

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1.0 The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology

One of Karl Rahner's memorable comments in *The Trinity* was the neglect of this doctrine in Christian living and Christian literature.

Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, would the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.<sup>1</sup>

He also commented that the Christian understanding of incarnation tended in a unitarian direction.

Nor does it help to remark that the doctrine of the *incarnation* is theologically *and* religiously so central for the Christian that, *through it*, the Trinity is always and everywhere inseparably 'present' in his religious life. Nowadays when we speak of God's incarnation, the theological and religious emphasis lies only on the fact that 'God' became man, that 'one' of the divine persons (of the Trinity) took on flesh, and not on the fact that this person is precisely the person of the Logos. One has the feeling that, for the catechism of head and heart (as contrasted with the printed catechism), the Christian's idea of the incarnation would not have to

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1 K. Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), J. Donceel (tr.), pp. 10-11.

change at all if there were no Trinity.<sup>2</sup>

Rahner was concerned to give the doctrine of the Trinity a central role in Christian doctrines and to revitalise this doctrine in the life of the church.<sup>3</sup> The contributors to *The Forgotten Trinity*, which include eminent theologians such as James Torrance, Alasdair Heron, John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, Paul Fiddes and Tom Smail, share these concerns with Rahner.<sup>4</sup> They point out how the doctrine of the Trinity, far from being irrelevant to the church, can have an important impact on the church in a number of areas. Firstly, the fundamental question which this doctrine addresses is: who is the God whom Christians worship and serve? From this central question others are also raised. What is the nature of Christian worship? What is the church's understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? What is the nature of person and what is the nature of the church? What is the role of the Spirit in the church and in our communion with God? How does God relate to the world which he has created?<sup>5</sup> In particular, they attribute much imbalance of the church's faith and practice to her imbalance in relating to the three persons of the Trinity.

If God's life is trinitarian, that should be reflected by the life of the Church, in which people are being renewed into the image of God. ... Much onesidedness and lack of balance in the faith and practice of churches can helpfully be understood in trinitarian terms as an over-emphasis on one or other of the Persons of the Trinity with a consequent failure to relate fully and freely to the remaining Persons.<sup>6</sup>

... But we do in general agree that conceptions of the Church derived from attention to one person of the Trinity only do tend to give rise to a variety of spiritual ills.<sup>7</sup>

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 11. Italics his.

3 'We must point out in *every* dogmatic treatise that what it says about salvation does not make sense without referring to this primordial mystery of Christianity [Trinity].' *Ibid.* p. 21.

4 The British Council of Churches, *The Forgotten Trinity* (London: The British Council of Churches, 1989-91) in three parts.

5 *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 1-2. There are further questions relating to cultures and politics.

6 *Ibid.*, 2, p. 21, in 'The Trinity and Our Relationship with God'. See pp. 21-24 for details.

7 See the following longer quote. '[W]e need trinitarian controls on the ecclesiology imagery we use, if it is not to produce one-sided distortions. But it must be *trinitarian* theology as a whole that we use, not unconsidered appeals to persons of the Trinity. Suggestions we considered were that 'Father-only' images are associated with power-lust and domination; 'Jesus-only' images with moralistic activism or

One of the emphases in *The Forgotten Trinity*, on the role of the Spirit in trinitarian theology, is an attempt to redress this balance. Such an emphasis helps us to think of the natures of personhood and the church; i.e., the relational aspect of persons and the relatedness or communion amongst members of the church.<sup>8</sup> In the important area of mission, the need for a more balanced trinitarian theology of God was also called for. Lesslie Newbigin, in *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, wrote,

The point has several times been made that a true doctrine of missions must make a large place for the work of the Holy Spirit; but it is equally true that a true doctrine of missions will have much to say of God the Father. The opinion may be ventured that recent ecumenical thinking about the mission and unity of the Church has been defective at both these points. The church-centric view of missions has perhaps been too exclusively founded upon the person and work of Christ and has perhaps done less than justice to the whole trinitarian doctrine of God.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning the place of the doctrine in preaching the gospel, Newbigin commented,

[W]hen one goes outside the 'Christendom' situation to bring the Gospel to non-Christians, one soon discovers that the doctrine of the Trinity is not something that can be kept out of sight; on the contrary, it is the necessary starting point of preaching.<sup>10</sup>

And he gave reasons for this rather surprising comment.<sup>11</sup>

In the area of spirituality, James Houston, in 'Spirituality and the Doctrine of the Trinity', recognises the importance and benefits of recovering the doctrine of the Trinity, especially in the West.<sup>12</sup> Karl

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individualistic pietism; 'Spirit-only' images with introspective escapism or charismatic excess. We would not necessarily agree with the precise form in which such points are made, particularly in view of the fact that matters of causality in these matters are notoriously difficult to discern. But we do in general agree that conceptions of the Church derived from attention to one person of the Trinity only do tend to give rise to a variety of spiritual ills.' *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 28-29.

8 See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), and his 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: the Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution', in *Trinitarian Theology Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), Christoph Schwöbel (ed.).

9 Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998. First published: Edinburgh House Press, 1963), p. 33.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 35f.

12 James Houston, 'Spirituality and the Doctrine of the Trinity' in *Christ in our Place:*

Barth identifies a wider significance for the doctrine of the Trinity than its limited role in certain aspects of Christian theology or practice. For him, the doctrine is the most decisive of all Christian doctrines and it distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God from other conceptions of God.

In giving this doctrine a place of prominence our concern cannot be merely that it have this place externally but rather that its content be decisive and controlling for the *whole* of dogmatics.<sup>13</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian.<sup>14</sup>

And he quotes Herman Bavinck,

With the confession of God's triunity stands or falls the whole of Christianity, the whole of special revelation. This is the kernel of the Christian faith, the root of all dogmas, the substance of the new covenant.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the New Testament testifies that eternal life is to know the Father and the Son (John 17:3). Entering the rest in God's presence is to know the Father through the Son (Mt. 11:25-30).<sup>16</sup> And it is implicit that this knowledge of the Father and/through the Son is granted through the Holy Spirit (John 6:63, 14:26), who in giving this knowledge conveys the personal presence of God to us as we obey (John 14:15-23). Christian knowledge of God involves the three persons of the Trinity. Neglecting any one person of the Trinity will inevitably impoverish our knowledge of and relationship with God.<sup>17</sup> Despite the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity as presented above, the doctrine has not

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*The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), T. Hart, D. Thimell (eds.), pp. 48-69.

13 *CD* I.1, p. 303. Italics mine.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

15 Quoted on *CD* I.1, p. 302 from H. Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. II, 4th edition, p. 346.

16 See exegesis in 4.0 of chapter 2.

17 In the author's pastoral experience, helping a congregation to know the Fatherhood of God, in addition to the Lordship of Christ, has been beneficial to their prayer life and relationship with God. The author has also sought to bring their attention to the role played by the Spirit who aids us to call out to God as 'Abba' and Jesus as 'Lord'.

always been in the forefront of Christian theology, beliefs and practice in the church, as Rahner observed. However, there are signs of progress in recent years as the following section on the context of the present study shows.

## 2.0 The Context of the Present Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity

Every study of a particular subject has its own context. This study has very much been influenced by the renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in recent decades. Its methodology, which takes up the use of gospel narratives in thinking about theology, also reflects the interest in narrative theology and narrative criticism in recent decades. Furthermore, the consideration of Jesus' relationship with the Spirit in this book echoes the recent interest in the Holy Spirit particularly raised by the charismatic movement. These four areas of interest which form the background of this study happen to have begun roughly at around the same time in the last century, that is, at the turn of the last quarter (or slightly earlier for the charismatic movement). The other essential background to this study is of course the work of Barth, which came to an end with his death in 1968.

### 2.1 Renewed Interest in the Doctrine of the Trinity

Rahner's observation regarding the actual significance of the Trinity was most probably true of the scene in British theology in the 1960s/70s. Maurice Wiles, who was Professor of Divinity at Oxford, wrote, 'The Trinity of revelation is an arbitrary analysis of the activity of God, which though of value in Christian thought and devotion is not of essential significance.'<sup>18</sup> Rahner's observation is also echoed by *The Forgotten Trinity* (mentioned above) which is a collection of preparatory papers published by The British Council of Churches in 1989-91 to raise the church's awareness of her neglect of this doctrine. The marginalisation of the Trinity could be attributed to at least three factors. Firstly, doctrinal criticism is inclined to understand doctrines as the products of historical circumstances rather than 'the inner logic of faith'.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, the influence of natural religion in modern theology had meant that God was conceived of in generic terms.<sup>20</sup> Natural

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18 Maurice Wiles, *Working Papers in Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1976), p. 15.

19 From lecture notes on 'The Trinity in Twentieth Century Theology' by Professor John Webster, Oxford, 1999. See also the next two points and the recent renewal of trinitarian theology.

20 See Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature*

religion cannot in itself conceive specifically of the triune God who is made known only in revelation. Thirdly, from the early modern period, the discussion of the proof of the existence of God in theology, which cannot generate a conception of the Triune God, preceded the specific doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, God is not conceived of as the Trinity from the beginning but only in the later discussion of a systematic theology.<sup>21</sup>

The renewed interest in the Trinity in the last two or three decades of the 20th century was the result of at least three factors. Firstly, recent interest in and contact with the Eastern Christian tradition has influenced the development of social Trinitarianism with its emphasis on the role of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, the doctrine of the Trinity is increasingly deployed to tackle various doctrinal issues, e.g., theodicy by J. Moltmann in *The Crucified God* and creation by C. Gunton in *The One, the Three and the Many*.<sup>23</sup>

Thirdly, some approaches to theology maintain the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity despite its marginalisation. Barth is a prime example and Rahner's prophetic call to the church to return to the doctrine echoes Barth's emphasis and concern. Barth's treatment of the Trinity, in order and in significance, reverses that of Liberal Protestantism. Schleiermacher relegated the doctrine of the Trinity to the appendix of *The Christian Faith*. The lack of importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in his theology can be attributed to his whole approach to theology which is based on human subjective experience. He wrote in the appendix:

But the assumption of an eternal distinction in the Supreme Being is not an utterance concerning the religious consciousness, for there it never could emerge. Who would venture to say that the impression made by the Divine in Christ obliges us to conceive such an eternal distinction as its basis?<sup>24</sup>

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*and Culture* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 184.

21 According to Rahner, this feature of the treatise of the one God preceding the treatise of the Trinity is found much earlier in the West. 'This separation of the two treatises and the sequence in which they are explained probably derives from the Augustinian-Western conception of the Trinity, as contrasted with the Greek conception, ... It begins with the one God, the one divine essence as a whole, and only afterwards does it see God as three in persons.' *The Trinity*, p. 17.

22 See, e.g., the work of John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.

23 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1974), R.A. Wilson and J. Bowden (tr.). Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

24 F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 739.

For Schleiermacher, the subjective experience of God in our human history cannot and does not point to the eternal distinction of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in God. It is interesting that Wilhelm Herrmann, Barth's teacher at Marburg, also reserved only a brief treatment of the Trinity for the very end of his *Systematic Theology*, which concludes with these sentences:

By the doctrine of the Trinity we are reminded that we can find eternal life in communion with God only if he remains for us unsearchable and therefore an eternal mystery. The way to the Christian religion is the unconditioned will to truth or to submission to facts which we ourselves experience. But *its beginning and its end* is none the less man's humbling of himself before the unsearchable. 'God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see' (I Tim. 6:16).<sup>25</sup>

Herrmann, like Schleiermacher, based Christian religion on human experience but, unlike Schleiermacher, he did say that such human experience or religion has its beginning (and end) in man's self-humbling before the unsearchable - in this context, the Trinity. Barth commented that this remarkable statement at the end of *Systematic Theology*, which acknowledges the mystery of the Trinity as the beginning of the Christian religion, was unique in Herrmann's work.<sup>26</sup> Thus he implied that Herrmann in his life and work had not actually made use of this doctrine in any significant way. Could this statement have been a mere 'reflection of faith' by Herrmann which could have had little theological significance to him? Barth granted that Herrmann might well have thought so but he continued,

Whether what is said here, once it has been thought and said, can be rendered harmless in such a way. ... If one has once thought that God is eternally Subject and never object, that he determines himself and is knowable exclusively through himself in 'pure act' of his Triune Personality - then one has thought it and must continue to think it. The thought cannot afterwards be put in brackets as just a "reflection of faith". ... It becomes obligatory to ask whether dogmatics does not have to begin

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25 Wilhelm Herrmann, *Systematic Theology* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1927), N. Micklem and K.A. Saunders (tr.), p. 152. *Italic mine.*

26 K. Barth, 'The Principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann' in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-28* (London: SCM, 1962), ed. T. Torrance, p. 255. In 1925, Barth's delivery of this lecture was occasioned by the publication of Herrmann's *Dogmatik* (i.e., *Systematic Theology*) after Herrmann's death in 1922.

where Herrmann ends. Herrmann on paper naturally rebuts me. But there is also a Herrmann in heaven, who perhaps does not offer a rebuttal.<sup>27</sup>

Whether Herrmann rebutted him or not, in 1932 Barth put the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics* (I.1) and truly began where Herrmann ended.<sup>28</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is not only prominent in order but also in significance in Barth's theology. 'In one very important sense, the whole of the *Church Dogmatics* is a doctrine of the Trinity, both in its architectural conception and its specific content.'<sup>29</sup> Barth's insistence on the central importance of the Trinity in theology has its influence on theologians such as Colin Gunton, John Webster, Thomas Torrance, James Torrance, Alan Torrance and John Thompson on the British scene, J. Moltmann and E. Jüngel on the German scene.<sup>30</sup> These writers, not to mention those in America, have contributed significantly to the recent renewal of trinitarian theology.

## 2.2 The Rise of Narrative Theology

Narrative theology is not a uniform or well-developed discipline in theology, possibly because of its short history. There are at least three different types of narrative theology. The first uses the narratives of the lives of contemporary Christians, e.g., Martin Luther King, as the primary material to investigate the meaning of doctrines such as

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27 *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

28 Barth's opposite treatment of the Trinity to those by Schleiermacher and Herrmann, i.e., putting it at the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics* rather than at the end, is a clear and significant sign of his break with and turning away from 19th century Liberal Protestantism after 1914.

29 John Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 72.

30 See, e.g., C. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), *The One, The Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *The Triune Creator* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); J. Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000); A. Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); J. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune Life of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996); T. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); J. Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Tom Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), *The Giving Gift* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988). See also E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976); J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM, 1974), *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1981).



‘atonement’ which may be different from some traditional interpretations.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, ‘others interested in narrative and theology wanted to begin with some theory about the narrative quality of human experience from which one could derive conclusions about the appropriateness of a narrative religious text.’<sup>32</sup> The third type uses biblical narratives as the source or basis for theology. Here, the interest will be in the last type of narrative theology. Although Hans Frei did not consider himself to be a narrative theologian because of his desire to distance himself from the first two types, his influence on the third type of narrative theology is significant and some of his ideas will be discussed in the following.<sup>33</sup>

Four important figures had crucial influence on Frei’s ‘narrative theology’: Barth, H. Richard Niebuhr, Erich Auerbach, and Gilbert Ryle. In 1957 Frei wrote his doctoral dissertation on ‘The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909-1922: The Nature of Barth’s Break with Liberalism’ under Niebuhr’s direction.<sup>34</sup> Niebuhr’s own writings in *The Meaning of Revelation* and *Christ and Culture* (especially the brief section entitled ‘Toward a Definition of Christ’) had a lasting impact on Frei.<sup>35</sup> Niebuhr brought his attention to the importance of story or narrative in theology. G. Stroup summarises his points succinctly when writing on Niebuhr’s understanding of revelation and Christian identity:

The first of these was Niebuhr’s claim that revelation cannot be separated from history and that revelation has its true locus in the internal or personal histories of individuals and communities. Secondly, Niebuhr made the intriguing suggestion that when Christians articulate or give expression to their appropriation of Christian faith they do so by means of a story or narrative, ‘the story of our life’. Finally, Niebuhr argued that the context in which this narrative recital of faith is learned and appropriated

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31 For example, see James McClendon, *Biography as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974).

32 Quotation from Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Hunsinger and Placher (ed.), p. 16. The classic source of this approach is Stephen Crites, ‘The Narrative Quality of Experience,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39 (Sept., 1971), pp. 291-311.

33 See Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) for an introduction to narrative theology. For an evaluation of narrative theology, see, e.g., Mark Wallace, ‘The New Yale Theology’ in *The Best in Theology*, vol. 3, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today Inc., 1989), J. I. Packer (ed.), pp. 169-186.

34 See Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 5.

35 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941); *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

is the shared life of the Christian community.<sup>36</sup>

Erich Auerbach, in his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, commented that biblical narratives are realistic in the sense that they are life-like or history-like. But the biblical narratives have a crucial difference from other realistic literature.

Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours [the Bible] seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.<sup>37</sup>

The Bible does not make neutral claims. It claims that its world is true and seeks to draw the readers into its own world, history and meanings. Frei found that Barth's analysis of the meaning of the text paralleled that of Auerbach: these narratives claim to define, in a way that any non-narrative translation loses, 'the one common world in which we all live and move and have our being.'<sup>38</sup> However, the question of truth concerning the narratives and the world of the Bible has yet to be answered. But according to Frei this was where the historians and apologists faltered and gave rise to the eclipse of biblical narratives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> They both failed to receive the literal meaning of the narratives, which Frei emphasised is the meaning for the reader. One should read the story within the bounds and the realistic world of the story. Regarding the question of truth, history or referential integrity, 'Frei thought that many of the episodes in the Gospels function as illustrative anecdotes: They show us the sort of person Jesus was, whether or not this particular incident took place.'<sup>40</sup> The story of the crucifixion and the resurrection, however, were thought by Frei to be genuine.<sup>41</sup> (For Barth's position on historicity, see 3.0 below.)

In 1975, Frei published his *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress

36 *The Promise of Narrative Theology*, by George Stroup, p. 70.

37 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), Willard R. Trask (tr.), 1953, p. 554.

38 See Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 7. Quote taken from, Hans Frei, 'Eberhard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth,' in *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), G. Hunsinger and W. Placher (ed.), p. 161.

39 See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 28-30, pp. 130-136.

40 Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 13.

41 *Ibid.*

Press, 1975), which was influenced by Gilbert Ryle. In his book *The Concept of Mind* (London, Hutchinson, 1949), Ryle attacked what he called ‘Descartes’ myth’ or ‘the myth of the ghost in the machine’, where a certain separation of mind and body is imposed. Frei contended that a person’s identity lay not in some inner essence but in the shape of the person’s life, but he acknowledged that human beings have intentions as well as actions. When an intention turns into an action, ‘There is a real or hypothetical “inside” description of that transition, of which all of us are aware but of which it is not easy to give an account.’<sup>42</sup> Frei’s crucial point was that *it is the development of intention into action that constitutes the self. One is the person one has come to be through one’s enacted intention.*<sup>43</sup> The gospels which narrate Jesus’ words and actions are therefore able to present Jesus’ identity: ‘Jesus was what he did and underwent, and not simply his understanding or self-understanding.’<sup>44</sup> As David Kelsey puts it,

A skilful storyteller can make a character ‘come alive’ simply by his narration of events, ‘come alive’ in a way that no number of straightforward propositional descriptions of the same personality could accomplish. He can bring one to know the peculiar identity of this one unique person. Moreover, what one knows about the story’s central agent is not known by ‘inference’ from the story. On the contrary, he is known quite directly in and with the story, and recedes from cognitive grasp the more he is abstracted from the story. So, too, biblical narrative can be taken as rendering an agent whose identity and actions theology is then to discuss.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 43.

See also ‘Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal’, in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, chapter 1, p. 37.

43 *Ibid.*, see also ‘Theological Reflections’, chapter 2 in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 73.

44 See ‘Barth and Schleiermacher’, chapter 7 in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 184. Frei recognised two types of identity description: one is intention-action and the other is self-manifestation which is based on the first type. ‘Self-manifestation description, on the other hand, tries to point to the continuity of a person’s identity throughout the transitions brought about by his acts and life’s events. ... This form of identity description deals with nothing less than the whole scope or stretch of a person’s life, in vigorous contrast to the other type of description, which deals only with a specific sequence of events. It is evident, then, that self-manifestation description of Jesus involves the full scope of the Gospel story.’ *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 127.

45 David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975), 1975, p. 39.

Narratives can portray a person and his identity in such a way that cannot be captured or summarised by propositional statements such as are often found in doctrinal formulations. G. Stroup extends this idea of identity description to the triune God.

The Trinity is, ..., a necessary description of God's identity, but it presupposes those narratives which witness to God's relation to the world. The claim that personal identity is always an interpretation of personal history applies to all persons - human beings and the triune God.<sup>46</sup>

In this book, attention is focused on knowing the person of Jesus Christ through his words and actions as given by the gospel narratives in Matthew but with the view that these words and actions of Jesus also witness to Jesus' relationship with his Father through the Spirit as he *reveals* his Father in these words and actions. The crucial idea connecting the identity description of Jesus Christ and that of the Father (and the Trinity) is Jesus' revelation of his Father (through the communion in the Spirit). The author is indebted to Barth for this crucial idea of revelation linking Jesus and the Trinity which will be made use of in this book.

### 2.3 *The Rise of Narrative/Literary Criticism in Biblical Studies*

From the late 1970s, there began a paradigm shift in biblical studies away from the strict historical approach towards a literary approach to the Bible.<sup>47</sup> The historical approach (or the diachronic approach) tries to reconstruct the author's circumstances and the history of the formation of the text (e.g., form criticism and source criticism), which cannot be directly yielded by the text itself. The attention focused on these issues and the minimalist approach adopted by some historians or scholars (such as Bultmann) make the literal meaning of the text almost invisible (this is the complaint of Frei in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*). The literary approach (or synchronic approach) arose out of this context of biblical studies and seeks to study the text as it is, without reference to hypotheses that cannot be found within the text. Its aim in some respects is thus similar to that of narrative theology. However, compared to narrative theology, the discussion in literary criticism is much more specific regarding its methodology and its conceptual elements.<sup>48</sup>

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46 G. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (London: SCM, 1984), pp. 245-6.

47 See Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), chapter 5: 'Literary Criticism of the Gospels', pp. 99f.

48 For an introduction to literary criticism applied to the Bible, see Tremper Longman, III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Leicester: Apollos, 1987), A. K.

Narrative criticism, which is relevant to the present study, is a branch of literary criticism dealing with the particular genre of narrative.<sup>49</sup>

The following conceptual elements are often used in narrative criticism: plots, evaluative point of view, narration (narrator, implied author, real author), irony, narrative pattern and characterisation. For example, the plot in Matthew adopted in this book consists of Jesus' radical confrontation with the religious leaders concerning their narrow legalistic religion in Galilee, and the escalation of this conflict after his entry into Jerusalem, which culminates in his suffering and crucifixion. Within this plot or overall direction of the narratives, one can discern certain narrative patterns (see later chapters). An *inclusio* (a pair of brackets) is formed by Jesus' baptism and his death. The baptism of Jesus and his temptations are a kind of introduction (in narrative terms, the *preparation*) of his life, ministry and death. The main body of the gospel is therefore an explication, unpacking or unfolding (in narrative terms, the *particularisation*) of this preparation in his baptism and temptations. Within the *inclusio* and the particularisation of the preparation, there are the *pivot* and *repetitions* of Jesus' foretelling of his passion so that his life, ministry and predictions culminate in the *climax* of the whole narrative - his death on the cross.

Concerning characterisation, the narratives can either *tell* the readers of the traits of a character directly and explicitly, or *show* the readers these character traits implicitly through narrating his thoughts, words and actions. The gospels seldom explicitly tell the readers that Jesus is sinless or that he is gracious to sinners (as Paul used explicitly the word grace in his epistles), but in their narrative manner they portray Jesus as such in his words and actions (and sometimes in his thoughts). The narratives' showing the character of Jesus is analogous to the 'intention-action' identity description suggested by Frei in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. It will be shown in later chapters that some of the crucial character traits of Jesus portrayed in Matthew's gospel are his radicalism, his lordship in exercising his authority in teaching and mighty works, his freedom, his unconditional love, his integrity and his humility. In these excellences, Jesus reveals his Father. It might be possible to draw from Jesus' revelation of his Father in these excellences some insight concerning the nature or content of Jesus'

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M. Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Norman Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). For an assessment and a bibliography of literary criticism, see Mark Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (New York; London: Greenwood Press, 1992).

49 For an introduction, see Mark Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism? A New Approach to the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1993).

communion with his Father, as will be attempted in chapters 3 and 4. The other crucial character traits of Jesus are of course his resolute obedience to his Father to the very end, the commitment and courage he shows in his path to the cross.

In studying the content of Jesus' revelation of his Father, the author has chosen to work mainly from the gospel of Matthew, though the pneumatology in Luke will also be made use of. It might be suggested that the gospel of John could be a more obvious choice than Matthew for studying Jesus' revelation of his Father. However, the appropriateness of Matthew for this purpose can only be assessed after an actual exercise or study with Matthew is performed. This question of appropriateness cannot be answered in the positive sense at the beginning of the book but only at the end. The use of Matthew has the advantage of being spared of the suggestion that its Christology is late and developed which is often directed at the gospel of John. It will be interesting to see if the concept and content of Jesus' revelation of his Father found in this synoptic gospel bear close resemblance to those of the fourth gospel.

#### *2.4 The Rise of the Charismatic Movement and the Interest in the Spirit*

In 1966, the publication of the first issue of *Renewal*, the magazine of the charismatic movement in Britain, probably marked the gathering momentum of this movement.<sup>50</sup> The exercise of charismatic gifts in this movement, e.g., speaking in tongues, prophecies and healings, highlighted some of the important works of the Spirit in Christian living and experience which might have been neglected in the majority of the churches. Some scholars or theologians who were aware of the neglect of the Spirit not only in Christian experience but also in Christian theology sought to recover the important place in theology which was due to the Spirit. Tom Smail, who once was the editor of the *Renewal* magazine, wrote *The Giving Gift* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), which deals with the theological issues relating to the Spirit (and Trinity).<sup>51</sup> James Dunn, from the perspective of biblical studies, first contributed to the discussions about the role of the Spirit in *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970) and then specifically dealt with Jesus' relationship with the Spirit in *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975). Colin Gunton from the perspective of dogmatic theology highlighted the important role of the Spirit in the Trinity in 'Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving's Christology' (published in 1988)

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50 See the Foreword in *Living in the Light of the Pentecost: A Selection from Renewal Magazine, 1966-1990* (Crowborough: Highland, 1990), Edward England (ed.).

51 See *Ibid.*, p. 10 concerning Smail's editorship of *Renewal*.

and in his other writings.<sup>52</sup> The heightening of the role of the Spirit in Christian theology and church life is welcome, but these biblical and theological studies raise a question regarding Jesus Christ. In what sense was Jesus divine if the power in which he lived and by which he exercised his ministry was the power of the Spirit? Could Jesus of the gospels be interpreted merely as a Spirit-inspired man, as Dunn was so keen to emphasise? Or did Jesus' relationship with the Spirit have both continuity with and unique distinction from his disciples' relationship with the Spirit? The answers to these questions have a decisive consequence for orthodox Christian doctrines and the experience of Christians. These questions and answers will be closely examined in this book. If Jesus' 'divinity' could only be attributed to the Spirit, i.e., he has no inherent divinity of his own, then the doctrine of the incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity could not stand. Also, the doctrine of atonement has to be drastically reinterpreted, for then it would not be God, but only a creature, who saves sinners. Furthermore, concerning revelation, the notion of Jesus' revelation of God his Father is severely undermined. This weakened sense of Jesus' divinity and revelation has its consequences for Christian discipleship and experience. Firstly, the power of the person of Jesus and the power of the words of Jesus will lose their decisive edge in Christian living and experience if his Lordship/divinity is diluted or denied. One can no longer perceive the sense of the decisive finality in Jesus' words and revelation; the Word that the Spirit wields has lost its sharpness, efficacy and cutting edge. Prayer and worship to Jesus can become difficult and meaningless. The result could be a kind of mysticism where the content of the person of Jesus Christ is emptied (Barth severely criticises mysticism, as did Herrmann). Barth quotes from *2 Clement* to emphasise the importance of acknowledging Christ's divinity:

Brethren, we must think of Jesus Christ as of God, as of the judge of the quick and the dead. For we ought not to think meanly of our redemption. If we think meanly of Him, that means that we expect only mean things ... that we do not know whence and by whom and to whom we are called.<sup>53</sup>

This book will study Jesus' words and actions as presented in Matthew's narratives and the narrative patterns emerging from the narratives (chapters 3 to 5). From this narrative study, the Lordship/divinity of Jesus will emerge and an interpretation of Jesus' relationship with the Spirit will be made. An answer to the important question of the mutual compatibility between Logos Christology and

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52 The paper appeared in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 41 (1988), pp. 359-76.

53 *CD IV.1*, p. 160.

Spirit Christology will be attempted. A theology concerning Jesus' relationship with the Spirit and the Father's relationship with the Spirit will be suggested and the issue of *filioque* in the economic Trinity will be discussed, with possible implications for our understanding of the immanent Trinity (chapter 6). While the Lordship of Jesus will be maintained in this book on one hand, on the other some considerable effort will be made to understand the nature of communion between Jesus and his Father (with some reference to Geoffrey Lampe) and the crucial role played by the Spirit in this spiritual communion in the economic Trinity, with some possible implications for the understanding of the immanent Trinity and the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ (chapter 6).

### 3.0 Comments on Methodology

The methodology of this book has already emerged in the above discussion of its background and context. On one hand, it seeks to pay attention to the content of Jesus' revelation of himself and of his Father as narrated in the gospel narratives of Matthew. On the other hand, it tries to develop some conceptual understanding of the economic and immanent Trinity from the narrative study, hence the 'Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity' in the title. This approach therefore may be distinguished from the traditional study of the Trinity in dogmatic theology, which often centres on the immanent Trinity and where the mode of discussion is often propositional, rational and abstract, but not narrative.<sup>54</sup> This book attempts to make the connections between the economic Trinity, which is more tangible and imaginable, and the less tangible immanent Trinity; in other words it attempts to understand the immanent Trinity via the economic Trinity through a narrative study of Jesus' revelation of his Father in history.

Rahner emphasised that the route to knowing the Trinity is via the economic Trinity. If one thinks of the Trinity merely in terms of divine essence, procession, relation and relative subsistence within the immanent Trinity, 'honesty forces us to admit that this does not lead very far.'<sup>55</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna echoed Rahner and lamented the

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54 See G. Lindbeck's criticism of the Cognitive-Propositional approach to doctrines in his *The Nature of Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1984). This book would retain the value of such an approach but suggests that it could be complemented by a narrative approach.

55 The quote is taken from a much longer complaint. 'As a result the treatise [the Trinity] becomes quite *philosophical* and *abstract* and refers hardly at all to salvation history. It speaks of the necessary *metaphysical* properties of God, and not very explicitly of God as experienced in salvation history in his free relations to his



neglect of the economic Trinity in the study of the Trinity through the centuries.

Given the trajectory set by Nicaea, in combination with the long-lasting controversies over Arianism and neo-Arianism, Christian theologians focused their attention more and more on the nature of *theologia per se*, that is, the interrelationship among the divine persons. While the motive was no doubt consistently soteriological, in time the economy became less and less decisive in shaping conclusions about the intratrinitarian relations. By the medieval period in both Byzantine and Latin theology, the divine persons were thought of as existing 'in' God, in a realm cut off from the economy of salvation history by virtue of an unbreachable ontological difference. In scholastic theology, the doctrine of the Trinity was identified as the science of God's inner relatedness. The result of this was a one-sided theology of God that had little to do with the economy of Christ and the Spirit, with the themes of Incarnation and grace, and therefore little to do with the Christian life. Greek medieval theology took refuge in an exaggerated agnosticism that relegated the trinitarian persons to a region far beyond our capacity to experience or understand. Hence, the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>56</sup>

Gordon Fee echoes LaCugna's observation: '[O]ur trinitarianism is terribly defective if we spend our labours on the ontological questions in such a way as to lose the essential narrative about God and salvation

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creatures. For should one make use of salvation history, it would soon become apparent that one speaks always of him whom Scripture and Jesus himself calls the Father, Jesus' Father, who sends the Son and who gives himself to us in the Spirit, in his Spirit. On the other hand, if one starts from the basic Augustinian-Western conception, an a-trinitarian treatise 'on the one God' comes as a matter of course before the treatise on the Trinity. In this event, however, the theology of the Trinity must produce the impression that it can make only purely *formal statements* about the three divine persons, with the help of concepts about the *two processions* and about the *relations*. Even these statements, however, refer only to a Trinity which is absolutely locked within itself - one which is not, in its reality, open to anything distinct from it; one, further, from which *we are excluded*, of which we happen to know something only through a strange paradox. It is true that, in an Augustinian, 'psychological' theology of the Trinity efforts are made to give real content to such formal concepts as procession, communication of divine essence, relation and relative subsistence. But *honesty forces us to admit that this does not lead very far.*' Rahner, *The Trinity*, pp. 17-9. Italics mine.

56 Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper; 1991), pp. 209-210. In stressing the importance of studying the economic Trinity - God for us - she might have overreacted when in her book she was unwilling to give equal consideration to the immanent Trinity - God in himself.

that raised those questions in the first place.<sup>57</sup> Pannenberg also points out the importance of paying attention to the active relations in the Trinity, in addition to the relations of origin.

When Scripture bears witness to the *active* relations of the Son and Spirit to the Father, it is not good enough to treat these as not constitutive for their identity and in this respect to look only at the relations of begetting and proceeding (or breathing), viewing solely the relations of origin which lead from the Father to the Son and the Spirit, as applicable to the constitution of the person. ... The Father does not merely beget the Son. He also hands over his kingdom to him and receives it back from him.<sup>58</sup>

Most of the salvific activities of the economic Trinity in the NT is found in the gospel narratives. But concerning these narratives, the biblical scholar, Tom Wright, laments the scant attention paid to the theological significance of Jesus' life and ministry as given in the gospel story in the last few centuries.

The Reformers had very thorough answers to the question 'why did Jesus die?'; they did not have nearly such good answers to the question 'why did Jesus live?'... It would not, then, be much of a caricature to say that orthodoxy, as represented by much popular preaching and writing, has had no clear idea of the purpose of Jesus' ministry. For many conservative theologians it would have been sufficient if Jesus had been born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, and risen again three days later. ... His ministry and his death are thus loosely connected.<sup>59</sup>

For the same reasons, ... the reformers and their successors have seemed to be much better exponents of the epistles than of the gospels. Although Luther and the others did their best to grasp the meaning of (say) Galatians as a whole, and to relate it to their contemporary setting, little attempt was made to treat (say) *Matthew* in the same way, or to ask what the evangelists thought they were doing in not merely collecting interesting and useful material about Jesus but actually stringing it together in what looks for all the world like a continuous *narrative*, a *story*. My later argument will, I hope, indicate that these two weaknesses - the failure to ask about the *theological significance of the ministry of Jesus*, and the failure to treat the gospels with full seriousness as they

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57 Gordon Fee, 'Paul and the Trinity' in *The Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (eds.), p. 72.

58 W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), vol. 1, p. 320. Italics mine.

59 N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 14.

stand, that is, as stories - are among the chief causes of much present confusion, and that they can and must be remedied.<sup>60</sup>

The systematic theologian, David Ford, argues for the primacy of the gospel story in Christianity,

Just as Iris Murdoch supports the relative priority of her novels over her philosophy in rendering what is most important in human life, so I have argued for *the primacy of the gospel story's content and perspective* in Christianity. Systematic thinking has many roles in relation to this, but *crucial issues will concern the way in which it allows itself to be informed by this story*, and how far its system, whether critical or constructive, is appropriate to the story's form and content.<sup>61</sup>

This book then attempts to draw out the theological significance of Jesus' birth, baptism, ministry, death and resurrection as given by Matthew's narratives in a study of Jesus' revelation of his Father, his Lordship and the Trinity. But how does one progress from narratives to theological/conceptual/doctrinal formulations? Alister McGrath has the following comment.

There is ... a dynamic relationship between doctrine and the scriptural narrative. That narrative possesses an interpretative substructure, hinting at doctrinal affirmations. It is evident that there are conceptual frameworks, linked to narrative structures, within scripture: these functions as starting points for the process of generation of more sophisticated conceptual frameworks in the process of doctrinal formulation. On the basis of these scriptural hints, markers and signposts,

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60 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15. Italics mine. Similar complaint can be found in George Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1959), p. 31. When writing about the Royal Man in *CD IV.2*, p. 156, Barth also commented on the lacuna in traditional Christology, 'The older dogmatics was preoccupied with the general and fundamental question of the Godhead and manhood of Jesus Christ. And in this question it was more interested in the former than the latter. It did not, therefore, give any independent consideration to this fact. It was undoubtedly the presupposition and goal of its Christology, but no more. This *lacuna in its presentation must be filled*. The Son of Man, who is also the true Son of God, obviously wills to be considered and understood for Himself. He, the royal man belongs to the very substance of Christology. Indeed, as seen from the angle now under discussion, He is the substance of the whole.' Italics mine.

61 David Ford, 'System, Story, Performance: A Proposal about the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology' in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), S. Hauerwas and G. Jones (eds.), p. 205. Italics mine.

doctrinal affirmations may be made, which are then employed as a conceptual framework for the interpretation of the narrative. The narrative is then re-read and re-visioned in the light of this conceptual framework, in the course of which modifications to the framework are suggested. There is thus a process of dynamic interaction, of feedback, between doctrine and scripture, between the interpretative framework and the narrative itself, paralleling the related process of mathematical iteration. There is an instructive parallel here with Hegel's understanding of *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*: the philosophical mediation of truth is characterised by the constant dynamic oscillation between representation and concept, as one is compared with the other and refined and modified accordingly.<sup>62</sup>

The initial conceptual framework for interpreting the narrative is to be discerned within, rather than imposed upon, the narrative.<sup>63</sup> In this book, Mt. 11:25-30 provides an initial conceptual framework (see 4.0 of chapter 2 on the concept of Jesus' revelation of his Father) for interpreting the narratives of Jesus' words and actions (see chapters 3 and 4). The interpretations of these narratives in turn inform further conceptualisations of Jesus' relationships with his Father and the Spirit, which are brought together in a *refined* concept of revelation and a theology of the Trinity (see chapter 6). Other conceptual elements, such as Jesus' Lordship (Mt. 3:3) and his conception by the Spirit (Mt. 1:20), will also play significant roles in the process of interpretations and further conceptualisations.

At this point, a brief treatment of Barth's view of the historicity of the gospel narratives is in order. Barth regards the gospel story as true even though its presentation may not reflect complete accuracy for the events being narrated. Concerning the intrusion of the terminology of later Judaism and extra-Judaic Hellenism into the gospels, Barth insists that the 'the human Word of Jesus was so constituted that objectively it was quite acceptable as a supremely particular and distinctive Word - His own Word - even in its formal and material similarity with so much of Rabbinism, even in the different versions given by the Evangelists, and even in its translation into Hellenistic thought forms and language.'<sup>64</sup> The word of Jesus, in virtue of its content, has its inherent power to

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62 Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 60-61.

63 'It [the conceptual framework] is not an arbitrary framework, however, but one which is suggested by that narrative, and intimated (however provisionally) by scripture itself. It is to be discerned within, rather than imposed upon, that narrative.' *Ibid.*, p. 59.

64 *CD IV.2*, p. 195.

burst through all its limitations, overcome all obstacles involved and came down to the first century community despite those intrusions. What Barth is saying is that the content of Jesus' word is preserved despite its possible outward adornments and changes in form induced by outside factors. That is, Jesus' word is still spoken and heard through its present embodiment as found in the gospels even though such embodiment may not be his word *ipsissima verba*.

David Ford, in *Barth and God's Story*, assesses Barth's attitude concerning the accuracy of the gospels by using Peter Stern's concept of 'middle distance' in fiction writing and comes to a similar understanding.<sup>65</sup> Central to this concept of 'middle distance' is the purpose of the story as a whole, and the level of accuracy employed should reflect or be consistent with this purpose: too low a level of accuracy is not sufficient for the purpose and too high a level of accuracy is not necessary. For Barth, the purpose of the gospel story is to present or portray the person of Jesus Christ in his words and actions. The gospels have 'the unmistakable unity of the picture which they draw of the totality of the activity of Jesus. The basic features of this portrait proved to be the same in all these recognised gospels.'<sup>66</sup> For Barth, the level of accuracy employed in the gospels is sufficient for the purpose of rendering the person of Jesus Christ in his words and action.<sup>67</sup> Barth's position concerning the referential integrity of the gospel narratives is much more affirming than those of many narrative theologians and biblical scholars.

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65 'There is no valid description of 'the middle distance' or indeed of that mixture of meaning and fact and language we call realism ... except one that is related to "the purpose of the whole" for which the description is intended; and any description that takes the notion of accuracy from some other purpose is bound to be misleading ... "The purpose of the whole", or again "the proper point of perspective" that determines the middle distance of realism, is the most familiar thing in all literature: it is the fictional creation of people, of individual characters and lives, informed by what in any one age is agreed to constitute a certain integrity and coherence.' Peter Stern, *On Realism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 120f; quoted by Ford in *Barth and God's Story* on pp. 54-5.

66 *CD IV.2*, p. 193.

67 "Barth is quite happy with contradictions and alternative accounts of the same events in the Bible, and even makes theology out of them, but without a certain 'middle distance' reliability (especially on the sequence of crucifixion and resurrection) many of his dogmatic arguments would be baseless. The literary judgment implied by the way he treats the gospel rendering of Jesus as normative, without being bothered by inadequacies or contradictions, is a recognition that the meaning of the story is grasped by appreciating it as a literary whole and accepting a middle distance perspective common to the evangelists." Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 55.

#### 4.0 Summary

Jesus' revelation of the Father is a key concept connecting Jesus with the Father and the Spirit. However, to gain some understanding of Jesus' relationships with the Father and the Spirit, i.e., the economic Trinity, it is essential but not sufficient merely to study this concept of revelation. The narrative content of revelation as given by the gospel narratives also needs to be studied such that the conceptual understanding of revelation and the economic Trinity can be 'fleshed out' by concrete tangible narrated events in the life, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. The vividness and the power of the story of Jesus can then complement the more reflective conceptual understanding of revelation and the Trinity. When speaking about the relationship between narratives and doctrines, Alister McGrath writes,

Yet the neatness and conceptual clarity of the doctrine is offset by the vividness of the parable [or story], and its firm location in the world of human life. Perhaps we need to recapture the ability and will to restate doctrines in terms of stories, if their power, relevance and vitality are to be fully appreciated.<sup>68</sup>

And it is possible that in restating doctrines in terms of stories, the gospel narratives of Jesus might inform the conceptual understanding of revelation and the Trinity (cf. Ford's comment above and see chapter 6).

The following questions concerning revelation and the Trinity are addressed in this book. Firstly, the *conceptual* question will be asked in chapter 2: how does Jesus reveal his Father? The answer inevitably involves Barth's doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ but an important exegesis of Matthew 11:25-30 (which contains the so-called Johannine thunderbolt in v. 27) is also illuminating. In chapters 3 and 4, the second question, about the *content* of revelation, is asked: what has Jesus revealed of his Father through himself? The answer involves some detailed exegeses of selected gospel passages which witness to Jesus' Lordship/divinity as he reveals his Father in words and actions. The third question, which is a general question to be broken down into more specific questions, is: what is the emerging picture of Jesus' relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit, given the answers to the first two questions? In particular, given the divine Lordship of Jesus, how can the problem of plural sources of divinity in the Trinity be solved? That is, (i) how can Jesus and the Spirit be united and (ii) how can Jesus and his Father be united, in Jesus' life,

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68 Alister McGrath, *Understanding Doctrine: Its Purpose and Relevance for Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 37.

experience and ministry? The former question prompts one to seek the compatibility between Logos Christology and Spirit Christology (chapters 5 and 6). A related issue concerns *filioque* and *per filium* in the context of Jesus' life and ministry, as opposed to the usual context after Pentecost or in the immanent Trinity in which these issues are discussed (chapter 6). The other question (ii) concerning Jesus' unity with his Father is crucial to his revelation of his Father. This unity and revelation involves Jesus' obedience to his Father and his communion with his Father which in turn are critically related to his divinity. Barth's notion - Jesus Christ has to be divine in order to reveal God - will therefore be unpacked in terms of Jesus' obedience, communion and unity with his Father (chapter 6). Finally, by using three senses of the word 'spirit' and with some references to G. Lampe and P. Tillich, the meaning and nature of Jesus' communion with his Father is further explored with some possible implications for a more refined understanding of the concept of revelation and a trinitarian approach to Christology (chapter 7).

The attempted answers to the questions concerning the Trinity and revelation will be justified on the basis of the narrated events of Jesus Christ in the economy and some conceptual framework or conceptual elements already found in the narratives, though some further conceptual formulations or rationalisation will also be necessary, especially for the refined concept of revelation (hence the narrative-conceptual approach of this book). The attempted answers concerning the economic Trinity (before Pentecost, because only the gospel narratives are used) will be used to inform our understanding of the immanent Trinity. This concrete handling of the economic Trinity and its subsequent linking with the immanent Trinity is one of the distinctive contributions of this book.

The Lordship of Jesus plays a very important role in this book and this is due to the influence of Barth. It is natural then, when dealing with this essential aspect, to quote Barth's expositions of Jesus' Lordship, which are often used not only Christologically but also in relation to the Trinity. Since Barth expounds his Christology using both doctrinal concepts and gospel narratives in *CD IV.1,2* (which is quite unique in contemporary theology in view of the comments of the last section), his work will be helpful and relevant to those chapters which deal with the conceptual or narrative aspect of the study.