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T.F. Torrance's non-dualist theological method and atonement theology: A resource for African theology?

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Abstract

The cross-fertilisation and comparison of global theological thought is a great gift to the church. However, one aspect that makes African engagement with Western theological thought less beneficial is the dualism inherent in Western epistemology but foreign to traditional Africans. In light of this, the Western theologian T.F. Torrance is recommended as a potentially valuable dialogue partner as Africans continue articulating a genuinely African Christian theology. Torrance's theology intentionally avoids the dualisms Africans find unnatural. His method makes the dual nature of Christ, the homoousion, its starting point and rule. This method shapes his view of the atonement by locating it in the person, and not only the work, of Christ. The article therefore recommends engaging with Torrance for African theologians who wish to benefit from a theological viewpoint beyond their own context, yet that accords with their own holistic epistemology.

Keywords

African theology; Torrance; dualism; atonement

Introduction

As has long been recognised, Western Theology "often does not resonate with African contexts".[1] Many of the early shining lights of African

1 Vhumani Magezi and Patrick Nanthambwe, "Public Within Public: Extending the Notion of Public Theology to Include African Public Praxis," *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024): 10.

Theology made similar observations. John Mbiti bemoaned the fact that, only having received Western Theology, "the Church in Africa now finds itself in the situation of having to exist without a theology."[2] In more recent days, though, many have taken up the cause of Africanising Christian Theology, seeking to express Christian Theology "from the perspective of African culture and context."[3] We are thankful that today it can be said that the African Church is indeed "developing her own contextual theology."[4]

This is, of course, an unfinished task. Echoing the words of Kwame Bediako 30 years ago,[5][6] Boaheng declares that the question still facing African Theologians today is "how the church in Africa can affirm its uniqueness (in terms of African identity and experiences) and yet be faithful to the beliefs and practices of the Christian religion."[7]

The conviction of the present writer is that this task is enhanced through interaction with the global Church, including (as is the focus of this article) the Western Church. This is the case in at least two ways. First is the cross-fertilisation of theological perspectives. Such cross-pollination "contributes to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of reality, on the one hand, and of theology, on the other."[8] Küster is more absolute, asserting that, "Christian faith lives from the multiplicity of strands of tradition that preserve its richness [and] open up different perspectives on

2 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (London: Morrison and Gibb, 1969), 232; See also, for example, E. B. Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 4, 22–23; Byang H. Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), 14–15.

3 Greg Kame, "O for the African Church: The Need for an Evangelical Approach," Conspectus 34 (2022): 32; For example, Dirk Van de Merwe, "From Christianising Africa to Africanising Christianity: Some Hermeneutical Principles," Stellenbosch Theological Journal 2, no. 2 (2016): 559–87.

4 Kame, "African Theology," 30.

5 Bediako, Christianity in Africa, 85.

6 Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 85.

7 I. Boaheng, "Nkunimdie Christology: An Akan Contextual Expression of the Christus Victor Motif of Atonement," Acta Theologica 43, no. 2 (2023): 12.

8 Henning Wrogemann, "Intercultural Theology as In-Between Theology," Religions 12, no. 1014 (2021): 7.

the truth."[9] Personally, as an Australian working in Africa, my vision of the person and work of Jesus Christ has been expanded through my interaction with African Theologians and ordinary fellow believers.

Second, having our own theological frameworks exposed to those of another culture can also illuminate blind spots. As Hiebert notes, it is right for each church to contextualise the gospel, but "churches in specific cultural settings need the check of the international community of churches to test where theologies are too strongly influenced by cultural assumptions."[10] As scholars seek to Africanise Christianity, engagement with just such an international "testing" could prove salutary.

However this interchange of ideas is not without challenges. For example, the current push for comprehensive decolonisation eliminates the possibility of any such mutually profitable dialogue. While the Decolonisation movement is understandable in many ways, responding to hurts, injustices and oppression as it does, if applied in an injudicious "blanket" way, it may close off the possibility of Africans engaging with Western thought, whether they agree with it or not. As Táíwò notes,

> Decolonising scholars cannot escape a Manichaean division in which (just as during colonial times), the colonised and the colonisers must occupy entirely distinct spaces [where] "ne'er the twain shall meet." Any colonialism-tinged phenomena must be purged from the postcolonial world.[11]

Cutting off from such dialogue also uncharitably denies the Western Church the opportunity to benefit from African perspectives.[12]

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9 Volker Küster, The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology, Revised ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2023), chaps. 2-'Christology in Context.'.

10 Paul G. Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 103.

11 Olúfémi Táíwò, Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously (London: Hurst, 2022), 7–8.

12 The Western Church has much to learn from Africans. E.g. Daniel J. Webster, "'Why Listen to the Africans?': Biblical and Scientific Arguments for an African Cosmological and Epistemological Advantage," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 173 (2022): 52–68.

Having said this, when Africans do engage with Western Theology, challenges remain. One key challenge was noted in the first sentence of this introduction. That is, often Western Theological ideas simply do not resonate with African believers. The first half of this article provides one reason why this is so. That is, Western Theology has certain dualisms in its DNA that traditional African thought forms do not have. The second half of the article presents T. F. Torrance as a Western intercultural dialogue partner who could be a helpful resource for African Theologians because he intentionally avoids these dualisms.

In more detail, the structure of the paper is as follows: first, it provides a concrete example of the problem being discussed, that is, the failure of certain Western theological concepts to connect with Africans; second, it suggests that one reason for this problem is that Western thought is inherently dualistic while traditional African thought is not; third it introduces T. F. Torrance as a possible Western dialogue partner since he also eschews dualisms; fourth and fifth, it outlines Torrance's non-dualist theological method and understanding of the atonement as possible resources for Theologians seeking to affirm African culture while remaining faithful to orthodox Christianity.

1. An example of the challenge

Isaac Boaheng provides a concrete instantiation of the problem addressed in this paper. His proposed solution also relates to the final section. Boaheng reports that Western understandings of the atonement are failing to engage with the lived experience of the Akan people. Boaheng writes that, "The vast majority of Akan Christians have not appreciated well the meaning of the atonement for the Akan community and how this understanding should inform religious beliefs and practices."[13] This is evident by the fact that "many Akan Christians still make sacrifices to gods to seek protection, wealth, peace, power, fame, and longevity, among others."[14] It is not Boaheng's purpose to explore the reasons for this disconnect, but rather to suggest a solution.

13 Boaheng, "Nkunimdie Christology," 12.

14 Boaheng, 12.

Boaheng suggests that the recovery of the Christus Victor view of the atonement might amend this syncretistic situation. Though sidelined by scholastic theologians, the Christus Victor understanding of the atonement was the "classic" view among both the Latin and Greek fathers and was brought back into prominence in the 20th Century by Gustav Aulén.[15] For those unfamiliar with this view, it will be briefly outlined. Rather than the "legalistic"[16] later Latin view or the "ethical" Abelardian view, Aulén describes Christus Victor as "dramatic."[17] It teaches that Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection, is victorious over the evil forces that wage war against him and his people, delivering them from their bondage.[18] Boaheng's thesis is that if the Akan understood and took to heart such a view of the atonement, they would not resort to syncretistic means of protection.

Boaheng's study relates to the present one in three ways. First, it gives a concrete instantiation of the problem noted above, that certain Western theological formulations often fail to connect with African people. Sections 2 and 3 below suggest one reason why this is the case. Second, it demonstrates that certain Western understandings of the central doctrine of the atonement do not fully resonate with African believers. Third, Boaheng postulates that retrieving an ancient understanding of the atonement will better satisfy the lived experience of Akan believers. These final two points are taken up in section 5, in which (similar to Boaheng) an ancient understanding of atonement, long lost but reintroduced in the 20th century, is proposed as a possible resource for African believers.

2. African non-dualist theological thought forms

One reason Western Theology often does not fully resonate with Africans is the pervasiveness of dualisms in Western epistemology. According to Torrance, the three most problematic dualisms for theology are cosmological, ontological and epistemological.

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15 Gustav Aulen, Christus Victor: *An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement,* trans. A. G. Hebert, Reprint (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 5–7.

16 Aulen, 38.

17 Aulen, 5–6.

18 Aulen, 5.

- By cosmological dualism, Torrance had in mind "a thorough–going dualism between absolute space and time [on the one hand] and the contingent events that took place within their embrace [on the other]."[19] In this "absolute space and time" events are abstracted from their concrete manifestations and considered in relation to strict and predictable mathematical laws. This in turn entails "a stronger notion of causality and a more rigidly mechanical conception of the universe."[20]
- By ontological dualism, Torrance refers to that Platonic division between "a realm of eternal ideas and a realm of empirical events."[21] An object's essential reality is not located in the physical world but in some external realm. This leads to a Cartesian division between subject and object in which the knower has no direct connection to the reality of the thing known.[22]
- Torrance held that, for Westerners, dualism has become an "epistemological structure."[23] Western thought engages itself with the action or cause of an object rather than the object itself. This is a knowledge that "does not probe into the ultimate nature of causes, but … limits itself to the system of phenomenal connections set up by it or dependent on it."[24]

19 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1976), 268.

20 Torrance, 95.

21 Torrance, Thomas F., *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 43.

22 E.g. Thomas F. Torrance, *Transformation & Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1984), 13.

23 Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologia*n (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 185.

24 Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 15–16.

In contrast, the traditional African worldview is holistic.[25] "At its core, the African worldview emphasises interconnectedness, communalism, and the inseparability of the material and spiritual existences."[26]

In relation to *cosmology*, the African worldview has no sense of an abstract, theoretical "absolute space and time" separate from the concrete events of the material sphere. For them, "everything is of the same fabric."[27] Reality is "one fluid coherent unit."[28] Only "modern, rationalising thought can abstract [this reality] from its manifestations."[29] With no sense of an "absolute space and time," the African does not see the universe as predictable and mechanical, controlled by rigid laws.

Turning to *ontology*, for an African, an object's essential reality is not located in some external realm of "ideas". To be sure, the object likely has a spiritual component, but this element does not prevent the subject from truly engaging with and knowing the object. "In Western thought a relatively sharp distinction is made between the knower and that which is known."[30] Knowledge is "depersonalized, disembodied pieces of information."[31] In contrast, African ontology has be called, "the Philosophy of integration."[32] In this philosophy, "There can be no knowledge of the

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25 It may, in turn, be demonstrated that the traditional African worldview has many resonances with the biblical one. E.g. Webster, "'Why Listen to the Africans?': Biblical and Scientific Arguments for an African Cosmological and Epistemological Advantage."

26 Chinyere Christian Emedo, "Exploring African Worldview as a Philosophy: A Critical Reflection on the Features, Values and Impacts on the Contemporary African Philosophy and the Global World," *Nnadiebube Journal of Philosophy 8*, no. 2 (2025): 122.

27 Barend Johannes van der Walt, *Understanding and Rebuilding Africa: From Desperation Today to Expectation for Tomorrow,* 4th edition (Potchefstroom: The Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Africa, 2008), 184.

28 Yusufu Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview* (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 32–33.

29 Janheinz Jahn, Muntu: *African Culture and the Western World* (New York: Grove, 1989), 100.

30 Peter Barrett, "Theology in the Context of Science: Western and African Aspects," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 147 (November 2013): 45.

31 Esther L. Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 63.

32 O. Jonathan Chimakonam and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, African Metaphysics, Epistemology, and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy (Cham: Palgrave

object without the subject entering into experience with the object."[33] Thus, for African Christology, "Christ is not an abstract expression, but a living reality with vital connection with the African present existence."[34] Christ is only known through participation with Christ himself.[35]

In terms of African *epistemology*, Jimoh asserts that "Knowledge […] is derived from a chain relationship in which all aspects of reality are intersected to provide a holistic and integrative understanding of reality as constituted in a unitary universe. […] The African thinker does not 'seek to subject phenomena to the idealist/materialist, rationalist/empiricist and mind/matter distinction and analysis.'"[36]

In summary, this section claims that this difference in worldview (the African being holistic and the Westerner dualistic) is one reason why Western Theological thought does not always resonate well with Africans. This, in turn, can reduce the utility of African/Western dialogue. T. F. Torrance, however, is one Western Theologian who intentionally avoided such dualisms in his theological thought. It is to him that we now turn.

3. Torrance as a Possible Interlocutor

Thomas Forsyth Torrance (1917–2007) was a Scottish theologian said to be "the greatest British Protestant theologian of his generation."[37] Two fundamental features of Torrance's theological framework are pertinent for the present study: dualisms and the *homoousion*. For Torrance, certain dualisms are the problem in much Western theological thought, while a proper emphasis on the dual natures of Jesus Christ is the path towards a solution. Torrance's eschewing of dualisms is the focus of the present

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Macmillan, 2021), 144.

33 Ovett Nwosimiri, "Engaging in African Epistemology as a Form of Epistemic Decolonization," *Filosofia Theoretica Journal of African Philosophy Culture and Religions 11*, no. 2 (2022): 83; See also Barrett, "Theology in the Context of Science," 83.

34 Dominic Ndubuisi Nwuzor, "A Survey of African Christology," Excerpta e Dissertationibus in *Sacra Theologia* 30, no. 1 (1997): 12.

35 Nwuzor, 32.

36 Anselm Kole Jimoh, "Decoloniality, Epistemological Decolonization and African Knowledge Practices," *Bodija Journal 12* (2022): 89–90.

37 Douglas Farrow, "T. F. Torrance and the Latin Heresy," *First Things 238* (2013): 25.

section, while his emphasis on the *homoousion* is taken up in sections 4 and 5.

3.1 Dualisms and "The Latin Heresy"

Torrance was assiduously opposed to dualism in Theology. "It may be argued that dualism and, most of all, overcoming it, are … at the heart of Torrance's theology."[38] For Torrance, not only Western thought but also Western Theological thought is deeply and problematically shaped by cosmological, ontological, and epistemological dualism. He saw this as having begun in the early Greek church, having been briefly overturned by the ante-Nicene fathers (more on this below), before being reinstated by Augustine. In a 1986 article, Torrance elucidated a form of this dualism which he called "The Latin Heresy."[39] Matin Davis summarises the "Latin Heresy" as,

> … a "dualist" understanding of the person and work of Christ, wherein the atonement is formulated in terms of external relations. […] According to Torrance, Latin theologians bifurcated the intrinsic, unitary relation between the person and work of Christ by construing the atonement in an "instrumentalist" way, in which the incarnation was regarded simply as a means of supplying a sinless human being to bear our sins on the cross.[40]

Thus, in Torrance's view, the Latin theologians placed a wedge between the person and work of Christ. In terms of the believer's subjective knowledge of Christ, it also had the effect of focusing the believer on *external theories*

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38 Tapio Luoma, *Incarnation and Physics: Natural Science in the Theology of T. F. Torrance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 92; So also, e.g., Farrow, "Latin Heresy," 25.

39 Torrance, Thomas F., "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," Scottish Journal of Theology 39, no. 4 (1986): 461–82. In his critique of Torrance's proposal, Farrow ("Latin Heresy," 28.) asserts that, in fact, there is no such thing as the Latin Heresy. He holds that, concerning the early church, Torrance 'misdiagnosed the problem and misconstrued the solution' (Farrow, 29). For our purposes it is not necessary to settle which one is correct. Our interest lies in Torrance's identification of this externalising dualism, and on this count Farrow (28) agrees that such dualisms and 'debilitating forms of externalism have … arisen in the West.'

40 Martin M. Davis, "Kataphysical Inquiry, Onto-Relationality and Elemental Forms in T.F. Torrance's Doctrine of the Mediation of Jesus Christ," In *Die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi 47*, no. 1 (2013): 6.

of the atonement rather than on Jesus Christ who atones. These two points will be expanded in turn.

First, due to the Latin emphasis on the divine nature of Christ, there was "resistance to [the] recognition of the Word, especially the incarnate Word, as belonging internally to the being of God. [And this emphasis] encouraged a purely instrumental view of his humanity, thus driving a wedge between his person and his work."[41] This division, in turn, affected their understanding of the atonement.

> The atonement was understood as something Jesus did, not something he was. It was merely an external transaction – the payment of a debt […] that altered juridically, but not ontologically, the relation between God and man. Atonement, we might say, was an act by Christ without being also the self-enactment *of* Christ.[42]

Second, the believer's focus shifts from Jesus' person to his now externalised works; from the concrete, inseparable connection between the incarnation and atonement to external theories that explain the atonement.[43] Torrance sees this (combined with cosmological dualism) as producing in theology "a *controlling* frame of thought which operates with a notion of *external logico-causal connections*."[44] He cites, for example, "a severe instrumentalization of Christ" in the "high Calvinist" doctrine of election.[45] "Where salvation is eternally determined for particular individuals without any prior reference to Christ, it is altogether evident that what Christ contributes is a remedy external to the actual condition of man, rather than a remedy worked out in the depths of our humanity as such."[46] The Westminster Confession likewise has a "logico-causal structure that constitutes a closed system of doctrinal propositions."[47]

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41 Farrow, "Latin Heresy," 27.

42 Farrow, 27.

43 Thomas F. Torrance, Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy Divine Interpretation: *Studies in Medieval and Modern Hermeneutics, ed. Adam Nigh and Todd Speidell* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017), 66.

44 Torrance, *Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy*, 63–64.

45 Farrow, "Latin Heresy," 28.

46 Farrow, 28.

47 Torrance, Barth, 225.

3.2 Possible application to African Theology

Thus, Torrance seeks to avoid the very dualisms that (amongst other things) prevent Western theology from resonating with Africans. Traditional African thought forms are, by nature, free from these dualisms; Torrance is so by intention and conviction. It does not sit well with an African to speak of Christ's work in abstraction from his person; Torrance finds such theories heretical. Africans struggle to fully embrace external theories concerning the works of Jesus Christ separated out from his person; Torrance would not have us embrace such theories. Africans do not naturally approach Theology as a collection of "external logico-causal connections";[48] Torrance does not believe that it is.

Could Torrance therefore be a valuable Western interlocutor for African Theologians? If so, what might be learnt from him? In what follows, I suggest two potential areas: in section 4, Torrance's general theological method that consistently begins with the God revealed in Jesus Christ; then in section 5, his retrieval of an ancient understanding of the atonement.

4. Torrance's theological source

Torrance may be a valuable model for African (and other) Theologians due to his methodological starting point. While Africans naturally avoid dualistic thinking, Torrance did so intentionally. He traced the Latin Heresy back to its source and therefore began his own stream of theological reflection from a different source. African (and other) Theologians may well find this instructive and seek to begin from the same source, that being the *homoousion*, the dual natures of Christ in hypostatic union. For Torrance, a right apprehension and appreciation of the *homoousion* is the refuge that protects theology from the dualisms noted above. The current section unpacks this claim by first tracing the source of the Latin Heresy; second, articulating Torrance's alternative theological source; then third, recommending this to African Theologians.

48 Torrance, *Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy*, 63–64.

4.1 The source of the Latin Heresy

The source of the Latin Heresy, as Stephen Lorance persuasively demonstrates, is Augustine's massively influential but "dualist Trinitarian theology".[49] For Augustine the incarnate Word "does not achieve the highest order of reality in that it is not internal to the mind of God"[50] He upheld a Platonic distinction in that "the historical Christ and the historical Gospel were 'shadow' compared to the 'reality' of the Eternal Truth in God."[51] This had the effect to "damage, and sometimes even to sever, the ontological bond between Jesus Christ and God the Father, and *thus to introduce an oblique or symbolical relation between the Word of God and God himself.*"[52] The stream of the Latin Heresy flows from this source.

4.2 Torrance's alternative source: the *homoousion*

If, for Torrance, this is the source of the problem, the solution is to ensure that his own theological understanding rests not on the one God in some monadic sense, but on the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God-man. For Torrance, our knowledge of something should be in accordance with its being; that is, "epistemology follows ontology".[53] If God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, then our knowledge of him should start there. Therefore, the *homoousion* is the "ontological and epistemological linchpin of Christian theology that gives expression to the truth with which everything hangs together, and without which everything ultimately falls apart."[54]

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49 Stephen R. Lorance, "T. F. Torrance's Ecumenical Trinitarianism: Cutting Behind the 'Latin Heresy' in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology" (PhD, North Carolina, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 7; Also Torrance, Thomas F., Reality and Evangelical Theology: The 1981 Payton Lectures (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 57.

50 Lorance, "Torrance's Ecumenical Trinitarianism," 81; See also Torrance, Barth, 46.

51 Torrance, Thomas F., Theology in Reconstruction (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 175.

52 Torrance, Barth, 215. Italics mine.

53 Davis, "Kataphysical Inquiry, Onto-Relationality and Elemental Forms in T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of the Mediation of Jesus Christ," 7.

54 Torrance, Thomas F., *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons.,* 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016), 95; Also Torrance, Theology in Reconciliation, 93.

When one commences theological reflection with the incarnate Word, and allows it to control that reflection, dualisms are avoided. The dualistic divisions in cosmology and ontology are avoided since the heavenly "absolute" or "eternal idea" has united Himself with the contingencies of this world. Likewise, the Cartesian disconnect between knowing subjects and the known object is avoided, since the divine subject has united himself with humanity and thus made Himself known. Finally, our theological epistemology will not externalise the works of God, separating them out from his person, because Jesus Christ (in his person and works) is the revelation of God himself, not simply a "system of phenomenal connections set up by it or dependent on" him.[55] Again, these dualisms are avoided (or healed for those with a dualist mindset) by making the *homoousion* the source and guide in theological reflection, for;

> "There is no God behind the back of Jesus Christ, and no God but he who has shown us his face in the face of Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ and the Father are one. What the Father is and does, Jesus Christ is and does; what Jesus Christ is and does the Father is and does."[56]

Torrance eschewed dualistic theological thinking and intentionally began and built his theological reflection with the God revealed in Jesus Christ, his person and work, rather in some monadic conception of God and what he has (externally) achieved through his instrument, Jesus Christ.

4.3 Recommending Torrance

Torrance would encourage each of us (African or not) to follow his lead by ensuring that our theological reflection begins with and is constrained by the *homoousion*, the God who reveals himself to us in the person and works of Jesus Christ. Such a method can act as a refuge against dualist Theology both for current theological reflection and in the future.

In the present day, Western Theology has bequeathed to Africans a theological framework that is and can be experienced as foreign and unsatisfying. In the effort to Africanise Christianity Theology, theologians

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55 Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 15–16.

56 Torrance, *Divine Interpretation,* 66; So also, Stephen D. Morrison, T. F. *Torrance in Plain English* (Kwara: Beloved, 2017), 79.

should beware of simply taking traditional Western, externalist categories and bending them into an African shape. Such a move will not address the ultimate source of the disconnect. Rather, a better approach, as modelled by Torrance, would be to discipline ourselves to build African Theology from the ground up, letting it flow from the source, the homoousion, not separating person and work, but holding them together in unity.

In the future, it is probably fair to say that, despite efforts towards decolonisation, secular globalisation and Western educational models will continue to influence African epistemology in dualistic ways. In such a future, building our Theology on the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ will protect African Theology from dualisms that are at once foreign to the Bible and to traditional African thought.

Hence, Torrance models a general theological method for us that could be of some use to African theologians. He also presents a model of the atonement that may resonate with the African worldview.

4. Torrance's understanding of atonement

One instructive and highly significant example of a theological stream flowing from the source of *homoousion* is Torrance's conception of the atonement. As noted in Section 1, some Western theories of atonement fail to connect with the lived experience of African people. Part of the reason for this is their externalised, theoretical nature, separating out Christ's work from his person. Torrance's reappropriation of an ancient view of atonement avoids this dualism and thus may find welcome in African minds and hearts. This section first describes Torrance's view and then recommends it to African believers.

5.1 Atonement: Internal to the person of Jesus Christ

Torrance can quite simply say that "Christ Jesus is the atonement."[57] Atonement is not something Jesus simply achieves, something separate or external from his person, something achieved in some abstract theoretical space separate from the contingencies of this creation. By virtue of the fact

57 Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ,* ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 187.

that Jesus Christ is both God and man, "atoning reconciliation falls within the incarnate *constitution of Christ's Person* as Mediator."[58]

> "In contradistinction to the Latin heresy and its "gospel of external relations," Torrance follows Patristic theology in arguing that the incarnation and the atonement are "internally linked." […] In Christ, the incarnation and the atonement are "one and inseparable," for atoning reconciliation takes place within, not "external" to, or "outside," his incarnate constitution as mediator between God and humanity."[59]

In the one man, Jesus Christ, God is acting for humanity, and also a human is acting for God.[60] By this "two-fold agency", Christ upholds both the human and divine sides of the covenant and thereby achieves and indeed embodies our atonement. As Torrance states, "Jesus Christ is Mediator in such a way that in his incarnate Person he embraces both sides of the mediating relationship. He is God of the nature of God, and man of the nature of man, in one and the same Person."[61] Salvation is therefore not an external legal or economic transaction between God and us, but is rooted in Christ's person.

> "The fundamental fact here is that Jesus Christ, in the oneness of his divine-human person and the inseparability from the person of his whole work of reconciliation (from Bethlehem to Pentecost), is *himself* our salvation. So understood, Christ *himself* is our justification, reconciliation and redemption, all *in his person*. Salvation is to be found only in his person, is identical with his person, and is never to be found outside him in his person."[62]

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58 Torrance, *Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy*, 68.

59 Davis, "Kataphysical Inquiry, Onto-Relationality and Elemental Forms in T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of the Mediation of Jesus Christ," 6; See also, e.g., Torrance, Barth, 475–76; Robert T. Walker, "Incarnation and Atonement: An Overview," Theology in Scotland 16, no. 3 (2009): 95; Torrance, Atonement, 191; Christopher Woznicki, "The One and the Many: The Metaphysics of Human Nature in T.F. Torrance's Doctrine ofAtonement," Journal of Reformed Theology 12 (2018): 106.

60 Morrison, T. F. Torrance in Plain English, 135.

61 Thomas F. Torrance, The Mediation of Christ, Revised Edition (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 56.

62 Walker, "Incarnation and Atonement: An Overview," 98.

Five additional points further explicate Torrance's non-dualist conception of atonement.

First, atonement hangs on union with Christ. This model of atonement makes it abundantly clear that our atonement rests on "Christ's incarnational union with us and our union with Christ on that ontological basis", without which "justification degenerates into only an empty moral relation."[63] Our salvation rests on our union with his person not upon an external legal transaction.

Second, the work of Christ is not ignored. Saying that "Christ Jesus is the atonement" is not to discount his works. Jesus Christ is both man and God "dynamically… never statically. The incarnation is the beginning of atonement and salvation, but it has to be lived out 'with strong crying and tears' throughout the life of Christ", including through the cross and resurrection.[64] Torrance's emphasis is simply that these works should not be separated from his person, for it is only by virtue of who he is that his death atones. "Everything depends on who He was."[65]

Third, Christ takes on real, fallen humanity. If Jesus Christ is to represent our humanity and in the *homoousion* reconcile that humanity to God, then it must be our real humanity that he takes upon himself; that is, "our perverted, corrupt, degenerate, diseased human nature enslaved to sin and subject to death under the condemnation of God."[66]

> "If in Jesus Christ the Son of God became incarnate within our fallen, guilt-laden humanity, then in becoming incarnate he not only took what is ours to make it his, but thereby *really* took upon himself our sin and guilt, our violence and wickedness, so that through his own atoning self-sacrifice and self-consecration he might do away with our evil and heal and sanctify our human nature from within and thus present us to the Father as those who are redeemed and consecrated in and through himself. He did all that precisely as Mediator who brought God and man together in himself, thereby

63 Morrison, T. F. Torrance in Plain English, 155.

64 Walker, "Incarnation and Atonement: An Overview," 100.

65 Thomas F. Torrance, God and Rationality (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 64.

66 Torrance, Mediation, 39.

> actualising reconciliation and recreating our humanity within the holiness and perfection of his own sinless life, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification."[67]

Fourth, it is essential that Christ's union with humanity is eternal. Christ's dual nature did not end at his resurrection or ascension. The fact "that Jesus is man still, means that he is the *eternal* union of God and man."[68] He remains our mediator, the High Priest, our representative forever.

Finally, this view is ancient. Just as with Boaheng's retrieval of *Christus Victor*, Torrance's atonement theology has ancient pedigree. He claims that it is the understanding "found everywhere in the early church in the first five centuries."[69] This is especially so in the Cappadocian Fathers. For example, in defending the *homoousion* against Apollinarianism, Gregory of Nazianzus refers to the atonement in the famous words,

> "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten and so be saved as a whole."[70]

5.2 Application to African Theology

This conception of the atonement flows from the source of the *homousion* of Jesus Christ. It avoids the dualisms that externalise the atonement, separating and instrumentalising Christ's person and work. Once more, it asserts that "the assumption of the flesh by God in Jesus Christ is itself a redemptive act and of the very essence of God's saving work. […] Incarnation is thus intrinsically atoning, and atonement is intrinsically incarnational."[71]

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67 Torrance, Thomas F., The Mediation of Christ: Evangelical Theology and Scientific Culture, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 63.

68 Walker, "Incarnation and Atonement: An Overview," 95.

69 Torrance, Mediation, 39.

70 Gregory of Nazianzus, "Epistle 101: To Cledonius," in The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings, ed. Mark DelCogliano (Cambridge: CUP, 2022), 388–98.

71 Torrance, Thomas F., "Dramatic Proclamation of the Gospel: Homily on the Passion of Melito of Sardis," The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 37 (1997): 155; So

This view may well leave Western theologians unsatisfied due to its lack of precise, mechanical explanation. But, as Torrance says,

> "The Gospel does not offer us a logical or causal explanation of the origin or presence of evil, or of precisely how it is vanquished in the Cross of Christ. But it does tell us what the Lord God has done to deal with evil. It tells us that in his unlimited love God himself, incarnate in Jesus Christ, has entered into the dark and fearful depths of our depraved and lost existence subjected to death and judgement, in order to make our sin and guilt, our wickedness and shame, our misery and fate, our godlessness and violence, his own, thereby substituting himself for us, and making atonement for sin, so that he might redeem us from our alienation and restore us to fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The saving act of God in the blood of Christ is an unfathomable mystery before which the angels veil their faces and into which we dare not and cannot intrude, but before which our minds bow in wonder, worship and praise."[72]

It is possible that this non-dualist view of the atonement might resonate more deeply with holist African thinkers than other Western theoretical alternatives.[73] Torrance's holist vision, specifically including Christ's assumption and healing of our whole being, body and all, has certain counterpoints in African Theology. An African atonement theology, for example, must recognise that,

> "man is a multi-dimensional being; if he is saved by Christ he must be saved in all of those dimensions, not just one. More concretely, African theologians repeatedly stress that man is not just spirit, but also corporeal; not just individual but cosmic; and that the salvation he hungers for is a total one."[74]

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also, Davis, "Kataphysical Inquiry, Onto-Relationality and Elemental Forms in T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of the Mediation of Jesus Christ," 6.

72 Torrance, Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy, 68.

73 It would be of great interest to field-test this hypothesis.

74 Nwuzor, "A Survey of African Christology," 53.

It is suggested that Torrance's vision of the atonement could provide a rich resource for African reflection on the wonderful mystery of the atonement.

Conclusion

To repeat the theme with which we opened, cross-cultural theological discourse can greatly aid the church. It can enlarge theological vision and can provide an external check, ensuring that efforts to Africanise the gospel do not lapse into heterodoxy. However, such interactions are difficult when Western thought forms do not connect with those of traditional Africans. This article has proposed that one reason for this disconnect is the dualism which is present in Western thought but absent in African. However, it has proposed T. F. Torrance as a potentially useful Western resource. Unlike most Western Theologians, Torrance assiduously avoids the dualisms he sees as inherent in Western thought. Torrance's theological method (built on the revelation of God in the person and works of Jesus Christ) and the ancient view of the atonement that he retrieves (that atonement is located not just in the works but the person of Jesus Christ) may therefore provide helpful building blocks as the African Church seeks to "affirm its uniqueness (in terms of African identity and experiences) and yet be faithful to the beliefs and practices of the Christian religion."[75]

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75 Boaheng, "Nkunimdie Christology," 12.

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