustine, among other concerns, made trinitarian thinking into a 'conceptual puzzle' rather than 'a saving mystery'. He saw strengths in the Cappadocian's emphasis on being, persons and communion, but was concerned about the way they at times dissociated their thinking from the triune saving action of God in Christ. Irenaeus' two hands of God approach appealed to him as it excluded modalism and subordinationism and identified the eternal Son of God with the person of Jesus. Irenaeus was seen as being more concerned with economic than ontological considerations.

*John Webster, Gunton and Barth*

Webster highlighted Gunton's preface to *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* where Gunton began by saying that ontological insights to who God is are precursors to understanding and appreciating humanity and creation.<sup>363</sup> Webster used Gunton's last book, *Act and Being*, to provide an outline of Gunton's theology:

all of God's acts take their beginning in the Father, are put into effect through the Son, and reach their completion in the Spirit. Put otherwise,

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<sup>360</sup> Harvey, *Theology of Colin Gunton*, *The*.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, xi, xii.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, see fn. 12, 13: Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, *The*, vii.

Gods actions are *mediated*: he brings about his purposes towards and in the world by the mediating actions of the Son and the Spirit, his ‘two hands’.<sup>364</sup>

Gunton believed, according to Webster, that God’s ‘two hands’, ‘mediate the Father’s action ... from within the structures of creation’ rather than simply acting externally and remotely.<sup>365</sup> Webster later quoted Gunton from *The One, the Three and the Many* that the ‘concept of the spirit’

is a way of speaking of the personal agency of God towards and in the world; anthropologically a way of speaking of human responsiveness to God and to others; cosmologically a way of speaking of human openness to the world and the world’s openness to human knowledge, action and art.<sup>366</sup>

**Dave Moore, *What is ‘left’ of the Spirit?*<sup>367</sup>**

*Synopsis, introduction and perceived need*

Moore focuses on Gunton’s disagreements with Western pneumatology and the way Gunton develops a social trinitarian understanding that profiles the person and relation of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity and God’s purposes in creation, redemption and fulfilment.

Moore sees Gunton considering ‘the Spirit’s distinctiveness from the Son’ and ‘the Spirit’s eternal relations to the Son’.<sup>368</sup> Gunton critiques Augustine, Barth and Torrance for their inadequate views of the *filioque* clause and the Father’s monarchy. This weakness can be repaired, according to Gunton, by highlighting the relations of the triune persons ahead of their one substance. Gunton’s emphasis shifts trinitarian theology from a psychological model to a sociological one.

*Identifying the Spirit*

Gunton adopts a social analogy inspired by Irenaeus’ ‘two hands of God’, and emphasises that the relations of the persons are constitutive of their being. He aims to uphold the Father’s monarchy and avoid modalism and Arianism. He also avoids tritheism by highlighting the mutuality of the persons in their oneness of being. Rather than defining an ontological hierarchy under the monarchy of the Father, Gunton refers to the Father constituting, the Son responding and the Spirit particularising – all as one unified divine action.

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<sup>364</sup> Harvey, *Theology of Colin Gunton, The*, 21, see fn. 28–30: Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being* (United Kingdom: SCM Press, 2011), 77, 78.

<sup>365</sup> Harvey, *Theology of Colin Gunton, The*, 21.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, see fn. 58: Colin E. Gunton, *One, the Three and the Many, The – God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity – the Bampton Lectures 1992* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 187.

<sup>367</sup> Dave Moore, ‘What Is ‘Left’ of the Spirit?’, <https://ministryprinciples.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/mtt-essay-gunton.pdf>.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

*Distinguishing the Spirit*

Gunton's focus is on the eschatological perfecting work of the Holy Spirit in achieving the Father's purposes in his incarnate, mediatorial Word, and in what this tripersonal, singular divine action tells us about the immanent Trinity. This perfecting action of the Spirit accomplishes the outward disposition inherent in the divine communion of love in the restoration of creation.

*Relating the Son and the Spirit*

Continuing his emphasis on the unity of the actions of the Son and the Spirit, Gunton explores their distinctiveness by referencing Smail's thoughts on the *filioque* clause. Just as the Son depends on the Spirit in relation to the Father, and the Spirit depends on the Son in relation to the Father, so the outward-orientation of the Spirit is constituting of the Father and the Son – and ensures their outward-orientation. Moore sees this triune mutual constitution as 'the pinnacle of Gunton's trinitarian theology'.<sup>369</sup>

*Observations and conclusion*

Moore questions Gunton's concepts of divine unity, and whether Gunton so elevates the Father that the Father becomes unknowable. He asks whether there are 'distinctive actions of the Father compared to his Son and his Spirit, apart from their source'?<sup>370</sup> He concludes by mentioning that Gunton's final thoughts were on this outward oriented triune communion as being 'a final, if mysterious explanation for the way things are'.<sup>371</sup>

**Michael D. Stringer, *The Lord and Giver of life – The person and work of the Holy Spirit in the trinitarian theology of Colin E. Gunton***<sup>372</sup>

*Abstract and Introduction*

Stringer states in his Abstract to his doctoral thesis that 'Gunton's trinitarian pneumatology is distinguished by an emphasis upon the Spirit as person, as transcendent, and as creation's perfecting agent'. His Introduction refers to Gunton's hope that trinitarian theology would be understood as relevant to 'the practice of worship and the concerns of life'. Central to this goal was a reframing of the person and work of the Spirit in ways that complement the Son, rather than be seen as subordinate to him.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 12; Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, 55.

<sup>372</sup> Michael D. Stringer, *Lord and Giver of Life, The – The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian Theology of Colin E Gunton* (University of Notre Dame, 2008).

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., Abstract, 2.

This result would be achieved, according to Gunton, by having a trinitarian doctrine of the Spirit which was not over-focused on subjective experiences or unrelated to the life of Jesus and the immanent Trinity. Rather than having an inward-spiral, Stringer highlighted Gunton's emphasis on the outward-looking nature of triune love, and of the ways in which the Spirit participates in God's actions in creation.

Pneumatology, therefore, is central to Gunton's understanding of Jesus' humanity and our destiny as the people of God. It is at the heart of Gunton's 'two-fold focus' on the Spirit's relation to creation and humanity, and the Spirit within the Trinity.

### Conclusion

After highlighting Gunton's profile and the significance of his writings, Stringer nominated Gunton's priority concerning creational and trinitarian insights regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He sets Gunton's theology in the context of those of Rahner, Barth and Zizioulas, and indicates that Western theology traditionally has focused on God's oneness of being rather than God's triune persons. Stringer believes that Gunton's pneumatology is based on an 'understanding of the Spirit as person, transcendent and perfecting agent'.<sup>374</sup>

### Spirit as person

Gunton saw *person* as a relational concept originally grounded in early trinitarian theology. This notion of person means that the triune persons are who they are because of their mutual, perichoretic relations. The actions of the Son and the Spirit in creation and redemption are not divine modes of being nor are they tritheistic individualism, rather they are God achieving God's purposes through and with them as persons.

Gunton used *perichoresis* to describe the mutual indwelling of the triune relations, especially that of the Son and the Spirit. This *perichoretic* dimension ensured both divine unity and particularity. It also enriched Gunton's views on the mediation of the Spirit as 'God's personal agent in transforming the world', along with his rejection of any form of ontological subordination.<sup>375</sup> The Spirit's mediation

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 120–122; note footnote references to Karl Barth, Thomas Smail and Kevin Giles. Gunton is described as affirming *economic* subordination while denying *ontological* subordination. Stringer quotes Gunton's view that 'the priority of the Father' is economic rather than ontological.

Stringer claims (ibid., 130) that 'For Gunton, the functional subordination of the Spirit to the Son is trinitarianly inadequate insofar as it inevitably results in a weakened christology and pneumatology: christology suffers because inadequate attention is afforded to the constitutive nature of the Spirit's involvement in Jesus' life and ministry, and pneumatology is severely weakened by the limitation imposed by an almost wholly immanent conception of the work of the Spirit in its application of the fruits of Christ's work to the individual believer'.

includes the Spirit's 'empowerment' of the Son's humanity. These emphases were central to Gunton's rejection of depersonalising Western individualism.<sup>376</sup>

*Spirit as transcendent*

Gunton identified a poor appreciation in Western theology of the Spirit as God's active, transcendent presence *in* (but not *of*) creation and not just in individuals. Gunton's understandings on the Spirit's transcendence – as God's ontological and personal *other* – were relevant to his thoughts on the Spirit's mediatorial work in the humanity of Jesus, and so in God's redemptive purposes.

Gunton believed his approach was enriching understandings of the mediatorial works of the Spirit in Christ and in believers, and so was correcting an imbalanced Western emphasis on Christ's divinity compared to his humanity.

*Spirit as perfecting agent*

God's creation-project involves bringing it to its intended destiny – in *perfecting* it, for which it will offer eternal thanksgiving. This goal for all creation involves and is achieved by 'the eschatological orientation of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>377</sup> This disposition is both *personal* and *transcendental* and is active in all of creation – time and space – from initial creation to ultimate consummation – including in redemption through Jesus' humanity.

Stringer adds a footnote citing Gunton:

... the eschatological office of the Spirit [is] that he is the one by whom the Father brings particular created things to perfection through the ascended Christ, beginning with the first fruits, his body incarnate, crucified and raised from the tomb. [In this way,] the Father both prevents the creation from slipping back into the nothingness from which it came and restores its teleology, its movement to perfection.<sup>378</sup>

Stringer concluded that Gunton's *trinitarian* pneumatology – of the Holy Spirit as person, transcendent and perfecting agent was a complementary partner to a full Christology rather than a subset of it.

*Avenues for further research*

Stringer nominated Gunton's 'doctrine of sin', his understanding of the 'post-ascension relationship between the Son and the Spirit' and theosis for additional consideration. In particular 'the continuing ministry of the ascended Christ does not feature prominently in Gunton's trinitarian theology'.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 240, 241.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 249, 250.

### Theosis

Stringer's lengthy excursus on *theosis* describes deification through union with Christ. He emphasises personal encounter and divine communion while insisting on the ontological distinction between God and creation. The uncreated Son's incarnation establishes the unity of divine and human natures in one person. Doctrines of *theosis* should affirm Christ's humanity, be developed from trinitarian understandings, highlight the Spirit's ministry in believers, and underscore the Father's gift of freedom.

### Concluding remarks

Stringer nominates two significant themes in Gunton's trinitarian theology.

- Gunton prioritised *personal* and *relational* understandings above Western perspectives about divine *substance*.
- Gunton's pneumatology has a distinctive emphasis on the Spirit as person, as transcendent, and as creation's perfecting agent.

**Tabitha Petrova Edgar, *Personhood, particularity, and perichoresis – The doctrine of the Trinity in identity and faith formation*<sup>380</sup>**

### Introduction and Conclusion

Edgar's thesis begins by using survey data to reflect on the decline in doctrinal understandings in her context, and develops a narrative about Christian theology and learning. She uses Gunton's theology in the next section as a way of enabling 'recovery and (re)engagement' of whole persons in faith-based lives.

Her third section applies 'Gunton's emphasis on personhood to the very practical and pastoral concerns of spiritual discipleship'. She believes that this approach can develop relational and community identity and encourage 'a holistic approach to faith formation' through mentoring.<sup>381</sup>

Edgar concludes her thesis by affirming that by sharing Gunton's trinitarian 'understanding of God as relationship', our relationships 'with God, each other, and the world ... can ... address some of the most fundamental questions of human life in current times'.<sup>382</sup>

### **Additional responses**

The following references provide extra resources on Colin Gunton's theology in addition to other articles in Lincoln Harvey (Ed.), *The theology of Colin Gunton*.

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<sup>380</sup> Tabitha Petrova Edgar, 'Personhood, Particularity, and Perichoresis – The Doctrine of the Trinity in Identity and Faith Formation' (The University of Western Ontario, 2021).

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 4, 6.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 98.

*Najeeb G. Awad, Personhood as particularity – John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, and the trinitarian theology of personhood*<sup>383</sup>

*Eve M. Tibbs, East meets west – Trinity, truth and communion in John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton*<sup>384</sup>

*Andrew Picard, Towards a living sacrifice of praise – A critical evaluation of Colin Gunton's trinitarian theology of culture*<sup>385</sup>

*Michael A. Tapper, The Trinitarian Culture and Corporate Worship Practices of Canadian Pentecostals: A Contribution from the Theology of Colin Gunton*<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Najeeb G. Awad, 'Personhood as Particularity – John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, and the Trinitarian Theology of Personhood,' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 4 (2010): 1–22.

<sup>384</sup> Eve M. Tibbs, *Personhood as Particularity – John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, and the Trinitarian Theology of Personhood* (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006).

<sup>385</sup> Andrew Picard, *Towards a Living Sacrifice of Praise: A Critical Evaluation of Colin Gunton's Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (University of Otago, 2021).

<sup>386</sup> Michael A. Tapper, *The Trinitarian Culture and Corporate Worship Practices of Canadian Pentecostals: A Contribution from the Theology of Colin Gunton* (Saint Paul University, 2015).

**Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship***

Robert Letham, like Donald Macleod, writes from within a reformed theological context. His publications cover christological and pneumatological issues as well as a second edition of the book I have reviewed.

I write more on Letham's views of Kevin Giles' theology in the next section – opinions which indicates Letham's opposition to women in ordained ministry, and therefore to his alignment with those who use this issue as a boundary condition in their conservative ecclesiology and political leadership.

I have delimited surveying early church theological developments of trinitarian theology and so have bypassed the first sections of Letham's book.

This brief section covers comments by Kevin Giles, Sinclair Ferguson's Forward to the second edition of Letham's book, and a published review by Nathan Betz.

**Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity*<sup>387</sup>**

Giles, seeing no substantial difference between references to the Son's eternal submission and subordination, affirms Letham's warning about subordination terminology. Giles and Letham disagree, however, about the way this issue was being used in complementarian or hierarchical theology.

Letham, as is evident from his adverse appendix on Giles, is, according to Giles' 'the most interesting supporter of the thesis that God's triune life in heaven somehow informs the male-female relationship on earth'.<sup>388</sup>

Giles, nonetheless, commends Letham for writing 'a comprehensive and informed historical account of the development of the Trinity in which the contribution of all the more important theologians is discussed'.<sup>389</sup> Giles affirms Letham's description of Nicene trinitarian doctrine and agreed with Letham's concerns that the Arian heresy involved hierarchically ordering the divine persons.

Giles adds that in 'these 390 pages I would not want to dissent from anything he says', before rejecting Letham's opinions about male-female relationships which follow. Giles claimed that

we meet [in these subsequent pages] another Dr. Letham; a Dr. Letham who speaks of an 'obedience' of the Son that is not limited to the economy, and of 'the submission of the Son eternally'.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Kevin N. Giles, *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity, The* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 18–24, 28, 41–48, 58.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Giles sees Letham's comments as contradicting what Letham had already written. Giles comments that 'the minute the doctrine of the Trinity and the relationship of the sexes get mixed up, good theology goes out the door.'<sup>391</sup>

**Sinclair Ferguson, Foreword in *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship – Revised and Expanded Edition*<sup>392</sup>**

Ferguson states in his Foreword that *contra* Alexander Pope's claim that 'the proper study of mankind is man', the 'greatest subject of human investigation and exploration is the knowledge of God the Trinity'. He indicates that Letham's *The Holy Trinity* 'has been widely read and appreciated' in an environment when evangelical culture has 'seemed to make little or no mention of God the Trinity'.

He mentions that Letham's book was awarded the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Gold Medallion and that it 'was a landmark work, the fruit of years of research, reflection, discussion, and writing'. He asked when the last 'evangelical or Reformed author ... attempted [to write] such a major monograph on the most profound yet fundamental article of the Christian faith'.

Ferguson believes that Letham's book has a prophetic thrust against 'deformed thinking' as it opposes contemporary monist and modalist views, and considered this as one reason why it was greeted 'with a sigh of theological relief'. Letham, according to Ferguson, accurately documented past theological understandings and sees trinitarian theology as providing a basis for considering divine mysteries.

Ferguson highlights the contribution Letham makes in providing valuable perspectives on areas of concern in trinitarian theology that would benefit from further thinking and action. He concludes his Foreword by noting that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is not about the writings of dead theologians but about the living God'.

**Nathan Betz, *Knowing the triune God*<sup>393</sup>**

***Outline***

Betz begins by acknowledging Letham's efforts to reflect a biblical views on both God's unity and triunity, and to avoid the over-emphasis in Western churches on God's unity. He believes Letham over-reacts to this problem. He, nonetheless, sees Letham's *The Holy Trinity* as

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>392</sup> Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship – Revised and Expanded Edition* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2019). Sinclair B. Ferguson's own considerable bibliography includes Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit, The*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Theology* (Illinois, United States: InterVarsity Press, 1996) which was published in the same series as Robert Letham, *Work of Christ, The*ibid. (1993).

<sup>393</sup> Nathan Betz, 'Knowing the Triune God,' *Affirmation & Critique* X, no. 2 (2005).

quite commendable both as a survey of trinitarian conversation and as a call to believers everywhere to know and worship our Triune God as He is.<sup>394</sup>

After briefly summarising the first three-quarters of Letham's book (which I have delimited in *Trinity – Wonder and Worship*), Betz critiques the final section. He affirms Letham's belief that trinitarian understandings must 'avoid both the modalistic and tritheistic predilections of West and East respectively'.<sup>395</sup>

Betz itemizes the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, trinitarian deficiencies in the Western church, trinitarian perspectives on creation and missions, and divinization as positive themes in Letham's final section. He notes that Letham's two appendices provide responses to two of his critics.

Betz believes that Letham's '*Trinity* is an admirable work of scholarship and synthesis' and thinks it will have long-term benefits in improving understandings of trinitarian theology.<sup>396</sup>

### ***Striking a balance***

Betz lists six priorities Letham used in aiming to balance God's unity and trinity.

- The Trinity is one being and three persons.
- The three persons have the same essence or being.
- They mutually indwell each other in a dynamic communion.
- They are irreducibly different from each other.
- Their relations are ordered.
- These parameters are all equally important.

He mentions Letham's comments about other monotheistic religions being somewhat comfortable with the preaching, hymnody and prayers of much defective evangelical, theistic worship. Authentic trinitarian worship, according to Letham, would enrich church communities and help them avoid the dangers of modalist and monist practices.

Betz sees Letham's argument as faulty because, while it may reflect views in academic contexts, evangelical cultures are mainly tritheistic. Betz's argument is, however, weak in that what he sees as popular tritheism may in fact be an ill-informed modalist framing of God's being and action using different terminology. Modalism at one extreme and tritheism in an opposite direction have similar weaknesses that healthy trinitarian theologies avoid.

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 99.

Betz reasons that trinitarian concerns about three-ness and oneness can be reduced by referencing the economic and immanent aspects of trinitarian theology. There are fewer defined differences in the divine economy, according to Betz, as the actions of God are unitary, whereas the persons of God are essentially distinct from each other. He believes that more emphasis by Letham on God's oneness using, for example, Isaiah 9:6, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and 2 Corinthians 3:17, 'would render a more accurate portrayal of our Triune God'.<sup>397</sup>

### *Oneness with the triune God*

Betz spends the last part of his review on Letham's thoughts on the history and content of a theology of deification. Betz states that

Talk of deification in non-Roman or non-Orthodox circles is still rare today, and the connection that *Trinity* draws to our daily experience of salvation is rarer still, thus all the more noteworthy.<sup>398</sup>

His 'enthusiastic affirmation' of Letham's references to deification relates to Letham's emphasis on deification as both our final destiny *and* part of our present experience. Deification, because of our union with Christ, and since his humanity and his deity as eternal Son of God are inseparable, means 'we are united to God'<sup>399</sup> This union in Christ with God facilitates relational intimacy without confusing the uncreated with the created or the divine with the human. Deification impacts our present lives as well as being the goal to which we move.

Betz points out that deification is not a return to some pre-fall perfection. He is also concerned that Letham sees it 'more as an objective transaction than as the subjective and organic participation of the Triune God and redeemed humanity'.<sup>400</sup>

### *Conclusion*

After reminding us of Letham's goals to balance 'the essence and persons of God and their relationship', to avoid the dangers of modalism and tritheism, and to prioritise Scripture over philosophy, Betz sees Letham's book as preferable to 'many other modern treatments' of trinitarian theology. He also affirms that Letham's exposition of divinisation 'finds few contemporary equals'.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 101, 102. See Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 468

<sup>400</sup> Betz, 'Knowing the Triune God.', 102.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 103.

## Related Readings

## Snapshots of some significant themes

## Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity*<sup>402</sup>

### Introduction

Christian creeds and confessions reject hierarchically ordering of God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit. They affirm ‘eternal generation, single divine will [and] inseparable operations’.<sup>403</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity took place over time and was not directly developed from biblical texts. It was distorted when used to support an agenda about gendered leadership in the last part of the twentieth century. Those who affirm the co-equality of the three divine persons, by contrast, follow the Athanasian Creed and mainstream orthodoxy. Mainstream arguments about gender equality are not based on trinitarian theology.

### The rise of the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity

The invention and rise of the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity resulted from the writings of George Knight III, Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware. They emphasised equal but differentiated roles rather than traditional views about male superiority and female inferiority. They used 1 Corinthians 11:3 to justify divine and human headship and subordination based on personal being rather than on personal action. Role and function terminology masked this shift from behaviour to fixed person-based power classifications.

Hierarchically ordering the Trinity validated a command-obedience gender differential. One gender complementarian, Todd Pruitt, by contrast, suggested that profiling an authority-based trinitarian hierarchy was probably blasphemy as it paralleled the divine Father-Son relationship with that of a husband and wife, and implied that the Holy Spirit is an offspring of the Father-Son relationship. This process feminises the Son of God and sexualises divine relationships.

The complementarian doctrine of the Trinity teaches the eternal subordination in authority of the Son of God and the ontological subordination of women to men. This doctrine applies views of human relationships to divine relationships and then uses these views of divine relationships to define human relationships. Eternal subordination involves God the Father having priority and pre-eminence in ways contradicted by the historic creeds and confessions.

Robert Letham accurately reflects these historic positions before profiling a belief in the eternal submission and obedience of the Son of God to God the Father in ways designed to counter what he sees as the adverse views of feminist theologians who he says eliminate such submission. Letham acknowledges that language about obedience and submission cannot be used to validate rejecting beliefs in the

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<sup>402</sup> Giles, *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity*, *The*.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

eternal subordination of the Son of God. In affirming this doctrine, Letham's views differ from those of Ware and Grudem.

Once eternal submission is used as a person-defining, eternal reality, then it has the same meaning as eternal subordination. This role-based framing of intra-trinitarian relationships is an invalid basis for defining a male-female hierarchy.

### **The fall of the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity**

Liam Goligher opposed this role-based approach by claiming that 'reinventing the doctrine of God' to validate subordinating women involved a 'move into unorthodoxy' since it suggested 'that there are three minds, three wills, and three powers within the Godhead'. He added that God's eternal life should not be used to establish human social agendas.<sup>404</sup>

This declaration, along with earlier concerns by Rachel Miller and Aimee Byrd, including Rachel Byrd's claim that these changes involved 'sanctified testosterone', established a differentiation among conservative theologians between those using their own biblical interpretations and those affirming the church's historic and collective wisdom expressed in its creeds and confessions.<sup>405</sup>

Letham endorsed the eternal generation of the Son and that the triune persons work inseparably, meaning that role-based terminology is best not used to differentiating them since the divine persons are 'one in being, equal in power and glory, [and all possess] all God's attributes.'<sup>406</sup> God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinguished by origin, by the Son being begotten and the Spirit proceeding. This irreversible and unalterable order does not establish a hierarchy of status.

Using differing authority rather than differing origination as an ontological basis for differentiating persons is therefore contrary to the Nicene Creed. This creed affirms that God *is* one being and does not *share* one being, especially in any way that establishes one God who rules and another God who obeys.

An apparent biblical link between intra-trinitarian and gender relations is in the three references to headship (*kephale*) in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Preferable readings of this text relate headship to source or origin rather than to authority. Claims that the Son of God is functionally subordinate in an authority hierarchy imply the that the Son of God is ontologically subordinate. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God affirms the Son of God's full divinity and full distinction from the Father, with whom and with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God shares one being.

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 42.

This debate seems to have arisen because of the importance given by its proponents to subordinating women and the dearth of theological teaching about the doctrine of the Trinity.

### **How the doctrine of the Trinity developed ...**

The historical development of trinitarian theology focused on answering questions not explicitly covered or resolved in the New Testament. Beliefs that God is one, based on the Deuteronomic *shema*, and on the tripersonal nature of God were readily accepted by the early church. The word God in their biblical writings mainly referenced God the Father in relation to the unique Son of God, with God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit identified as being God together.

While *modalism* was an early answer to questions regarding one God being three persons, its sequential nature – Father then Son then Spirit – failed to account for God acting at the same time as three persons.

*Economic trinitarianism* stated that God the Father acted in history as the Word and Spirit of God without eternally being God the Father, God the Son and Holy Spirit. This view failed to acknowledge the equivalent deity of God the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and so did not establish an adequate trinitarian theology.<sup>407</sup>

*Arius* reasoned that God the Father was uniquely God and created a pre-eminent Son who was not God in the same way as God the Father. This means that Son of God is subordinate to God the Father *temporarily, ontologically, and relationally*.<sup>408</sup>

The view that was eventually established stated that God was eternally one *and* triune as Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>409</sup> They affirmed that the three persons were differentiated by the Son of God being eternally begotten of God the Father and God the Spirit proceeding from God the Father. This meant that the three persons were of the same *eternal* being within the *eternal life of God*, and had the same power. They believed that God's actions in history are consequential of God's eternal being and that they do not define God's eternal being.

The bishops agreed at Nicaea and Constantinople that the three divine persons are *of one essence (ousia)* and do not just *share* the same essence. Their single being (*homoousios*) means that what 'they are in unity, they are as persons and vice versa'. Their unity with their 'unique *being-in-communion*' excludes subordination and includes divine 'majesty, dominion, authority, and glory'.<sup>410</sup> This mutual indwelling or *perichoresis* excludes any division of being or essence between God

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 87, including by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 88, including by Origen, Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, Athanasius (Alexander's successor), and Augustine.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 92.

the Father, God the Son and Holy Spirit, and emphasises that there is no divine being apart from the divine persons.

It follows that God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable and indivisible in their actions while distinct in doing them. They have one will and do not act independently since tritheism or forms of social trinitarianism would prevail.

Since they are one in sovereign power, in their *basileia*, *dunamis* and *exousia*, or reign, power and authority, God has one *monarchia* or divine rule which is not limited to God the Father. This divine sovereignty distinguishes the irreversible eternal divine ordering (in which the Son is eternally begotten and the Spirit eternally proceeds) from eternal subordination.

Christological questions concerned the Son of God self-subordinating in Jesus' incarnation and Jesus having a human will. One danger involves developing a doctrine of the immanent Trinity from beliefs about the economic Trinity, and so concluding that the Son of God is therefore eternally subordinate.

A further priority is in not inferring social agendas from trinitarian doctrines: 'The Bible never makes divine relations in eternity prescriptive for human relationships on earth'. Consequently, 'the threefold life of God in eternity is not a model for human relationships in general or in particular of the man-woman relationship on earth'.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 102, 110.

James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*<sup>412</sup>

**Preface and Introduction**

‘True theology is theology that sings’, with the Bible as a resource for worship before ethics, values, ideas and doctrine.<sup>413</sup> This focus on worship recognises that the life of the community of God is a participatory gift received through and in the Holy Spirit, a gift that centres on Jesus Christ’s relationship with God the Father and the outworking of trinitarian relationships in the world. Awareness of and insights into the incarnation and atonement, and the nature and purpose of humanity, flow from prioritising trinitarian worship.

We are to worship and serve God as ‘priests of creation’, gathering ‘up the worship of all creation’ into a glorious symphony of praise. This priestly ministry recognises our collective responsibility to care for creation, acknowledges Jesus Christ as the true priest in whom we faithfully serve, worship and praise God, and receives the Holy Spirit with a view to everything being reconciled in Jesus Christ. The intercessions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are part of the ‘wonderful exchange’ of God’s grace that enable this worship to flourish. Our response is self-giving intercessory expressions of gratitude for the unique and authentic offering of Christ Jesus for us as our High Priest, Lord and Saviour.<sup>414</sup>

**Worship – unitarian or trinitarian**

*Two views of worship*

We act as our own priest following Jesus as supreme example in unitarian views of worship. Trinitarian views of worship, by contrast, see worship as ‘the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father’.<sup>415</sup> This participation is revealed in Jesus’ self-giving sacrificial love. It includes what he is now doing for us with God the Father by the Holy Spirit in their redemptive and restorative plans and purposes for humanity and creation.

Trinitarian worship recognises one true priest and mediator through, with and in whom we have access to the Father. It acknowledges the centrality of the cross of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in making us into an adopted, reconciled and holy family who worship ‘*Abba* Father’, Son and Spirit. This trinitarian and incarnational view sees God, by God’s Son and Spirit, lifting ‘us up out of ourselves to participate in the very life and communion of the Godhead,

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<sup>412</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 2.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

that life of communion for which we were created'.<sup>416</sup> Christ is among us. He leads our worship, prayers and praises and guides our lives.

### *Three theological models today*

Worship models are either openly unitarian, practically unitarian or genuinely trinitarian. An openly unitarian model denies Jesus as God's incarnate Son and mediator. God is everyone's Father, and we are all individual siblings who need no intermediary agent or agency. Trinitarian doctrines are dismantled and theologies of union with Christ and of the Holy Spirit become virtually irrelevant.

An experiential, practically oriented, unitarian model recognises God's gifts of grace in the life and death of Jesus but centres on our faith responses, and so has little or no need of trinitarian or incarnational understandings. This approach acknowledges the action of God towards and for us in Jesus Christ but leaves us to respond. It puts aside Jesus' vicarious humanity and intercessory priesthood and minimises our union with Christ.

Central to an incarnational trinitarian model is the belief 'that worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father'.<sup>417</sup> Jesus' relationship with the Father is one of reciprocal self-giving love, seen in the affirmations they give and receive. Jesus knows this intra-trinitarian shared intimate communion in his humanity by and in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus relates to God vicariously by and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit and we participate in his communion (*koinonia*) with the Father by and in the Holy Spirit. This participation is one of mutual indwelling, of 'perichoretic unity'.<sup>418</sup>

Jesus' incarnate participation with the Father is a participation in his eternal communion with the Father as Son of God. God's internal being-in-communion is 'externally extended' by the triune God to humanity in the incarnation.<sup>419</sup> God moves to us in grace from the Father, through his Son, in the Spirit to enable us to move towards the Father through his Son in the Spirit. This God-humanity worship-service 'dialogue' is sourced in God's perichoretic being-in-communion, and is essential to knowing something of the way the God relates to creation and humanity.<sup>420</sup> The Holy Spirit comes to Jesus in his incarnate humanity as well as proceeding 'from the Father and the Son', requiring care concerning the inclusion or exclusion of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed.

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 9, 10.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 21.

### *The Trinity and the human person*

Our views of God inform our thoughts about humanity, and our beliefs about humanity shape our ideas about God. Individualism, with its focus on reason, will and emotion in the context of natural law, readily conceives of God as removed, moralistic and legalistic. Trinitarian theology, by contrast, believes God is being-in-loving-communion and in a dynamic, filial relationship with humanity that is not primarily judicial. Understanding humanity as persons who find authenticity in communion with God and other people, and in sustainable relationship with the non-personal creation, flows from this *perichoretic* view of God's mutual triune indwelling, God's internal *koinonia*.

Humanity images God's being-in-communion in diverse and differentiated relationships, relationships that are renewed in Jesus Christ by and in the Holy Spirit. An anthropological theology in which we are freely and lovingly accepted by God in Christ expresses and explores personal and community relationships as

the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father, in the trinitarian life of God.<sup>421</sup>

The word 'person' needs reshaping as a relational term with its meaning defined by loving communion rather than by being reduced to concepts of individuality. An aggregation or even a pair of individuals is different from a community or gathering of persons. Individuality eventually collapses into a self-absorbed narcissism and results in nihilism or neo-gnosticism.<sup>422</sup>

It is better to return to 'the forgotten Trinity', to a deliverance by the Holy Spirit from a self-oriented individualism, and to fresh discoveries of who we are, and of God, other people, and creation as we are recreated and 'find our true being in loving communion with God and one another'.<sup>423</sup>

### **The sole priesthood of Christ, the mediator of worship**

#### *The interceding Christ*

Our loving Father God has given us Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to draw us to God's-self in prayer, to Jesus Christ who died for us that we might be forgiven and given the gift of being God's family, and to be led by the Holy Spirit into eternal life. Jesus Christ is our great high priest. He intercedes for us and opens us to the triune God by the Holy Spirit who shares in his intercessions for us.

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 31. Cf. James B. Torrance and Costa (Co-Chairmen) Carras, *Forgotten Trinity, The: The B.C.C. (British Council of Churches) Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today- Report, Study Guide and a Selection of Papers* (London, United Kingdom: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2011).

Jesus is already praying for us in and by the Holy Spirit in whatever situation we face. He makes our prayers his own and his prayers become ours in presenting us as God's family to an already loving Father-God. Jesus' intercessions mean we can pray in his name because he lived, suffered, died, was raised from death and ascended for us.

Jesus' mediatorial ministry is as the true person, the authentic high priest, who offers to the Father that worship, that obedience, that life of love in unbroken intimate communion, which we cannot offer [and who] consecrates himself for this ministry of leading us into the presence of the Father.<sup>424</sup>

God does not need to be appeased or managed because of God's wrath or anger but rather is to be received as being innately gracious and merciful towards a frail and faulty humanity. This reconciling ministry of grace and mercy is confirmed and affirmed by Jesus sending us the Holy Spirit from the Father so that we can share in God's restorative work as God's royal priesthood.

### *The one and the many*

The humanity of Jesus Christ is not simply an ideal to follow. God has given God's-self uniquely in Jesus in and by the Holy Spirit to and for us with the intention to bring God's purposes to God's planned goals. This understanding of Jesus' humanity was the basis of Irenaeus' theology of recapitulation – that the one who created everything is the same one who rescues and restores everything.

Recapitulation meant 'the fulfilment of God's purposes for humanity in and through the inclusive and vicarious humanity of Christ', with 'the unassumed' being 'the unredeemed'.<sup>425</sup>

### *The God-humanward and human-Godward relationship ..., both freely given to us in Jesus Christ*

God's grace is God's gift of God's-self in Jesus Christ by and in the Holy Spirit. God does in Jesus what we are unable to do by freely and unconditionally coming to us. God then shares God's triune self with us as Messiah Jesus presents 'us in himself through the eternal Spirit to the Father'.<sup>426</sup>

Our responses are in the response Jesus has already made for us in the Father's holy love. Our responses need not be seen as necessary conditions for being loved, forgiven and accepted by God but as responses to God's generosity, goodness and

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<sup>424</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 37.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

grace. God's loving forgiveness recognises our faults and failures *and* 'provides for us, one, in Jesus Christ, who makes the perfect response of vicarious penitence'.<sup>427</sup>

This dual ministry represents God to humanity *and* simultaneously represents humanity to God. It highlights Jesus' high priesthood and his vicarious action on the cross. The triune God – not just the Father – opposes, judges and condemns sin *and* sends the Holy Spirit so that we can 'participate in the vicarious penitence of Christ, in his priestly vicarious [and propitious] self-offering'. In this triune action, 'God is always the subject of propitiation never its object'. God demonstrates and reveals grace and mercy rather than demanding grace and mercy. Our actions of grace and mercy are in Christ Jesus and by the Holy Spirit according to the will and holy love of God, Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>428</sup>

### *The two hands of God*

Irenaeus' metaphor of *the two hands of God* emphasises that the same God who created everything is the one who redeems and restores everything, and who brings God's family and creation to ultimate glory. God does this by *coming* in Jesus as the Word-become-flesh in and by the Holy Spirit, *and* by *bringing* us to God's-self as Father, Son and Spirit in Jesus Christ in and by the Holy Spirit. The mediatorial intercessions of Jesus Christ as our ascended high priest that draw us to the Father are accompanied by the intercessions of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

### **Gender, sexuality, and the Trinity**

Male language used for God includes Father and Son. It might be seen as 'projecting male, sexist, patriarchal language on to God' and that questions about including feminine terminology and using inclusive language are appropriate.<sup>429</sup>

### *The Arian-Nicene debate today*

Arius saw father and son terminology for God as indicating that Jesus was created and not eternal. Athanasius responded by stating that the Father and Son trinitarian relationship was eternal and that it was better to use begotten terminology to clarify the distinction between God as Father and human fathers.

Matthew records a narrative of Jesus with his disciples where Jesus distinguishes between the servant nature of God's fatherhood and his contemporary cultural, patriarchal and sexist expressions of fatherhood where women were subordinated to and dominated by men (Matthew 23:8, cf. 11:27; John 14:9). God's fatherhood is defined by their relationship: God is the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Cf. Ephesians 3:14ff). There is no gender in God and projecting male images onto God or deducing male-only images from God is inappropriate.

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 84.

*Right and wrong roads in the feminist debate*

The hierarchical, patriarchal profile in the Church is long-standing, and is evident in the insistent exclusion of women from ordained ministry and leadership. The incarnation does not rationalise male-only ordained ministry. Jesus includes men and women in his teaching and actions. His incarnation does not promote or privilege maleness, but opposes abuse, exploitation and domination of anyone, especially those subordinated by false trinitarian and incarnational theologies. Toxic behaviours create legitimate calls for change, including by facilitating healthy father-children and husband-wife relationships.

We are called to remould and reshape our understandings of God as Father and Son as we meditate on ‘the mystery’ their relationship revealed in and by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit ‘in the New Testament witness’.<sup>430</sup>

The incarnation means that everyone, regardless of race, class, status or gender can see themselves and their relationships cleansed and purified in Jesus’ communion with God the Father in the Spirit. God in Christ reconciles everything to God’s-self by Jesus’ offering of himself in his life, death and resurrection.

The Father and the Son love each other in the *perichoretic koinonia* of the Spirit. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are equally God and one in being – they are *homoousios*. They are harmoniously differentiated in one being-in-communion, with each person having particular distinctions. God has named God’s-self ‘Father’ in and by Jesus as God’s incarnate Son (cf. John 12:28, 14:6ff, 17:1ff; Matthew 11:25ff etc.).

**On human language for God: *simile, metaphor, parable, analogy, name***

Biblical authors and editors avoided using female metaphors for God. God is not identified as Mother. They never call God ‘Mother’, and used ‘motherhood’ as a simile in four Isaiah passages (Isaiah 42:14, 45:9–10, 49:15 and 66:13). Sophia, while personified in Proverbs, is not a literal person and references the divine qualities of and associated with wisdom.

Calling God ‘Father’ is saying who the Father is, and so is more than metaphorical. It names personal identity and describes more than preferable characteristics. There is not some unnamed God behind God-with-a-label or God-as-an-ideal. God, in using human terminology regarding a class of human persons, is not implying a divine gender or sexuality construct or a multiplicity of fathers. The name adopted is immediately reshaped for its trinitarian purposes.

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<sup>430</sup> Cf. JB P Rom 12

God's fatherhood is prior to God being creator as it references an eternal, internal trinitarian relationship.<sup>431</sup> We, however, learn about human fathers before understanding anything of triune relationships. It is these triune relationships into which we are baptised and in which we to participate in *eucharistic* community.

We name, proclaim, praise and pray to God as 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' and worship and serve God as triune being-in-love-communion. And we are called to let the Spirit reveal that Jesus Christ and his relationship with the Father is emptied of 'biological, male, patriarchal [and] sexist content' and filled with its trinitarian meaning, so enabling us to 'more truly pray: "*Abba, Father*"'.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> There is no special class group that includes divine and human fathers. God's fatherhood is understood as being prior to any creaturely parenthood. The reverse logic suggests anthropomorphisms which easily lead to speculative results.

<sup>432</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 114.

Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*<sup>433</sup>

**Triune atonement: The foundation of the doctrine – 1**

The triune persons and relations, who God is and the way God acts, are evident in Jesus' death and resurrection. These events teach us about 'the [salvific] depths of God's [triune] self-involvement with creation'.<sup>434</sup> Conversely, trinitarian theology provides the richest view of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

*The divine dilemma*

Our problem with evil and wickedness points to *God's* dilemma and *God's* delight. God does not have internal difficulty or inner conflict in working to fulfil God's intentions for God's humanity in God's creation. Everything that happens in creation 'takes place only because of the prior and fundamental reality of the life and will of the triune God'.<sup>435</sup>

God created from inner motivation, without external pressure or encouragement, in sharing God's-self by binding with humanity and creation in covenant and

making himself vulnerable in certain ways ... This is the mystery of the self-imposed dilemma of God – where God in his freedom chooses to bind himself to creatures, thereby in a sense binding their failures to himself.<sup>436</sup>

*God* does not fail when *humanity* fails, but works patiently with forbearing in acting providentially to fulfil God's purposes *in relationship with created humanity*.

*Why a mediator?*

Athanasius wrote that only a human person created in the image of God could accomplish reconciliation, while Anselm commented that whoever delivered humanity from death would have humanity obliged to obey them.

God is involved with God's humanity *in* God's creation and ...

- wants to share from God's self-knowing so that all humanity can participate in the life of Jesus Christ. The atonement is the way God reaffirms God's intention to include humanity in this self-knowing, and enables and re-establishes this original goal to be fulfilled. Jesus Christ is God's mediator so that God's 'self-investment' in creation might be surpassed by God's incarnate Son being both the *way* God is victorious and the *goal* God has in creation and its humanity reaching fulfilment.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. God is not the author of evil; evil cannot occur without the prior goodness of God's creative activity. Evil is essentially parasitic and predatory.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

- wants to open up God's eternal 'self-glorifying' so that all God's creatures share in this exchange of glory. The atonement is the way God reaffirms his eternal glory, and enables and re-establishes this original goal to be fulfilled. Jesus Christ is God's mediator so that God's binding God's-self to creation enables shame to be the gateway to our sharing in God's self-glorification and honouring both now and forever.<sup>438</sup>
- wants to enable humanity to live in and respond to God's sharing of God's eternal self-loving as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The atonement reaffirms God's love for humanity by enabling and re-establishing this original love-sharing to flourish. Jesus Christ is *the way* God accomplishes this goal and *the love of God* among us as a human person as God's mediator.

Jesus Christ as incarnate Son is *the way* God reaffirms and re-establishes God's bond with creation as well as *the life* in which we participate. Jesus Christ is both the *means* and the *reality* by which God accomplishes God's purposes.

Anything less would be unworthy of the intensity and completeness with which God bound himself, his life, his purposes to the creative project, to us.<sup>439</sup>

Trinitarian theology indicates that God is self-giving, other-person affirming and love-community creating and that God's triune life 'constitutes the basis of both that for which God saves us and the means by which he does so'.<sup>440</sup> Atonement theology explores God's redemptive and restorative work in Jesus Christ in the context of God's life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### ***Divine violence***

Those who oppose the atonement as an intentional divine act that they consider to be contrary to the one God's life of tri-personal love see divine violence in the atonement. Anything that describes God the Father treating God's incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, as a sinner and so exercising violence against him is regarded as repulsive, abusive, dominating and oppressive. Eternal triune relations in this context are seen to include behaviours that readily and inevitably impact hideously and horrifically on human familial and social relationships. Responding to these concerns needs to ensure that atonement theology describes

the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a work willed and accomplished by the triune God, without introducing violence and oppression into the life of God and his followers.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 69.

## Triune atonement: The foundation of the doctrine – 2

### *The atonement as the work of the one God*

Criticisms that atonement theories in which the Father relates to the Son in a violent and abusive manner suggest or assume a form of tritheism in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are separate beings. Unlike humanity, God's oneness means one essence and one will with God's actions inseparable from God's being. The triune persons are not defined by mutual separation or opposition but by their interpersonal relations and shared consciousness as one God, three persons.

Whatever God willed as one God concerning the atonement was according to God's triunity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What God willed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit was the will of one God. God can relate to God's-self as *another* without that *other* being 'a distinct or separate person' but not in such a way as to generate internal conflict.<sup>442</sup>

Rather than envisioning God as cruel and hostile, the incarnation and trinitarian theology describe God in God's atonement as enduring human suffering so as to transform the discord of evil into harmonious community. The *kenosis* of self-giving inherent to triune relationships works to affirm God's bonding with creation through God's 'utter self-involvement in Christ's atoning work'.<sup>443</sup>

The death of Jesus does not imply God is a hidden or hostile Father but reveals God the Father as one with God the Son and the Holy Spirit in the sufferings of Jesus. In sending God's Son, the Father fully gave himself with the Son being the Father's living presence among humanity. There is no separate will of the Father wanting the Son of God to do something that the Father was not willing to participate in with the Son. There is, therefore, no room for a substitutionary atonement involving 'a wrathful Father and a loving [ameliorating] Son'.<sup>444</sup>

This atonement understanding emphasises that we *know* God as Father in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, and that we *know* God as God is since the triune God is one God. God's presence in the midst of human suffering is reciprocal: one triune person does not suffer alone. God's triune love and unity *know* something of the suffering of the incarnate Son of God since 'God brings suffering into the divine life in the person of the Son by means of the incarnation'.<sup>445</sup>

God in Christ *enters our circumstances*, The 'full resources of divine life' – of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – are active in the physical sufferings of Jesus. God's suffering is not an impersonal detachment but is the way God's redeeming

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 75.

presence operates in Christ's mediatorial sacrifice. God's self-investment in God's creation is evident in the atonement and anticipates the destiny God has for the new creation. The abundant life promised by Jesus is the life of the triune God at work in the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*The atonement as work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

'God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and only as such is [God] one'. There is no God other than this God whose eternal identity is exclusively triune. The self-humility of God is evident in 'the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ'.<sup>446</sup> God's incarnate Son also enables the ascent of our failed, faulty and frail humanity into the life of God by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

God in this action 'remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed'.<sup>447</sup> God does not act as a detached and independent sovereign and judge but acts within God's-self in faithfulness to humanity and all creation. This divine re-affirmation rejects and extinguishes sin and evil as ontological defiant and preserves the authentic humanity and creational context that God has created, continues to sustain and works to bring to fulfillment.

There is room in the triune relations for atonement to occur. The divine internal holy and loving otherness with which God relates to God's-self is where alienation, anger, accusation and defilement are purged, embraced and ended.<sup>448</sup> Only God can achieve the complete removal of sinful deceit and defilement and so restore human dignity, decency, integrity and identity.

God's *opposition* to violence, abuse and hostility is seen in God's transparent *affirmation* of and *insistence* on love, compassion, gentleness, peace, holiness, goodness, truth and righteousness in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. There is no 'divine violence' outside of this divine virtue by and in the being of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God's liberty, God's freedom within God's triune being and towards humanity and creation acts to release humanity and creation from their/our enslavement to and bondage by evil, sin and wickedness. Divine wrath is the intense outpouring of uncompromising divine love to banish evil and renew goodness. Only God in Christ Jesus is able to ensure the judgement and destruction of sin and evil without 'being overthrown and destroyed' and 'without suffering dissolution, and ceasing

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 78, fn. 57. Quote from Nazianzus, *On God*, *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 80: 'The Son's eternal, holy distance from the Father, in the Spirit, forms the basis on which the unholy distance of the world's sin can be transposed into it, can be transcended and overcome by it' (*Theo-Drama IV: Action*, Hans Urs von Balthasar, 362). Also fn. 61: 'As Migliore puts it, "God can enter into vulnerable interaction with the world, even to the depths of temporality, deprivation, suffering, and death, because as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is essentially an inexhaustible history of mutual self-surrendering love". Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 81'.

to be altogether'.<sup>449</sup> In this sense, God makes every sinner's confession and acknowledgement of God's rejection of evil *with the sinner* and acts in the sufferings of Jesus to enable the renewal and recreation of failed humanity in God's own triune likeness and image.

This renewal and recreation occurs by the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son with God the Father. The Holy Spirit 'mediated to Jesus [as sin-bearer] the presence of the Father' and 'the experience of the Father mediated by the Spirit could only be the experience of death, forsakenness, judgement and expulsion'.<sup>450</sup> This triune action can only be what it was because of the oneness of God's being and will – a oneness which is and acts without inner division or conflict.

... it is because God is triune that he is able to be both God and our God, to do away with our sin without being faithless to himself or destroying us, and in that same act, able to establish us in eternal life with himself.<sup>451</sup>

*The triumph of the life of God: atonement as theosis*

The goal of the atonement was more than defeating and removing evil. It was to give humanity the gift of participating 'in the life of God as completely as possible, without ceasing to be the distinct and unique creatures God made us to be'.<sup>452</sup> This divinisation or *theosis* means that we are God's family and co-heirs with Jesus Christ, as Paul explained in Romans 8:4–16.

God wants to share God's-self – to share nothing less than God's own life – with God's humanity, and there is nothing more that God can give. God 'is both the means and the end of our salvation, of our filial relationship with [God's-self]'.<sup>453</sup>

Divinisation theories vary from relegating and/or deleting atonement theologies to developing an integrated understanding of salvation that fulfills creation as well as removes evil and sin. This holistic approach has an eschatological focus in which our union with Jesus Christ as God's incarnate Son through his atoning sacrifice transforms us from our current corruption to receiving the gift of sharing in God's own incorruptible life, as Athanasius indicated, and as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:35–58.

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 84.

## Responses to these themes

## Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity*

I included some of my thoughts on Kevin Giles' *The headship of men and the abuse of women* in *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*. The following references relate especially to his views on the eternal subordination of the Son.<sup>454</sup>

### Aída Besançon Spencer, *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*<sup>455</sup>

Spencer quotes Giles' uncompromising thesis in his book as everyone having the 'same status, dignity, and leadership potential [in] the home, the church, and the world'.<sup>456</sup> Spencer praises the fact that Giles' critiques 'complementarian theology and methodology' using current resources, and that Giles' writing is bold, direct, clear, easy to read, accessible, and interesting'.

Spencer notes that 'Giles establishes what the Bible *actually* teaches, not what complementarians *allege* the Bible teaches!' Spencer identifies that Giles' wrote for lay and academic audiences.

After reminding readers of his views on theological methodology, Spencer states Giles views concerning subordination, slavery and gender. In particular, 'Paul may have tolerated some cultural norms, but he subverted them with his teachings' and that arguments in favour of slavery, racism and sexism have adverse impacts and are attractive to men wanting control and requiring obedience.<sup>457</sup>

Spencer sees Giles' focus on the way complementarians use role terminology to describe permanent hierarchical relationships rather than provisional, temporary responsibilities as 'pertinent':

Vehement complementarians and egalitarians may actually worship different gods: a god who first and foremost represents power versus a God who represents love.

She concludes (after offering a personal correction) by affirming that Giles book is 'a most helpful resource' concerning complementarian theology.

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<sup>454</sup> Kevin N. Giles, *Trinity & Subordinationism, The: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002); *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006); *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity, The; What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018); *Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?, The* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020). Priest, *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*, 139–142, 165, 166. Also, Kevin Giles, 'The Nicene and Reformed Doctrine of the Trinity,' *Priscilla Papers* 31, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>455</sup> Aída Besançon Spencer, 'What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women,' *ibid.* 33 (2019).

<sup>456</sup> Giles, *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, 4, 5.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 201ff, 224.

**Tom Parsons, *Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father*<sup>458</sup>**

Parsons cites Giles when writing on Smail's doctrine of the eternal functional subordination of the Son of God. Parsons claims that Giles' identification of Smail with the doctrine of the Son of God's eternal functional subordination was 'reasonable' but not 'quite fair'.<sup>459</sup>

Parsons refers to Giles when considering whether Barth subscribed to a theology of eternal subordination. While Parsons thinks Barth's use of divine superiority and divine subordination terminology is implicit in Barth's theology, Parsons acknowledges that Giles' views concerning Barth's caution are valid. Parsons saw no such hesitancy in Smail's thinking.

**Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship, Appendix 2*<sup>460</sup>**

I have already profiled Letham's views on Giles' theology and Giles' response.<sup>461</sup> Letham had already written a 'theological comment' on 'The Man-Woman Debate'. His first claim was that

The equality of the persons of the Trinity exists in the form of an order which includes a relation of authority and obedience.<sup>462</sup>

Letham developed this claim by arguing that the Trinity 'are from eternity coequal [in terms of essence] in the unity of God'. He indicated that this equality is ordered 'in the eternal ontological relations of the persons of the Trinity. ... The alternative would ... take the form of modalism'. He concluded that 'In part, this order consists in authority and obedience':

That there is in the communion of the three persons participating in the one undivided divine essence a relation of authority and obedience, of sending and procession, all entirely compatible with full and eternal coequality of essence is a matter of fundamental importance.

Giles affirmed Letham's early points but rejected this type of conclusion.

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<sup>458</sup> Parsons, 'Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father.'

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 33, 34.

<sup>460</sup> Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 489.

<sup>461</sup> Giles, *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity, The*.

<sup>462</sup> Letham, 'Man-Woman Debate, The: Theological Comment.'. His subsequent claims were that 'Man (*sic*) in his imaging of God in righteousness, knowledge, and true holiness is also a relational being, the equality of male and female existing in the form of an order including a relation of authority. Man in the church is being renewed in the image of God, not so as to supersede the above relation of authority. ... The feminist movement within the church is incompatible with the historic Christian doctrines of God and man.

Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, *Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussion*<sup>463</sup>

Bird and Shillaker ‘argue that, when properly understood, eternal functional subordination is consistent with Christian orthodoxy and the biblical evidence’. They critique Giles’ theology under several headings:

- They question Giles’ claim that trinitarian function determines ontology while affirming Giles’ acceptance of trinitarian order. They accept that functional subordination within the Trinity ‘cannot mean submission of the Son’s will to the Father’s within the Godhead, as they have the same divine will’ while insisting that functional subordination has ‘the potential to describe or draw attention to a distinctive feature of the relationship between Father and Son’.
- They ask why the Son of God became human, rather than the Father or the Spirit if there is ‘complete co-equality in being and function between the Father and Son’. They argue that seeing the Father-Son relationship as an incarnation-only description empties these names of their eternal significance. They cite Barth to support their claim.<sup>464</sup>
- They claim Jesus’ incarnate subordination implies that there is something similar within the immanent Trinity.

After commenting on several biblical passages, Bird and Shillaker note the following points before re-affirming the above themes:

- They agree with Giles that the Son and the Father have ontological equality, that the incarnate Son was subordinate, and the Son’s sonship is eternal. They disagree as to whether eternal functional subordination negates equality and enhances the distinctiveness of the divine persons.
- The debate appears to be driven by those wanting to connect hierarchical gender beliefs with trinitarian theology. They affirm that intra-trinitarian ordered relationships are not well aligned with male-female relationships or with women being excluded from various ministries.

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<sup>463</sup> Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, ‘Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussion,’ *Trinity Journal* 29:2 (2008).

<sup>464</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4.1, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1974), 195ff, 200ff: ‘... essential to the being of God [is] the offensive fact that there is in God himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination. ... As we look at Jesus Christ we cannot avoid the astounding conclusion of a divine obedience. Therefore we have to draw the no less astounding deduction that in equal Godhead the one God is, in fact, the One and also another, that He is indeed a First and a Second, One who rules and commands in majesty and One who obeys in humility.’

**Kevin Giles, *Response to Michael Bird and Robert Shillaker: The Son Is Not Eternally Subordinated in Authority to the Father*<sup>465</sup>**

Giles was appreciative of the common ground he shared with Bird and Shillaker, including that they did not think he taught modalism and that trinitarian relationships should not be used to describe man-woman relationships. Giles responded to Bird and Shillaker's main points as follows:

- Hierarchical authority order differs from order of divine persons. Claims that subordinated roles and functions are eternal are invalid as they are *person* defining.
- Affirmations about the eternal subordination of the Son in authority are wrong as they base the Father-Son relationship on the Father commanding and the Son obeying. Divine authority derives from God's oneness of being and does not differentiate or break the equality of the Father and the Son. The unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is eternal and reciprocal.

There can be no Father without Son and no Son without Father. The Father is the Father and the Son is the Son and the Spirit is the Spirit for all eternity. Creation, redemption, and sanctification are works of the divine persons; they do not constitute the persons. In all my writings on the Trinity I come back to this point time and time again.

Explaining why the Son of God became incarnate rather than the Father or the Holy Spirit by claiming that there must be an intra-trinitarian command-obey hierarchy overlooks the biblical silence on this issue.<sup>466</sup>

- The Father and the Son are equal and sovereign as God. The triune persons are not distinguished by power or authority.
- The three authors are 'one hundred percent' in agreement that it is wrong to read incarnational subordination 'back into the immanent Trinity', and that their differences relate to 'who commands and who obeys'.

Giles concludes by reflecting on their conversation. He affirms their warning that using 'the language of subordination' about the Son-Father relationship comes 'perilously close' to adopting the grammar of Arianism.

He highlights their early emphasis that 'functional subordination cannot mean submission of the Son's will to the Father's will within the Godhead, as they have the same will' and asks

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<sup>465</sup> Kevin Giles, 'Response to Michael Bird and Robert Shillaker: The Son Is Not Eternally Subordinated in Authority to the Father,' *Trinity Journal* 30:2 (2009).

<sup>466</sup> Giles mentions Rahner's hypothesis that the Son of God became incarnate 'because he is the Word of God and the Word of God is God in communication'.

how can the Son be eternally subordinated in authority to the Father and thus eternally obedient to the Father and yet have the same will as the Father? Surely the word ‘obedience’ implies that one party submits their will to the will of the one set over them, and if this is the case then the language of eternal obedience implies by necessity two wills, if not three in the Godhead. Three wills speaks of three separated divine persons and this is tritheism.

**Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, *The Son really, really is the Son: A response to Kevin Giles*<sup>467</sup>**

Their reply focuses on affirming that ‘the eternal functional subordination of the Son is biblically and theologically sound’. Both parties reject any link between this theology and so-called complementarianism.

- Order vs. hierarchy

They, like Giles, do not accept that the Father-Son relationship is a ‘chain of command’. They recognise that ‘subordination’ readily suggests Arianism and ‘prefer Pannenberg’s reference to the eternal and obedient self-distinction of the Son from the Father’, commenting that the words function, role and order are all problematic.

- Eternal sonship in the immanent Trinity

They agree with the creeds that the ‘Son is *homoousios* with the Father and thus equal in all authority and power, along with the Holy Spirit’. They agree that ‘functional subordination’ inevitably links with ‘ontological subordination’ and mention Letham’s use of ‘disposition’ as in ‘what is fitting and suitable’:

Maybe our language should have been along these lines: that there is, in the relationship of the Son to the Father, a ‘disposition’ that meant that it was ‘fitting and suitable’ that the Son became incarnate and not the Father. This ‘disposition’ is in the person of the Son, as a part of the immanent Trinity, and not only in the economic Trinity.

Bird and Shillaker see a ‘glimpse of the divine [inter-personal relations] revealed by the incarnation of the Son’. This ‘glimpse’ is

an irreversible revelation through the sending of the Son that does not mean that one is greater than the other, but does distinguish them and is connected with the begotten/unbegotten personal characteristics. There is something ‘fitting’, and thus revelatory about the relationship between the Father and the Son, in the sending of the Son.

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<sup>467</sup> Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, ‘The Son Really, Really Is the Son: A Response to Kevin Giles,’ *Trinity Journal* 30:2 (2009).

They quote Donald Macleod's view that 'the fact that he was sent by the Father need not point to any ontological subordination' because the Son acts as mediator 'by mutual agreement with the Father'.

Bird and Shillaker responded to Giles' reference to their inconsistent statements about divine will. Giles insisted that there is no clash of, or separation of wills between the Father and Son since Nicene theology indicated that the three divine persons share one will. They acknowledge Giles' concern as 'indeed a thorny problem' for which they do not have a 'definitive answer'. They quote Gerald Bray:

To suppose that they are subject to their common will, and therefore in themselves merely agents of its execution, is to retreat into a theology in which the divine essence takes priority over the persons.

Their claim is that Giles denies intra-trinitarian diversity and imply that he was attempting 'to say what God can or cannot do in the Godhead'.

- Biblical teaching on the Son's identity and role

Bird and Shillaker comment on several passages, stating that there is no 'chain of command' in 1 Corinthians 11:3 since Christ 'brackets the list at front and end'.

They insist that 'Jesus' submission to his Father tells us something of the eternal life of God' and that the death of Jesus accurately reveals who God is in eternity.

We believe in Jesus' equality with God, but also believe in his obedient self-distinction from the Father as intrinsic to his identity as the eternal Son of God. What is more, by virtue of his sonship he was singularly suited to become the God-Man who would effect the salvation of the elect.

They conclude that while they agree with a considerable amount of Giles' theology, they disagree with 'how the Son's submission to the Father in the incarnation relates to the Son's eternal relationship and role within the Godhead'.

**Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower (Editors), *Trinity without hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene orthodoxy in evangelical theology*<sup>468</sup>**

In his Preface, *Theologians of a Lesser Son*, Bird reflects on his and Shillaker's two articles on the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father in conversation with Kevin Giles. After summarising their articles, Bird states that he is 'now convinced that Grudem, Ware, and others were arguing for something analogical to a semi-Arian subordinationism [and that] they resemble a species of semi-Arianism, called "homoianism"'. He thinks their intra-trinitarian theology formulates its hierarchical views using 'an overreliance on the economic Trinity in

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<sup>468</sup> Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower, eds., *Trinity without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019). *Trinity without hierarchy* includes a series of articles on biblical, historical and systematic theologies.

Scripture’. This approach results in ‘consequently identifying the Son as possessing a lesser glory and majesty than the Father’. He believes that

a quasi-homoianism was drafted into the complementarian narrative by a small cohort of theologians in order to buttress their claims about gender roles and to define what distinguishes them as complementarians.

He hopes for a future where everyone can recite the Athanasian Creed together<sup>469</sup>.

### **Additional responses**

These references provide extra resources on the eternal subordination of the Son in addition to articles in *Trinity without hierarchy*. Erickson gives a helpful overview and Sexton’s article is a literature review with comments. Doyle claims Giles’ book is ‘is a very bad book. Its argument is tendentious, and consistently and grossly distorts the evidence from a long tradition of trinitarian reflection’.

*Millard J. Erickson, Whose Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*<sup>470</sup>

*Jason Sexton, The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence*<sup>471</sup>

*Robert Doyle, Use and abuse of the fathers and the Bible in trinitarian theology*<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> ‘Nothing in this Trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are co-eternal and co-equal with each other. / For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. / But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal’

<sup>470</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Whose Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009).

<sup>471</sup> Jason S. Sexton, ‘The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence,’ *JETS* 54.4 (2011): 787–805.

<sup>472</sup> Robert Doyle, ‘Use and Abuse of the Fathers and the Bible in Trinitarian Theology,’ <https://thebriefing.com.au/2004/04/use-and-abuse-of-the-fathers-and-the-bible-in-trinitarian-theology/>

## James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*

Jason Goroncy, *James Torrance on 'Prayer and the triune God of grace'*<sup>473</sup>

Goroncy includes audio recordings of Torrance's Didsbury Lectures<sup>474</sup>, Torrance's article on *The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship*<sup>475</sup> and Torrance's hymn, *I know not how to pray, O Lord*,<sup>476</sup> which I have included in my Conclusion.

Bryan D. Spinks, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*<sup>477</sup>

Spinks' review focuses on Torrance's 'incarnational trinitarian model, which he agrees is the only one which is theologically defensible. He highlights, however, Torrance's 'apparent failure to exploit fully the *homoousios* of the Son and Spirit in terms of the *address* of worship'. 'The movement to the Father through the Son in the Spirit', according to Spinks, 'can easily reinforce the binitarian/unitarian nature of most Western forms of public prayer'.

He also wanted Torrance to emphasise that Jesus' divinity and humanity were both part of Christian worship from the beginning of the early church.

Spinks concludes his brief review affirming Torrance's sacramental theology, along with Torrance's mention that the Nicene affirmation of God as Father was central to its rejection of Arianism and its focus on the incarnation, rather than being an affirmation of divine masculinity.

Robert Leach, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*<sup>478</sup>

Leach endorses both Torrance's 'warm pastoral style' and his use of biblical texts and early theologians in affirming the relevance of trinitarian theology to Christian worship. Torrance's 'superb chapter on the mediation of Christ as our sole High Priest' focuses on God's incarnational grace-gift *to* us and Christ's ministry *for* us through the Holy Spirit.

Leach explores Torrance's thoughts on the use of language in referring to God, including the way Torrance 'properly engages "re-imagers"' by showing that they

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<sup>473</sup> Jason Goroncy, 'James Torrance on 'Prayer and the Triune God of Grace',' <https://jasongoroncy.com/2013/11/07/james-torrance-on-prayer-and-the-triune-god-of-grace/>.

<sup>474</sup> James B. Torrance, 'Didsbury Lectures,' <https://jasongoroncy.com/2013/11/07/james-torrance-on-prayer-and-the-triune-god-of-grace/>; <https://nazarene.ac.uk/public-lectures/didsbury-lectures/>.

<sup>475</sup> 'The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship' in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. Ray Anderson (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999).

<sup>476</sup> *New Creation Hymn Book*, (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 2010), 347.

<sup>477</sup> Bryan D. Spinks, 'Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 2 (2000): 250–51.

<sup>478</sup> Robert Leach, 'Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 3 (1999): 532–33.

are projecting themselves upon God and thus [falling] into the pit of mythologising'. He appreciates Torrance's outline of the way '*simile, metaphor, parable, analogy and name*' are used regarding God.

Leach concludes by commending Torrance and his book, stating it is a 'wonderful introduction into the theology of worship, trinitarian theology, and trinitarian ecclesiology at the parish, Bible college or seminary level'.

**Colwell, John E., *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* by James B. Torrance<sup>479</sup>**

Colwell, in his brief review, says Torrance's book is a 'delightful and delightfully written account of the implications for Christian worship of the doctrine of the Trinity'. He sees a 'pastoral warmth and impressive clarity' in the way Torrance develops 'profound insights' regarding worship. He comments that, while it requires thoughtful reading, it not 'simplistic or superficial' and has minimal theological expressions. Colwell thought that some might find the last chapter on gender and sexuality and the appendix inadequate and unconvincing.

**Keith Purvis, *A review of Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*<sup>480</sup>**

Purvis looks at the book 'chronologically with interwoven discussion'.

**Ted Johnston, *A review of Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*<sup>481</sup>**

Johnson provides a 'comprehensive look' at Torrance's book, with its outline of a 'Trinitarian, personalized shape of Christian worship'. He affirms Torrance's encouragement to 'return to "the forgotten Trinity" away 'from a narcissistic preoccupation with the self'. He sees this facilitated by focusing on the *who* questions before the *how* ones. Johnson concludes by emphasising that

an incarnational, Trinitarian theology leads us to look all other matters/questions through the lens of the person (being) and work (act) of Jesus.

**Kevin J. Navarro, *Worship as Participation by the Spirit in the Son's Communion with the Father: A Doxological Theology of T.F. and J.B. Torrance*<sup>482</sup>**

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<sup>479</sup> John E. Colwell, 'Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace by James B. Torrance,' *Evangelical Quarterly: An International Review of Bible and Theology* 69, no. 4 (1997): 356, 57.

<sup>480</sup> Keith Purvis, 'A Review of Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace,' [https://upwardworship.com/assets/docs/Purvis\\_TorranceReview.33154504.pdf](https://upwardworship.com/assets/docs/Purvis_TorranceReview.33154504.pdf).

<sup>481</sup> Ted Johnston, 'A Review of James B. (Jb) Torrance's Book, Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace,' Grace Communion International, <https://thesurprisinggodblog.gci.org/2016/10/christ-our-worship-leader.html>.

<sup>482</sup> Kevin J. Navarro, '*Worship as Participation by the Spirit in the Son's Communion with the Father: A Doxological Theology of T.F. And J.B. Torrance*' (University of Manchester, 2018).

**Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed***

Kevin W. Wong, *Adam J. Johnson. Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*<sup>483</sup>

Wong outlines Johnson's background for claiming that atonement theology is essentially trinitarian rather than primarily Christological. He highlights Johnson's views that inclusive atonement theologies avoid adversarial conflicts with other singularly focused atonement theologies.

After indicating that atonement theologies need to be 'thought of as multifaceted as God himself', Wong mentions Johnson's emphasis on a 'revelation theory of the atonement' where atonement enables us to know God. Wong highlights that Johnson's trinitarian theology claims the 'indivisibility of the external works of the Trinity' can reduce notions of intra-trinitarian child abuse in the atonement:

It is not the case that the Father exacts punishment on an unwilling Son, but instead the one God acts in the three Person[s] with a single, harmonious will.<sup>484</sup>

Wong mentions that Johnson prefers to focus on what the atonement is *for* – namely, *theosis*, – rather than on what it is *from*. Johnson, according to Wong, was also concerned that atonement theologies are best based on more than one divine attribute. He does this 'by applying the Trinitarian indivisibility and the doctrine of appropriations to the divine essence itself'.<sup>485</sup> His application meant that, while everything God does is done by all three persons, their actions can be summarised by considering the actions of one divine person without setting one attribute against another attribute (e.g. justice against mercy). Wong indicates that this approach is similar to the one Johnson used in seeing Christology as an aspect of trinitarian atonement theology.

After noting Johnson's referencing the atonement as an action not merely limited to the crucifixion, Wong states that Johnson

provokes deep thinking about the subject matter. It was unexpected and refreshing for Johnson to disregard the standard framework that fragments all of the different models and pits them against one another.<sup>486</sup>

Wong concludes his review by identifying what he sees as several weaknesses in Johnson's book. He identifies the benefits that come from further readings of historical resources while recognising the book's page limitations. He then raises the question of what God in Christ says about the Father suffering and God

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<sup>483</sup> Kevin W. Wong, 'Adam J. Johnson. Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed,' *Journal of Analytic Theology* Volume 4 (2016).

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 448. See Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 71, 72.

<sup>485</sup> Wong, 'Adam J. Johnson. Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed.', 448.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

changing before indicating that he finds Johnson's approach to the indivisibility of God's actions and the appropriation of triune persons 'both compelling and confusing'.<sup>487</sup> He sees it as compelling in that it avoids reductionist and myopic atonement theologies while confusing in that there is a need to explore further the relationship between divine inseparability and the identities and beings of the triune persons. Identity, inseparability and identity need careful consideration.

Wong's recommends Johnson's book for being 'thorough, insightful, integrative, engaging, and simple without being simplistic'.<sup>488</sup>

**Alan Le Grys, *Adam Johnson, Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*<sup>489</sup>**

Le Grys begins by referring to 'negative endless debates about penal substitution' and the 'the Western fixation on the cross emphasized by Anselm'. Johnson is seen as addressing this 'doctrinal myopia' by insisting that atonement covers 'Christ's entire ministry from incarnation to eschaton' and by replacing 'an obsession with personal sin and guilt' with 'a cosmic dimension' oriented towards 'human-divine reconciliation [and] the restoration and perfection of all of creation'.

Johnson is described as working on this 'rethinking' by considering those involved, the divine attributes highlighted, the outcome intended, the condition being rectified, and the future being created.

The second tool for rethinking atonement is the doctrine of the Trinity. Atonement, Johnson rightly insists, is a thoroughly Trinitarian affair, in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together to achieve the new creation. This is the essential starting point for a fresh understanding.

Le Grys believes Johnson's book 'is an excellent book and a stimulating read 'and can be beneficial to a wide range of readers even though its 'brave attempt to address the charge of "divine child abuse" from feminist theologians' and its efforts to explore apparent weaknesses 'in the doctrine of penal substitution' may be less than successful.

**Jane Barter, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*<sup>490</sup>**

Barter indicates that Johnson 'writes clearly and broadly on one of the most vexing themes in Christian theology: the doctrine of the atonement' and that he succeeds in avoiding Aulen's approach. She claims that

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>489</sup> Alan Le Grys, 'Adam Johnson, Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed; Daniel Castelo, Pneumatology: A Guide for the Perplexed,' *Theology* 119, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>490</sup> Jane Barter, 'Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed,' *Theology Today* 73, no. 4 (2017).

Instead of the wooden and exclusive models, Johnson capably alerts us to the dynamic and multiple layers of interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection according to theologians throughout the centuries.

Johnson's approach, according to Baxter, follows Aquinas in emphasising God's goal of reconciliation all things in Christ. By highlighting many diverse aspects of atonement theology, Johnson 'offers salvation in a variety of ways consistent with the character of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ'. Johnson looks at church history as well as biblical theology and aims to 'awaken the modern church to underrepresented accounts of Jesus' atonement'.

Baxter criticises Johnson for giving

short shrift to feminist and womanist critiques of the doctrine of the atonement, claiming (too breezily in my view) that feminist theologians have not taken seriously enough the doctrine of the Trinity in their criticisms.

She rejects his claim that feminist critics verge on tritheistic trinitarian thinking, and says his monotheistic trinitarianism underemphasises Jesus' physical, human suffering, and that Jesus' cry of abandonment and alienation is one 'which other creatures echo throughout history in this fallen world'.

Baxter states that believing God accomplishes God's purposes out of human suffering is aligned with feminist and other liberationist theologies, even though the complexities of considering the *necessity* of the human suffering of Jesus to God's accomplishments establish differences which make 'all the difference'.

**Fred Sanders, *Unperplexed About Atonement*<sup>491</sup>**

Sanders identifies Johnson's core perspective as correlating the doctrines of God and atonement. He asks 'if atonement is "an event in the life of God himself," how does the life of God shape and determine the atonement?' Johnson's answer is seen as centring on the 'unity and diversity of the Trinity and the divine perfections', on 'who God is and what God does [in the atonement]'.<sup>492</sup>

Since Johnson sees the atonement as everything that brings humanity into communion with God, his 'kaleidoscopic approach' is as inclusive as possible.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Fred Sanders to The Scriptorium Daily, 3 June 2015, <https://scriptoriumdaily.com/unperplexed-about-atonement/>. Sanders notes that 'Adam Johnson is a friend and colleague ... So in case you mistook this for an impartial or disinterested review, think again. I had the honour of showing Adam where some of the treasure was buried at the beginning of his theological education'.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Sanders cites Johnson's footnote reference to Leon Morris: Morris, *Cross in the New Testament, The*. See Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 11, fn. 20.

## Conclusion

### Attributes, attitudes and persons – mystery not manipulation

The everyday reality of trinitarian theology is in seeking to live in its mystery and wonder, and of not being consumed by the difficulties inherent in our beliefs. Trinitarian theology will always be manipulated by social, ethnic, hierarchical, ecclesiastical and gender power-constructs which lead to various forms of abuse, subordination, exploitation and destructive exclusion.<sup>494</sup>

Somehow, in the bodily experiences of personal and community crises, chaos, confusion, complexity and conflict, and in the bewilderment of seemingly tautological circularities and sustained cultural and social reductionisms and rationalisations, worship and wonder, and awe and adoration, break through.<sup>495</sup>

As Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, God's light shines *out of* darkened hearts to reveal the knowledge of triune glory in Jesus Christ. This inner illumination comes in the unwelcome and hostile environments mentioned in the surrounding verses, and is accompanied by the transforming freedom of the Lord-Spirit of the Lord-Christ – who, in a holy love-mystery, transforms us from perpetual shame to eternal triune glory – to the glory of the tripersonal one-God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in overlapping sequences (2 Corinthians 3:12–4:12).

Richard B. Hays' salutary and insightful retirement reflections testify to the impact of this transforming glory:

We also believed that we were smarter than everybody else, that we were destined for success and that we should be in the position of prescribing social order and passing enlightened judgement on everyone else's ideas and practices. I'm afraid that same prideful attitude carried over suddenly into my later studies in theology. It's a bitter paradox that those of us in the academic world can use our knowledge of scripture and theology to gain leverage over others, to compete and climb the ladder, to advance to

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<sup>494</sup> Cf. Jenkins, 'Nicene Myth, The: The Da Vinci Code is but One of the Council's Many Misrepresentations'. He writes that 'The story of Nicaea is quickly told. In 312, Constantine consolidated power in the Roman Empire and granted toleration to Christianity the following year. He accepted some leading Christians as his advisors on religious matters and felt the need to demonstrate his leadership of the larger church when it fell into crisis or division'.

John Flett and Jason Goroncy, 'The Heresy of Nicaea and the Jesus of Colony' in *Receiving Nicaea Today: Global Voices from Reformed Perspectives*, ed. Hanns Lessing and Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2025)

Also, Leonard Cohen, 'Leonard Cohen Files, The,' <https://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/> Anthem: Ah the wars they / will be fought again / The holy dove / She will be caught again / bought and sold / and bought again / the dove is never free.

<sup>495</sup> 'Leonard Cohen Files, The'. Anthem: Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in.

professorships and named chairs while subtly aggrandizing ourselves and without necessarily meaning to exactly, putting others down. I fear that the same thing happens within the politics of the church.

In the time unexpectedly given to me now for reflection over these past three years, I've more than once recalled T. S. Elliot's words about the pain of looking backwards at one's life. He writes of, quote, the rending pain of reenactment of all that you have done and been, the shame of motives late revealed and the awareness of things ill done and done to other's harm which once you took for exercise of virtue. That last line is so extraordinary. Things done to other's harm which once you took for exercise of virtue.

Now none of that should come as a surprise to those who have really thought about Jesus' stern words of warning for the Scribes and the Pharisees, who sit in named chairs, he calls it the seat of Moses, and love the places of honour at banquets, and love to be greeted with respect by people who call them professor. Nor should any of this come as a surprise for those of us instructed by the apostle, Paul, who looked back at his own advantages of birth and academic achievement and critical superiority and pronounce this retrospective judgement on it: these I've come to regard as loss because of Christ. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the *koinonia* of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.<sup>496</sup>

I include this lengthy quote as it points to a core, crucial and recurrent theme in the Scriptures where we repeatedly learn of Israel's God as the deity who delivered them from Egyptian slavery and Babylonian exile, who opposed Israelite religious and political empire building that replicated these and later regimes, and who would dismantle current Roman and subsequent tyrannies.<sup>497</sup>

Deliverance from slavery and freedom from exile revealed a divine parenting that was present with a suffering people (cf. a maternal theme in Exodus 2 and paternal in 3:13–21, 4:18ff; Deuteronomy 32:6, 7. Also Isaiah 9:6, 45:9ff, 51:2, 63:16, 64:8, 66:13).

The attributes or properties of the divine persons can sound clinical and abstract until considered as divine attitudes informing divine behaviours in difficult and disastrous circumstances – actions in history that reveal the *one-in-essence, will and agency of the tripersonal, distinct, perichoretic relations* of God as God works for the renewal and welfare of all creation and its ever-vulnerable humanity.

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<sup>496</sup> Richard B. Hays, 'Richard Hays Retirement Lecture: 'A Dark Fruition: Waiting in Hope'', Duke Divinity School, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W-3IBxEGMs>.

<sup>497</sup> Cf. my studies on the Book of Revelation, *One in Love and Freedom*, in Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom*, 67–123. Also, *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*

## The subversive tripersonal God

### *I am the strange woman*

This divine subversion of human ego and ambition reveals something of the *intra-trinitarian other-person centred relations* and *other-person centred trinitarian relations with creation and its humanity* revealed in and by God's Son and Spirit. It discloses the truth that God's *intra-personal relations* void any basis for monadic modalism or non-monotheistic tritheism.

I wrote my poem, *I am the strange woman (of Proverbs 1 to 9)*, with aspects of this theme in mind.<sup>498</sup> Corrupting the outward looking fruits of the Holy Spirit is part of the discriminatory practices that Paul opposes in Galatians 3:27. Indulging in self-absorbed love, self-centred joy, and other sour 'fruits' that destructively curl inwards rather than the fruits of the Holy Spirit which abundantly spiral outwards is aligned with false claims that Galatians 3:27 only concerns *entry* into Christ and that Paul's *no longer* themes in that verse no longer apply once *anyone is in Christ*.

I suspect that one reason why there appears to be minimal, if any, emphasis on God the Father, on *paterology* (or *pateriology*), is that Jesus' teaching, along with that in the epistles, reveals a radically different fatherhood to that which prevailed in the first century and which continues to dominate many discourses today.

Jesus' and the Epistles' theologies of fatherhood populate passages like Psalm 2 with themes of sacrifice and service rather than superiority and strength. They profile generosity and goodness rather than greatness and grandeur. They elicit anthems that testify to the tri-personal, other-person centred *wonder-full God*.

While Christendom has aligned God's fatherhood with the political and religious *status quo*, the biblical teaching is that God is Father and that Father-God opposes self-aggrandising and self-exalting social and personal patriarchy. This false alignment attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct the biblical revelation of divine parenting. Perhaps it is time for rethinking trinitarian teaching on God the Father.

### *One triune God*

As God's 'two hands' – God's Son and Spirit – reveal each other and Father-God, Arianism collapses along with every human empire based on itself and its own glory. Any form of intra-trinitarian hierarchy fails the simple criteria of mutual honouring and serving, of a perichoretic oneness of will, purpose and agency.

Any perverse anthropological application of divine ordering – where order is used to describe relational power differentiations – contradicts what distinguishes the triune God from human persons and communities.<sup>499</sup> The Father is Father of the

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<sup>498</sup> *Learning to Love Wisdom*, 102, 103.

<sup>499</sup> *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*, 43–126.

Son and the Spirit, and always with the Son and the Spirit. The Son is the Son of the Father and the Spirit, and always with them, and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and always with them.

God's oneness of essence is revealed in the *perichoretic, koinonia* of the intra-trinitarian relations where mutual dependence discloses reciprocal honouring, giving, serving and receiving. However helpful *ordering* statements might appear, use of *ordinal* notions almost inevitably lead to emphases on power, priority and primacy. The divine monarchy is of one God, with the monarchy of each divine person revealed in assigning monarchy to the other divine persons.

There is a need, in reflecting on the early church theologians and their Creeds, to be both appreciative of these formulations and those who developed them with humility, as well as being respectfully alert to their deficiencies in depicting the way the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are inter-related and inter-dependent within the immanent and economic being and actions of God.

The Son is eternally begotten and fully human, and not just a better person, and the other-than-creation divinely spirated Holy Spirit is not an intrinsic essence in society or creation. Moreover, the begottenness and incarnation of the Son and the procession and giving of the Spirit are of eternal *persons* impacting the ongoing present with eschatological intent and without intra-trinitarian subordination.

I have made some commentary on creation in this book, but have written little about human families and the triune God. McGowin helpfully comments that

from a theological point of view, it seems to me that humans find themselves in families because humans are made for communion. We know we're made for communion because we've been made in the image of God.

But that [communion] is an image of God's own life. God's inner life is one of communion between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, [of] distinct persons who are one in essence and one in will and an agency, and yet distinct.

Now, of course, humans are not God. None of us are persons of the Trinity, and we don't share our essence in the same way that the persons of the Trinity do. But I think we're made for communion to at least analogously image that community in our relations. And the place where we're meant to learn that is in our family.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Emily McGowin, 'Family and Mutuality,' CBE International (Christians for Biblical Equality), <https://mutualmatters.podbean.com/e/home-church-and-world-family-and-mutuality-with-rev-dr-emily-mcgowin/>.

## An outline in review

### *Early Explorations*

Packer's propitiation-adoption perspective on trinitarian thought profiles divine attributes and persons. Propitiation and adoption reference God's mercy and triune being. They reveal God's immanent tripersonal essence in and by God's economic actions.

Packer's refutation of Letham's critique seems reasonable, especially in the light of Packer's other writings. Packer's deep biblical theology, his insights from Orr about culture, creation and redemption, and his interest in connecting with a diversity of contemporary theologians, speak of a confidence in trinitarian perspectives that was not dogmatically constricted.

Chadwick and Smail outline different alternatives to a narrow Logos-Christology. Their Spirit-Christologies centre on the person and work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' incarnation – in his birth, ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension – and subsequently at Pentecost in the mutual triune initiatives of the Father, risen and ascended Son, and Holy Spirit, and so in the life of the church and in God's mission for creational renewal.

Chadwick's Spirit-Christology can be seen as a Christological-pneumatology as he emphasised the action of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation and in the subsequent work of the ascended Messiah Jesus at and since Pentecost. His perspectives provide the context for his *promise theology*, by which, as Bailey quotes him,

the miracle of the Incarnation [is] duplicated, multiplied, and perpetuated in Christ's believing people. For the Son a body was prepared, but the Spirit is incarnate in the believer, and dwells in the bodies of all that believe.<sup>501</sup>

Smail's emphasis on the reciprocal relationship of Jesus as the Son of God with the Holy Spirit, and that they work for and witness to God the Father's glory, is a significant strength in his theology. His application of his trinitarian insights to the Nicene Creed and its added *filioque* clause adds value to his thinking.

Smail's relational trinitarian theology is enriched by focusing on Jesus' ministry in a cross-centred rather than triumph-oriented framework. The trinitarian divine life revealed in the atonement and at Pentecost indicates, for Smail, the primacy of the Father in the Son's generation and the Spirit's spiration, as well as the mutual inter-dependencies of the Son and the Spirit.

At the heart of Smail's theology was both a response to cultural modernity and a desire to avoid a glory-based theology and ministry by preferencing love to power

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<sup>501</sup> Bailey, "Wesleyan Spirit-Christology: Inspiration from the Theology of Samuel Chadwick.", 14, see Chadwick, *Humanity and God*, 190.

and giving to receiving. One of the main ways by which he sought to achieve this goal was by using a theology of eternal subordination of the Son.

Smail's approach focuses on obedience rather than communion, and poorly aligns suffering with the redemptive sufferings of Jesus. Parson's critique reframes Smail's thinking so that its valuable insights can be better appreciated. Exploring the relationships between the economic and immanent Trinity, and the connections between divine procession and generation and mission, leads to more clarity about the oneness of divine monarchy and the way it is revealed in the three persons of the trinity. Parson's quote of Nazianzen is valuable in this context.

This brief review of Smail's thinking cycles back to his original concerns about seeing triune gifting in trinitarian relationships and God's redemptive purposes. The Father, for Smail, is source and goal, working in and through the Son and by the Holy Spirit, who work together in achieving God's creation-reconciling goals.

### ***Further Learning***

Macleod clarifies the essential considerations of trinitarian theology and focuses them on worshipping Jesus as Lord and Saviour. His concerns about Arianism and anything that fractures the intra-trinitarian oneness of God's being and tripersonal *perichoretic* relations are significant.

His care in describing terminology provides a positive perspective on the insights generated from reading Packer, Chadwick and Smail. He points out that *logos-only* concepts can deny God *is* love and miss the *withness* of intra-trinitarian relationships. His emphasis on *autotheos* helps eliminate thoughts about eternal subordination and assists in focusing on *homoousios*, *filioque* and *perichoresis*.

Macleod delineates differences between divine and human generation but follows the pattern of Western Christianity in saying little about the trinitarian nature of the Spirit's relations. This weakens his affirmation about the basic differences between divine and human order and authority. Nonetheless, he returns to the theme of worship throughout his writings, highlighting the way the biblical writers reflected on the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Gunton richly develops much that is inherent in both Macleod's and Letham's approaches to trinitarian theology, and provides trinitarian insights on social, political, cultural and ecclesiological concerns. Gunton's focus on triune being in communion is informed by and informs his understandings of the specific actions of God in creation, redemption and restoration.

God's revelation in Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, according to Gunton, indicates that God's works are undivided revelations of God's attributes, including love. Economic and immanent trinitarian accounts are therefore interconnected and inter-related but distinguishable.

Letham's comments on feminism and his criticisms of Packer and Giles diminish his otherwise valuable book. He has, nonetheless, made a substantial contribution to trinitarian theology, including in his final section on divinisation. *Contra* Betz, I see an appropriate balance between God's unity and triunity in his writing. Letham provides a rich and positive narrative about God's being and work that exposes the core weaknesses of modalism and tritheism.

### *Related Readings*

Trinitarian theology has significant implications for human relationships, worship and beliefs in the atoning actions of God in Jesus Christ. If human relationships are ontologically hierarchical and so determine roles and function by persons rather than responsibilities, then abusive tyrannies led by Narcissistic leaders, obsessed by a self-declared command-obey regime where consent is replaced with conquest, can readily flourish. Similarly, if worship is promoted as a do-as-I-say activity, fundamentally contrary to Torrance's trinitarian profile, then the same kinds of dysfunctional, destructive outcomes are likely. Thirdly, if atonement theologies are characterised by divine violence and other-person sacrifice, then well-being, community growth and environmental care are probably ignored.

Giles' trinitarian theology has assisted me in working through some of my concerns about the discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of women in evangelical churches. It has provided me with fresh insights regarding the eternal generation of the Son, and that the Son's relation to the Father does not involve the Son's eternal subordination to the Father. It has also helped me reject male privileged and dominating efforts that insist on hierarchies which subordinate women to men in marriage, ministry and community participation.

Worship, for Torrance, is a whole person relationship with God, centred on the mediation of Jesus Christ with God the Father in the Holy Spirit. Jesus mediates God to us, and, as ascended Lord, mediates us to God. These two mediations are enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ and in humanity.

His emphasis on trinitarian worship provides insights into the way unitarian approaches leave worshippers relying on their own efforts rather than on the mediatorial, high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ *with* the Father, in and by the Holy Spirit. This re-orientation of attitude and mind-set adds value to our life as God's family, including in baptism and the eucharist.

Johnson includes chapters on trinitarian foundations and divine attributes before one on christology and another on the incarnation. He emphasises that atonement is best considered as a triune action where the persons are in harmony and the divine attributes align. An eschatological focus in reflecting on the atonement helps develop a panoramic awareness of God's intent to realise God's purposes by transforming and renewing creation and bringing humanity into rich and fulfilling relationships with God's-self and each other.

## Worship and wonder

*James B. Torrance*

James Torrance's theology is more than a treatise on trinitarian concerns. His writing focused on triune, Christ-centred worship, whether in his hymn, his book on *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* or his extensive contribution to *The Forgotten Trinity, The British Council of Churches Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*.<sup>502</sup>

I know not how to pray, O Lord,  
So weak and frail am I.  
Lord Jesus to Your outstretched arms  
In love I daily fly,  
For You have prayed for me.

I know not how to pray, O Lord,  
O'erwhelmed by grief am I,  
Lord Jesus in Your wondrous love  
You hear my anxious cry  
And ever pray for me.

I know not how to pray, O Lord,  
For full of tears and pain  
I groan, yet in my soul, I know  
My cry is not in vain.  
O teach me how to pray!

Although I know not how to pray,  
Your Spirit intercedes,  
Convincing me of pardoned sin;  
For me in love He pleads  
And teaches me to pray.

O take my wordless sighs and fears  
And make my prayers Your own.  
O put Your prayer within my lips  
And lead me to God's throne  
That I may love like You.

O draw me to Your Father's heart,  
Lord Jesus, when I pray,  
And whisper in my troubled ear,  
'Your sins are washed away.  
Come home with Me today!'

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<sup>502</sup> Reprinted from *New Creation Hymn Book*, 347; Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*; Torrance and Carras, *Forgotten Trinity, The: The B.C.C. (British Council of Churches) Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today- Report, Study Guide and a Selection of Papers*.

At home within our Father's house,  
Your Father, Lord, and mine,  
I'm lifted up by Your embrace  
To share in love divine  
Which floods my heart with joy.

Transfigured by Your glory, Lord,  
Renewed in heart and mind,  
I'll sing angelic songs of praise  
With joy which all can find  
In You alone, O Lord.

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### *Geoffrey Bingham*

I have benefitted from and appreciated Geoffrey Bingham's emphasis on and delight in trinitarian worship while having different perspectives on aspects of his approach to Nicene theologies.<sup>503</sup>

These poems maintain their original published syntax, including Bingham's use of male-privileged terminology. Those, who like me, use non-gendered inclusive language, are encouraged to rephrase his work where necessary.

Oh Father! Oh Father! we come in our wonder,  
To join with the angels who sang at His birth.  
We learn the great anthem they sang from the glory  
To shepherds who trembled with joy on the earth.

You sent Your great angel to speak to the virgin,  
You took the sweet maiden You chose in Your grace.  
She bore our dear Sovereign – the scion of Jesse –

Our loving Redeemer, the King of our race.  
To Mary and Joseph the angels brought tidings,  
The tidings the prophets had ever foretold;  
The hope of the ages was born in a manger,

The news of His coming was heard in the fold.  
The sword of His sorrow pierced Mary His mother,  
The fire of baptism raged in His soul.  
The Cross and its suff'ring, the Tomb and its silence,

The Father had planned as His love's highest goal.  
Come Mary and Joseph, come Simon and Anna!  
Come Magi and shepherds, come heaven and earth!  
Come all the new-born of all the creation!

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<sup>503</sup> Priest, *Geoffrey Bingham – Theologian and Troubadour*; *Geoffrey Bingham – Theologian and Troubadour Music Supplement* (2025); Reprinted from *New Creation Hymn Book*, 61, 41, 282, 260, 245. Also, Don Priest, *Songs of Joy and Peace* (2025).

Trinity – Worship and Wonder

Shout praise to the Father for Jesus' dear birth!  
Raise louder and louder the anthem of wonder:  
All creatures cry 'Glory!' to Yahweh's great grace!  
All nations fall down to the praise of His glory,  
Cry, 'Jesus is born the King of our race!'

*© 1984 Geoffrey Bingham. Used by permission.*

You are our Father, loving God!  
The Sun and Sum of all our soul;  
You are the Source of all our life,  
You are our Sunset and our Goal.  
Our heart and mind are full in You  
Who are our birth and end-in-view.

Oh Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Your wisdom was – us to create;  
All love, truth, good and holiness  
Flowed from Your loving heart so great;  
You shaped us in Your likeness true  
That we might live and grow like You.

The sadness of our sinful choice,  
The hardness of unthankful hearts,  
The sin that chained its captive souls  
Brought sorrow into all our parts.  
Apart from You is darkness dread,  
And we are living as the dead.

Oh Christ of God, You then appeared,  
You brought sweet healing from Your balm –  
The blood that on the Cross You shed  
To save us from all hell and harm –  
The cleansing that this blood has brought,  
So long our souls in pain had sought.

Oh Spirit of the living God,  
Oh Spirit dear – so holy, true –  
Our hearts are melted in the love  
That flows within our hearts from You.  
The Father clearly now we see,  
And Son – who sets our spirits free.

Oh Holy Father, low we bend;  
Through Holy Son we come to You.  
Oh Holy Spirit, keep us fresh,  
And strong and rich and free in You.  
Oh God of love, possess our hearts,  
Fill us to full in all our parts.

Trinity – Worship and Wonder

Rise, all creation! Rise and sing  
The glories of our God and King,  
Let heart and soul, and mind rejoice,  
We live in Him who is our choice.  
We live in Him to endless days,  
Who planned our acts and all our ways.

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Immanuel! Immanuel!  
Our hearts are opened to You;  
We see Your flesh in Mary's womb,  
And know Your love is usward.  
We cannot tell the glory left  
Or if Your angels wholly wept.

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
God in our flesh forever,  
You walk our streets, and feel our pain  
With love that none can sever.  
Our eyes had never seen our God  
Nor known that He would shed His blood.

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
The prophets sang Your coming,  
They said that God would dwell with Man  
That we might see His loving,  
Oh, how our hearts and minds are dazed,  
Whilst all creation stares, amazed.

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
We see Your eyes of pity,  
We watch You walk in Spirit's power  
In hamlet, vale and city.  
We see the Father's glory near  
And know His Presence all so dear.

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
The Spirit dwells within You.  
He shows His power and love to all  
In fruit You bear abundant.  
Ah Triune God, we see You One  
In this eternal holy Son.

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
The mystery of the Godhead  
Is plain for us in all You do  
And say as You lead homeward.  
Great Shepherd of the needy flock  
You lead us to the living Rock.

Trinity – Worship and Wonder

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
Our great High-Priest in heaven,  
You intercede as man for us  
And lead our worship ever.  
Our hearts are one with You above  
Whilst here we tell the world Your love.

Immanuel! Immanuel!  
The God who loves forever,  
The sinful race made new in You,  
Dear Father, Son and Spirit,  
The whole ecclesia sings Your praise  
As priests unto their God, always.

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Time was when spirit, fallen, human,  
Full certain of its innate powers,  
Living within its world of idols,  
And shaping out its ego hours.  
The Father gave the Son to suffer,  
The Spirit led Him to that Tree  
And aided Him to rise in power  
And rule as Lord eternally.

Then came the pain of self and idols,  
Then came the anguish, horror, fear.  
The Wind was blowing in His mercy,  
A Voice to dread and yet so dear.  
The Voice spoke of the grace of glory,  
The Cross that purifies the mind  
And heart and spirit – all its story –  
To give the peace the heart must find.

Ah! Spirit gentle, Spirit hallowed,  
Who takes this heart so sinful, weak,  
And makes it pure and makes it holy  
And turns the wilful into meek:  
You came – the gift of Holy Father;  
You came – the gift of loving Son;  
You purified the heart from evil  
And made the shattered spirit one.

You lead the weak in holy power;  
You intercede within the heart;  
You cause us to cry 'Father! Abba!'  
Ah! You, who never will depart.  
You cause us to share all the glory,  
Of all the grace and all the love.  
And when we've told the matchless story  
You take us to our home above.

Trinity – Worship and Wonder

Ah! Spirit of our Holy Father,  
Ah! Spirit of the loving Son,  
Through You we'll sing the praise forever  
Of You, the glorious Triune One.

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Holy Father, in Your mercy  
You draw us to worship You:  
By Your love in full adoring  
With the heart that You made new.  
Abba Father! How we love You  
In our worship wholly true.

Blessèd Son! Oh blessèd Saviour!  
Blessèd Brother! Holy Lord!  
To the Father all our worship  
Is through You who are the Word.  
Blessèd Priest who, in the sanctuary,  
Helps us worship Father God.

Holy Spirit! God Eternal!  
By Your power and uttered Word  
We adore the Son and Father,  
Worship full the Triune God.  
Pentecost has won our worship  
Through the power of Christ's dear blood.

Through the Holy City's portals  
Stream the nations and the tribes,  
God and Man in glory seated,  
One forever, loosed from strife,  
Freed of guilt and wounds by healing  
Leaves plucked from the tree of life.

With the hosts of heavenly creatures  
One with You, Your children cry,  
Singing, 'Glory, power and honour,  
God of love eternally,  
You who ever live within us  
Granting immortality!'

Triune God! Eternal Glory!  
Filled our spirits are to raise  
Songs and psalms of adoration,  
Praise and worship all our days:  
To Your Persons in Your Oneness  
Flow eternal, endless lays.

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## Conversations along the way

*Conversations along the way* records ideas and perspectives exploring biblical themes written over many years as rough drafts or more revised documents. I hope my thoughts may be enriching and encouraging. Where my writing suggests ideas and frameworks that vary from those held by other Christians, our common faith can keep us in community and help us explore and reconcile our differences. I hope readers with non-theistic and/or secular understandings can find some helpful common values, even though I have used what might seem to be merely a discussion of literary narratives, symbols, and imaginations. Those with other religious belief systems may find fresh insights by sharing in my journey of faith-seeking-understanding, including where collisions of thought and practice emerge. To all readers, please forgive my short-comings and my inevitable and unhelpful biases, and may your reading bring you peace, joy, and hope.

### In this series

*Learning to Love Wisdom* includes a version of my Master of Theological Studies dissertation while *In Triune Community* and *Living in Love and Freedom* cover earlier and later ministry resources.

*Meditations on Hope and Peace* and *Meditations on Resilience and Renewal 1 and 2* are edited collections of sermon preparation notes. *Living Love, Travelling Together* and *Towards Eternity* include edited study series plus reflections. *Meditations on Hope and Peace* and *Living Love* were written first.

*Redefining* outlines some of my understandings of *Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies*, and *Community and Leadership*. *Trinity – Worship and Wonder* reviews literature that has influenced my trinitarian theology.

*Geoffrey Bingham – Theologian and Troubadour* with separate *Music Supplement* considers themes in his theology through the lens of his song-poems. *A Quiet Revival Reviewed* responds to a book about his life and ministry.

*Songs of Joy and Peace* is a collection of my music with reflections. *The Vinedresser Revisited* and *On Earth as in Heaven* respond to documentation about my involvement in church and related groups.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> *In Triune Community; Learning to Love Wisdom; Living in Love and Freedom; Meditations on Resilience and Renewal*, 2; *ibid.*, 1; Priest, *Meditations on Hope and Peace; Towards Eternity; Travelling Together; Living Love; Trinity – Worship and Wonder* (2025); *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry; Songs of Joy and Peace; On Earth as in Heaven – Lay Ministry with Martin Bleby* (2024); *A Quiet Revival Reviewed – a Response to a Quiet Revival, Geoffrey Bingham in Life and Ministry by Martin Bleby* (2022); *Vinedresser Revisited, The – a Response to The Vinedresser, an Anglican Meets Wrath and Grace by Martin Bleby* (2019).

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful for Geoffrey Bingham's mentoring, encouragement and affirmation of my theological learning and ministry from 1972 to 2009 while participating in a wide range of practical, teaching and pastoral activities.

I appreciated studying my first academic theology topic in 2000 with Hector Morrison, founding faculty member in 1994 and Principal of the Highlands Theological College of the University of Highlands and Islands from 2009 to 2025, and have valued contact with him since 1998.

I am thankful for Craig Bailey's initiative, encouragement and assistance in 2012 (as an Adelaide College of Divinity lecturer) in my enrolling for and successfully studying the Master of Theological Studies after also successfully completing a Master of Education (Leadership and Management), both at Flinders University.

I am thankful for my educational and theological studies, with the opportunities they provided to learn from my lecturers, including Denis Edwards' lectures on *God the Trinity* and Liz Boase's supervision of my theological studies dissertation. I value the wisdom I gained from reading a range of authors, and from subsequently accessing online resources.

My lay ministry and my educational leadership and teaching would have been greatly diminished without the practical and perceptive wisdom of my family. I am very thankful for the rich insights into life and faith I have received from my parents and parents-in-law and our daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren.

The encouragement, kindness and generosity of Bev, my wife, has led me to a much deeper awareness of God and his mercy, grace and peace, and to a greater appreciation of the ways human community enhances our lives together. This book results from and has enabled several small steps forward.

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*Trinity – Worship and Wonder* shares some of my understanding of and appreciation for the trinitarian theologies of nine theologians. I respond to outlines of their theologies with the help of reviews of their books and articles. *Trinity – Worship and Wonder* considers a range of resources that I have found helpful as I have tried to be more aware of the faith, social and cultural dynamics associated with trinitarian theology.

I have found this long-term personal learning journey a far from purely conceptual one. The personal and relational themes, the confronting life-style challenges, the emotional and cognitive impacts, and the enriching and encouraging beliefs about core values, have repeatedly slowed down my reading and led to times of meaningful meditation and renewing reflection.