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AMO UT INTELLIGAM (I LOVE SO THAT I MAY UNDERSTAND): THE ROLE OF LOVE IN T.F. TORRANCE'S THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

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Most contemporary discussions about theological epistemology have focused upon discussions about foundationalism, coherentism, realism, anti-realism, and basic beliefs, among other topics. However, with a few exceptions, one topic that has received noticeably little attention is the role that love plays in our knowledge of God. This essay turns to the work of T.F. Torrance to show how love may play a crucial role in our theological epistemology.

Here I show that Torrance's understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in atonement provides us with the tools to form a theological epistemology grounded in the concept of love. I begin by providing a brief overview of Torrance's epistemology which features two important principles: 1) all genuine knowledge involves a cognitive union of the mind with its object and 2) knowledge of an object is only in accordance with that object's nature. Having examined Torrance's epistemology, I then provide a brief outline of Torrance's theory of atonement. I proceed to address the first principle and explore the Holy Spirit's role in enabling believers to enter the union of love necessary to know God. Following this I turn to the second principle and argue that given God's loving nature we must approach God in love and in a loving manner in order to know him. Furthermore, I show how the Holy Spirit enables us to approach God in love. I conclude by noting some of the important implications these principles have for the task of theology.

1. TORRANCE'S THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Torrance is notorious for presenting an epistemology which is dense and difficult to understand.¹ In fact not a few trees have been killed in

¹ Torrance has written much on the subject of theological epistemology, for some examples see T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press); T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); T.F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (New York:

attempts to clarify his ‘philosophy of theological science.’² However, Torrance’s clearest articulation of his epistemology can be found in *The Mediation of Christ*. There Torrance begins his discussion of the mediating work of Christ by outlining what he takes to be a major epistemological problem. According to Torrance the epistemological problem is that ‘aspects of reality that are naturally integrated have been torn apart from each other, with damaging effect in different areas of knowledge.’³ This means that in the areas of philosophy and science ‘the knowledge of reality was artificially cut short at appearances and what we can logically deduce from our critical observations of them.’⁴ In essence the problem is that an inadequate theory of how form is integrated in knowing has led to an overly analytic, deductive, abstract, mechanistic way of knowing.⁵ Torrance believes that this abstract and mechanistic way of knowing is best exemplified in the physical sciences. For instance, Isaac Newton viewed science as an inquiry into the causal relations between material realities, then on the basis of ‘empirical data’ he deduced or abstracted natural laws. One problem with this approach was that Newton could not deduce or abstract theoretical elements (like absolute time or space) from observing causation. Another problem with this approach was that the analytic isolation of empirical data tends to efface (or ignore) complex relations between things that are defining or characteristic of what those

Bloomsbury, 2000); T.F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

- ² See the following examples: E. Colyer, ‘The Integration of Form in Theology’, in *How to Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2001). Chs. 2–4 in M. Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T.F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013). T. McCall, ‘Ronald Thiemann, Thomas Torrance and Epistemological Doctrines of Revelation’, *IJST* 6 (2004), 148–68. B. Myers, ‘The Stratification of Knowledge in the Thought of T.F. Torrance’, *SJT* 61 (2008), 1–5. P.M. Achtemeier, ‘The Truth of Tradition: Critical Realism in the Thought of Alexander Alasdair MacIntyre and T.F. Torrance’, *SJT* 47 (1996), 355–74. J.D. Morrison, ‘Heidegger, Correspondence Truth and the Realist Theology of Thomas Forsyth Torrance’, *EVQ* 69 (1997), 139–55.
- ³ T.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, Co: Helmers and Howard Publishers, 1992), p. 1.
- ⁴ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 1.
- ⁵ Colyer provides a Torrancean account of how form and knowledge were disintegrated in the Early Modern Period. He traces this dualistic split beginning with Rene Descartes, moving to Isaac Newton, David Hume, and culminating in the work of Kant. See Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology*, pp. 325–31.

realities are. However, according to Torrance some scientists like James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein have turned away from ‘severely analytical and abstractive modes of thought inherited from classical physics and observational science’ and have developed ‘dynamic, relational, and holistic ways of thinking more in accordance with the modes of connection and behavior actually found in nature.’⁶

The problem of analytic, abstract, mechanistic patterns of thought has also affected theology and biblical studies. For instance, consider certain strands of biblical studies which attempt to isolate various textual and pre-textual sources in order to arrive at ‘authentic historical data’ on which to construct a ‘historical Jesus.’⁷ This is the method of inquiry which scholars like the ones involved in the Jesus Seminar have employed. Yet there has also been a turn away from severely analytical and abstractive modes of thought in Biblical studies. Richard Horsley, for example, has argued for a relational-contextual approach to historical Jesus studies.⁸

1.1 Two Basic Principles of Knowledge

The notion that the nature or the form of a thing and the method of inquiry into that thing must somehow be integrated leads Torrance to assert two epistemological principles. The first principle is that ‘all genuine knowledge involves a cognitive union of the mind with its object, and calls for the removal of any estrangement or alienation that may obstruct or distort it.’⁹ Let us call this the Cognitive Union Principle (CUP). Torrance provides several examples of how the CUP is true. His first exam-

⁶ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 2.

⁷ ‘Various versions of this kind of approach tend to tear the natural cohesion of scripture (form in being) by severing the New Testament from the Old, breaking up the gospels into various fragmentary sources, and separating various books within the New Testament from one another [...] This analytic isolation of data effaces the intrinsic interrelations defining or characteristic of Jesus Christ and the gospel.’ Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, p. 347.

⁸ In *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel* Horsley says that a mechanistic, abstract, and atomistic approach to the study of Jesus, exemplified by the scholars in the Jesus Seminar, is problematic. The first problem with the abstract/atomistic approach is that nobody communicates to other people in ‘isolated sayings.’ The second problem is that the meaning of a saying or story always depends on its context. The third problem is that it fails to approach the gospels as whole stories, not just stories strung together. Instead of this approach Horsley says that we must discern a more adequate, relational, and contextual approach to Jesus as a significant figure. R. Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 67–78.

⁹ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 25.

ple comes from the study of mathematics. He cites the Swiss mathematician, Ferdinand Gonseth, who insisted that a good mathematician must be dedicated to integrity and rigor in mathematics.¹⁰ Gonseth believed this could not but affect the mathematician's whole character. Torrance agrees with Gonseth's claim and says that even in mathematics a certain 'sanctity' of mind is required. Torrance observes this 'sanctity of mind' in mathematicians and scientists such as Pascal, Maxwell, and Einstein. The second example Torrance gives is friendship. He says that we are not able to know other people except in so far as we enter into reciprocal relations with them through which we ourselves are affected.

The second principle is that 'we may know something only in accordance with its nature.'¹¹ Let us call this the Knowledge-Nature Principle (KNP). According to the KNP, the nature of that thing prescribes the mode of knowing appropriate to it and determines the way we ought to behave towards that object.¹² Personal beings, for instance, require personal modes of knowledge and behaviour.¹³ The way we come to know personal beings is through 'rapprochement or communion of minds characterized by mutual respect, trust, and love.'¹⁴ This is not only true of other human beings, it is also true of our knowledge of God. Thus, Torrance says, 'God may be known only in a godly way, in accordance with his nature as God.'¹⁵ God is by nature holy, loving, and worthy of praise thus to know God one must approach God in a holy, loving, and worshipful way. In other words, 'Knowing God requires cognitive union with him in which our whole being is affected by his love and holiness.'¹⁶

Having stated Torrance's two basic principles of knowledge, we shall now turn to his theology of atonement.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² E. Colyer, *The Nature of Doctrine in T.F. Torrance's Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), p. 15.

¹³ One might wonder how the KNP applies to non-personal objects, for instance, how does the KNP apply to knowledge of H₂O? Does this mean in order to know H₂O I must come to know it 'water-ly?' Like theological science, the natural sciences will have their own particular scientific requirements and material procedures which will be determined by the nature of the empirical objects they study. Like theological science, natural science must be faithful to the nature of the object or subject matter under investigation.

¹⁴ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

2. TORRANCE AND ATONEMENT

According to Torrance the person and work of Christ cannot be separated. For Torrance the hypostatic union (person) affects every aspect of atonement (work).¹⁷ In this section we will examine what Torrance has to say regarding three major aspects of atonement in the New Testament and how the hypostatic union is the driving force behind these aspects. Doing this will help bring clarity to his theological epistemology.

2.1 Three Aspects of Atonement in Torrance's Theology

The first aspect of atonement that Torrance treats in *Atonement* is justification.¹⁸ Let us briefly look at how this works in light of the hypostatic union. Torrance argues that justification is a twofold act. On God's side it means to judge or condemn in order to put right and it means to deem right. On humanity's side there are also two actions that must be performed, there must be confession of God's righteousness and there must be obedience to it. Torrance suggests that these four things are all fulfilled in Christ. In Christ humanity (in virtue of anhypostasis) acknowledges its sinfulness.¹⁹ In Christ, God judges humanity as sinful and puts it in the right therefore revealing his own righteousness. At the same time, in Christ, humanity (enhypostasis) offers up perfect obedience and faithfulness to God. Finally, in Christ, God deems humanity as being in the right. Thus, Jesus is the judge and the judged in one person.

The second aspect of atonement that Torrance examines is reconciliation. In contrast to atonement that justifies, being a legal relation, atonement as reconciliation is the recreating of the bond of union between God

¹⁷ For a more in-depth overview of Torrance's understanding of the relationship between the person and work of Christ see A. Radcliff, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ* (Eugene, Pickwick, 2016), pp. 53–73.

¹⁸ T.F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009).

¹⁹ *Anhypostasis* refers to the fact that the humanity of Jesus had no independent reality of its own apart from the incarnation of the Son and *enhypostasis* refers to the fact that the humanity of Jesus did have real personal being in the person of the Son as a result of the incarnation. These definitions presented by Torrance can be a bit confusing. However it is helpful to think of *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis* as referring to a shared human nature and an individual human nature respectively. In *Incarnation* Torrance says that *anhypostasia* refers to the fact that Jesus Christ took possession of human nature, the 'same or common human nature.' This means that there is a metaphysical solidarity between Jesus and all humanity. *Enhypostasia* on the other hand refers to the fact that Jesus came as an individual human being, having a personal mode of existence.

and humanity and humanity and God. In other words, atonement here means 'at-one-ment' both ontologically and relationally.²⁰

Torrance argues that 'reconciliation stresses the fact that God came down to our estate in order to assume us into fellowship with himself, and to effect such a oneness between the sinner and God, that the sinner is exalted to share with God in his own divine life.'²¹ We might ask, how does this happen? Once again, we must say that the key to answering this question is the hypostatic union. In Christ we have the turning of God to humanity and the turning of humanity to God. Unlike other human beings, however, Christ 'lives his life in perfect oneness with God, so achieving reconciliation of God to humanity and of humanity to God.'²²

The fact that reconciliation needs to occur between God and humanity implies that there is a breach between humanity and God. Christ comes to heal this existential breach. However, in order for reconciliation to occur, Christ must bring all of humanity into union with God. Christ must carry human nature as a whole (*anhypostasis*) and he must carry the human life in all its personal and existential reality (*enhypostasis*) into the life of God. In the hypostatic union, both of these elements are brought together so that the whole of human nature is reconciled to God. It must be stressed that for reconciliation to occur, the oneness of God and human nature must be carried through the entire life of Jesus. It must take place over the whole course of his life from birth to death.²³ The oneness of God and human nature is carried through to its completion in the resurrection, so that after the resurrection human nature and God are united in Christ for eternity.

The third aspect of atonement that Torrance treats is redemption. For Torrance redemption is a comprehensive term regarding our salvation through justification, expiation, and reconciliation in Christ. It is eschatological and teleological. It is the consummation of God's redeeming purposes in the new creation. It tells us that glorification is an essential part of our salvation.²⁴ According to Torrance this act of redemption is completed and actualized by the pouring out of the Spirit to the church so that the church can participate in the atonement that Christ has undertaken on its behalf. It is through the Spirit that we are incorporated into him; it is through the incarnation that God is incorporated into us. Thus,

²⁰ Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 137.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

at Pentecost, double incorporation occurs, meaning that redemption has been completed.²⁵

2.2 A Summary of Torrance's Atonement Theory

According to Torrance atonement is the recreation of the bond of union between God and humanity. The recreation of this bond is accomplished objectively through the hypostatic union (from incarnation through resurrection) but it is actualized subjectively for the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ and hence unites the human nature to divine nature. Having described Torrance's understanding of the atonement we are now in a position to see how his doctrine of atonement provides the basis for an alternative theological epistemology.

3. ATONEMENT AND EPISTEMOLOGY

3.1 Cognitive Union and the Love of God

We have noted that Torrance presents two basic epistemological principles: The first being that genuine knowledge involves cognitive union of the mind with its object and calls for the removal of any estrangement or alienation that may obstruct or distort it. This cognitive union with God, which is necessary for knowing God, is accomplished in two ways through the atonement. First, the possibility for humans to even know God is opened up by the hypostatic union. Humanity, because of sin is alienated from God. Thus in order for humanity to know God all estrangement and alienation must be removed, that is, humanity must be reconciled to God. This reconciliation between humanity and God occurs in the atonement, whose basis is the Hypostatic Union. Through the atonement there is an 'at-one-ment' both ontologically and relationally between humanity and the divine. Christ carries human nature as a whole (*anhypostasis* as opposed to *enhypostasis*) into the life of God. It is because of the anhypostatic union that it is possible for human nature to know God. However, knowledge of God is more than a mere possibility. Individual humans actually know God. According to Torrance the pouring out of the Spirit belongs to atonement. The pouring out of the Spirit

²⁵ Here we see how much Torrance is indebted to Patristic thought, especially to the thought of Athanasius. Note the similarity between this doctrine of 'double incorporation' and what Athanasius has to say about the topic: 'Because of the grace of the Spirit which has been given to us, in him we come to be, and he in us; and since it is the Spirit of God, therefore through his becoming in us, reasonably are we, as having the Spirit considered to be in God and thus is God in us.' (*Discourses* 3.24) This quote from Athanasius was cited in P. Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), p. 69.

into the believer is not a separate act of atonement, rather, it ‘is atonement actualizing itself, really and subjectively within the personal lives of men and women.’²⁶ If the pouring out of the Spirit into the believer is the basis for the individual believer’s union with God (through union with Christ) then we can say that the individual who is united to Christ experiences the union with God which is necessary in order to know God without any alienation or estrangement which distorts knowledge of God. In other words, the Spirit’s role in atonement makes it possible for an individual believer to know God.

The Spirit’s role in bringing about the cognitive union necessary to know God is the key to understanding the first way in which love plays a role in our knowledge of God. As it was noted, God draws near to us and draws us near to him and brings us into union with himself through the gift of the Spirit. As human beings become united with God they are able to really know the one God in the inner relations of his divine being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²⁷

This ‘entering’ into the inner relations between God is crucial to knowing God as God really is. In *The Christian Doctrine of God* Torrance says that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity simply means ‘that God himself is love.’²⁸ He elaborates upon this by saying that God’s being is an eternal movement of love which consists of the love with which the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit ceaselessly love one another. In other words, God’s love *ad intra* and *ad extra* reveals something about the inmost nature of God’s being. What role does the Holy Spirit play in a love based theological epistemology? Torrance tell us that in giving us his one Spirit, who proceeds from the Father through the Son and sheds abroad in our hearts the very love which God himself is, God reveals his innermost being to us. God reveals the love that flows between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; God reveals that he himself is love. This is something we could not know unless we are an active part of this movement of love, which as we have seen is actualized in the life of the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit.

3.2 Love and Knowing God According to God’s Nature

Torrance’s second principle is that ‘we may know something only in accordance with its nature.’²⁹ Assuming that Torrance is correct in stating this principle then we should say that in order to know God we must

²⁶ Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 189.

²⁷ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 117.

²⁸ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 162.

²⁹ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 25.

know God in a godly way, that is according to his nature. It is not easy to spell out what exactly this means, however we know, in an uncontroversial way, that God is holy and that God is love. In fact, the conviction that God is first and foremost a God of love seems to be at the very heart of the Christian faith. Consider the following words of John Wesley,

It is not written, "God is justice," or "God is truth:" (Although he is just and true in all of his ways;) But it is written, "God is love," love in the abstract, without bounds; and "there is no end of his goodness." His love extends even to those who neither love nor fear him.³⁰

If it is central to God's nature to be holy and loving as Scripture and our intuitions tell us, then we must approach knowing God in holiness and in love.³¹ Thankfully the Holy Spirit progressively actualizes holiness and love in the life of the believer. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit is the one who makes us holy and conforms us to the image of Christ.³² The holiness which we need to approach God in knowledge has been made possible by Christ. Through the course of his incarnation, Christ has sanctified himself for our sake.³³ The participation in Christ which is necessary for believers to partake in that holiness, however, is made possible by the Holy Spirit.³⁴ Yet, the Holy Spirit does not just conform us to the holiness of God, thus enabling us to approach God in holiness, the Holy Spirit also produces love for God within believers. Calvin says of the Holy

³⁰ Cited in Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1992), p. 83.

³¹ The idea that we must approach God in love in order to know him is not explicitly developed in Torrance's theology. Although Torrance does say that, 'knowing God requires cognitive union with him in which our whole being is affected by his love and holiness,' he does not fully develop this idea. The rest of this paragraph develops this Torrancean idea.

³² See 1 Peter 1:2, Romans 15:16, 1 Corinthians 6:11, and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

³³ 'The Torrances root sanctification objectively with justification in Christ. We have been sanctified once-for-all through Christ's vicarious humanity.' Radcliff, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ*, p. 140.

³⁴ Radcliff explains that, 'the Torrances believe that the outworking of this sanctification found objectively with justification in Christ comes as we participate by the Holy Spirit in Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit is to turn us out of ourselves to share in this sanctification found definitively in Christ.' Radcliff, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ*, pp. 136-7. Torrance's own words are also instructive here. Torrance explains: 'Because the church is the body of Christ in which he dwells, the temple of the Holy Spirit in which God is present, its members live the very life of Christ through the Holy Spirit, partaking of and living out the holy life of God.' Torrance, *Atonement*, p. 387.

Spirit, that he is ‘persistently boiling away and burning our viscous and inordinate desires, he enflames our hearts with the love of God and with zealous devotion.’³⁵ The Holy Spirit produces affections towards God; a desire for God, a desire to know him, to have a personal relationship with him, and a desire to achieve some sort of union with him. In other words, the Holy Spirit produces the affection of love towards God, which is needed in order to approach God in a loving manner. Finally, Scripture also tells us ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.’³⁶ Thomas Schreiner suggests that this passage implies that the Spirit, who should not be sharply distinguished from the love of God himself, has the unique ministry of filling believers with the love of God.³⁷ Although this love is both knowledge of divine love towards us and the kindling of love in the believer to love God in return, in this passage it refers primarily to the knowledge of God’s love for us.³⁸ Thus it is the case that the out pouring of the Spirit, which according to Torrance is a part of atonement, enables us to have knowledge of God in accordance with the KNP.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Thus far I have shown how Torrance’s work can shed some light on the role that love may play in our theological epistemology. I will conclude by spelling out some important implications for the task of theology that we can draw out from our discussion of Torrance’s epistemology.³⁹

4.1 Implications for Justifying our Religious Beliefs

The first implication of Torrance’s theological epistemology is that his epistemology shifts the conversation away from typical internalist accounts of

³⁵ Quoted in A. Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 72.

³⁶ Romans 5:5 (See also 1 Thessalonians 4:9).

³⁷ T. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 257.

³⁸ See Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), p. 193. Here Calvin says, ‘This knowledge of divine love towards us is instilled into our hearts by the Spirit of God; for the good things which God has prepared for his servants are hid from the ears and eyes and the minds of men, and the Spirit alone is he who can reveal them.’

³⁹ Even though I limit myself to exploring the theological implications of Torrance’s epistemology, exploring the implications that Torrance’s epistemology has for other disciplines would be a worthwhile task. This task, however, shall be left for another day.

justification towards an externalist account. Typically, most accounts of theological epistemology have been based upon either some sort of foundationalism or coherentism. Accounts based upon these positions tend to be internalist accounts of justification. Foundationalism states that an agent can justify mediated beliefs by reference to basic beliefs, both of which are something that the agent holds to internally. Coherentism states that an agent can justify any belief by reference to other beliefs in her set of beliefs. That is, both of these accounts of justification agree that justification ‘consists in reasons or evidence that are somehow internal to the agent’s cognitive perspective, and upon which she bases her belief, so that she has a justified belief.’⁴⁰ Torrance’s account is quite different from these accounts because instead of appealing to other beliefs in order to justify religious claims, Torrance shifts towards appealing to an external state of affairs in order to give warrant to such religious claims.

Consider the following proposition, which is one definition of what externalism might amount to:

1. It is false that justification comes by way of the internal cognitive perspective of the knower. In order to be justified in one’s belief in B_1 one must come to believe B_1 while the believer can meet a certain state of affairs.

Proposition 1 is a state account of justification (i.e. the knower must be in a certain state in order to be able to claim that her beliefs are justified).⁴¹ According to this view, what allows the believer to justify her beliefs consists of an objective relationship between the agent’s cognitive faculty and external reality.⁴² In other words, the agent must be in a certain cognitive state in order to be able to justify her beliefs.⁴³ As an example of this state view of justification we may say that a person’s belief that their perception (e.g. I see a kitten) is only justified if they are in such a state which their cognitive and perceptive faculties are unhindered.

As we have described the internalist and externalist accounts of justification it becomes clear that T.F. Torrance holds to an externalist state account of justification. For Torrance all genuine knowledge involves

⁴⁰ J. Adam Carter, J. Kallestrup, S. Orestis Palmeros, and D. Pritchard, ‘Varieties of Externalism’ *Philosophical Issues* 24, no. 1 (October 2014), 66.

⁴¹ This is just one of several forms of an externalist account of justification.

⁴² Carter, Kallestrup, Palmeros, and Pritchard, ‘Varieties of Externalism’, p. 67.

⁴³ Although I am using the language of justification here, what I am stating has affinities with what Alvin Plantinga calls warrant. Plantinga argues that warrant is the property enough of which is what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief. Here I am saying that meeting CUP and KNP is partly what makes belief about God warranted.

cognitive union of the mind with its object calls for the removal of any estrangement or alienation that may obstruct or distort it. When we apply this principle to our beliefs about God, we can say that for Torrance we are only justified in holding to our theological beliefs if we are in a state of cognitive union with God. Thus,

2. Theological belief B_1 is justified if and only if the knower is in a state of cognitive union with God.

How does that state of union come to be? That state of cognitive union with God, which is necessary for knowing God, is accomplished through the objective aspect of atonement (Christ's person and work) and the subjective aspect of atonement (the Spirit's work in uniting us to Christ). Thus, Torrance's account of justification can finally be stated as,

3. Theological belief B_1 is justified if and only if the knower is in a state of cognitive union, which is accomplished in Christ and the Spirit's work of atonement for the believer.

This is a radically different account of justification than foundationalism and coherentism since both of these views justify theological beliefs in terms of other beliefs, yet Torrance's account of justification justifies theological beliefs in terms of a state of being united to Christ. This is clearly a version of (1), except that what it means to have one's cognitive state unhindered is defined in reference to a reconciled relationship, i.e. a relationship of reciprocal love, with the object of knowledge (i.e. God) rather than some other account of what it means to have one's cognitive state unhindered (e.g. one is sober, one has not experienced brain damage, etc.). Thus given the fact that Torrance grounds his justification in the Christ and the Holy Spirit's union creating work of atonement we might say that for Torrance, the justification of our religious beliefs is found in the loving union we experience with God.

4.2 Implications for the Theologian's Task

In addition to having implications for how we justify our religious beliefs, Torrance's atonement based epistemology has implications for how a theologian goes about doing her work. As we have seen, genuine knowledge of God necessitates union with God that is not marred by alienation or estrangement. If alienation or estrangement exists, the person attempting to know God will not be able to genuinely know him. Atonement, through the hypostatic union and through the work of the Holy Spirit, removes this alienation and estrangement. It follows that if a person has not appropriated the work of atonement, through the double incorporation carried out by the Holy Spirit, then alienation and estrangement still

exist. Therefore, it is impossible for the person who has not appropriated atonement to genuinely know God.

The first implication of this is that if a person is not in a loving relationship with God she cannot properly do theology. How does this follow? As we have seen, unless a person is in a state of cognitive union with God, accomplished and effected in Christ and the Spirit's work of atonement, then that person cannot know God. We might put this in a slightly different manner, we may say that a person who has not entered into a loving relationship with God free from alienation, i.e. who has not accepted the fact that while we were still sinners God loved us (Romans 5:8), that we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us (Galatians 2:20), and that by God's great love even when we were dead we were made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4–5), cannot *really* know God. This does not mean that the person who is not in a loving relationship with God cannot hold true beliefs about God, it simply means that these beliefs do not count as knowledge. These beliefs do not count as knowledge because they are not warranted. They are not warranted because they do not meet the necessary conditions for knowledge posited by the CUP and KNP. Given that these beliefs do not amount to actual knowledge of God we can conclude that theology which is done apart from being in Christ is not actual knowledge of God, even if it is 'correct' theology. Thus, in order to truly do theology a theologian must be in a loving relationship with God.

To some, the belief that one must be in a loving relationship with God in order to know theological truths might seem to border on subjectivism. After all, revelation, it seems, is supposed to be objective. That is, it is supposed to be true apart from the state of the person knowing. Does this Torrancean account of theological knowledge lend itself towards subjectivism? Carl F.H. Henry, in *Revelation and Authority*, seemed to think it did. Henry writes, 'If a person must first be a Christian believer in order to grasp the truth of revelation, then meaning is subjective and incommunicable.'⁴⁴ Henry's concern with Torrance's theological epistemology is understandable. After all, Henry was seeking to 'establish the foundation of an apologetic theology.'⁴⁵ Henry was attempting to engage in public theology, which could be accepted or rejected as true or false regardless of whether or not the person who is presented with that theology is a Christian. Thus, if theology carried the precondition of union with Christ, it could not in principle, be accepted or rejected by all. Habets summarizes Henry's position well when he explains that, 'according to Henry, truth and statements of truth correspond such that

⁴⁴ C. Henry, *Revelation and Authority*, vol. 3 (Waco: Word, 1979), p. 457.

⁴⁵ Habets, *Theology in Transposition*, p. 96.

the truth is objectively known despite the condition—fallen or otherwise, Christian or not—of the subject.⁴⁶ However, Henry's criticism that Torrance's theological epistemology leads to subjectivism is wrongheaded. Torrance believes that theological knowledge is indeed objective. This is because, Torrance believed that theology that accepts the 'primacy of its proper object of inquiry can be considered rational and scientific—hence objective.'⁴⁷ Theology reflection is governed by its object of inquiry, God, thus it is not subjective. Even though Henry misreads Torrance, Henry has brought up an important point regarding Torrance's theological epistemology; namely that, a consequence of Torrance's theological epistemology is a diminished role for apologetical theology. Those who believe that human reason 'is capable of intellectually analyzing rational evidence for the truth-value of assertions about God,' and thus elevate the role of apologetical theology, will find this consequence unacceptable.⁴⁸ However, those who believe that there is a deficiency in human reason that prevents humanity from knowing God apart from the gift of faith, and thus find little value in apologetics for conversion, will not find this an untoward consequence.

A second implication of Torrance's theological epistemology is that repentance will be crucial to the theological task. Although we know that objectively alienation and estrangement have been removed through Christ's atoning work, and that true reconciliation has occurred in the person and work of Christ, alienation and estrangement towards God can exist subjectively in the mind of a believer.⁴⁹ Acts of repentance (turning to God, confessing one's sins, accepting and believing that God's loving act of atonement has covered one's sin) can help remove that subjective alienation and estrangement that can exist in the mind of a believer.

A third implication of Torrance's theological epistemology is that a theologian must carry out her work in the context of Christian community, for the Holy Spirit carries out his work of making believers more loving especially within the context of a Christian community. It is within the context of Christian community, especially community centred upon hearing the word of God and the receiving of the Eucharist, that our love and affections become directed towards Christ, and in turn our very being is shaped in a Christ-like manner. Thus, it is especially within the

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁸ C. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1 (Waco: Word, 1976), pp. 226–7.

⁴⁹ A believer can 'know' the facts of gospel and even believe that it is true, yet at the same time not live as though the gospel were true.

Church that we become people who love God, i.e. the type of people who can ‘know God in a godly way,’ and in turn speak of God in a godly way.⁵⁰

5. CONCLUSION

We began by noting two principles within Torrance’s theological epistemology. We have seen how love may play a role in both of these principles. As the reader can probably tell, the title of this paper is inspired by Anselm’s maxim ‘*Credo ut Intelligam.*’ Anselm’s statement implies that an understanding of Christian doctrine is impossible without faith or belief. This essay has suggested something similar; knowledge of God is impossible without love. This thesis is in line with most traditional theology that has stressed the need for spiritual discipline in the mind and life to truly know God.⁵¹ If we take seriously the implications of Torrance’s epistemology, that love plays a major role theological epistemology there can be no such thing as merely ‘cold, rationalistic, academic’ theology. Theology will always be an act performed in light of God’s love for us and our love for him. In other words, taking Torrance’s theological epistemology seriously means that we need to love God so that we may understand him.⁵²

⁵⁰ In addition to the role that preaching and the sacraments might play in making us loving people who can know God in a loving way, something might also be said about the role that community may also play in shaping us into people who love God. It is often through the love of others that we experience God’s love for us. It is often through the challenge of dealing with difficult people that our eyes are opened as to how God unconditionally loves us.

⁵¹ One can think of many great theologians in the history of the church who are also exemplars of deep faith and love for God, for instance Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Jonathan Edwards. Some contemporary theologians have also made a similar point. Consider John Webster who explains that, ‘Good Christian theology can only happen if it is rooted in the reconciliation of reason by the sanctifying presence of God.’ J. Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 10.

⁵² I would like to thank Fuller Theological Seminary’s Analytic Theology for Theological Formation team (Oliver Crisp, James Arcadi, J.T. Turner, Jordan Wessling, and Jesse Gentile) and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen for helpful feedback on this essay.