

decenter self, decenter ethics, and decenter society, thus giving rise to conflict, potential violence, and despair in society. Here Thiselton argues that the postmodern self, however, stands closer to biblical realism than the illusory optimism of modernity's self about human nature and society (130). Postmodern self can find hope, though, only in the context of a biblical theology of promise. In the context of promise, a new horizon is formed in which the postmodern self, which has "a constructed identity," can be "reconstituted."

For Thiselton, acting in the present on the basis of that which is yet to come constitutes a faith that has self-transforming effects. It transforms the self because it "reconstitutes self-identity" as no longer the passive victim of forces of the past which "situated" it within a network of pre-given roles and performances, but opens out a new future in which new purpose brings a "point" to its life. "

The self perceives a call and its value as one-who-is-loved within the larger narrative plot of God's loving purposes for the world, for society, and for the self" (160). The "image of Christ" assumes a fundamental role in relation to future promise. To be transformed into "the image of Christ" and to become "like him" constitute the heart of the divine promise which lifts the self out of its predefined situatedness and beckons from "beyond" to a new future (153).

This creative transformation comes through the Holy Spirit, who transposes self-interest into love for others and for the Other (154). The personhood of God-as-Trinity provides the framework for a dialectic of self-identity and relation to the "other." In spite of the excellent ideas in this section, Thiselton's theological development of promise, Holy Spirit, and the personhood of Trinity proves rather vague in comparison to the in-depth, philosophical discussions of earlier sections. His lack of specificity here, unfortunately, is in keeping with much of the current dialogue on either of these issues, and again reflects an existentialism and neo-orthodox perspective of Scripture. At the most, in his own terms, he reaches "toward a theology of promise." This is a significant discussion on the post-modern understanding of self, but the solutions it advances, while in principle correct, need more biblical structure and concreteness.

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Torrance, Thomas F. *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons*.
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As an example of doctrine-as-explanation (in contrast to, say, doctrine-as-grammar), Thomas Torrance's *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons* is a tour de force. Torrance, who is professor emeritus at the University of Edinburgh, is concerned that the Protestant doctrine of God no longer succumb to the tendency to wrongly conceive God's tri-unity *first* in terms of the divine essence and only *subsequently* in terms of the divine Persons (112). Torrance offers a two-fold conception of divine Being, as personal and perichoretic, to make this corrective.

Torrance begins with the insistence that the evangelical, or economic, trinity is identical with the immanent, or ontological, trinity (133). Thus, following Karl

Barth, the revelation of God in Christ as Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness factually indicates the same triadic ratio that characterizes God's intrinsic Being (32). The difficulty here, of course, is to avoid simply reproducing the tritheism that seems implicit in all Platonic formulations of the Trinity, in which *ousia* relates to *hypostasis* as universal to particular. However, Torrance claims to have unearthed an "onto-personal" conception of Being, which escapes tritheism, in the line of thought that stretches from Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria to Epiphanius and Gregory of Nazianzus. While earlier patristic doctrine treated *hypostasis* (a relational term) as synonymous with *ousia* (a static term), subsequent thinkers beginning with Athanasius conceived the "ontic relations" between the divine Persons as *belonging to what they are* as Persons (156-157). Torrance concludes, "The relations between the divine Persons are not just modes of existence but hypostatic interrelations which belong intrinsically to what Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coinherently in themselves and in their mutual objective relations with and for one another. These relations subsisting between them are just as substantial as what they are unchangeably in themselves and by themselves" (157). The upshot of this bit of conceptual archeology lies in Torrance's conclusion that God's Being is not static and impersonal (as Greek philosophy demanded) but *personal*: God's Being cannot but be spoken of in the same breath as God's triadic Personality, *and vice versa* (128).

Torrance's second corrective to the doctrine of the Trinity is an emphasis on the soteriological necessity of God's *perichoresis*. The form of Athanasius's christological argument (namely, that the efficacy of salvation hangs upon the full divinity of the Son), applies simultaneously to the Father and the Spirit. Thus, "unless the Being and Activity of the Spirit are identical with the Being and Activity of the Father and the Son, we are not saved" (169). The mutual coinherence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit excludes any consideration that "some attributes and activities common to the whole Trinity may be specially assigned or 'appropriated' to one Person rather than another in order to reveal his distinctive hypostatic character" (200). Rather, each Person of the Godhead is the onto-relational source (which is *not* to say the causal or temporal origin) of qualities that apply uniformly to the whole. For example, the Holy Spirit is the onto-relational source for the "spiritness" of the Godhead by which God *as a whole* imbues creation with life, or spiritual power. God as a whole acts as spirit toward creation just as God as a whole acts as father toward creation. In this way God's activity outside the Godhead is not only indivisible (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*); it is an important analogy to intra-trinitarian relations (140, 215, 218-220, 243).

Torrance provides his theses with strong historical support derived mainly from a careful exegesis of Athanasius's writings. Torrance's approach is historical in a second way as well. Like his forebear Barth, Torrance aspires to an intentionally "circular" methodological holism (7), or "depth exegesis" (37-50), that aims to avoid grounding theology on any nontheological source. In his eyes, revelation provides its own frame of reference for intelligibility (43). That is to say, there is no basis for knowledge of God prior to that knowledge of God. This implies, first, that one's character must be adequated by God's Spirit to the task

of theology (11, 34, 61-62, 83, 88, 99-100, 106, 127). Only such a person can attain to the "mystery of godliness," which Torrance identifies as the ability to think in a trinitarian way (74). But, second, this means that just as God cannot be analyzed into parts (*simplicitas Dei*), so too knowledge of God is of a piece; each Person of the Godhead, being internally related to the others, can be known only to the extent one understands the other two, and thus to the extent one understands the whole (174). In this sense the Trinity can be likened to the three-dimensional image which emerges from a stereoscope: only by simultaneous focus on each of the similar, but necessarily *different*, pictures can the accurate image of the whole be perceived (47).

The difficult task of mastering this difficult book is made more onerous by the persistence of a number of problems throughout. For example, after establishing that intra-trinitarian *relations* belong to the *nature* of each Person and thus to the Being of the whole Godhead (surely a form of idealism), it becomes very difficult to imagine on what grounds Torrance can assert that the relations of God *ad extra* do *not* belong to God's nature. In other words, how can it be that Pentecost manifested a change in God's relations with creation, but *not* a change in God's "nature" (238)? This inconsistency renders ambiguous the cash value of his notion of "onto-personal" Being.

However, a more glaring difficulty, it seems to me, is the lack of nuance in Torrance's theological use of language. First, Torrance claims that "theological concepts are used aright when we do not think the concepts themselves, thereby identifying them with the truth, but think through them of the realities or truths which they are meant to intend beyond themselves" (194). But how can we ever be certain we are getting things right? On the presupposition that the Holy Spirit *compels* an adequate transformation of an individual's consciousness (34, 61-62)? Perhaps. On the grounds that there *must* be an *analogia relationis* between God's dealings with creation and his intra-trinitarian relations (243)? Maybe. But these ways of putting the matter turn the clock backwards to the early twentieth century, when conservatives debated liberals over the mechanism of theological language; a debate, incidentally, that was never satisfactorily settled in these terms and, moreover, that predated Barth's own thoughts on the matter.

Second, and even more troubling to this reviewer, is Torrance's inattention to the irreducibly social character of theological language and belief. Nowhere does Torrance discuss the role that participation in the believing community's corporate life plays in understanding claims about God. So Torrance cites the apostle Thomas's ascription of lordship to Jesus as if that were intelligible apart from the political context in which it was written. But early readers of John's Gospel would not naturally hear "my Lord and my God" as an ontological claim about the identity of Jesus Christ with Yahweh (51-53). Rather, they would recognize in these words the very *Dominus et Deus noster* that Domitian demanded be rendered unto *him!* Thus Thomas's claim is none other than a declaration of allegiance to a new, and in Rome's eyes subversive, *polis* called the church. Similarly, it may have been more fruitful for Torrance to consider *perichoresis* as a *grammatical* remark that gets its sense from the social solidarity that constitutes the Body of Christ than as a meta-scientific term that purportedly explains God's

intrinsically trinitarian nature (88-111). Sadly, Torrance appears unable to suggest any way in which *the church* is the foundation of doctrinal truth (1 Tim. 3:15), not the other way around.

Torrance may very well be correct that contemporary Western theology lacks the conceptual resources for correctly conceiving God. But it is not clear that such resources can be supplied by a meticulous explanation of ancient vocabulary that does not attend to the communal form of life which gave this vocabulary its original sense. In the end, Torrance may simply have invented a new language (using old words), the language of *onto-personality* and *perichoresis*, which is grounded in contemporary scientific culture rather than in the praxis of first-century faith. The question remains, therefore, whether fluency in *this* language ought to be preferred over the biblical declaration, "My Lord and my God."

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