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Towards an evaluation of Tom Smail's doctrine of God the Father

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TOWARDS AN EVALUATION OF TOM SMAIL'S DOCTRINE OF GOD THE FATHER

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (MTh)

By Tom Parsons

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July 2023

Abstract

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Towards an Evaluation of Tom Smail's Doctrine of God the Father

MTh

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Tom Smail sought to address what he saw as deficiencies in the 1970s charismatic movement in the UK by calling for a renewed focus on the person of God the Father. This thesis contributes to an evaluation of the doctrine of the Father he offered in *The Forgotten Father* (1980) and in subsequent books on Trinitarian topics. Smail's contribution is set in its ecclesial and theological context, and his account of the Father described. Objections are raised against his commitment to the notion that the Son is eternally functionally subordinate to the Father. This concept – derived from Smail's understanding of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* IV.I – leads him to blur necessary distinctions between the immanent and the economic Trinity and between the divine processions and the missions. These weaknesses lead to a characterisation of the Father principally in terms of authority which, it is argued, detracts from, rather than advances, his pastoral aims.

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Conclusion 77

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Abbreviations

CD	Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*
EFS	The Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son
EG	Eternal Generation
FF	Tom Smail, *The Forgotten Father*
GG	Tom Smail, *The Giving Gift*
LFLS	Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*
NPNF	*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*
RG	Tom Smail, *Reflected Glory*

Introduction

Tom Smail was a church theologian who, over a period of thirty years, brought aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity to bear on ecclesial and pastoral issues. His four major books all address Trinitarian themes: *Reflected Glory*[1] (1975) focuses on the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Son; *The Forgotten Father*[2] (1980), calls the Charismatic Renewal to a fresh vision of the First Person of the Trinity; *The Giving Gift*[3] (1994) explores 'the interface between the renewing work of the Holy Spirit… and the classical Trinitarian tradition of the church'[4]; and *Like Father, Like Son*[5] (2005) examines the anthropological implications of Trinitarian doctrine. This thesis offers the beginnings of an evaluation of one of his central areas of interest: the person of God the Father.

Smail wrote for the church, rather than for the academy. It is fitting, therefore, that the introduction to this thesis will identify the ecclesial and pastoral goals he sought to meet with his doctrine of God the Father. These are clearly discernible in his most directly relevant text, *The Forgotten Father*. This book will inevitably remain important to the discussion throughout the central chapters of the thesis, in which we will evaluate Smail's understanding of the Father within his own theological traditions. However, his thinking developed in significant ways in the twenty-five years after 1980, so his later books will also be considered. The thesis' conclusion will return to Smail's original pastoral goals and reflect on how effectively his doctrine of God the Father achieves them.

These goals can only be understood with reference to Smail's context in 1980. Smail wrote *The Forgotten Father* to correct deficiencies he observed in a particular ecclesial movement at a critical moment in his relationship to it. We

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[1] Thomas A. Smail, *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975). Hereafter referred to as *RG.*

[2] Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Gospel*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980). Subsequent page references are from the 1996 Biblical Classics Library edition (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996). Hereafter referred to as *FF.*

[3] Thomas A. Smail, *The Giving Gift*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988). Subsequent page references are from 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994). Hereafter referred to as *GG*.

[4] *GG*, 9.

[5] Thomas A. Smail, *Like Father Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005). Hereafter referred to as *LFLS*.

need to identify the shortcomings Smail observed and the benefits he hoped to offer by reminding the Charismatic movement of those 'aspects of the Christian message that gather round the person, nature and work of God the Father.'[6]

1. Tom Smail at the time of writing *The Forgotten Father*

Tom Smail (born 1928) was ordained into the Church of Scotland in 1954 following study in Glasgow (Philosophy), Edinburgh (Theology) and a year of postgraduate work with Karl Barth in Basel.[7] He ministered in three Scottish parishes, experiencing personal charismatic renewal in the early 1960s. A move to Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church, County Antrim, followed in 1968. There, he came to the attention of Revd Michael Harper, the founder and director of the charismatic agency Fountain Trust.

Fountain Trust aimed to bring charismatic renewal into the mainstream churches, both Protestant and Catholic. Harper invited Smail to join the Trust's leadership team in 1972. Three years later, Smail succeeded Harper as the Director, placing him in a prominent position within the Charismatic Renewal movement.

Once appointed, Smail immediately established a journal to supplement the Trust's existing magazine. To *Renewal* he added *Theological Renewal*. Mark Cartledge has evaluated Smail's editorials and articulates Smail's intention in them: '*TR* [*Theological Renewal*] is aimed at enabling the CR [Charismatic Renewal] to think theologically.'[8]

Smail discovered, however, that not everyone in the Charismatic Renewal appreciated his contributions. He remained editor of the journal until it was taken over by Grove Books in 1983.[9] However, from 1978-1981 he offered no editorial articles. When he resumed writing them, he explained the reason for

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[6] *FF*, 16.
[7] The biographical information that follows is dependent on the account given by Rt Revd Dr Colin Buchanan, Smail's colleague at St John's Theological College, Nottingham. Colin Buchanan, 'Obituary: Canon Thomas Allan Smail,' *Church Times*, accessed at https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2012/2-march/gazette/obituary-canon-thomas-allan-smail on 8 November 2021
[8] Mark J Cartledge, 'Theological Renewal (1975-1983): Listening to an Editor's Agenda for Church and Academy', *Pneuma* 30, no. 1 (2008): 86.
[9] Thomas A Smail, 'Envoi', *Theological Renewal* 25 (1983): 2–3.

his silence: he had received a complaint that his offerings amounted only to 'theological notes.'[10] This discouragement was part of a disillusionment with the Charismatic Renewal that became increasingly painful to him during these years.[11] Cartledge argues that, whilst Smail moved on from the Charismatic Renewal around 1983, he was disillusioned enough to step down as Director of Fountain Trust in 1979.[12]

This disillusionment can be discerned in *The Forgotten Father*, published in 1980. Smail himself recognised this. In the preface to the reissue of the book in 1986, he reflects that, when he originally wrote it, he was 'smarting under the unexpected wounds it [the Renewal] had inflicted.'[13] This pain, he suggests, will be evident, to a 'perceptive reading' of the opening chapter.[14] Yet his criticisms of the Renewal are so prevalent throughout the book, that even an unperceptive reader would notice them. Perhaps, even after six years, he had not quite acknowledged to himself the depth of the disenchantment the book betrays.

However, disillusionment was not Smail's only motive in writing *FF*. Another impulse prompted him: a new personal awareness of God as Father. Smail's father died when he was a very young child.[15] He reflects on insecurities in his adult personality and suggests 'that the lack of a father to look to in the early years has had more than a little to do with it.'[16] Yet, at some point during the 1970s a new experiential knowledge of God's Fatherhood helped him. It is impossible to say exactly when this happened, and precisely how. In a 1977 *Theological Renewal* editorial on God the Father, he rehearsed some of the central theological perspectives that are developed in in *FF*.[17] Yet neither in that article, nor in the book itself, does he reveal when or how this personal transformation occurred. All we can say with certainty is that by the time he

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[10] Thomas A Smail, 'On Editorials, Exorcisms and Ecumenism', *Theological Renewal* 20 (1982): 2.
[11] After taking up his editor's column again, Smail only offered two more editorials, with ominous titles: 'Fountain Trust: A Theological Farewell', *Theological Renewal* 17 (1981): 2–5, and 'Envoi', *Theological Renewal* 25 (1983): 2–3. An *envoi* is a writer's last word.
[12] Cartledge, 'Theological Renewal (1975-1983): Listening to an Editor's Agenda for Church and Academy', 103.
[13] *FF*, 9.
[14] *FF*, 9.
[15] *FF*, 11.
[16] *FF*, 12.
[17] Thomas A Smail, 'In Tune with the Trinity: 3', *Theological Renewal* 6 (1977): 2–7.

wrote *The Forgotten Father* he was able to look back on it as something that had already taken place, and state 'This book was written out of my own discovery of Abba…'[18]

2. Smail's critique of the Charismatic Renewal

Smail had been involved in the Charismatic Renewal for over a decade by the time he levelled various criticisms against it in *FF*.[19] He does not enumerate these observations systematically,[20] but a clear picture emerges from comments which are scattered throughout the book.

A recurring metaphor gives shape to both Smail's critique and to his positive proposals: he viewed the Renewal as *immature*. Reflecting on the Renewal's development, he comments that 'even worse than the failure to increase has been the failure to mature.'[21] He gives greater specificity to the metaphor when he describes the Renewal as having reached an ecclesial version of the teenage years:

> It is not perhaps unfair to picture the present renewal as having passed through the vigour of its infancy with its only seeming simplicities, into the ambiguity of its adolescence when all sorts of disturbing and disruptive influences that have been present from the beginning emerge into the open and make the prospect more complicated and perilous than it appeared at the start.[22]

The cause of this immaturity is repeatedly identified as a preoccupation with the meeting of the felt needs of the Renewal's participants. The movement sought 'all sorts of instant-answer expedients'[23] and as a result it had forgotten that 'man's chief end is not to have his soul saved, or his body healed or even his church revived – but to glorify God and enjoy him forever.'[24]

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[18] *FF*, 203.
[19] Whether his assessment of the Charismatic Renewal is accurate is moot in the context of this thesis.
[20] He does not provide evidence for them either. This weakens the book. Smail's criticisms lack evidence and specificity, leaving him vulnerable to the charge that he is criticising a caricature.
[21] *FF*, 15.
[22] *FF*, 15-16.
[23] *FF*, 152.
[24] *FF*, 30. Note Smail's allusion to Question 1 of *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

To Smail, this preoccupation with immediate human need prevented the Renewal from embracing key elements of Christian living. A preoccupation with proximate concerns hindered a clear vision of the ultimate summons of God to holiness.[25] This, Smail believed, had led to an underemphasis on repentance from sin. He observes that '[the Renewal] has spoken much more of the needs that require healing than it has of sins that require repentance'[26]

Smail expresses the same criticism in other terms. He claims that a focus on the fulfilment of immediate needs prevents the Renewal from following the example of Jesus' obedience to the Father:

> A renewal in danger of being dominated by the desire of Christians to have their felt spiritual, emotional or physical needs satisfied, or by the pursuit of charismatic power, needs to be converted from its own self-concern to a new obedience to the universal purpose and will of the Father.[27]

Later, Smail suggests that this orientation away from obedience to God, and towards human satisfaction, is in fact '*the central crisis* that besets the charismatic renewal at the moment.'[28]

The same fixation that led to a neglect of repentance and obedience also left the renewal susceptible to the appeal of panaceas: a 'sorry procession'[29] of them, 'a swift succession… on average one a year.'[30] This created a cyclical pattern of dashed hope, as 'there is left behind a trail of disappointment and disillusionment that depresses the level of faith and expectation.'[31]

The Renewal's pursuit of panaceas for the satisfaction of immediate needs, made it vulnerable to another dysfunction. Smail criticised the movement's dependence on 'strong leaders offering instant answers,[32] its vulnerability to 'a

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[25] See *FF*, 48.
[26] *FF*, 164. Smail suggests that this deficiency distinguishes the Renewal unflatteringly from other revival movements in church history (*FF*, 48).
[27] *FF*, 16.
[28] *FF*, 163. My italics.
[29] *FF*, 15.
[30] *FF*, 169.
[31] *FF*, 15.
[32] *FF*, 15.

cult of charismatic gurus.'[33] These leaders were often authoritarian in their approach,[34] and their impact on the Renewal was debilitating. Smail observes what he saw as 'a false and crippling dependence upon human leaders'[35] within the movement.

This sketch of a movement Smail considered immature can be completed with reference to one more dysfunction. Driven to panaceas by its preoccupation with meeting instant need, the Renewal often gave central place to what is properly peripheral. Smail comments that,

> Often… the things that are said about the Spirit, his baptism and gifts in renewal circles seem … to be … onesided and unrelated to the centralities of the gospel as evangelical faith has grasped it and Catholic tradition understood it…[36]

Healing and speaking in tongues, for example, seemed to Smail to occupy the central place that doctrines like the person and work of Christ should hold,[37] making it more difficult for the wider church to receive the Renewal's positive contributions. In Smail's view, the movement needed to be 'delivered from its own idiosyncrasies and eccentricities.'[38]

Smail critiqued the Charismatic Renewal for its immaturity. Pursuing the satisfaction of immediate human need, it neglected Christ-like obedience and embraced the panaceas promised by authoritarian leaders. All the while, the movement was losing touch with its proper centre. We must now explore why, in Smail's view, it needed to come to terms with God the Father.

3. Smail's positive proposal: some benefits of remembering the forgotten Father

We have observed that the notion of *immaturity* provides Smail with a conceptual lens through which to examine the renewal's deficiencies. It also

[33] *FF*, 69.
[34] *FF,* 17, 167.
[35] *FF*, 17.
[36] *FF*, 17.
[37] *FF*, 18.
[38] *FF*, 18.

lends itself naturally to his positive proposal: the adolescent movement needs to mature through a fresh encounter with Father God.

Smail's book opens with a reflection upon a father's role in a child's development. These reflections are paradigmatic in relation to the Renewal's needs. Smail suggests[39] that in contrast to mothers who 'cosset and even… capitulate to the inclinations of their sons; fathers… confront their sons with their own interests and conscript them into the service of their own needs.'[40] In this way, the son learns that he is not 'the one round whom everything revolves.'[41] Paternal love dethrones a child, because fathers require 'the obedience of their sons from above!'[42] Smail believed that the renewal needed to experience an analogous encounter with the First Person of the Trinity, to convert it 'from its own self-concern to a new obedience to the universal purpose and will of the Father.'[43] Smail encapsulates his positive proposal for the Renewal in these terms:

> Precisely at this stage in its development [the Renewal] needs the correction and direction that would be given to it by a concentration on these aspects of the Christian message that gather round the person, nature and work of God the Father.[44]

Smail foresees that a renewed focus on God the Father will yield four relevant benefits.

First, he argues that by remembering the Father the Renewal will gain a correct perspective on God's ultimate purposes. The Father is the source of the missions of the Son and the Spirit, which only achieve their final purpose when – in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:28 – 'Christ hands the Kingdom to God the Father.'[45] Smail repeats the same observation in connection with the Greek verb

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[39] Ironically, he prefaces these comments with the qualification, 'it is foolish to generalise about the function of a father in a family.' He appears to do exactly that. (*FF*, 11) He does not reflect on the extent to which his concept of fatherhood might be shaped by his own cultural prism of Scottish culture in 1930s-40s.
[40] *FF*, 11-12.
[41] *FF*, 12.
[42] *FF*, 12.
[43] *FF*, 16.
[44] *FF*, 16.
[45] *FF*, 20.

Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: *hoteleis*. He argues that the combined notions of wholeness and purpose contained in the verb's etymology refer to the Father's intention for his people's 'utter completeness.'[46] To encounter the Father is to be confronted with 'the goal (*telos*) of the Christian life when the Church and the Kingdom and all their members are brought to completion and are ready to be surrendered to the Father.'[47] It was precisely this encounter with the Father that Smail believed the Renewal needed. Only then could it be delivered from its preoccupation with its immediate needs, personal experiences and trivial providences.'[48] Smail recalls the Renewal to the First Person of the Trinity in the hope that it might be converted 'from its own self-concern to… the universal purpose and will of the Father.'[49]

Second, Smail hoped that, if he could turn the Renewal's attention towards the Father, he might recall it to obedience. In *FF's* closing comments, the author underlines one of his most prominent themes: 'There is a central stress in this book on God's fatherhood implying our obedience.'[50] To Smail, God's Fatherhood implies our obedience because the paradigm for the Christian's adopted sonship is the relationship of Jesus to the Father. We see this relationship lived out on the pages of the Gospels in the incarnate life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus' Sonship was expressed in trustful obedience, and as a result Smail can state that, 'The essence of sonship is trustful obedience – if one thing has emerged from our study, it is that.'[51] As we will explore later in this thesis, Smail holds that the obedience required of the adopted children has roots deeper even than in the incarnate life of Jesus. He argues that the relationship between Father and Son in eternity is also characterised by the Son's obedience. Hence, he urges that, 'The sonship of the eternal Son consists of a divine obedience; the sonship of the adopted human sons of a human

[46] *FF*, 48.
[47] *FF*, 48.
[48] *FF*, 15.
[49] *F*F, 16.
[50] *FF*, 203.
[51] *FF*, 159. Note that in this sentence, as in the quotation earlier in this paragraph, Smail owns this theme as one of the book's key messages.

obedience.'[52] This thesis will have more to say on this theme. For now, we note that Smail intended his presentation of God the Father to convert the Renewal 'from an obsession with our needs to an obedience-centred Christianity.'[53]

Third, Smail believed that with a renewed focus on the Father, the Renewal would become better integrated with the central concerns of the Christian faith. He sees the Father as 'the integrating factor within the Godhead and the gospel… the catholic person within the Holy Trinity who gives context and unity to the work of the Son and the manifestations of the Spirit.'[54] The integration Smail envisages would have benefits both within and beyond the Renewal. Within the Renewal, imbalances and idiosyncrasies could be corrected by a re-engagement with the Father. This is because, according to Smail, 'to know [the Father] is to be recalled from what is peripheral to what is central, from what is partial to what is whole.'[55] In addition, there could be benefits for the Renewal's capacity to offer its blessings beyond itself to the wider church. For Smail, the Father's 'wholeness will discipline and centre down our various expressions of the faith and make them adjust to each other.'[56] Remembering the Father had the potential to make the Renewal more 'recognisable and receivable' by the rest of the Church.[57]

Fourth, remembering the Father would help to correct the problems related to authority which Smail perceived in the Renewal. In particular he hoped that, by casting a vision of the Father as the 'source of all authority and lordship,'[58] he might challenge the tendency towards authoritarian leadership. Smail intends that remembering the Father will relativise the status of those who exalt themselves in the church and liberate others who find themselves in thrall to such leadership. He urges that, 'The way of deliverance for human authoritarianism is the rediscovery of divine authority. It is when we are most

[52] *FF*, 159
[53] *FF*, 29.
[54] *FF*, 17.
[55] *FF*, 17.
[56] *FF*, 18.
[57] *FF*, 18.
[58] *FF*, 16.

captive to the second that we shall be most free from the first.'[59] Smail also challenges the authoritarians on a related point: the corollary of the Father's authority is the obedient sonship. On that basis, he states his hope that, 'The leader who lives out of obedience to God will be careful about depriving others of their liberty by bringing them into an old- or new-style hierarchical domination to himself.'[60]

4. Conclusion

This introduction has described Tom Smail's purposes in writing *The Forgotten Father*, with reference to his decreasing involvement in, and sharp critique of, the Charismatic Renewal, in which he had played a leading role. Next, in the central chapters of this thesis, we will evaluate the doctrine of the Father that Smail offers, both in *FF* and in his later works. During these central chapters Smail's ecclesial purposes will receive *some* attention. They will only be brought into the foreground again in the thesis' conclusion, when we consider how far Smail's vision of the Father promotes the benefits he promised.

[59] *FF*, 17.
[60] *FF*, 167.

1 The Father of *The Forgotten Father*

1. Introduction

Tom Smail wrote *FF* to recall a Charismatic Renewal movement to a fresh vision of the First Person of the Trinity. It is our task in this present chapter to provide a detailed outline and analysis of the book, and of the understanding of the Father he offers within it. This significant emphasis on a single book is appropriate. This is not because Smail has nothing to say about the Father in his later books,[61] but because despite developments in his thinking, the core convictions he expressed in 1980 remain essentially unchanged.[62]

Before embarking on this analytical outline, it is helpful to offer a brief consideration of what paradigms or templates Smail might have had in mind as he wrote his Paterology.[63]

2. Considering possible templates for *The Forgotten Father*

The very rarity of the term *Paterology* goes some way to justifying the contention contained in Smail's title: the First Person of the Trinity is often overlooked.[64] A scan of the shelves of theological libraries confirms that books specifically on the First Person are rare. Hundreds of texts on the Trinity give way to hundreds more on Christology, followed by quite a few on Pneumatology. The Paterology section is comparatively small.

This should not be taken to suggest that the Father's person has not received deep reflection. Within the New Testament, 'God' often refers to the Father: 'God' being identified in relation to his Son and Spirit.[65] In the Church's early centuries, the starting point of debates in Trinitarian theology is precisely that the Father of Jesus Christ is the eternal God. The very givenness of the Father's

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[61] We will pay particular attention to *LFLS* in the next two chapters.
[62] Smail was a self-reflective author who was willing to engage critically in later books with what he had written in the past (E.g., *GG*, 44). He never withdraws the core convictions expressed in *FF*, so it seems likely that he remained content with them.
[63] 'Paterology' is the Greco-English term for the study of God the Father to parallel Christology and Pneumatology.
[64] Thomas Weinandy agrees. Citing *FF*, Weinandy comments: 'In the light of the contemporary concern for the Holy Spirit, it could now be said that, in most recent theological thoughts, it is actually the Father who has become the forgotten person of the Trinity.' Weinandy, T. *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Eugene, OR; Wipf and Stock, 1995) 8.
[65] E.g., Jn 3:16, 15:26; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 4:6.

divine identity is precisely what demands enquiry into the identities of the Son and the Spirit in relation to him.[66] The Father is not overlooked, but rather omnipresent in the work of the Church Fathers. However, he is not singled out for special attention in the way the Son and the Spirit are.[67]

The 19th century witnessed increased interest specifically in God the Father. This interest has left its mark in print. Smail's Scottish forbear Robert S. Candlish engaged with Professor Thomas Crawford in written controversy in the 1860s over the status of God's Fatherhood with respect to humanity as a whole.[68] Smail's position is closer to Candlish than to Crawford when he states that, '"Abba" does not mean "creator".'[69] However, Smail does not demonstrate awareness of this historic controversy. Reflecting on 19th Century liberal Protestantism Smail identifies its 'twin pillars' as 'the universal fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man which was a consequence of it.'[70] This approach is exemplified in A. Scott Lidgett's *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life*,[71] perhaps the last major English-language theological work on God the Father before *The Forgotten Father*; yet, again, Smail makes no reference to it.

There is no evidence that Smail used Lidgett's book, or any other earlier free-standing doctrinal treatise on God the Father, as a template for *FF*. By contrast, he was evidently familiar with P.T. Forsyth's published sermon *God the Holy Father.*[72] Smail shared Forsyth's conviction that, lacking an adequate vision of the Father's holiness, the Church was floundering in immaturity, sentimentality

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[66] Peter Widdicombe's monograph *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* provides ample evidence to justify this observation. See Widdicombe, P. *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius (Oxford: Oxford Theological Monographs, 2000).*
[67] Such a focus might in fact have been considered perilous. Treating the Father as a topic in his own right could have raised fears of separating the divine persons leading to tritheism.
[68] See Candlish, R. *The Fatherhood of God considered in its General and Special Aspects; with a Review of Recent Speculations on the Subject. By Thomas J. Crawford, D.D., Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1866).
[69] *FF*, 34.
[70] *FF*, 35.
[71] J. Scott Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902).
[72] P. T. Forsyth, *God the Holy Father* (Australia: New Creation Publications Inc., 1987). Accessed at https://www.newcreationlibrary.org.au/books/pdf/181_GodHolyFather.pdf on 24/03/2022. Smail cites Forsyth's sermon at *FF* 137 and 148.

and a piety that 'is too weak in the face of the virile passions it should rule.'[73] However, Forsyth's chapter-length sermon does not provide a template for Smail's book-length treatment of the doctrine of the First Person in *FF*. Smail formulated the structure of his doctrinal presentation independently.

Another factor Smail had to consider as he shaped his material is the tension between his aim and his method. His aim was to address the church, not the academy. Yet his method is academic.[74] He risks speaking over the heads of his target audience,[75] whilst providing insufficient technical detail and references to satisfy more academically minded readers. Yet he aims to hold this tension and, as a church theologian, to combine the personal, the pastoral and the doctrinal.[76]

As we will note in our analytical outline, the substance of Smail's position is not new. However, the form in which he delivers his material is his own. He is not following a template. This makes it vital to outline, in detail, not just the substance of his doctrine of the Father, but also the structure of his presentation.

3. Smail's Preliminary Commitments

Three deficiencies prompted Smail to address 'aspects of the Christian message that gather round the person, nature and work of God the Father.'[77] *FF* begins with an outline of these deficiencies. The first deficiency is, or rather *was*, personal: Smail had recently experienced God as Father in a new, transforming

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[73] Forsyth, 5.
[74] Other methods might have suggested themselves. For example, five years later, Floyd McLung's *The Father Heart of God* found a wide readership at a popular level, including within Charismatic circles. McLung takes a pastoral, rather than doctrinal approach. McLung, F. *The Father Heart of God* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1985).
[75] One reviewer recognised the danger: 'I was sometimes left wondering if some of those who ought to read it might not find it at these points a little beyond them.' Spanner, Douglas C. 'The Forgotten Father.' *Churchman*, 102 no 2 1988. Accessed at https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=15&sid=7ce3d525-d0f4-4013-9ee7-3bc9af2d5c57%40redis on 8th June 2023.
[76] This observation goes some way towards answering Mark Cartledge's criticism that Smail did not break sufficiently free of the modernist division of the Church and the Academy. Smail's genre is hard to categorise precisely because he did – at least to some extent – blur that distinction. See Mark J Cartledge, 'Theological Renewal (1975-1983): Listening to an Editor's Agenda for Church and Academy', *Pneuma* 30, no. 1 (2008): 83–107, 101.
[77] *FF*, 16.

way.[78] Given that his own father died when he was young, Smail understood his search for the Heavenly Father against that background.[79] The second deficiency is ecclesial: he intends to address the problems with the Renewal which we described in the introduction to this thesis.

The third deficiency is theological: Smail had begun to sense that his own theological education inclined him to neglect the Father, relative to the Son and the Spirit. He offers an anecdote that, to him, illustrates that neglect. He had delivered a lecture on Acts 2:33, a text which refers to the work of all three persons of the Trinity. An astute observer asked him afterwards why he had made almost no reference to the Father's role in the Son's sending of the Spirit. Acknowledging the omission, he could only plead that 'I was not alone in being guilty of it – it was indeed characteristic of the kind of Reformed Christocentric emphasis in which I had been grounded.'[80] Smail intended to fill that doctrinal deficiency with a study of the Father that follows the contours of 'orthodox trinitarian teaching.'[81]

Smail now outlines three fundamental commitments related to the Trinity. These, he hopes, will orient the reader in assumptions that undergird the entire ensuing argument.

First, Smail asserts that 'God reveals himself a Trinity.' That is, the idea that God is Three and One is not the result of speculation, but observation. The doctrine of the Trinity is, he claims, 'only an explication of the New Testament doctrine of God.'[82] The Church has not read the Trinity into the biblical text. Rather, Smail argues that it arises out of the text, in which 'we meet the same God three times.'[83]

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[78] *FF*, 203.
[79] *FF*, 11.
[80] *FF*, 19. The qualifier 'Christocentric' which specifies the adjective 'Reformed,' points to Smail's Barthian education. It is the first hint in the book of his debt to Karl Barth.
[81] *FF*, 16. Smail identifies his position as being in line with 'classical Christian tradition' (*FF*, 109). By this he positions himself over and against developments in Christology and Trinitarian doctrine that reject Patristic and Conciliar formulations on the person of Christ, setting himself in contrast to scholars such as John Robinson (*FF*, 96), Rudolph Bultmann (*FF*, 97), G.W Lampe and D.M. Baillie (*FF*, 105) and John Knox (*FF*, 109).
[82] *FF*, 22.
[83] *FF*, 22. This is strongly reminiscent of Karl Barth's phrase, 'The name Father, Son and Spirit means that God is the one God in threefold repetition.' Karl Barth, Trans. Geoffrey William

Secondly, Smail asserts that what we see of God in the economy of salvation is not only a matter of appearance, but of reality. The one true God not only *appears* to be Father, Son and Spirit; he *is* Father, Son and Spirit in eternity. This must be so, Smail argues, because if the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection do not 'tell us the ultimate truth about God's being and nature'[84] then their revelatory value is compromised. It is in this context that Smail refers for the first time in FF to the language of 'the immanent or essential Trinity.'[85] We will revisit his use of these conceptual terms in the next chapter of this thesis.

If these ideas seem distant from the practical needs of the Renewal, Smail expresses a third preliminary Trinitarian commitment. It grounds his doctrinal reflection in church life. He is convinced that the church's health depends on relating 'equally and appropriately' to the three divine persons.[86] He goes so far as to claim that, 'All onesidedness in the faith and practice of the churches can be understood in trinitarian terms as a failure to do due honour to one of the persons of the Trinity, or to realise their proper relationships to one another.'[87] This is the principle that motivates him to write *The Forgotten Father*: the Charismatic Renewal could find maturity by remembering the forgotten First Person of the Trinity.

With these core convictions in place, we must now observe how Smail accesses his topic.

4. Smail's access point into his doctrine of the Father

Smail discovers the Father with greatest clarity in a specific historical situation: the cry of '*Abba'* from the lips of Jesus Christ.[88] He contends that this is the very location to which the Spirit of God points followers of Jesus Christ.

Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, *vol. I, I Church Dogmatics*, 2d ed (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 350.

[84] *FF*, 24.

[85] *FF*, 24.

[86] *FF*, 24.

[87] *FF*, 25.

[88] *FF*, 32.

Smail maintains that the Holy Spirit's essential New Testament activity[89] is to enable believers to make two utterances: to confess Jesus as Lord,[90] and to cry out *abba ho patēr*.[91] By this second Spirit-inspired utterance, Smail argues, the believer is recalled unmistakably to 'the language of Jesus who alone spoke to God in this way.'[92] Put another way, the Holy Spirit leads believers to Jesus, to learn from him what it means that God is '*Abba*, Father.' This is why Smail offers a detailed, multi-dimensional discussion of Jesus' characteristic address to God, which the Spirit causes believers to share: *Abba*.

Smail's use of the phrase 'the *Abba* cry' intentionally directs us to one specific occasion on which Jesus used the word. Quoting Joachim Jeremias, Smail acknowledges that the Aramaic word *Abba* is likely to consistently underlie the far more frequent Greek *patēr* in the Greek text, and that it was therefore very probably Jesus' usual mode of address in his native language.[93] However, to Smail, it is *that one place in the Gospels* where the Aramaic is left untranslated that 'focusses and fulfils'[94] all previous perceptions of divine fatherhood: the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.[95]

For Smail, it is in Gethsemane that the 'austere context of Old Testament fatherhood has its ultimate affirmation.'[96] In the obedient surrender of the Son, *Abba* is revealed as the one who makes 'absolute demand' and offers 'ultimate succour.'[97] Smail recalls these two dynamics of the Father-Son relationship in his postscript to *FF*. He acknowledges that the need to address the Renewal's immaturity has inclined him to emphasise the absolute demand over ultimate succour.[98] That self-reflection is surely accurate, in so far as it goes. What Smail

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[89] *FF*, 31.
[90] 1 Corinthians 12:3. Smail refers to his earlier book, RG, in which he explores 'the relationship of the word of the Spirit to the lordship of Jesus.' (*FF*, 31).
[91] Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6
[92] *FF*, 32.
[93] *FF*, 41, where Smail follows C.F.D Moule and J. Jeremias in translating *Abba*, 'Dear Father.' This captures the familial intimacy of the form of address, while avoiding the 'suggestion often made be preachers of the more tearjerking variety that the correct translation of *Abba* is Daddy.'
[94] *FF*, 38.
[95] Even among the Synoptic evangelists, it is only Mark who leaves the word in the Aramaic. The parallel passages, Luke 22:42 and Matthew 26:39, both render the original in the Greek, πατήρ.
[96] *FF*, 38.
[97] *FF*, 39. These phrases are taken from H.H. Farmer's *The World and God* (London: Nisbet, 1935), 25.
[98] *FF*, 203

does not acknowledge in this reflective comment is that there is another significant reason he emphasises paternal demand over succour. His conception of the Triune relationships inclines him to view obedience as the essential mark of sonship – but this is to get ahead of ourselves.

At this point, we must follow Smail's exposition of the *Abba* cry a step further. This form of address first belonged to Christ. But the Holy Spirit brings Jesus' cry from its historic location into the believer's 'personal eventfulness.'[99] By the Spirit,

> Abba is not understood by the believer from the outside in terms of its Old Testament and gospel origins, [rather] it expresses a prayer that he [i.e. the believer] offers out of an experience of God's fatherhood that he has shared.[100]

Thus, the Spirit, by whom the believer cries out '*Abba*, Father' (Galatians 4:6), draws us to share the same relationship of absolute demand and ultimate succour that Jesus shared with his Father.

This shared sonship also has an eschatological dimension. Following Paul's reasoning,[101] Smail understands that those who share in Jesus' *Abba* cry also share in his inheritance. While this means suffering now ('the location at which we say Abba to God has always something of Gethsemane about it'),[102] the cry also sets the Father before Christ's brothers and sisters as the goal, the *telos*, of their existence. Since the Son is destined finally to hand the kingdom to God the Father,[103] his people will be surrendered to the Father too, finding wholeness with him.

We have followed Smail to the person in whom he finds the Father, Jesus Christ. Smail has led us with precision to Gethsemane, where the relationship between Father and Son is most clearly revealed. Jesus brings his followers into this relationship with the Father, and its reality is revealed to them through the

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[99] *FF*, 42.
[100] *FF*, 42.
[101] In both Pauline references to the *Abba* cry (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6), Paul makes a direct connection between sonship and eschatological inheritance.
[102] *FF*, 46.
[103] 1 Corinthians 15:28. *FF*, 87.

ministry of the Spirit, who brings our adoption into 'charismatic eventfulness'.[104] This sonship involves being 'trained and disciplined'[105] in the current age. It is fully realised in the eternal perfection of the Father.

5. The doctrinal foundations that underpin the *Abba* cry

Smail has accessed the doctrine of the Father through a narrow door: the *Abba* cry of Gethsemane. He now intends to widen his perspective by setting the Abba cry 'within the whole context of God's revelation and action in Christ.'[106] Therefore, in Chapters 3-5 of *The Forgotten Father*, he expounds the doctrinal content that undergirds the historic *Abba* cry and its charismatic eventfulness in the lives of believers. These three chapters are the theological centrepiece of Smail's book, and they form a continuous argument.

An instinctive biblical expositor, Smail grounds his doctrinal agenda with an extended reflection on Matthew 11:25-30.[107] He notes in these verses a 'mutual dependence'[108] of the Father and the Son upon one another. His intention is to explain what this means in both directions, examining first what we learn of the Father from his dependence on the Son, and second, what we learn of the Son from his dependence on the Father. We will outline his reasoning presently, after briefly pausing to note the vagueness of Smail's language of *dependence* and introducing into our discussion the work of Adonis Vidu on the doctrine of the inseparable operations.

The publication of Adonis Vidu's *The Same God Who Works All Things*[109] in 2021 has re-confronted contemporary theology with the Patristic doctrine of the inseparable external operations of the Trinity (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*). Vidu's clarity on what the classical doctrine of inseparable operations

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[104] *FF*, 51.
[105] *FF*, 49.
[106] *FF*, 51.
[107] *FF*, 53. Smail defends his right 'to make positive use of these verses' against allegations that they are a later Johannine insertion. With J. Jeremias, he contends that, in fact, it is more likely that John's Christology was dependent on these verses in Matthew.
[108] *FF*, 57. Smail repeatedly uses the word 'dependence' (or its cognates) to describe the Father-Son relationship. E.g., *FF*, 55, 65, 66, 72, 74 etc.
[109] Vidu, A. *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021). (Hereafter noted as *Same God*).

entails will allow us to open some lines of critique as we survey Smail's doctrinal exposition of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Vidu states that this rule, as traditionally maintained, 'holds that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the divine agency of the one God.'[110] He argues that the mainstream of Patristic tradition enshrines what he describes as a 'hard' version of the rule, in contrast to 'soft' versions.[111] 'Hard' inseparability insists that 'every token act of any Trinitarian person is also an act token of the other persons;' soft interpretations of the rule envision the divine persons merely participating in 'shared and collective actions together.'[112] Vidu contends the doctrine of inseparable operation arises from the Scriptural observation that the persons of the Trinity share common actions – creation and salvation, for example. This informed the Trinitarian logic that pervades the pro-Nicene Church Fathers, by which, 'beings that have the same power and operation must have the same substance.'[113]

An analytical clarity arises from this brief review of Vidu's work as we now turn to consider Smail's doctrinal reasoning. Smail will himself employ a strategy approximating the patristic argument from shared divine operation to union of divine being. Vidu prompts us to consider how successfully Smail implements the strategy. We note at the outset, that the vagueness of Smail's terminology of 'dependence' invites just such an enquiry because, in Vidu's terminology, it is open to both 'soft' and 'hard' accounts of inseparable operation.

(i) Recognising the Father through his dependence on the Son

Based on John 1:18, Smail affirms that 'The Father has his identity through and in his Son.'[114] The Father is unseen and can only be known in his equally divine

[110] *Same God*, 1.
[111] Same God, XV.
[112] *Same God*, XV. By 'act token,' Vidu refers to irreducible and indivisible acts. He intends to contrast this 'hard' position from 'soft' versions of inseparability according to which the persons of the Trinity perform the same type of acts within unified, but *complex*, divine actions. (See *Same God*, 55).
[113] *Same God*, 89. For Patristic examples of this reasoning, see Athanasius, *Ad Serapion*, in *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius's Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit, and, Didymus's On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres, (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2011), 1.14.
[114] *FF*, 57.

Son.[115] Thus, for Smail the Father is dependent on the Son, since 'It is both God's nature and will that as Father he should speak and act in his Son, Jesus.'[116] Smail takes this opportunity to make explicit a theological principle that he treats as axiomatic throughout the ensuing discussion: the Son can only make the Father known truly, if he is understood to be identical in being and nature to the Father.[117] If the Son were less divine than the Father, he could not offer 'an adequate revelation of the Father.'[118] To Smail, this is because he is committed to a rule he associates explicitly with Barth, that 'only God can reveal God.'[119]

This reasoning, Smail believed, must have determinative significance for all human thinking about God the Father. For Smail, therefore, 'the nature and character of God's fatherhood is in the New Testament defined by Jesus.''[120] Smail will return to the positive implications of this view. Before doing so, he wishes to expose and discount three false ways God's Fatherhood is often approached.

First, the Father is not to be seen as the universal father of all people by virtue of having created humanity. His fatherhood relates primarily to God the Son.[121] Secondly, since God's fatherhood is defined in relation to Christ, it is a mistake – albeit an understandable one – to project onto God the Father the image of whatever our personal experience of fatherhood might be.[122] Thirdly, Smail raises the issue of gender. It is likely that were he writing today,[123] he would have given more than the two pages he offers on questions and objections that arise from the use of male terms for God.[124] Smail's point here is that the Father is so named in relation to a Son, not in contrast to a mother. Therefore, his

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[115] *FF*, 59.
[116] *FF*, 57.
[117] *FF*, 58.
[118] *FF*, 58.
[119] *FF*, 58. Smail points out that 'Karl Barth makes it a basic principle of his theology that… only God can reveal God.'
[120] *FF*, 58.
[121] *FF*, 59.
[122] *FF, 59-62.*
[123] Not only would he have to address feminist critiques about the use of male imagery for God; but also, in our cultural moment, the instability and fluidity of the concept of gender itself.
[124] *FF*, 62-64.

Fatherhood is not to be interpreted in terms of masculinity over and against femininity.

These pastoral and apologetic comments are not extended. In the context of Smail's argument, he is simply observing the implications of his conviction that the Father is known only in relation to the Son. To this theme he returns, reasserting that the Father depends on the Son to make him known, and that the Son can do this because 'ultimately [the Son's] being is identical with the being of God.'[125] We observe that, at this point, Smail is expressing a position that Vidu would label 'hard' inseparability: the Father and the Son share the same nature.

Smail completes his account of the Father's dependence on the Son by demonstrating that the Father accomplishes the work of creation,[126] of salvation[127] and of eschatological consummation[128] through him. For the most part, this survey of the Father's dependence on the Son in his relation to the creation holds to a 'hard' view of inseparability. For example, commenting on John 14:10, Smail rejects the idea that Jesus refers only to a 'mystical or metaphysical unity' with the Father, insisting instead that there exists between the Father and the Son 'an identity in agency and action.'[129] Again, in the same connection, he states that 'The words of Jesus are identified with the work of God.'[130]

However, Smail sometimes betrays a looser adherence to 'hard' inseparability. For example, in the same context as the statements just cited, he can write of 'the mighty words of Jesus in which his agency and that of the Father are each in its different way involved.'[131] At the very least, the language of the two agencies of Father and Son 'involved' in the same work demonstrates that Smail was not concerned to rule out the possibility that the one divine nature possesses two

[125] *FF*, 64.
[126] *FF*, 66.
[127] *FF*, 66-69.
[128] *FF*, 69-71.
[129] *FF*, 64.
[130] *FF*, 64.
[131] *FF*, 65.

participating agencies. By contrast, 'Hard' inseparability cannot admit the dual agency within the divine nature, which Smail seems to propose here. [132]

(ii) Recognising the Son through his dependence on the Father

Smail has established that the Father is dependent on the Son for revelation, creation, salvation and eschatological consummation. Now, conversely, in Chapter 4 of *The Forgotten Father* he considers the Son's dependence on the Father: The Son knows himself to be *Son* through his relationship with the Father.[133] He knows it as a twelve-year-old in the Temple.[134] His baptism and transfiguration reaffirm him in the same knowledge. Jesus receives his identity as Son from the Father in the agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary, entrusting himself to the Father completely in perfect obedience.

Not only does the Son know himself through the Father, but he also depends on the Father to make his true identity known: 'it is the Father who reveals him and makes him known to others, just as it is the Son who makes the Father known to others.'[135] Furthermore, Smail recognises Jesus' dependence on the Father for all his actions. The Father is 'the source of Jesus' mission,'[136] and the goal of that mission is to hand the kingdom to God the Father: 'the Father is the future of the Son's mission.'[137]

Smail employs an awkward phrase to describe Jesus' dependence on the Father during the accomplishment of his work: 'The Father is in continuous control of Jesus' action.'[138] The notion of the Father *controlling* the Son is not acceptable on the basis of 'hard' inseparability because, if the divine nature has a single

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[132] Smail's language of two agencies could be reconciled with 'hard' inseparability on the grounds that, *formally*, in the incarnation there is another natural will involved: Jesus' natural human will. However, in case of point, Smail's language is unhelpful. It obscures the clarity of John Damascene: 'Even after the incarnation [the Son] has the same operation as the Father' (Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*, 3:14, quoted in *Same God*, 81).
[133] *FF*, 73-75.
[134] *FF*, 76.
[135] *FF*, 82. Smail points out that in the gospels, the knowledge others receive of Jesus' identity is sometimes ascribed to the Father and sometimes to the Holy Spirit. This leads him to point out, 'In John, there is already an incipient trinitarianism which knows that there is a basic unity between the action of the Father and the action of the Spirit' (*FF*, 84). In Vidu's terms, this leans towards 'hard' inseparability.
[136] *FF*, 86.
[137] *FF*, 87. Smail has 1 Corinthians 15:28 in mind here. He references the same verse earlier (*FF*, 20-21) in a similar connection.
[138] *FF*, 86.

will, it is very hard to see how the notion of control can apply. One will exercises control *over another* – a scenario that cannot pertain if the divine will is undivided.[139] However, it is difficult to know how hard to press Smail on this choice of language, since the biblical illustrations of the 'control' he has in mind – Luke 7:8 and John 5:19-20 – do not amount to 'control' but rather to the Father's authorising initiative in the mission of the incarnate Son.

Smail's account of the Son's dependence on the Father ends with a reflection on how 'as we read in and between the lines of the gospels we can trace something of the ways in which the Father and Son in the glorious mystery of their being speak together.' He refers to the communication the Son receives through everyday life,[140] the Old Testament scriptures,[141] in prayer,[142] through specific words,[143] and the vindicating verdict of the resurrection.[144] We note that Smail does not point out that these means of communication cannot apply between the Father and the eternal Son, but only between the Father and the incarnate Son. This omission can be explained, in part, due to the fact that Smail has not yet advanced his argument from the economy of salvation to the eternal being of God. Yet, as we will argue later in this thesis, the absence of such a statement it in line with Smail's tendency to blur any distinction between the eternal and economic Trinity.

(iii) The Father and Son, and God's eternal being

Smail's argument now takes a decisive step forward. He has demonstrated that the Father and the Son depend on one another to be known. Smail will now press the case that this phenomenon cannot be adequately accounted for by anything less than traditional Christian doctrine: that a pre-existent divine person, who is of one substance with the Father in the eternal Trinity, became incarnate. [145]

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[139] Even the notion of self-control suggests *different* desires within one person.
[140] *FF*, 88.
[141] *FF*, 89.
[142] *FF*, 90.
[143] *FF*, 91.
[144] *FF*, 91.
[145] *FF*, 93.

Smail recognises that within contemporary theological discussion, many consider the traditional doctrine of the incarnation to be an intellectual imposition on the gospel's simplicity, one which hinders its communication in mission.[146] In the course of his discussion, he engages with the functional Christologies of J.A.T. Robinson[147] and R. Bultmann; with the Spirit Christology of G.W. Lampe;[148] and the fulness Christology of D.M. Baillie.[149] Smail's contention is that none of these alternative proposals provide adequate explanation for the actions and words of the Jesus we meet in the New Testament.

Smail explains that those who take a functional approach 'describe Jesus almost exclusively in terms of his function in revelation.'[150] Smail notes that they do not consider it necessary to ask ontological questions about Jesus' identity. They accept that his words and actions function to reveal God, but they are unwilling to make ontological claims about Jesus' divine identity lest they 'throw into doubt the real humanity of Jesus and his identity with us.'[151]

In response, Smail invokes 'the important scholastic principle that "operation follows being" (*operari sequitur esse).*'[152] The principle enshrines a relation of priority of being over doing, or ontology over activity. That is, what a person or thing does, depends on whom or what that person or thing is. In the present context, the maxim obliges us to look behind Jesus' action 'to the nature and the

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[146] *FF*, 93.
[147] Smail cites John Robinson as an example of a theologian who sees Jesus as only a means of revelation, rather than its substance (albeit, in Robinson's case, as the unique means). *FF*, 95.
[148] Smail interprets Lampe as forging an alternative to classic Christology, in contrast to Baillie, who, Smail holds, sought to reinterpret it. (*FF*, 105)
[149] On Smail's analysis, both theologians reinterpreted classic ontological Christological categories in terms of Jesus the man filled with the Spirit (Lampe) and grace (Baillie). *FF*, 105.
[150] *FF*, 95.
[151] *FF*, 95.
[152] *FF*, 96. Smail's citation of this rule is dependent on H.E.W. Turner, who adduces it in his engagement with J.A.T. Robinson (in *Jesus the Christ* (London: Mowbrays, 1976), 94). The scholastic principle is general and can't be said to belong to any one single thinker. Thomas Aquinas expressed the thought in various terms, though never in exactly the form Smail/ Turner supply. For example, in arguing that Christ cannot have used his free human will to bring his own human nature into being, Thomas writes *Prius est enim esse rei quam agere vel operari* ('For a thing is before it acts or operates') *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 34, a. 2 arg. 1. Accessed at http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_III/Q34 on 23rd May 2023.

status of the one who performs it.'[153] If operation follows being, then we cannot allow matters to rest with the observation that Jesus acted and spoke in ways that reveal God, as functional Christologies do. We must enquire as to the nature of a person who can act and speak in these divine ways. As Smail puts it, we have to ask whether a man can 'do the work of God in the sense that Jesus is said to do it, and not be God?'[154]

As a test case, Smail considers which approach to Christology – functional or incarnational – makes better sense of Jesus' words in John 10:30: 'I and the Father are one.' According to the exegesis of Rudolph Bultmann, who holds to a functional Christology, Jesus only intends to indicate 'a moral unity between the words and acts of Jesus and those of God.'[155] This functional view appears to be buttressed by the four commentors Smail mentions, who detect no metaphysical intent in Jesus' words. [156] Yet Smail does not accept the implied contrast between the metaphysical and the practical, as if these were mutually exclusive categories in John's Gospel, or in Jesus' mind. Neither does he find the notion of 'metaphysical' helpful, with its overtones of speculation and irrelevance.[157] He agrees that Jesus' words refer to a practical unity but insists that John's language also makes a concrete theological statement about Jesus' ontological union with the Father, one that is a necessary presupposition 'for the whole New Testament Gospel.'[158]

Smail offers three aspects of that New Testament Gospel which, he argues, presuppose Jesus' ontological identity with the Father. First, he notes that Jesus consistently asserts 'his authority as one who was able to do what only God can do.'[159] Jesus does not speak as one who considers himself as only a means to

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[153] *FF*, 96.
[154] *FF*, 96.
[155] *FF*, 97.
[156] Smail cites the commentaries of Barrett, Temple, Hoskyns and Davy. In fact, C.K. Barrett's comments actually support Smail's argument for an ontological reading of John 10:30. Barrett writes, 'Here, as in the Prologue, John's language comes somewhat nearer to metaphysics…' He goes on to claim that the union of Father and Son Jesus describes is 'a oneness of love and obedience *even while it is a oneness of essence*.' Barrett, C.K. *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 382. (My italics).
[157] *FF*, 97.
[158] *FF*, 98.
[159] *FF*, 100.

know God, a Spirit-inspired prophet who points enquirers beyond himself. Rather, he says 'I am.'[160] To the same effect, secondly, Smail argues that a Jesus who is ontologically *other than God* cannot accomplish an atonement that has the objective impact on the life of God that the New Testament claims it does.[161] And, thirdly, whilst Smail affirms the positive proposals of the Spirit and Fullness Christologies of G.W. Lampe and D.M. Baillie, he finds them insufficient. This is because Jesus is not only presented as a man supremely filled with the Spirit and grace: he also gives the Spirit.[162]

These three facets of the New Testament Jesus – his authoritative words, effective atonement, and authority to give the Holy Spirit – 'require us to see him in a relationship with God that is not simply functional, involving his action, but that is also ontological, involving his being.'[163]

Smail has argued that the mutual dependence of Father and Son witnessed in Jesus Christ can only be interpreted adequately on the assumption that they share the same nature: his operation is divine, and therefore his being, on which his action if predicated, must be divine.[164] This leads Smail to assert the pre-existence of the Son. More than that, to Smail this logic requires us to hold that the relationship between the Father and the Son 'belongs to the very life of God from eternity to eternity.'[165] Indeed, more emphatically still, Smail can claim that this is relationship defines who God is: it 'constitutes his own life as God.'[166]

Smail is aware that he has now advanced from his observation of interdependence between the Father and the Son, through conclusions about the divine identity of the eternal Son, to the doctrine of the Trinity itself.[167] In

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[160] *FF*, 100.
[161] *FF*, 102.
[162] *FF*, 106. In this connection, Smail refers approvingly to the *filioque* clause in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. He changed his mind about the clause before writing *GG* in 1988.
[163] *FF*, 107.
[164] *FF*, 107-108. Note the allusion to the rule that *operari sequitur esse*.
[165] *FF*, 110.
[166] *FF*, 111. This statement suggests a binitarian view of God. This is an ironic weakness in Smail's argument, given that he is addressing the Charismatic Renewal movement. However, in view of Smail's emphasis elsewhere on the work of the Spirit (in *RG* and *GG*), we should attribute Smail's omission of the Spirit here to the specifics of the argument he has employed rather than a blind spot in his theology.
[167] *FF*, 111.

particular, Smail affirms the Nicene Creed's affirmation that the Son is 'of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father' which is 'the root of the doctrine of the Trinity.'[168] Smail does not clarify in any detail how he understands the *homoousion*. For example, he doesn't offer any account of what is meant by *ousia*. He only asserts that 'the Son is of one being with the Father.'[169]

It is unfortunate that Smail did not express himself more fully at this point, for reasons that will become clear in our subsequent chapters. At this point, we observe that Smail's argument, though parallel to the one Vidu ascribes to the pro-Nicene Church Fathers, does not claim quite as much. Vidu writes:

> Athanasius often deploys a form of argumentation, later to be perfected by the Cappadocians, that moves from a common operation to a common and indivisible nature.[170]

In contrast, Smail's form of argumentation has moved not from a *common* operation, but a mutual interdependence. This is a subtly different conception, more akin to a shared rather than an identical operation. Likewise, Smail has argued towards a statement of the *homoousion* that – whilst it strongly affirms the ultimacy of the Father-Son relationship – does not include a clear affirmation of what Vidu labels 'a common and indivisible nature.' It will become clear in Chapter 3 of this thesis, that this weakened form of the Patristic argument leaves Smail vulnerable to hazards in relation to the unity and the equality of the Triune persons.

(iv) The eternal relationship between Father and Son

Having asserted the oneness of the Father and the Son in terms of John 10:30, Smail now turns to consider their relationship: 'We now have to define more precisely what sort of relationship they have within the identity that they share.'[171] To this end, he focuses on another Johannine verse: 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28). Smail argues that by Jesus' own frequent insistence, 'he is second the Father first.'[172] There is a mutual dependence between the

[168] *FF*, 112.
[169] *FF*, 112.
[170] *Same God*, 53.
[171] *FF*, 114.
[172] *FF*, 114.

persons, with the Father as the one who purposes, and the Son who responds and obeys.

In the light of this reality, Smail acknowledges that no one questions the propriety of the Son's obedience in his incarnate state. This is uncontroversial, since 'such a relationship of obedience to God would be almost taken for granted as exemplary and appropriate for all godly men.'[173] However, Smail wants to say more than this. He asks rhetorically, 'Is there in God an ability not just to be first and command, but also to be second and obey?' [174] Implicit in his question is the recognition that a positive answer may raise a 'problem,'[175] and that 'this notion of a divine obedience is a difficult one.'[176] However, Smail's ensuing argument moves towards a qualified affirmation of an obedience within the life of God.

By his own admission, at this point Smail is dependent on Karl Barth.[177] Smail undertook post-graduate studies with Barth in Basel in 1953, the year the Swiss theologian published *Church Dogmatics IV.I.*[178] It is possible that Smail heard Barth deliver, as lectures, the 'magisterial exposition'[179] that became *Church Dogmatics IV/1,* 59.1, 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country.'[180] Whether he did or not, Barth's account of the divine obedience of the Son exerts considerable influence on Smail's account of the inner relationship between the Father and the Son.[181] Smail cites Barth's acknowledgement that the notion of a divine obedience offends human ways of thinking.[182] Smail himself offers two examples from church history of ways this offence has manifested itself.

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[173] *FF*, 114.
[174] *FF*, 114.
[175] *FF*, 114.
[176] *FF*, 115.
[177] It is tempting to suggest – with an allusion to Karl Adam's famous comment about Barth's *Römerbrief* – that Smail's *The Forgotten Father* landed like a Barthian bomb in the playground of the Charismatics.
[178] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. In 13 pts. (hereafter *CD*). Vol. 4, pt, 1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1974).
[179] Smail's phrase. (*FF*, 121).
[180] *CD IV/1*, 157-210. The German edition was published in 1953.
[181] In addition to explicitly acknowledging his dependence on Barth's sub-chapter as he begins his case for the Son's eternal functional subordination (*FF*, 115), Smail also gives Barth the last word (*FF*, 121).
[182] *CD IV/1*, 192.

First, to the subordinationists of the early church, 'subordination in function implies inferiority of being.'[183] To them, the obedience of the Son confirmed that he was not God. Secondly, Smail charges Calvin with a less drastic strategy for avoiding the notion of a divine obedience. Calvin, Smail claims, attributes Jesus' obedience and humility to the human nature, and his majesty to the divine nature.[184] For Smail, this hermeneutic strategy not only undermines the hypostatic union, but it also jeopardises the integrity of revelation. Revelation requires that God reveals God.[185] Therefore, Smail asks the following question, in full expectation of an affirmative answer: 'When Christ speaks and acts in humble obedience to the Father, is his word and action as man also the authentic word and action of God?'[186] Jesus' obedience must be an authentic action of God, or else 'revelation' collapses into subjectivity as readers of the gospels are left to use their *a priori* assumptions about God to determine which of Jesus' actions are divine and which are human.

In contrast to this hermeneutical strategy, Smail insists, we must lay aside our assumptions and allow ourselves to relearn from Jesus what the divine nature is like. Specifically, if Jesus is obedient to the Father in the gospels, then 'this aspect of the self-emptying and self-humbling of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God.'[187] From Jesus' incarnate actions, we learn that God is free, within his own eternal life, to both require and render obedience. Smail writes:

> There is no intrinsic impossibility about seeing how the same free love can express itself in Father and Son in two different ways: in the Father as initiating majesty to will the purpose of his love and the decree of his grace, in the Son the same love still doing what only God can do, but doing it in free service and obedience towards his Father.[188]

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[183] *FF*, 115.
[184] *FF*, 118. Smail does not cite specific examples from Calvin.
[185] This is Smail's earlier contention (*FF*, 58).
[186] *FF*, 118.
[187] *CD IV/1, 193.* Cited, *FF*, 119.
[188] *FF*, 119-120.

Smail is emphatic that the inner-Trinitarian subordination he argues for is '*functional* as against an *ontological*.'[189] He affirms the *homoousion* again, this time with a quotation he credits to Athanasius: 'But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.'[190] Thus, Smail does not intend his case for the Son's functional subordination to compromise the oneness of the divine nature. However, our engagement with Vidu's work on inseparable operations has already raised questions about Smail's account of the divine unity. Indeed, in Chapter 3 of this thesis, we will question whether Smail's distinction between ontological and functional really does maintain the full equality of Smail's functionally subordinated Son.

In due course, we will critique Smail's commitment to the eternal functional subordination of the Son. We will not, therefore, open that discussion now. However, before ending the present chapter, we will note that Smail's stress on the Son's obedience is matched by a corresponding emphasis on the theme of obedience in his account of the Father's outward works.

6. The Father-Son relationship in the works of God *ad extra*

Smail, first, considers the divine work of atonement in his Chapter 6: 'The Father, the Son and the Cross.'[191] He stresses that the Father is both the initiator and the object of atonement. The death of the Son costs the Father dearly, a reality often over-looked behind the more visible cost to the Son.[192] This adds depth to his portrayal of the Father himself. Yet Smail's emphasis falls on the Son's obedience, which 'is the key to an understanding of the cross.'[193] As man, the divine Son provides the obedient response that rebellious humanity has

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[189] *FF*, 116. (Smail's italics).
[190] *FF*, 116. Smail does not footnote this quotation. It is from *The Athanasian Creed*, named after the 4th century bishop in Egypt. On the Creed's true authorship, Martin Davie concludes, 'As we have seen, the author of the Athanasian Creed seems to have been someone from southern Gaul writing at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries.' Davie, M. *The Athanasian Creed* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2019), 22.
[191] *FF*, 123-141.
[192] On this point he declines to go as far as Jürgen Moltmann in positing the death of the Father's fatherhood in the death of the Son. Yet, he does want to stress the emotional weight behind the verb παραδίδωμι in Romans 8:32. (*FF*, 136). See Moltmann, J. *The Crucified God* (London: S.C.M., 1974).
[193] *FF*, 125.

failed to offer. Jesus' obedience reverses both the human 'no' towards God and the divine 'no' towards humanity.

Next Smail turns to the doctrine of adoption. His account is satisfyingly Trinitarian, both uniting and distinguishing the work of Son and Spirit in relation to the Father: 'The business of the Holy Spirit is not to make us sons, still less to make God our Father, but to reveal and realise in us the sonship that has its whole basis in the work of Christ'.[194] He sought to correct both a general tendency to under-realise the intimate privileges of sonship[195] and the Charismatic overfamiliarity with 'a heavenly Daddy who is seen as the distributor of goodies.'[196] It is Christ's Sonship that determines what our experience of sonship should be. Believers are made co-heirs *with him* and must therefore expect to share his suffering before entering his glory.

And like him, they must prize obedience. That is the theme of Smail's Chapter 8, 'The Will of the Father.'[197] It is also the burden of the book: 'The essence of sonship is trustful obedience – if *one thing* has emerged from our study, it is that.'[198] This obedience is *trustful* because the Father offers 'ultimate succour,' and this trust must be obedient because the Father makes 'absolute demand.' As noted earlier in this chapter, Smail himself acknowledges that the emphasis of the book falls on the latter: 'There is in this book a central stress on God's fatherhood as implying our obedience – more perhaps on the side of absolute demand than of ultimate succour… this emphasis is deliberate.'[199]

We noted in our introduction that this emphasis is driven, in part, by the need he perceived: the Charismatic Renewal needed to mature, to grow out of its indulgent need-centredness.[200] Yet this does not fully explain the book's emphasis on obedience. At a deeper level, Smail's account of the relationship between the Father and the Son in eternity inclines him to lay the stress here.

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[194] *FF*, 147.
[195] Smail quotes P.T. Forsyth's *God The Holy Father* to great effect: '[Many] treat God as power, judge, king, providence of a sort. He is for them a rectorial Deity' (*FF*, 148).
[196] *FF*, 147.
[197] *FF*, 159-174.
[198] *FF*, 159. (My italics).
[199] *FF*, 203.
[200] *FF*, 203.

7. Conclusion

We have surveyed *FF*, and opened some lines of critique which will be drawn out in the next two chapters of this thesis. These lines include the lack of clarity we observed during the course of Smail's argument about the unity of divine agency; an inattention to some implications of the *homoousion*; and a tendency not to draw a distinction between the Son as he is in eternity, on the one hand, and in the economy of salvation on the other.

In the following two chapters, we will notice that these weaknesses are closely connected with Smail's commitment to the eternal functional subordination of the Son. It is this aspect of Smail's theology that will occupy the foreground in our evaluative discussion. In particular, we will argue that this understanding of the Father-Son relationship leads to an inaccuracy in Smail's portrayal of the Father, identifying his hypostasis in terms of authority, rather than as the unbegotten begetter, the source of the Triune life.

2 Tom Smail and the eternal functional subordination of the Son

1. Introduction

Towards the end of our previous chapter, we expressed the intention to critique Tom Smail's commitment to the eternal functional subordination of the Son (hereafter EFSS). It was claimed that this aspect of Smail's Trinitarian doctrine is closely interconnected with other points of weakness in his theology.

In this chapter we will, first, examine more closely the place EFSS occupies in Smail's thinking, arguing that it is an essential and central commitment for him. This will be demonstrated, on the one hand, by noting that his commitment to the doctrine endured despite major developments in other aspects of his Trinitarian thought and, on the other, by showing that Smail considered EFSS to be a necessary consequence of his central theological commitments. Having demonstrated that, secondly, we will explore the interaction between EFSS and what, we will argue, is a lack of clarity in Smail's work about the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity.

One preliminary note of clarification is necessary. Since Smail wrote *FF*, EFSS has become a prominent issue in discussions about gender. This gender debate has generated a substantial literature on EFSS.[201] These later discussions are not the focus of this thesis – even though Smail's chapter on gender in *LFLS* (2005) does apply EFSS to the relationship between the genders.[202] Rather,

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[201] Kevin Giles, an opponent of EFSS, identifies George Knight III's book, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) as the place 'This trinitarian argument [for male headship] was first promulgated.' Kevin Giles, 'Barth and Subordinationism', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 3 (August 2011): 330. Giles argues that Knight's views were given 'wide dissemination' by Wayne Grudem's influential *Systematic Theology*. Grudem states that 'the idea of eternal equality in being but subordination in role has been essential to the church's doctrine of the Trinity since it was first affirmed in the Nicene creed.' Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 251. Opponents of the application of EFSS to gender include Richard and Ann Kroeger in Walter ed. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1058.; Millard Erickson, in *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) and Kevin Giles in the article cited above.

[202] Giles identifies Smail as a theologian who applies EFSS to gender: 'In Smail, and most other conservative evangelicals [note: this is not a label Smail would have accepted or appreciated] who argue for the permanent subordination of women, the governing premise is that it is possible to have permanently ascribed functional subordination and ontological equality.' (Giles, 'Barth and Subordinationism', 330). Giles is not quite fair to Smail. In speaking of the

attention is centred on the implications of EFSS for our understanding of the person of the Father. The gender-related literature is relevant to my discussion only insofar as it clarifies the eternal Father-Son relationship itself.

2. The place of EFSS in Smail's Trinitarian theology

The remainder of this thesis will offer an extended critique of the impact of Smail's EFSS on his understanding of the Trinity in general and the Father in particular. Since this issue will receive such emphasis, it is necessary to demonstrate that it is a correspondingly significant theme for Smail. We will do so in two ways. First, we will note that, whilst Smail's Trinitarian theology significantly develops between publication of *FF* (1980) and *LFLS* (2005), his commitment to EFSS remains firmly in place. Secondly, we will show that Smail considered the doctrine a necessary implication of some of his central theological commitments.

(i) Smail's Trinitarian theology moves, but his EFSS stands

In the previous chapter's extended survey of *FF*, it was noted that Smail frames the relationship of the Father to the Son with reference to two Johannine verses. He affirms their ontological identity and equality on the basis of John 10:30: 'I and the Father are one.' As for their interrelatedness, Smail appeals to John 14:28. Commenting on Jesus' words, 'the Father is greater than I,' Smail writes: 'Jesus, while he shares the divine authority that we have already described and acts as God, because he is God, nevertheless insists that he is second and the Father first.'[203]

Smail then pursues his case that this 'greater than,' which is expressed in the context of the incarnate Son's relationship with the Father, *also applies to their relationship in eternity*. As he develops his case, he acknowledges his debt to

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relationship between men and women in the image of Father and Son, Smail *does not* use the language of subordination (*LFLS*, 249). However, given Smail's clear commitment to EFSS earlier in the book, it is reasonable to read the notions of super- and sub-ordination into his language of 'initiative' and 'responsiveness'. In contrast to Smail, Barth *did apply* the language of subordination to the wife in the marriage relationship. For example, he asks 'Why should not our way of finding a lesser dignity and significance in what takes the second and subordinate place (the wife to her husband) need to be corrected in the light of the *homoousia* of the modes of divine being?' *CD IV/1*, 202.

[203] *FF*, 114.

Barth, 'on whose exposition we are dependent at this point.'[204] He describes Barth's articulation of the doctrine as '*magisterial.*'[205] He will repeat exactly that adjective in the same connection after twenty-five years of theological development.

During the 25 years that separate *FF* from *LFLS*, Smail's Trinitarian theology develops significantly. Under the influence of Colin Gunton, Smail became critical of the western tradition, with Augustine at its head and Barth as its latest major exponent.[206] Gunton levels three major criticisms of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine in his influential essay 'Augustine, the Trinity and the theological crisis of the West.'[207] Smail repeats two of them. Following Gunton, Smail claims that the Western tradition focuses on the unity of God's essence to the detriment of the three-ness of the persons, leading to an individualistic rather than relational anthropology.[208] He also echoes Gunton's allegation that this tradition relegates the Holy Spirit from the status of a person in his own right, to the 'common factor and fellowship' between the other two persons.[209]

These insights enabled Smail to approach Barth's Trinitarian doctrine more critically in *LFLS* than he does in *FF*. For example, in *LFLS* he affirms Moltmann's criticism that Barth's Trinity is 'single absolute subject,' precluding real interpersonal relationships between the persons.[210] Critiquing Barth's reticence to use the term 'person' in relation to the three hypostases,[211] Smail asks how a God who is not 'three persons but one person in three modes of being can sit easily with the authentic I-Thou relationships that for Barth constitute the life of God.'[212]

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[204] *FF*, 115. The extent to which Smail has interpreted Barth accurately is not straight forward to determine. There is disagreement in scholarly literature about precisely what Barth's position is. We will return to this disagreement in a later section of the present chapter.
[205] *FF*, 121.
[206] For Smail identifying Augustine and Barth in these terms, see *LFLS*, 81, 92.
[207]Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 30–55.
[208] *LFLS*, 93.
[209] *LFLS*, 91. Gunton alleges that Augustine gives the Holy Spirit 'inadequate economic hypostatic weight' (*Promise, 51).*
[210] *LFLS*, 88.
[211] *LFLS*, 87. See Barth *CD, I/1,* 351, *355-359.*
[212] *LFLS*, 90.

We have highlighted some of the significant developments that took place in Smail's Trinitarian theology during the twenty-five years between *FF* (1980) and *LFLS* (2005), noting that he distanced himself in some respects from Barth. Yet his commitment to EFSS remains unchanged. Indeed, it is striking that he articulates the doctrine in very similar – at times identical – terms in the later book as he did in the earlier. For example, as in *FF*, so in *LFLS,* the unity and the relationality of the Trinity are framed by appeal to John 10:28 ('three persons are equally divine') and to John 14:28 ('there is a differentiation of order.')[213] Again, in what can only be an approving reference to his position in *FF*, the Smail of *LFLS* writes,

> The ontological unity of being does not preclude the difference of function between Father and Son, so that, *in what I have called a functional subordination*, the one is first and the other is second and equally the functional subordination does not threaten the ontological unity but indeed presupposes and requires it to attain its true significance.[214]

In addition, Smail is clear that – even though he has distanced himself from Barth on some points – he remains under the influence of the Swiss theologian's 'magisterial exposition'[215] of the Son's eternal obedience. Note that Smail refers to Barth's 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country'[216] with precisely the same phrase he uses in *FF*.

Smail's commitment to EFSS persists throughout a period in which his Trinitarian theology was otherwise subject to intentional development. It is a fixed point for him, a sustained conviction.

We should note that by the time Smail wrote LFLS, EFSS no longer exercises exclusive influence on his account of the Father-Son relationship. In *FF*, it is the only aspect of that relationship he mentions, intent as he is to allow John 14:28 to frame his account of 'what sort of relationship they have within the identity

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[213] *LFLS*, 76. See also 74.
[214] *LFLS*, 76 (my italics).
[215] *LFLS*, 76.
[216] *CD IV/1*, 157-210

they share.'[217] His portrayal is more expansive in LFLS. For example, he also speaks of the Father's 'dynamic of self-giving that begets the Son and spirates the Spirit…'[218] He speaks of the Father as 'sovereign initiating source,'[219] as 'the prototype of leadership.[220] However, even in *LFLS*, a strong statement of EFSS precedes all other comments on the Father-Son relationship.[221] As a result, it colours his portrayal of the Father's sovereign initiating love for the Son with the tincture of an authority over him.

We are assessing how significant EFSS is in Smail's work. So far, we have noted its persistence in his theology during a period when, in other respects, his Trinitarian theology developed significantly. This persistence suggests that it was significant for Smail. Indeed, as we will now observe, it was not only significant, but structurally essential to his thought.

(ii) EFSS as an essential theological commitment for Smail

Tom Smail believes that a commitment to EFSS is a necessary consequence of a theological priority of the highest order: it is an essential entailment of taking 'seriously the divine identity of Jesus.'[222] Smail is determined that we recognise that the actions of the man Jesus Christ are authentically God's actions. This must include Jesus' obedience. Smail asks:

> If we were talking only about the man Jesus, such a relationship of obedience to God would be almost taken for granted as exemplary and appropriate to all godly men. But *if we take seriously the divine identity of Jesus*, another problem and possibility arises. Can we talk of a divine obedience?[223]

Smail believed that we must, for two reasons we will now state and explain:

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[217] *FF*, 114.
[218] *LFLS*, 102-3.
[219] *LFLS*, 159.
[220] *LFLS*, 161.
[221] As in *FF*, so in *LFLS*, Smail explains the Trinity's differentiated unity with an appeal to John 10:30 (unity), and John 14:28 ('functional subordination') (*LFLS*, 74, 76).
[222] *FF, 114*
[223] *FF*, 114.

a. First, if the economic obedience of the Son truly is the action *of God*, then this obedience cannot be alien to God's eternal being, but proper to the person of the Son.[224]

Smail insists that the human actions of Jesus are competent to reveal and act divinely in salvation history, *precisely because they are already present in God's eternal being*. Smail is following Barth here – only he goes further. Barth argues that 'If what the man Jesus does is God's work, this aspect of the self-emptying and self-humiliation of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God.'[225] Rather, for Barth, the incarnate obedience reveals a prior obedience that belongs in eternity.

Where Smail goes further is in his assumption that this obedience must be interpreted as *proper* to the person of the Son, and not only appropriated to him. As we will discuss later in our present chapter, Barth is generally careful to ascribe obedience and humility to the Godhead, and not to one person of the Trinity in particular. Yet for Smail, the subordinate function belongs to the Son specifically. He writes: 'If what Christ is on earth *is what the Son is eternally* with the Father, then we must see this functional subordination as being within the very nature of God's own life.'[226]

This sentence not only illustrates Smail's conviction that obedience belongs specifically to the Son, but it also repeats the point we have made, that for Smail EFSS is an essential implication of the conviction that Jesus' economic actions are truly the actions of God. Without it, Jesus' revelatory integrity and salvific effectiveness is compromised.

b. Second, the eternal Son can only be reckoned to act freely in the incarnation if he does so according to the reality of his eternal being.

Our perspective now reverses. Smail's insistence that the actions of Jesus are taken seriously as the actions of God led him to look backwards, as it were, to insist that these actions already belong to the Son in eternity. Now we look in the opposite direction and note that, as Smail looks forward from eternity

[224] *FF*, 119. Smail borrows the 'alien' language from *CD*, IV/1, 193.
[225] *CD* IV/1, 193.
[226] *FF*, 120 (my italics).

towards the incarnation, he requires EFSS as essential to his account of divine freedom.

Smail argues that God the Son is free to act as he does in the incarnation because functional subordination is already present in his eternal relationship to the Father. If it was not, Smail argues, there could be no incarnate obedience. He writes:

> That he who is less than God should obey God is self-evident, but that God himself should be able and willing to humble himself and become obedient *is the possibility of his incarnation and the very foundation of his grace*.[227]

The Son's position of eternal functional subordination to the Father is what makes it possible for God *to remain himself* whilst acting in human obedience and humility. The fact this subordination belongs specifically to the Son, therefore, explains why it is he who becomes incarnate, rather than the Father of the Spirit:[228] 'It was because the humility and obedience that were manifested in the incarnation were already there in the Son from all eternity.'[229]

In this connection, Smail alludes obliquely, but with agreement, towards Barth's theology of divine freedom. Barth strongly asserts God's freedom in relation to the world. However, crucially, this is not an arbitrary freedom that could be used in any one way or another, a 'game of chance which takes place within the divine being.'[230] Rather, the freedom of God to act with humble obedience in Christ takes place, 'in the inner necessity of the freedom of God and not in the play of a sovereign *liberum arbitrium*.'[231] That is, God acts in freedom in the incarnate obedience because he acts in accordance with his own nature: he is 'making use of a possibility grounded in the being of God.'[232] Smail concurs: for him, God is free to remain himself in the act of self-giving because he acts there in accordance with who he already is. In becoming incarnate and obedient to

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[227] *FF*, 116. (My italics).
[228] *FF*, 120.
[229] *FF*, 120.
[230] *CD* IV/1, 195.
[231] *CD* IV/1, 195.
[232] *CD* IV/1, 196.

death, he does not have to submit to any requirements that are extrinsic to his eternal existence; rather, he acts unhindered in accordance with his own eternal functional subordination. Smail puts it this way:

> If we seek to understand the nature of God in biblical rather than philosophical perspective… as love that has unconditional freedom to give itself and to be itself in the giving, there is no intrinsic impossibility about seeing how the same free love can express itself in Father and Son in two different ways: in the Father as initiating majesty to will the purpose of his love and the decree of his grace, in the Son the same love still doing what only God can do, but doing it in free service and obedience towards his Father…[233]

Unconstrained by any limits beyond his own being, God is free to give himself as he really is. Since the Son is eternally obedient to the Father, he is free to be obedient to the Father for our salvation.

We have been considering the significance of EFSS in Smail's thought, and demonstrated that it is both an enduring theme and an essential component of his theology. It cannot therefore be seen as incidental and peripheral, but as necessary and central. This justifies the correspondingly central emphasis we will place on it in our critique.

We will now develop this critique with reference to an area we will suggest constitutes a weakness in Smail's thinking: a blurring of the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity.

3. Smail's EFSS and the relationship between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity

In the remainder of this chapter, we will argue that Smail's EFSS is closely related to a lack of clarity that emerges in his writing about the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity.[234] We will make the case that,

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[233] *FF*, 119-20.

[234] This terminology was introduced into theology by Johan August Urlsperger (1728-1806). He aimed to assert God's triunity in both the eternity and the economy, but at the same time to limit every revealed element of the inter-personal relationships only to the economy. This is why, in Fred Sanders' words, he 'steadfastly refused to follow the traditional route of tracing

whilst at times he argues for positions that assume a sharp distinction between eternity and the economy, at other times he overlooks any such distinction. This blurring stands in a reciprocally sustaining connection with Smail's EFSS: that is, to some extent EFSS causes him to overlook the distinction; but equally, this lack of clarity leaves Smail susceptible to overlook some hazardous implications that arrive from his account of EFSS.

(i) Smail's conflicted account of the immanent-economic relationship

Smail offers little explicit discussion of the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. In *FF* he strongly asserts that the Triune God we meet in history is Triune in himself: 'That God not only acts in history as Father, Son and Spirit, but that he is in himself Father, Son and Spirit is the doctrine of the immanent or essential Trinity.'[235] He identifies the immanent Trinity with God's being, and the economic Trinity with his action.[236] Later in the book, he asserts – against Arianism and Sabellianism – that, 'In maintaining the truth of the immanent or essential Trinity, it [the doctrine of the Trinity] holds that the God who has come in his Son and worked in his Spirit is the only God there is.'[237]

These are broad statements that would meet with wide agreement, and Smail does not specify his view on the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity any further. It is important to point this out, in view of the fact that two theologians with whom Smail was familiar expressed significantly different views on this subject: Karl Barth and Karl Rahner.

On the one hand, in *CD*, I/1, Karl Barth insists that, whilst what we see of the Trinity in the economy corresponds with God's immanent being, we must also draw a 'deliberate and sharp distinction between the Trinity of God as we may know it in the Word of God revealed, written and proclaimed, and God's immanent Trinity.'[238] On the other hand, in his axiom, Karl Rahner precludes

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temporal missions back to eternal processions.' (Sanders, F. *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 147). Urlsperger coined the distinction that would be transmitted to modern theology through Karl Rahner's rule, or axiom, which we will consider below. Rahner was intent on 'repairing a breach that Urlsperger opened.' (Sanders, *Triune God*, 148).

[235] *FF*, 24.

[236] *FF*, 24.

[237] *FF*, 112.

[238] *CD I/1*, 172.

any such distinction: 'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.'[239]

We highlight these contrasting approaches to the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity – correspondence with deliberate distinction (Barth) and absolute identity (Rahner) – for a specific reason. In Smail's only explicit comment on the immanent-economic relationship in his later book, *LFLS,* he betrays a lack of clarity in his own thinking: he cites Barth's and Rahner's approaches *as though they were the same*. He refers to,

> …the patristic rule, strongly affirmed in our day on the Catholic side by Karl Rahner… and on the Reformed side by Karl Barth… that as God is in his revelation, so he is in himself, that his action proceeds from and is consonant with his inner being. As Rahner's famous dictum puts it, the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity.[240]

Smail is right to say that Patristic orthodoxy, Barth and Rahner *all* affirm that 'as God is in his revelation, so he is in himself.' But the statement glosses over significant differences. Barth self-consciously stands in line with Patristic theology at this point: he considers it 'absolutely essential' to maintain a distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity *'along with all older theology.'*[241] In keeping with traditional concerns, Barth believes the distinction is vital because it preserves God's freedom over against the creation and enables him to relate to the world in love, and not out of necessity.[242]

Rahner's axiom is designed to safeguard a different theological priority: he wants to affirm that what God communicates in salvation is truly himself.[243] Rahner must, therefore, resist any distinction between the immanent and eternal Trinity, lest what is offered in the salvation is not entirely God's own self. This is why both halves of the axiom are important to Rahner's project. The

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[239] Rahner, K. *The Trinity*, 3rd impr (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1986), 21-22.
[240] *LFLS*, 40. Notice that Smail only cites the first half of Rahner's axiom. It is the *second part* that differentiates Rahner's position from the view Barth expresses in *CD* I/1.
[241] *CD I/1*, 172. (My italics)
[242] See E.g. *CD I/1*, 172.
[243] This is why, for Rahner, 'Christology and the doctrine of grace are, strictly speaking, doctrine of the Trinity.' (*Trinity*, 120). They must be, for if what is offered in the Christ by grace is not the Trinity, then God cannot be reckoned to have communicated his own being.

first half is uncontroversial: if Rahner were only affirming that the God we meet in the economy is an accurate revelation of God in eternity, he is simply repeating Barth's view, in line with tradition. But Rahner needs the second half of the axiom too, in order to guarantee that the revelation we see in the economy is not merely accurate, *but also complete*. As David Lincicum puts it: 'Rahner is not simply saying that the economic Trinity gives us an accurate picture of who God is in himself, but also that the immanent Trinity is somehow fully disclosed in the economic Trinity.'[244]

Lincicum draws attention, helpfully, to a clarifying question Catherine Mowry LaCugna asks in her reflections on Rahner's axiom: what is intended by the copula, *is*?[245] On the one hand, she explains, it could be interpreted metaphorically to mean that what we see of the Triune relationships in the economy is a real and true picture of 'God as internally and antecedently related in God's self, and vice versa.'[246] Alternatively, 'is' could be taken literally, as an ontological statement, in a way that collapses the distinction between God in eternity and God in the economy. According to the first interpretation, the axiom asserts the revelatory integrity of the economy: it reveals the life of God accurately, though not necessarily exhaustively. The second interpretation, however, would imply that the economy of salvation does indeed reveal the immanent life of God exhaustively *because it is that life*: the immanent Trinity literally and ontologically *is* the economic Trinity.

Lincicum claims that Rahner made statements that support both possible interpretations of his axiom.[247] However, he argues that Rahner's 'vice-versa,' – 'the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity' – requires it to be taken ontologically. He develops his case for this, persuasively, with reference to Rahner's identification of the divine missions with the processions. For

[244] David Lincicum, 'Economy and Immanence: Karl Rahner's Doctrine of the Trinity', *European Journal of Theology* 14, no. 2 (2005): 114.
[245] Lincicum, 113. C. M. LaCugna, 'Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 1 (February 1985): 3.
[246] LaCugna, 11.
[247] Lincicum, 114.

example, Rahner writes: 'The two immanent processions in God correspond (in identity) with the two missions.'[248]

The rationale behind this correspondence in identity lies in Rahner's claim, early in *The Trinity*, that the Son's mission is *proper* to him.[249] To refer to the properties of a person of the Trinity is to point to that which distinguishes that particular person from the other two. Thus, if the Son's mission is proper to him, then it is what constitutes the Son's person. In that case, the Son's mission in the economy cannot be merely a revelation of his antecedent procession; rather, it must be identified as an aspect of the procession itself. If the Son's mission is proper to the Second person of the Trinity, then the axiom must be interpreted in ontological terms. As a result, there is a risk positing a relationship of necessity between God and creation, or even of undermining the crucial distinction between them.

This brief exploration of two contrasting views on the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity exposes significant differences between them. Yet Smail cites them as examples of the same approach.[250] This lack of precision leaves him vulnerable to inconsistency on the topic.

We can demonstrate this inconsistency if we contrast Smail's case for the divinity of the Son with his argument for EFSS. His argument for the divinity of Jesus, and indeed for the necessity of the doctrine of the Trinity, rests on something closer to Barth's construal of the immanent-economic relationship as expressed in *Church Dogmatics I/I*. By contrast, his case for EFSS inclines Smail towards a position closer to Rahner.

That Smail assumes a distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity can be demonstrated in relation to his case for the divinity of Jesus. To clinch his argument against functional Christology and for traditional Trinitarian ontology, he cites 'an important scholastic principle that operation follows being (*operari sequitur esse*).'[251] As Smail puts it in other terms, 'a verb requires

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[248] Karl Rahner, "Trinity, Divine," Pages 295-303 in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopaedia of Theology* 259. (vol. 6; New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 298.
[249] *Trinity*, 23.
[250] *LFLS*, 40.
[251] *FF*, 96. See note 156 above.

an appropriate subject.'[252] He argues that, since being precedes action and Christ's actions are divine actions, then the actor must be divine.

Significantly for our present discussion, Smail employs the same language of *action* and *being* in relation to the immanent and economic Trinity. Early in *FF*, he explicitly identifies the economic Trinity with the *action* of God and the immanent Trinity with his *being*.[253] According to the principle of *operari sequitur esse,* therefore, the immanent Trinity is prior to the economic. God is what he is apart from, and antecedent to, his action. His actions are those of a Being who already is what he is. Put another way, there is a one-way relationship, as opposed to a reciprocal and mutually constitutive relationship between Triune being and Triune action: God's eternal being informs the economic actions; but the economic actions cannot constitute God's being that is prior to them and defined apart from them. This line of reasoning, explicit in Smail's Christology and implicit in his Trinitarianism, commits him to maintain a distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinities.

However, Smail appears to compromise these commitments in his case for EFSS. In the closing phase of his discussion of the Son's relationship with the Father in *FF*, he appeals to Rahner. Smail is arguing that, if the obedience of the incarnate Son *is not* recognised as an aspect of the Son's eternal nature, 'we have to lay aside [as of little relevance] all the human characteristics of the Jesus of the gospel story.'[254] Smail insists that far from laying them aside – perhaps because our *a priori* philosophical assumptions rule out a divine obedience – we should recognise that these human acts not only reveal God; they also partially constitute who he is. Smail quotes Rahner directly:

> May we really say without more ado that from the concept of Son of the synoptic Jesus we must eliminate his obedience to the Father, his adoration, his submission to the Father's unfathomable will? For we eliminate them when we explain this kind of behaviour in him only

[252] *FF*, 107.
[253] 'But in the doctrine of the Trinity, besides speaking of God's action (economic Trinity) and God's being (immanent Trinity) has a regulative function…' *FF*, 24.
[254] *FF*, 120.

> through the hypostatic union as such. These things are then properties of the Son, but not constitutive moments
>
> his Sonship.[255]

We emphasise that, in this passage, Rahner is going further even than merely affirming that the obedience we see in the incarnation must precisely reveal prior obedience in the eternal Trinity. That is a possible – though, as we will see, questionable – interpretation of the first part of his axiom. More than that, Rahner is applying the vice-versa and claiming that the being of the immanent Son is constituted by the human obedience – because the immanent Son *is* the economic Son.

This is contrary to the position on the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity that Smail has assumed in the first part of *FF*. Yet in his making the case for EFSS, he affirms Rahner's words: 'It is obvious that for Rahner *as for us* the obedience and the submission are constitutive of the Sonship of Jesus both on earth and in heaven.'[256]

By affirming Rahner's notion of the incarnate Son's obedience as constitutive of his person, Smail softens the clarity with which he maintained the principle *operari sequitur esse* earlier in *FF*. This is because, if the historic acts partially *constitute* the being of the eternal Son, it is questionable whether the Son's person is fully realised prior to the incarnation.[257]

This is not, we suggest, a theological move Smail intended to make, since he is self-consciously working within the tradition of 'orthodox trinitarian teaching.'[258] Yet in making the case for EFSS he has stepped outside that tradition. It seems likely that he has done so inadvertently. This is not a

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[255] *Trinity*, 62-63. Quoted *FF,* 120.
[256] *FF*, 121 (m*y* italics).
[257] It could be argued, contrary to our position, that the *operari sequitur esse* principle requires EFSS. On the basis of the scholastic maxim, the obedience and submission enacted in the incarnation are actions that must follow a state of being in which they already exist. In the next chapter of this thesis, we will highlight aspects of disjunction between the Son's procession and his mission which, we suggest, invalidate this application of the principle. Our contention in the present context, that Smail has softened his adherence to *operari sequitur esse,* is addressed specifically against his agreement with Rahner that the incarnate obedience is constitutive of the Son's person.
[258] *FF*, 16 (see also *FF*, 93).

deliberate departure, but one to which Smail was susceptible because he was so committed to this one theological priority: EFSS. This demonstrates again how important EFSS is to Smail. It also prompts us to explore what drove his thinking on this topic with enough strength to induce this inconsistency. That is what will do now.

(ii) Smail's journey into a far Trinitarian country

Karl Rahner is not the leading influence that moved Smail to blur the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity as he makes his case for EFSS. Rather, Smail is inspired by Karl Barth's 'magisterial exposition,'[259] 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country' in *CD* VI/1. Barth's sub-chapter is the focus of considerable scholarly controversy about the same twin issues we are considering here in relation to Smail: the eternal functional subordination of the Son on the one hand and, on the other, the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. These discussions will be referred to in the paragraphs and notes that follow. The essence of the conversation concerns both the extent to which the position Barth expresses on these points in *CD IV/1* is different to that articulated in *CD I/1,* and the influence of his doctrine of election on any such shift.[260]

In what follows, we will argue that the later Barth does in fact depart from his earlier views on these topics. We will show that Smail's account of EFSS and of the immanent-economic relationship, was influenced by an essentially accurate reading of Barth's later position. However, we will also claim that Smail's account of these intertwined doctrines lacks some of the nuances Barth

[259] This is the description Smail employs in both *FF* (121) and *LFLS* (76).

[260] Philip W. Tolliday has argued that Barth's doctrine of election led him to modify his earlier commitments, and 'to posit a subordination of the Son to the Father that is not limited to the economy.' Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday, eds., *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 148 (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011). Kevin Giles disagrees and, as we will see, insists that Barth's doctrine of election does not substantially change his earlier view. Specifically, Giles argues that Barth's position in *CD, VI/1 does not* reverse his earlier rejection of all forms of subordination. Kevin Giles, 'Barth and Subordinationism', 344, 345. Paul Molnar, by contrast, despite denying that Barth actually was a subordinationist, argues that 'Barth's view of grace in CD II/1' led Barth, in CD *IV/1* to 'conceptually introduces a hierarchy into the divine being… even though he explicitly rejected such thinking as Origenistic earlier in the Church Dogmatics.' Paul D. Molnar, 'The Obedience of the Son in the Theology of Karl Barth and of Thomas F. Torrance', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 1 (2014): 61.

maintains. As a result, Smail's Trinitarian theology – and his doctrine of the Father – is exposed to the hazards that will be highlighted in the next chapter.

In *CD* I/1, Barth resists any blurring of a distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity:

> It is not just good sense but absolutely essential that along with all older theology we make a deliberate and sharp distinction between the Trinity of God as we may know it in the Word of God revealed, written and proclaimed and God's immanent Trinity.[261]

Furthermore, Barth emphatically refused to countenance a subordination among the Triune hypostases, arguing that 'If revelation is to be taken seriously as God's presence, if there is to be a valid belief in revelation, then in no sense can Christ and the Spirit be subordinate hypostases.'[262]

Yet, *prima facie*, in CD *IV/1* Barth's view has shifted. He uses the language of subordination and obedience with reference to the eternal life of the Trinity. For example, he states that,

> We have not only not to deny but actually to affirm and understand as essential to the being of God the offensive fact that there is in God himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination.[263]

Furthermore, he appears to have softened the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. In a passage that demonstrates again the interconnectedness of the twin issues we are considering, Barth goes so far as to claim that,

> He [God] does not do it [humble himself in the incarnation into union with a sinful being] apart from its basis in His own being, in His own

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[261] *CD IV/1*, 172

[262] *CD I/1*, 353. T.F. Torrance, however, perceives subordination within Barth's Trinity in *CD* I/1. (Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 131.) For example, Barth writes: 'Here, then, sonship as well as fatherhood, in and with the super-and subordination expressed thereby, is to be understood as unrestrictedly true deity.' (*CD* I/1 414).

[263] *CD IV/1*, 200.

> inner life. He does not do it without any correspondence to, but as *the strangely logical final continuation of, the history in which He is God*.[264]

This is a substantial departure from Barth's earlier position. The distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity becomes blurred[265] when Barth claims that the Son's economic obedience is a *logical final continuation* of the immanent life of God. Such a position comes very close to positing a necessity in the immanent Trinity with respect to the Triune actions in the economy, since without these acts of creation and redemption the immanent Trinity is left *logically unfinalized*. If this is the case, then the economic acts do not merely reveal who God is prior to and apart from these actions; rather they are seen as necessary elements that, in part, constitute 'the history in which he is God.' For Barth in *CD* IV/1, it seems, the immanent Trinity is, literally and in an ontological sense, the economic Trinity. The 'deliberate and sharp distinction' between the immanent and economic Trinity which Barth maintained in *CD* I/1, is significantly softened in his later work.

As we saw above, Smail builds his Christology on the foundation of the same clear distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity that the earlier Barth maintained. However, in following Barth's later account of the divine obedience in *CD IV/1*, Smail also blurs the immanent-economic distinction. Commenting on Jesus' authoritative invitation in Matthew 11:27ff, Smail writes: 'The divine authority is confirmed, revealed and realised in the meekness and lowliness rather than being obscured and contradicted by them.'[266] It is Smail's choice of the word 'realised' that reveals a shift in his thinking, parallel to what we have observed in Barth above. Just as Barth implied that the economic actions were logically necessary for God's history to be finalized, Smail's language implies that the immanent Trinity is *unrealised* without the economic actions. Thus, as we have just observed in Barth's case, so

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[264] *CD IV/1*, 203 (my italics).
[265] Paul D. Molnar comments that in this sentence Barth's 'blurring the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity [in *CD VI/1*] comes to a head.' Molnar, 'The Obedience of the Son,' 65.
[266] *FF*, 116.

also in Smail's argument for EFSS the assumption is made that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.

I have shown that, in arguing for EFSS, Smail followed Barth's sub-chapter 'The way of the Son of God into the far country.' As a result of that dependence he was led, with Barth, to blur the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. However, in two respects Smail's position is less nuanced than Barth's, and as a result his Trinitarian doctrine – and his account of the Father – is exposed to the significant objections we will raise in the next chapter.

First, Barth's doctrine of election provides coherence to what I have, until now, characterised as a blurring of the immanent-economic distinction. For Barth, Jesus Christ is both electing and elect man. He is always such:

> Jesus Christ was at the beginning. He was not at the beginning of God, for God has indeed no beginning. But he is at the beginning of all things, at the beginning of God's dealings with the reality which is distinct from himself.[267]

Barth claims this status for Jesus Christ – that he stands at the beginning of all things – in order to avoid any conception of God the Son apart from the flesh of Jesus Christ (ασαρκος), fearing that to conceive of God apart from this man would deliver an abstract doctrine of God.[268]

Smail, however, lacks any such nuance, and is therefore vulnerable to projecting aspects of Jesus' incarnate life into God's eternal being. His presentation assumes that obedience belongs to the eternal Son apart from any prospective connection with humanity on his part. As a result, Smail implies that the necessity for such a posture and its realisation rests in God *as God*. This leaves Smail's portrayal of the Father exposed to the charge that, just as the Son's economic obedience is a necessary realisation of his being, so is the Father's super-ordination. The Father cannot be Father without making the 'absolute

[267] *CD* II/II, 102.
[268] *CD IV/1*, 181.

demand'[269] on the Son's obedience that we see in Gethsemane. Yet, we must note by way of objection, that in Gethsemane the Father is interacting with the Son *as one who is fully identified with alienated humanity*. The Father is standing over against the incarnate Son as humanity's judge. And yet, according to Smail's account, this posture reflects, and indeed in some sense *constitutes,* the eternal inner-Trinitarian relationship between Father and Son. If the Father really does require the Son's obedience in these circumstances, then his apparently free gift of his Son is not free, it is necessary. Smail would surely have recoiled from that conclusion, yet it is a consequence of his blurring the immanent-economic relationship in defence of EFSS.

There is a second way Smail failed to maintain a nuance that Barth – for the most part – insisted upon. In the *Church Dogmatics IV/I*, Barth is generally careful to ascribe obedience to God as Trinity, not specifically to the Son's mode of being. It is for *God* – rather than only for the Son – that 'it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far, to be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as to be at home.'[270] Again, when Barth uses the traditional Trinitarian language of *properties*, he refers the property of humility to the Trinity proper and not solely to the Son's hypostasis: 'The humility in which He [*God as Trinity*] dwells and acts in Jesus Christ is not alien to Him, but proper to Him.'[271]

Kevin Giles has emphasised the care Barth takes over his language on this point. In the course of making his case that Barth did not espouse EFSS, Giles argues that Barth designated both humility and majesty as properties of the whole Godhead. He claims that:

> Lordship and humility are inherent perfections in the one (Triune) God. Barth never divides or separates the divine three… [he] never allows any separating or dividing of the divine three or hierarchical ordering. Thus

[269] As noted, Smail took this phrase from H.H Farmer. (*FF*, 39).
[270] *CD IV/1*, 192.
[271] *CD IV/1*, 193.

> Jesus is never subordinated, obedient and suffering Son *simpliciter*, as some superficial readings of Barth maintain.[272]

Giles is overstating his case at this point, however. He himself concedes that towards the end of 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country,' Barth's language reaches 'breaking point.'[273] Here, Barth appears to allocate superiority and subordination to the persons of the Father and the Son respectively:

> … God in His mode of being as the Son in relation to God in his mode of being as the Father, One with the Father and of one essence. In His mode of being as the Son He fulfils the divine subordination, just as the Father in his mode of being as the Father fulfils the divine superiority.[274]

Giles argues that Barth's ascription of superiority and subordination to the persons of the Father and Son respectively stands in tension with a holistic reading of Barth's work.[275] However, we suggest that in fact Barth makes explicit here what he has implied throughout 'The way of the Son of God into the far country': that in some sense the divine obedience belongs to the Son, and divine superiority to the Father. However, the very fact Giles can plausibly make the case he does confirms that Barth was indeed wary about distinguishing the hypostases of Father and Son *simpliciter* in terms of super- and sub-ordination.

Smail, by contrast, was not so careful. In both *FF* and *LFLS*, there is no ambiguity: obedience is proper to the Son's hypostasis, and therefore, by implication, 'absolute demand' is proper to the Father's. To justify this contention fully would be to trespass on ground we will cover in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to offer one quotation from Smail. The quotation is from *LFLS*, and it leaves no doubt that the Father and the Son are eternally distinguished in terms of the sovereignty of the one and the obedience of the other. Employing the traditional language of Trinitarian theology, Smail writes,

> If purposeful sovereign initiation is the *proprium*, the defining hypostatic characteristic, of the Father, willing responsiveness is the *proprium* of

[272] Giles, 'Barth and Subordinationism', 341.
[273] Giles, 'Barth and Subordinationism', 344.
[274] *CD IV/1*, 209.
[275] Giles, 'Barth and Subordinationism', 344.

> the Son. Here we see the same love and freedom that we see in the Father in the mode of sovereignty, given a distinctive personal expression in the mode of obedience by the Son.[276]

Smail does not maintain Barth's nuance at this point. He unguardedly locates 'a certain subordination' not in the Godhead – as Barth generally did – but specifically in the Son's hypostasis.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored more thoroughly some foundations that underpin Smail's theology. We have noted the pervasiveness of Smail's EFSS and the high degree of significance he placed upon it. We have also explored the close connection between his elaboration of EFSS and his lack of clarity about the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. This has led us, towards the end of the chapter, to suggest that Smail's lack of clarity on this point leaves him susceptible to projecting elements of human life, even of human life under judgement, directly onto the eternal Trinity. In addition, we have stated that Smail designates obedience as proper to the Son's person. We will develop this critique in our next chapter, though using alternative conceptual language: that of the divine processions and missions.

[276] *LFLS*, 169.

3 The Son's Eternal Functional Subordination in relation to his Procession and his Mission

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we argued that Smail's commitment to EFSS is entangled with a blurring of the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. We will now explore the consequences of this blurring, although we will do so using different language. We will leave aside the abstract[277] notions of the 'immanent' and 'economic' Trinities and employ, instead, the conceptual framework of the divine processions and missions.

This ancient frame has the benefit of concreteness: it assumes that we are speaking of the Triune God who exists externally in a particular type of plurality, and who acts historically.[278] The 'immanent/economic' distinction, with its inevitable repetition of the word 'Trinity,' can encumber the conversation, conceptually as well as grammatically, with the disconcerting question: *which* Trinity are we talking about? By contrast, the processions/missions scheme directs the discussion towards consideration of how the only Trinity there is, acts. Specifically, to think in terms of the Son's procession and mission compels us to account for the way the Trinity's unity and plurality expresses itself in the historic life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son made flesh. And – to reverse the perspective – this language of processions and missions requires us to clarify how this historic action reveals the antecedent plurality and unity of the Trinity.

Thus, classic Trinitarian theology proceeds by way of a two-directional contemplation. From the missions, faith learns of the eternal processions in the one divine nature. Then, with knowledge of that eternal nature, faith reads

[277] Noting the abstraction of the terms 'immanent/economic,' Fred Sanders concedes that there is, perhaps, an 'evident advantage' in their comprehensiveness' (Sanders, *Triune God*, 146). However, more fundamentally, Sanders echoes Gilles Emery's critique: 'When the doctrine of the Trinity is posed in these terms, it leads at times to presenting the Trinitarian faith in a dialectical and even wooden manner.' (Emery, *Trinity*, 178).

[278] Sanders stresses the advantages of this framework: 'These missions [of Son and Spirit] must be kept central in all our thinking about the Trinity… Failure to recognize that they are manifestations of eternal processions has kept much modern Trinitarianism abstract and brittle' (Sanders, *Triune God*, 146).

Scripture with what Adonis Vidu describes as 'a second *naïveté*' or 'an exercise of *redoublement*.'[279] This two-way process is necessary because, whereas the missions are revealed to creatures within the creation (indeed, to fallen people within a fallen world), the processions take place within the uncreated life of God. Allowance must be made for the vast difference between the life of God considered apart from creation and the created context in which Triune revelation occurs. Trinitarian contemplation moves 'backwards' and 'forwards' from missions to processions and processions to missions, taking care with each movement to attune to this difference.

In the ensuing discussion, we will argue that just as Smail blurs the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinities, so he misrepresents the relationship between the Son's procession and his mission. More precisely, in his case for EFSS Smail identifies them so closely that he makes scant allowance for the created context in which the uncreated God reveals himself. Thus, in the first part of this chapter, we will argue that by projecting the circumstances of the Son's mission without qualification into the procession, Smail inadvertently introduces ontological subordination into the Trinity. Then, in the second part, we will consider the consequences of prematurely introducing the mission into the procession for the drama of divine condescension.[280]

2. Eternal generation, the divine *monarchia* and the ontological subordination of the Son

In his earlier theology, Smail consistently reads the incarnate obedience of Jesus Christ into the procession of the Son from the Father – that is, into his eternal generation (EG). Before observing this directly, we must locate the place EG occupied in Smail's thinking.

(i) Smail on Eternal Generation

In both *FF* and *GG*, Smail affirms his commitment to the conviction expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that the Son is 'eternally begotten from

[279] *Same God*, 115.
[280] The choice of the word 'drama' will be explained in due course.

the Father.'[281] For example, in *FF*, he argues for 'the dependence of the Father on the Son,' and for their identity in nature, on the basis of John 1:18: 'The Father is God the unbegotten, but the Son also is *monogenes theos* – God the only begotten.'[282] Likewise, in *GG*, Smail distinguishes between the Father's begetting of the Son and his spiration of the Spirit, suggesting that the begetting originates 'someone to love'.[283]

Smail stands with pro-Nicene orthodoxy in believing that EG buttresses two crucial doctrines associated with the Son in particular, and the Trinity in general. On the one hand, for Smail, EG provides the rationale for the Son possessing the same divine nature as the Father.[284] Smail asserts that the Son's 'ontological identity with God' rests on the fact that he is '*monogenes* – of his [God's] own being and nature.'[285] Expressed another way, Smail assumes, without explicitly stating, that EG provides the basis for credal conviction that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father.[286]

On the other hand, Smail also holds that EG provides the rationale for the Son's distinct personhood in relation to the Father's. Again, this is consistent with the pro-Nicene conviction that the Son is all that the Father is, except that he is

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[281] Formulated in the theology of Origen, the notion that the Son is eternally begotten from the Father enabled pro-Nicene theologians to affirm, on the one hand, the unity of substance between the Father and the Son while differentiating their persons; and on the other, to assert that God has always existed as Father and Son. (Widdicombe, P. *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: OUP, 2001). Despite its credal pedigree, EG has encountered some recent rejection among evangelical scholars. For example, Bruce Ware, argues that 'The "eternal begetting of the Son" and the "eternal procession of the Spirit" seem to me highly speculative and not grounded in biblical teaching.' (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway 2005) p. 162). Scepticism has intensified in the light of etymological studies demonstrating that the Greek tern μονογενὴς, (John 1:18, a *locus classicus* for EG), refers not to the Son's *begottenness*, but to his *uniqueness* as 'one and only.'

[282] *FF*, 57-8. We note that, in this context, Smail cites two possible renderings of John 1:18, based on divergent manuscript (μονογενὴς θεὸς or μονογενὴς υἱὸς). Both renderings translate the adjective μονογενὴς as 'begotten.'

[283] *GG*, 122.

[284] Athanasius, for example, states, 'He is God's offspring, and as being proper Son of God, who is ever, He exists eternally…' Four Discourses Against the Arians 1.14 *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 28 vols. in 2 series. 1886–1889. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1891) Vol IV, 314 (Hereafter noted: author, *work*, NPNF, vol, page).

[285] *FF*, 110–11.

[286] Smail introduces the language of *homoousios* in *FF*, 112, immediately after discussing the concept of eternal generation.

begotten and the Father unbegotten.[287] Being begotten, then, is sole hypostatic property of the Son and is not shared with the other two persons of the Trinity.[288] Smail alludes to this line of reasoning in *FF* when he writes, 'The Father is God the unbegotten, but the Son is also *monogenes theos* – God the only begotten.'[289] In *FF* and *GG*, then, Smail identifies the properties of the Triune persons through their relations of origin within the eternal life of God.[290]

In keeping with Patristic orthodoxy, Smail believed that EG established both the oneness of the Father and the Son in the divine nature and the distinctness of their relative hypostatic properties. Therefore, since the main distinction Smail identifies between the Father and the Son is EFSS, we should not be surprised to find that his thinking links this functional subordination and EG.

(ii) The relationship between EG and EFSS

In Smail's earlier thought (*FF* and *GG*), the very nature of EG requires a commitment to EFSS: the Son's functional subordination is a necessary implication of Smail's particular understanding of his begottenness. A clear example of this is offered in *FF* where Smail quotes Sir Norman Anderson to bolster his case for EFSS. Anderson writes:

> Even in the "essential Trinity" moreover we can, I think, discern a certain element of priority and what may perhaps be termed subordination. The Bible almost always speaks of a certain priority residing in, and an initiative being taken by, the Father – or simply God… *The very title Son*

[287] Gregory Nazianzen: 'The Father is Father, and is Unoriginate, for He is of no one; the Son is Son, and is not unoriginate, for He is of the Father…by generation.' Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 39:12, NPNF, vol. 7, 396.

[288] Nazianzen, again, states, 'All that the Father has belongs likewise to the Son, except Causality; and all that is the Son's belongs also to the Spirit, except His Sonship.' (Nazianzen, *Oration* 34. 10, NPNF, vol. 7, 337.

[289] *FF*, 58.

[290] In this, Smail follows the mainstream of western Trinitarian reflection. Note, for example, these typical expressions from Roman Catholic and Reformed perspectives: 'Each person possesses his own personal traits. These distinct personal features constitute the "property" of each divine person: paternity and innascibility (Father), filiation (Son), and procession (Holy Spirit).' (Emery, G. trans. Levering, M. *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, (Washington: CUA Press, 2011), 111). 'Hence the *relatio* or *notio personalis* of the Father is *paternitas*, that of the Son filiation or *nativitas*, that of the Holy Spirit *processio*.' (Heppe, H. ed. Bizer. E., trans Thomson, G. *Reformed Dogmatics*, (London: Wakeman Trust, 2000), 115).

> *suggests generation, derivation, and a certain subordination together with identity of essence*…[291]

To Anderson, and to Smail who quotes him, EG establishes 'a certain subordination' within the one divine essence: the begetting Father is functionally above, the begotten Son is below.[292]

The same thought is repeated in *GG*. Here Smail closely relates the Son's status as begotten to Jesus' statement in John 14:28: 'the Father is greater than I.' Having stated that 'the Father is the *prime source* and ultimate end of everything that the Son does and is,' Smail asserts that:

> Within the divine being that they both share, the Father is first and the Son second. It is true both of his time on earth and from eternity to eternity in heaven that 'the Father and I are one' (John 10:30) and 'the Father is greater than I' (John 14:28).[293]

It is the fact that the Son is from the Father as his source that makes John 14:28 *eternally* true. At risk of pre-empting a later stage of our discussion, here we simply note that Smail's application of John 14:28 to the Son in eternity puts him outside the pro-Nicene mainstream.[294]

We are exploring the relationship between EG and EFSS and must now deepen the enquiry with an examination of how Smail understood the generation itself. Specifically, we will ask what it is about the EG that means Jesus' words in John 14:28 ('the Father is greater than I'), apply – as Smail repeatedly claims they do[295] – to the functional subordination of the Son in the eternal Trinity. To

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[291] *FF*, 120 (my italics).
[292] Hence the English words *subordination* and *super-ordination* which derive from Latin roots meaning 'ordered below' and 'ordered over' respectively.
[293] *GG*, 123-124.
[294] Thomas F. Torrance refers to the interpretation of John 14:28 as an 'early Church test of orthodoxy.' To adhere to Nicene orthodoxy, Jesus' saying must be 'interpreted, not ontologically, but soteriologically, or "economically", as Gregory Nazianzen, Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine understood it.' (Torrance, Thomas F. *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 66-67). The point is that, to these theologians, applying John 14:28 to the eternal Son would be to consider him 'a secondary or subordinate divinity, as if [the Son] were inferior to the Father in respect of being.' (*Perspectives*, 66). Such a move would imperil the *homoousion*.
[295] E.g., *FF*, 114, *GG*, 123-124, *LFLS*, 76.

address this, we need to press him on what he believes the Father gives to the Son by EG.

(iii) The Father's *monarchia* in *FF* and *GG*

In *FF* Smail implies, and in GG he explicitly affirms, his commitment to the view that the divine *monarchia*[296] belongs to the person of the Father, rather than to the whole Trinity.[297] For Smail, 'Authority and Lordship' properly belong to the Father, and only in a derived sense to the other persons:

> Within the life of the one Godhead, it is, according to the orthodox trinitarian teaching, the Father who is the source of all authority and lordship; the equally divine authority and Lordship of the Son and the Spirit are nevertheless derived from the Father's authority and Lordship, not in self-sufficient autonomy, but in obedience to the Father who is 'greater than I.'[298]

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[296] The term blends two Greek words: 'only (μόνος) and 'principle' (ἀρχη). *Monarchia* is a patristic conceptual label for that about God which guarantees his oneness, and therefore refutes the charge that Trinitarianism is, in fact, tritheism. (See Koutloumousianos, C. *The One and the Three: Nature, Person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition* (Cambridge, U.K: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 15.

[297] This places him on one side of a long running debate in Trinitarian theology about where to locate the single divine *monarchia*: in the person of the Father or in the Triune divine nature. If the *monarchia* is seen to belong to the *person* of the Father as the unifying source of Godhead, then his *person* is interpreted as the principle (ἀρχὴ/*principium*) or cause (αἰτία) *of the deity* of the other two persons. If, however, the monarchy is located in the divine nature, the notion of the Father's *monarchia* applies not to the gift of deity itself to the other two persons; rather, it applies relationally to the Father as the source their personal identities. Calvin notes apparent disagreement among Patristic authors on this subject: 'Sometimes, indeed, they [the Church Fathers] teach that the Father is the beginning of the Son; sometimes they declare that the Son has both divinity and essence of himself.' (Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Ky. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 20), I.XIII.19, 143-144. Calvin held the second view – that the Son is αὐτόθεος, possessing divinity of himself, just as the Father does, within the divine nature. John Zizioulas' *Being as Communion* has brought the issue into the mainstream of Western theological discussion in recent times. He argues that the Cappadocian Fathers teach that the Triune communion is what it is because the Father 'as a person freely wills this communion,' Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians 4 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 44. Chrysostom Koutloumousianos has challenged Zizioulas' claim that the Cappadocians taught that the monarchy belongs to the person of the Father: 'The Cappadocians are not, in fact, afraid of essence-language, nor do they anchor monotheism to a single hypostasis… monarchy is not the monarchy of the 'person of the Father' above and beyond the common nature.' (Koutloumousianos, *One and Three*, 21).

[298] *FF*, 16.

Smail expresses the same position even more clearly when, in *GG*, he offers a solution to the *filioque* controversy.[299] Smail is one of several recent theologians who have attempted to resolve it.[300] In the course of making his proposal, he describes the Eastern position on the divine *monarchia* in this way:

> The Son and the Spirit have a divinity that is not their own but is derived from [the Father's]. Although they are eternal, divine persons and not creatures who come into being in time, they owe their being to the Father and not to themselves; he has primacy and priority over them. "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28)… there is an original underived deity that belongs to the Father alone and there is a derived, dependent deity that the Son and Spirit have because it comes to them from the Father.[301]

Since Smail's own solution to the *Filioque* controversy seeks to take 'full account of the eastern emphasis on the priority of the Father,'[302] it is reasonable to infer that he accepted this perspective. He held that by EG, the person of the Father gives deity to the Son and the Spirit. It is by virtue of this derived deity that Jesus' words, 'the Father is greater than I,' apply to the eternal Son.

We have been seeking to understand why, for Smail, the EG entails EFSS. The explanation we have found in his earlier work lies in the fact that, in his thinking, EG bestows on the Son a derived and dependent deity, of which John 14:28 is eternally true: the Father possesses a greater deity than the Son, if only because the divinity of the one exists of itself, and that of the other exists in derivation.[303] This raises the question of whether Smail has adequately upheld

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[299] Smail's interest in this debate was motivated by a desire to offer a fuller account of the relationship and interaction of the Son and the Spirit, rather than to develop his doctrine of the Father.

[300] Smail's solution is that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed should read: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father *through the Son*.' He also proposes a balancing insertion to the creed's clause about the Son, indicating that he is 'eternally begotten of the Father *through the Spirit*.' For other attempts to resolve the *filioque* controversy, see Thomas G. Weinandy, '*The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2010) and Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM, 1981), 187.

[301] *GG*, 121.

[302] *GG*, 138.

[303] Contrast Smail's position with Thomas Torrance's: 'The principium of the Father does not import an ontological priority, or some *prius aut posterius* in God, but has to do only with a 'form

the *homoousion*, a possibility to which we will return after we have considered how Smail's Trinitarian theology develops after writing *GG*.

(iv) EG and some developments in Smail's understanding of personhood

By the time Smail writes *LFLS*, his understanding of divine personhood has developed. He retains a commitment to identifying the Triune persons from their relations of origin. For example, he appeals to John 1:18 to affirm that the Son 'shares his Father's being and nature.'[304] Furthermore, he employs the notion of begetting to account for the Father's actions in the economy when, echoing Augustine, he employs the preposition 'from'.

Augustine stressed that the Son is begotten *from* the Father, and not the other way around, as a way to affirm that the order of the divine persons we witness in the economy has its basis in the processions, while carefully avoiding any notion of subordination. For example, Augustine writes,

> … and yet… the Son was sent by the Father. Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter, the other begotten; the first is the one *from* whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is *from* the sender. For the Son is *from* the Father, not the Father *from* the Son.[305]

In the same vein, Smail comments that,

> All in all, there is what we have called a "from-ness" that defines the distinctive place of the Father within the Trinitarian ordering of the divine action in history, which faithfully reveals the divine being in eternity.[306]

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of order' (*ratio ordinis*) or 'arrangement' (*dispostitio*) of inner trinitarian relations governed by the Father/Son relationship, which in the nature of the care is irreversible.' (*Perspectives*, 65-66). It is almost impossible for readers of Barth's *CD IV/I* to miss Torrance's reference to Barth's assertion that, 'we have to reckon with an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination in God' (*CD* IV/I, 196).

[304] *LFLS*, 71. We will discover that EG recedes into the background in Smail's thinking in *LFLS*. In keeping with this shift, it should be noted that when Smail cites John 1:18 in *LFLS*, he does so in the NRSV which renders μονογενὴς as 'only' rather than 'begotten.'

[305] Augustine, trans. Hill, E. *The* Trinity, The Works of Augustine, Vol. 5 (New York: New York City Press, 1991). IV.28, 173. This statement is typical in Book IV of *De Trinitate*.

[306] *LFLS*, 160.

However, Smail's theology of the Triune persons underwent significant development in the years before the publication of *LFLS*. He no longer restricted his identification of the hypostatic properties to the relations of origin. He sought a more expansive account of personhood (human and divine) than he considered possible in the Augustinian, Thomist, and Reformed traditions. In this, he followed Colin Gunton's lead.

In *Act and Being*, published only a year before *LFLS*, Gunton defines 'person' in terms that go far beyond relations of origin. Gunton writes: 'An approach to their [the Triune persons'] identification in terms merely of relations of origin is not adequate to the way scripture speaks of persons.'[307] For Gunton, this limitation leads to a failure to individuate the persons from the divine essence.[308] To be recognised as truly personal, Gunton urges, they 'must each have their own attributes, their own distinctive characteristics, or they would be indistinguishable from one another, and so theologically perform no function.'[309]

Gunton argues for a univocal (rather than an analogical) view of personhood.[310] To be a person, he claims, is to be one of 'those particular beings – hypostases – whose attributes are manifested in particular kinds of action, such as love, relationality, freedom, creativity.'[311] As far as divine and human 'persons' both exhibit these characteristics, the term means the same for both referents. This is certainly true as far as the man Jesus Christ is concerned, in whose life 'human love is also the love of the Father in action… the word [person] means the same at the levels of creator and creation.'[312]

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[307] Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 138.
[308] *Act and Being*, 139.
[309] *Act and Being*, 127.
[310] Gunton qualifies his use of the term univocal. He does not take it to mean that personhood is used of the human and the divine 'in exactly the same sense.' Rather, following Scotus, he clarifies his meaning thus: 'that concept [is] univocal which possesses sufficient unity in itself, so that to affirm and deny it of the same thing would be a contradiction.' *Act and Being*, 146.
[311] *Act and Being*, 146-147.
[312] *Act and Being*, 147.

Smail was strongly influenced by Gunton.[313] Under Gunton's influence, he believed he had arrived at 'a new concept of personhood with which to interpret the life of humanity.'[314] This 'new' concept, Smail argued, was actually the recovery of the vision of the Cappadocian Fathers, to whom 'in blatant contrast to Augustine, the three Trinitarian hypostaseis are not seen as manifestations or aspects of the one divine self-consciousness, but as three sources of free personal action in rich relationships with one another.'[315] In this, Smail affirms Gunton's univocal view of personhood, human and divine: Smail claims that the Cappadocian Fathers redefine the word hypostasis 'so that it comes to mean not just a particular existent thing (like a table) but something much more like the modern concept of a person.'[316] Again, following Gunton, Smail believes he is correcting a Western over-emphasis on the one-ness, rather than the three-ness of God.[317] Smail warns that,

> an over concentration on the oneness of God can obscure the distinct personal identities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the uniqueness of the complementary roles and functions that each fulfils in the inner life and outward action of Triune God.[318]

In summary, Smail's understanding of personhood has shifted. It is true that he remains committed to the notion that the Son's procession from the Father (EG) constitutes his person, but that is now only part of the picture. The personhood of the Father and the Son now also includes their unique and complementary roles in eternity and in the economy. For example, Smail can state that 'within that [divine life] *and in the accomplishment of that salvation*, the freedom of the

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[313] In a review of *LFLS*, Michael Reeves, a former PhD student of Gunton, suggested that 'For anyone new to this field, or perhaps intimidated by works such as Gunton's classic *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, this study provides an extremely reliable and readable introduction.' Michael D Reeves, 'Like Father, like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity', *Themelios* 32, no. 2 (January 2007): 111–12.
[314] *LFLS*, 93.
[315] *LFLS*, 93. The question of whether Smail has accurately represented the Cappadocian Fathers is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[316] *LFLS*, 93.
[317] 'The East says "three" with a louder voice than it says "one," and the West says "one" with a louder voice than it says "three".' *LFLS*, 81.
[318] *LFLS*, 78.

one divine life is expressed in three different ways which define the hypostatic distinctness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'[319]

Two fields of activity now combine, in Smail's thinking, to identify the Triune persons: the divine life in eternity and the saving acts in history. Crucially, however, these two fields of activity cannot exert equal epistemic influence, since we can only directly know what we observe in the accomplishment of salvation. By contrast no one can observe the roles of the persons in eternity. Thus, it is inevitable that the economic actions are interpreted as the hypostatic properties. These actions include the Son's incarnate obedience. As a consequence, EFSS gains an even stronger foundation in Smail's understanding of the Father-Son relationship. Furthermore, even though EG plays a less explicit role in Smail's later thought, it is still present in the background. Therefore, by implication, it is the ultimate basis for much more divergent hypostatic distinctions than Smail would have entertained in his earlier work.

Put another way, Smail now finds even stronger warrant than before to project what we observe in the Son's mission backwards into his unique procession. Indeed, as we observed at the end of our previous chapter, Smail goes so far as explicitly to identify the Father's and the Son's relative hypostatic *propria* in terms of the obedience witnessed in the mission.[320]

As this part of the discussion concludes, it will be helpful to note a subtle, but telling, difference between Smail's conception of the Father's hypostatic property and that which is traditionally ascribed to him. Smail has spoken in terms of the Father's initiating sovereignty, which is met in the Son's willing obedience. Meanwhile, tradition has tended to identify the Father's hypostatic property as innascibility (in relation to his own person), and (in relation to the Son) as his giving of his own life to the Son in EG. Expressed in plain language, the Father requires nothing and gives everything. Yet the hypostatic property of Smail's Father includes the notion of an authority that requires the Son's obedience. This re-characterises the Father at a profound level.

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[319] *LFLS*, 157 (my italics).
[320] *LFLS*, 169.

(v) Developments in Smail's understanding of the divine *monarchia* in *LFLS*

It was not only Smail's view of personhood that developed in the years before he wrote *LFLS* (2004). He also became aware of problems related to his earlier understanding of the divine *monarchia*. These developments could potentially have led him to modify his account of EFSS.

For example, Smail rejects John Zizioulas' affirmation of sole *monarchia* of the Father, a position Zizioulas ascribes to the Cappadocians and one which Smail accepted in *GG*.[321] For Zizioulas, in Smail's words, the Cappadocian Fathers' insistence that the person of the Father is the source of all being,

> makes the ultimate source of all reality, whether uncreated in God or created in the world, unambiguously personal in the hypostasis of the Father, rather than, as in the West, the impersonal divine essence of which the three persons are diverse expressions.[322]

In *GG*, Smail assumes something like Zizioulas' personalist view of the Father's *monarchia*. However, in *LFLS* he accepts Alan Torrance's critique of Zizioulas. Torrance reasons that to give ontological priority[323] to the Father, ironically, prevents the First Person of the Trinity being recognised as Father. This is because he is who he is only in relation to the other persons.[324] Torrance argues that ontological primordiality should be ascribed to the tripersonal community, insisting that the 'intra-divine communion is not only a primordial concept but an eternal "given," that is, ontologically, primitive and original.'[325]

Thus, we observe that Smail's earlier view (*FF*, *GG*) of the Father's *monarchia* is modified in *LFLS*. From his engagement with Zizioulas and Torrance, Smail

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[321] As mentioned in note 316, above, Chrysostom Koutloumousianos has disputed Zizioulas' claim that his position accurately represents the Cappadocians.
[322] *LFLS, 101.* This is a caricature of the Western position. Adonis Vidu argues that in 'creedal Trinitarianism,' both East and West, 'an equiprimordiality must be affirmed of substance and persons.' (*Same God*, 97).
[323] There is no question of *temporal* priority in any of the authors we are considering, ancient or modern.
[324] *LFLS*, 101.
[325] Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation, with Special Reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 293.

clearly knew some of the hazards of viewing the person of the Father as the source of the Son's divinity. However, Smail's concern with this position, as far as he expresses it, is limited in scope: he raises Alan Torrance's critique only to safeguard the ultimacy of Triune communion. By contrast, he does not appear to perceive the possible implications of the Zizioulas/Torrance dialogue for the relative status of the persons. That is, he fails to follow through the logic that, if the community of the Three is ontologically ultimate, then the Son's divinity cannot be derived from the Father's. Thus in *LFLS,* as in his earlier books, Smail delineates the Son's eternal relationship to the Father with reference to John 14:28: 'The Father is greater than I.'[326]

This failure to apply a revised understanding of the Triune *monarchia* in *LFLS* leaves standing a serious objection we alluded to in discussing Smail's earlier books: that his account of EFSS is grounded in what he sees as an ontological, and not merely relational, difference between the divinity of the Father and the Son. Thus, we have to ask explicitly whether Smail has adequately maintained the *homoousion*.

Smail was emphatically committed to upholding the *homoousion*[327] and would baulk at the suggestion that he did not maintain it adequately. He only wanted to affirm the Son's *functional* – not ontological – subordination. However, since according to Smail's view of the Father's *monarchia*, the Son derives his deity from the Father, then the two cannot be considered as being of the same substance. Smail implies that they are different, since the *divinity* (rather than the personhood) of one is underived, and of the other, derived. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Smail has inadvertently introduced ontological subordination into the Trinity.

Smail believes that the distinction between the Son's ontological subordination (which he formally rejects) and functional subordination (which he affirms) is meaningful, and that in affirming the latter he cannot be accused of the former.[328] Yet, this distinction cannot be maintained, because the functional

[326] *LFLS*, 74, 76.
[327] E.g., *FF*, 112; *LFLS*, 74.
[328] Smail's subheadings, (inspired, perhaps, by Barth), express his view here clearly: 'Inferiority of being – No!' and 'Subordination of function – Yes!' (*FF*, 115-116)

subordination is ontologically embedded. That is, since the functional subordination is a direct consequence of the procession (EG), and the EG is conceived as a communication of deity itself, then the 'functional' subordination cannot be anything other than ontological. Again, Smail absolutely does not intend to espouse ontological subordinationism within the Trinity. However, by projecting the obedience that befits the Son in his mission into his procession, he inadvertently does exactly that, since this is an eternal procession and therefore intrinsic to the Son's eternal hypostatic identity.[329]

3. The drama of divine condescension

We have argued that by projecting the circumstances of the Son's mission without qualification into the procession, Smail inadvertently introduces ontological subordination into the Trinity. Now, in the second part of this chapter, we will consider the consequences of blurring the Son's mission and procession for the drama of divine condescension. We will argue that, because Smail prematurely introduces the circumstances of the mission into the eternal procession, he risks dividing the Triune will and thereby disregards the difference it makes when the Son takes to himself a human will in the incarnation. As a result, he underplays the drama of divine condescension and mischaracterises its *dramatis personae*.

The concept of salvation's story as a *drama* is prompted by Gregory Nazianzen. Nazianzen envisages the obedient submission of the incarnate Son as 'a marvellously constructed drama dealing with us.' We will cite his conception of this drama at length because it will act as a focal point for our discussion:

> These things [Christ's learning of obedience and tears] are a marvellously constructed drama dealing with us. As Word he was neither obedient or disobedient – the terms apply to amenable subordinates or inferiors who deserve punishment. But as the "form of a

[329] This is a criticism of Smail's account of EFSS specifically: his view that by EG the Son receives a derived deity means that the subordination he envisages is ontological, not merely functional. EFSS itself does not necessarily invite this criticism – so long as the commonality of the one divine nature the Father and Son share is adequately emphasised, and any hint of division of the divine will is ruled out (see below). We suggest however, that by the time these safeguards are in place, the word 'subordination' will no longer prove helpful to describe the eternal Son's receptive relationship to the Father.

> slave" he comes down to the same level as his fellow slaves; receiving an alien "form" he bears the whole of me, along with all that is mine, in himself, so that he may consume within himself the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the sun ground mist, and so that I may share in what is his through the intermingling.[330]

For Nazianzen, the Son can only be obedient in his incarnation when he receives 'an alien form.' By contrast, Smail is willing to speak of the obedience of the Son *in eternity*. For example, he writes, 'Obedience is not just a law given to the creature, it is the basis of the life of the Creator;'[331] and elsewhere, 'The sonship of the eternal Son consists of a divine obedience.'[332] We will develop our discussion by considering the implications of Smail's claims in relation to the unity of the divine will.

(i) Obedience and the unity of the divine will.

As we have seen, for Smail the Son's eternal functional subordination is conceived in terms of *obedience*. Yet Nazianzen not only denies that there is an obedience within God's eternal being, more than that he insists that the very notion of obedience is moot. This is because, as we will observe below, he was concerned to uphold the unity of the divine will. *Obedience* would threaten this unity, since the very definition of the word 'obedience' implies the presence of two wills: one that yields to the other.

Adonis Vidu's recent work on the doctrine of inseparable operation has confronted contemporary theology with what is at stake in ascribing separate actions, *and locating personal will*, in the Triune hypostases rather than in the one divine essence. Reflecting on the Trinitarian doctrine of Athanasius and the Cappadocians, Vidu contends that,

> The development of Trinitarian theology secured the doctrine that the Trinity has a single operation *ad extra*. It also fortified a particular

[330] Nazianzen, *Oration* 30.6, 97.
[331] *FF*, 121.
[332] *FF*, 159.

> association between nature, operation, and will. These did not belong to the hypostasis, but to the divine nature.[333]

For these pro-Nicene theologians, the divine identity of the Son and Sprit was secured by the conviction that, though distinct persons within the divine nature, they share, with the Father, the one divine operation and will of that single nature. For example, Nazianzen, responding to the objection that, since he refers to three persons as 'God,' he must worship 'a plurality of powers,'[334] asserts the unity and indivisibility of the single divine will and power. To Nazianzen, a plurality of wills and powers would entail a plurality of gods. But in the case of the Trinity,

> We have one God, because there is a single Godhead. Though there are three objects of belief, they derive from a single whole and have reference to it. They do not have degrees of being God or degrees of priority over against one another. They are not sundered in will or divided in power. You cannot find there any of the properties inherent in things divisible. To express it succinctly, the Godhead exists undivided in beings divided. It is as if there were a single intermingling of light, which existed in three mutually connected suns.[335]

The consequence of this insistence on the unity of the divine will and operation is that the *persons* of the Trinity cannot be reckoned to possess a will and operation of their own, without sundering the single Godhead. As a result, pro-Nicene theology understood will as a predicate of nature, not of person.[336]

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[333] *Same God*, 74.
[334] Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.13, 127.
[335] Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.13, 127.
[336] Vidu demonstrates that the association of will with nature rather than person, the fruit of 4th century Trinitarian controversy, was decisive in the Christological debates of the 7th century. The logic that will belongs to nature not person, demanded that Jesus Christ must have possessed two wills because he had two natures, divine and human. (*Same God*, 72-84). Vidu is aware how strange this notion of will as a postulate of nature sounds to modern ears. He reflects, 'How foreign this naturalization of will must be to the modern mindset! Modern anthropology locates will in personal existence, hoping to preserve the freedom of the self-expression of the person.' (*Same God*, 89). This contemporary notion of personhood is in tension with the one clarified amid the Trinitarian controversies of the 4th century. Indeed, if our contemporary conception is applied to the persons of the Trinity, it would necessarily yield three wills and three operations in God, which would amount to tritheism. It is for this reason that Barth was reluctant to use the word 'person' for the Triune subsistences. He wanted to avoid importing modern notions of autonomous personhood into the Trinity with the inevitable

A vital nuance must be stressed alongside this insistence on the unity of the Triune will. Vidu brings this nuance to the fore in his exposition of the Dyothelite controversy. Quoting Stăniloae, he argues that, while will belongs to nature, it is the person that wills: 'The willer is the person or the hypostasis. The will belongs to nature. Nature demands its fulfilment, but the person fulfils it.'[337] In the case of the Triune hypostases this means that each person possesses the single will of the divine nature according to the mode of their own personal origin. In the case of the Son, this mode is one of filial 'receptivity to the Father.'[338] Vidu draws a direct link between this modal possession of the divine will and the Son's incarnate life: it is 'played out on a human level through the obedience of Jesus Christ.'[339]

Smail himself alludes to this notion of the single divine nature expressing itself in different personal modes, when he writes,

> there is no intrinsic impossibility about seeing how the same free love can express itself in Father and Son in two different ways: in the Father as initiating majesty to will the purpose of his love and the decree of his grace, in the Son the same love still doing what only God can do, but doing it in free service and obedience towards his Father.[340]

Yet this quotation illustrates Smail's blurring of the processions and missions, the very weakness our present chapter is seeking to explore. Whilst it is unclear in this particular context whether Smail is describing the Father and the Son in eternity or in salvation history, it is clear that he holds that the obedience pertains either way. Yet, if we follow Nazianzen's thought, this distinction is of

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consequence of tritheism. He preferred to designate the persons '*Seinsweise' or* 'modes of being.' (*CD 1/1*, 351, 359). Smail was aware of Barth's reasoning (*LFLS*, 87), but does not share his early mentor's caution. This is evident in *LFLS*, where Smail explicitly grounds the personal identities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a definition of personhood 'much more like the modern concept of a person.' (LFLS, 93). This concept demands more space for 'free personal action' (*LFLS*, 93).

[337] *Same God*, 79.

[338] *Same God*, 82. (See also 177).

[339] *Same God*, 177. It is important to note that, whilst a congruent line is drawn here between the Son's participation in the one divine will in the mode of filial receptivity and his incarnate obedience, it is only on 'a human level' that the notion of obedience is appropriate. The description of the Son's hypostatic mode of receptivity cannot legitimately be 'stretched' to include the idea of an eternal obedience without implying the presence of a second will when there isn't one present.

[340] *FF*, 119-120.

absolute importance. For if, on the one hand, Smail is referring to the mission of the Son then not only is what he describes *possible*; more than that, it is what has actually happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet, on the other hand, for Nazianzen the notion of obedience is moot as far as the divine life in eternity is concerned, since the divine will is one. That logic renders Smail's proposal impossible. It only becomes possible for the Son to offer 'free service and obedience' when he takes the 'alien form' of human nature. Smail elides these stark alternatives.

The Nicene concern not to pre-empt in the conditions that pertain in the incarnation by locating them in the eternal life of God, is well illustrated by Augustine's care to preserve the unity of the divine will in the decision to send the Son. The Son's sending cannot be considered an act of the obedient submission of the Son alone to the will of the Father alone. This is because, as Augustine puts it in his discussion of the Father's sending of the Son in Book 2 of *De Trinitate*,

> The Father and the Son have but one will and are indivisible in their working. Let him understand the incarnation and the virgin birth in the same way, as indivisibly wrought by one and the same working of Father and Son…[341]

According to Augustine, Jesus applies the language of 'sending' to the Father, and the language of 'sent' to the Son, because it is the *will of both* that the Son should appear and not the Father:

> Since then it was the work of the Father and the Son that the Son should appear in the flesh, the one who so appeared in the flesh is appropriately said to have been sent, and the one who did not to have done the sending.[342]

Augustine was careful not to divide the single divine will. By contrast, Smail locates super- and sub-ordination, initiation and obedience in the Son's procession. He holds that what pertains to the mission already applies in the

[341] *De Trinitate*, II, 9, 103.
[342] *De Trinitate*, II, 9, 103

procession, threatening the unity of the divine will as a result. He is therefore correct to say that we witness the Son performing 'free service and obedience towards the Father,' but we only do so once another nature becomes involved, with a distinct will and operation. This is what happens when the Son takes a human nature in his mission, as we now turn to discuss.

(ii) An alien *form?*

We develop our critique by raising another concern that arises from Smail's premature insertion of obedience into the life of the pre-incarnate Son: Smail inadvertently underestimates the degree of condescension involved in the Son receiving the 'alien form' of humanity in his incarnation. At issue here is a proper appreciation of the difference it makes to the Son of God to be made flesh.

We return to our earlier quotation from Nazianzen. By virtue of the Son's eternal procession from the Father, he is '*neither obedient nor disobedient*.'[343] These categories are moot since the three persons possess the same will. By contrast – to refer again to Nazianzen – when, 'receiving an alien "form" the Son bears the whole of me,' obedience is appropriate due to the status of the form he received. The reception of this alien form, and with it a second natural will, makes obedience *possible* (in that now two wills are involved) and *appropriate* (given the nature of the form he has received). The incarnate mission places the Son into a posture before the Father that now includes his creatureliness[344] and – more than that – his identification with humanity under judgement. The result of Smail prematurely locating these aspects of the mission in the procession, is that he glosses over the vast contrast between the life of the Son in eternity and the experience of the incarnate Son. Put another way, he collapses the distinction between the Son's procession and his mission and thereby diminishes the condescension involved in his incarnation.

It must be stressed that Smail arrived at this position for positive reasons: he wanted to ensure that 'when Christ speaks and acts in humble obedience to his

[343] Nazianzen, Oration, 30.6.
[344] 'There are, in any case, as we have already noted, elements in the incarnate economy such as the time pattern of human life in this world which we may not read back into the eternal Life of God.' T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 109.

Father… his word and action as man [is] also an authentic word and action of God'[345] This is an entirely valid concern, because if there is no actual correspondence between the actions of the incarnate Son and the eternal Son, then the claim that Jesus reveals God is undermined. Yet, at the same time, allowance must be made for the radical difference – the 'newness' – that the incarnation brings. [346]

It is our contention that, in his determination to assert the revelatory integrity of the life of Jesus Christ, Smail has neglected to make adequate allowance for this difference. By contrast, the tradition expounded by Vidu, and discussed above, gives good account of *both* the revelatory integrity of the incarnation *and* the vastness of the condescension it entails. There is continuity from procession to mission, in that the Son's filial mode of receptivity is the same in eternity as in the incarnate obedience and humiliation; but there is also discontinuity, because this eternal procession is revealed in an obedience and humiliation that can only exist when – in Nazianzen's words – 'as the "form of a slave" he comes down to the same level as his fellow slaves; receiving an alien "form" he bears the whole of me, along with all that is mine.'[347]

Smail's proper insistence that the words and actions of Jesus Christ must be seen as acts of God is not balanced by a corresponding concern to account for aspects of the soteriological[348] and cultural[349] context that cannot apply in the eternal life of God. Instead, the distinction between the Son's procession and his mission collapses, and the true cost of the Son's condescension is undervalued.

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[345] *FF*, 118.

[346] We are put in mind of T.F. Torrance's language – used in relation to the doctrine of the Triune *creatio ex nihilo* – of 'newness.' Torrance writes, 'The incarnation must be regarded as something "new" even for God, for the Son was not eternally man any more than the Father was eternally Creator' (Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, 2. ed (London: Clark, 1997), 155. See also *Doctrine of God*, 108).

[347] Nazianzen, *Oration* 30.6, 97.

[348] For example, for our salvation the incarnate Son not only experiences a creaturely life, but he also suffers under divine judgement. Smail is at risk of eternalising these facets of Jesus' human existence.

[349] We acknowledge that Father/Son language in Jesus' first century cultural context, as well as in many settings today, intrinsically includes notions of obedience. However, we suggest that the point of analogical correspondence between human and divine Father/Son language does not lie here, but only in the notion of begetting. In Nazianzen's words: 'Just as with us these names [Father and Son] indicate kindred and affinity, so here too they designate the sameness of stock, of parent and offspring' (*Oration* 26:16, 84).

For example, whereas the yielding of Jesus' will in Gethsemane, should be recognised as a radically alien act for the Son, one to which he stoops from a prior state in which such an experience was impossible, in Smail's account the impression is that the yielding of his will is the continuation of an eternally familiar pattern.

(iii) Defining Divine Fatherhood

As we draw this present chapter towards a conclusion and prepare to recapitulate Smail's pastoral concerns that we identified at the start of this thesis, we will pursue one line of thought that is particularly relevant to its theme: by blurring the processions and the missions together in his commitment to EFSS, Smail has defined fatherhood in terms of *authority-over*, and sonship in terms of *obedience-to*. The *dramatis personae* of salvation's drama are thereby mischaracterised.

Smail understood vividly the experiential significance of his topic for Christians. He writes: 'There is obviously a very close psychological connection between our experiences of human fatherhood and our approach to God's fatherhood. The whole notion of fatherhood in whatever context it arises is highly emotive.'[350] Smail recognised the tendency for human beings to project their personal experience of their fathers, and cultural norms of fatherhood, onto God the Father. He argues that in fact, in Christ the projector is pointing in the opposite direction: 'The authentic projection and image of the Father is his own Son come from him to be made man among us.'[351] As a result, our personal notions of fatherhood derived from our experiences and assumptions need to be put on one side in recognition of a new norm. Smail writes:

> The Christian norm for fatherhood and sonship is the dealings between God and Jesus; the love with which Jesus was loved and to which he trusted is the Father's love and not any other, the authority that he exercised is the Father's authority and not any other.[352]

[350] *FF*, 59.
[351] *FF*, 60.
[352] *FF*, 60.

This statement has significant positive pastoral implications for those whose image of fatherhood is distorted. Yet our argument thus far requires us to question Smail's uncritical dependence on the metaphor of *projection*. This word-picture is another example of the way Smail blurs the parallel distinctions between the immanent and economic Trinities, and between the Son's procession and his mission. It implies that the character of God's immanent inner-Trinitarian Fatherhood is *directly* reproduced in Jesus' incarnate experience. But this fails to account for the fact that the Son assumed the 'alien form' of human flesh and, in addition, that in Jesus Christ, he acted on behalf of humanity under judgement. In terms of the metaphor of projection, Smail has not allowed for the very different medium through which the downward image is refracted. Thus, while it is vital to affirm, with Smail, that the image of Fatherhood we see in Gethsemane (for example) truly reveals the procession, it is equally important to insist that there are elements of the Garden encounter that only pertain to Jesus' incarnate state and soteriological role. Specifically, the Father's 'austere'[353] demand and Jesus' submission, so fitting in this context, are not in themselves hypostatic properties of the Father and the Son respectively.

On one level this might seem an irrelevant distinction for pastoral theology, since we are in full agreement with Smail that Jesus' obedience is the pattern for the Christian's obedience. Christians are adopted into his incarnate relationship with the Father, so obedience like his is necessary regardless of whether, like Smail, one accepts EFSS or otherwise. However, Smail's EFSS shapes his conception of the Father profoundly: to be Father is to be in authority and to be Son is to obey.[354] Therefore, there is a level on which this distinction is of great pastoral relevance, because it determines to a significant extent the nature of the person we are called to obey.

In Smail's account, the Father's hypostasis is defined in terms of authority. He is the 'authority figure' in the Trinity. Yet the Father cannot be seen as *hypostatically* and *immanently* super-ordinated over the Son. It is true that the

[353] *FF*, 38.
[354] 'The essence of sonship is obedience' (*FF*, 159).

adopted children must obey the Father's authority in any case. However, if, with Smail, we claim that this is because super-ordination is the Father's hypostatic property, then his relationship with us (as with the eternal Son) is *essentially* about our submission to that authority. In contrast, we have argued that the Father is not hypostatically superordinated over the Son. As a result, we conclude that it is only for us and for our salvation that the Father assumed a relationship of authority over the incarnate Son, who assumed a posture of obedience for the same reason. In that case, the Father's authority over his adopted children is not a necessary expression of his own personhood, but a gift of his life-giving grace.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that, just as Smail blurs the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinities, so he misrepresents the relationship between the Son's procession and his mission. First, we argued that by projecting the circumstances of the Son's mission without qualification into the procession, Smail inadvertently introduces ontological subordination into the Trinity. Then, we considered some consequences of prematurely introducing the mission into the procession on the drama of divine condescension.

Towards the end of the chapter, we have moved in a pastoral direction, raising the concern that Smail has defined the Father in terms of *authority-over* and sonship as *obedience-to*. This has prepared us to move into our conclusion.

Conclusion

This thesis offers the beginning of an evaluation of Tom Smail's doctrine of God the Father. We set out his view of the Father, as presented in FF, in Chapter 1. This descriptive survey led us to identify Smail's EFSS as a prominent feature of his Trinitarian vision. Since then, much of our critique has centred on Smail's commitment to EFSS. In Chapter 2 we argued that this commitment is closely entangled, in Smail's theology, with a blurring of the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. We deepened this criticism in Chapter 3, using the conceptual framework of the divine processions and missions. Towards the close of that chapter, we alleged that EFSS has led Smail to identify the Father's person in terms of authority.

As we bring this thesis to a close, we need to fulfil the promise of our Introduction, and appraise Smail's Father in the light of his aims in writing the *FF*. He wrote the book to address deficiencies he perceived in the Charismatic Renewal, in which he had played a prominent part. He believed that the Renewal was intent on satisfying immediate human needs, neglecting Christ-like obedience in the process. He considered it vulnerable to authoritarian leaders who promised panaceas. Meanwhile, he sensed that the movement was losing touch with central Christian concerns and becoming less, not more relevant to the wider church.

We identified four benefits Smail believed would be brought to the Renewal by consideration of those 'aspects of the Christian message that gather round the person, nature and work of God the Father:'[355] first, he foresaw the Renewal gaining a proper perspective on God's ultimate purpose, weaning it off self-centred concerns; second, he intended to offer a summons to obedience, prompting a conversion 'from an obsession with our needs to an obedience-centred Christianity;'[356] third, he intended his presentation of the Father to help the Renewal reintegrate with the central concerns of the Christian Faith; and fourth, he hoped to correct the Renewal's problematic relationship with authority.

[355] *FF*, 16.
[356] *FF*, 29.

It is hard to measure objectively how fully these hopes were fulfilled, and to assess the impact of one book on a movement as diverse as the Charismatic Renewal is certainly not the task of this thesis. What we must do, however, is to consider how far the doctrine of the Father Smail offers meets the four aims we have just recapitulated. We will offer, first, a positive assessment in relation to the first and third; then, after that, a less positive evaluation in relation to the second and fourth.

1. Smail's Father measured against Smail's pastoral aims

In relation to his first aim – to point beyond proximate human needs to God's ultimate purpose – Smail succeeds. He consistently highlights the eschatological dimension of the Father's work. For example, he writes, 'When we look to the Father… we are looking at the goal (*telos*) of the Christian life when the Church and the kingdom and all their members are brought to completion.'[357] His account of adoption in his Chapter 7 strengthens these statements of the Father's eschatological ultimacy: Smail expounds Romans 8 with special attention to the Father, who 'is also the Creator and the homecoming of his sons is a central factor in the remaking of his creation.'[358]

In relation to the third aim – to encourage the Renewal towards integration with the central concerns of the Christian Faith – again, Smail succeeds. Methodologically, FF is a blend of exegetical, historical, doctrinal and pastoral theology. The result is that to read *FF* is to be drawn into the mainstream of a broad Christian conversation. As Smail presents the Father, he successfully recalls the Renewal to the core doctrines of Trinity, Christology, Atonement and Adoption.

It is in relation to the second and fourth aims that we will offer a more negative assessment. In both cases, the underlying problem is the same: Smail portrayed the person of the Father in terms of *authority-over*, and therefore considered sonship as essentially a matter of *obedience-to*.

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[357] *FF*, 48. Note here the overtones of 1 Corinthians 15:28 which also presents the Father in eschatological terms. This important verse is also cited at *FF*, 70, 87, and alluded to at *FF* 193.
[358] *FF*, 157.

The second aim is directly connected to the notion of obedience. Smail intended to help the Renewal move from an obsession with personal need to a concern with obedience. Yet, aside from the problems we have raised throughout the thesis with identifying the Father as hypostatically super-ordinated, we have to consider whether the best pastoral solution to this problem was to offer a Father who is essentially an authority figure. If the Renewal really was unconcerned with obedience, is an assertion of authority a wise way to transform the situation? Such an approach might perhaps have been counterproductive, entrenching the adolescent Renewal in its self-concern.

Smail's fourth aim was to address the problems he perceived with authoritarian leadership in the Renewal. However, again, we suggest that Smail's EFSS has frustrated this aim's fulfilment. Smail argued that 'The way of deliverance for human authoritarianism is the rediscovery of divine authority. It is when we are most captive to the second that we shall be most free from the first.'[359] It is undeniably true that Smail has asserted the Father's authority in a way that relativises human authority. Likewise, he emphasises the obedient sonship which leaders, as much as church members, are called to embody. However, he has perhaps let loose some unintended consequences too. In *LFLS*, Smail identifies the Father as 'the prototype of leadership.'[360] Thus, if the Father's hypostatic property involves his authority over the Son, it is hard to resist the conclusion that leadership is essentially about authority.[361] This might inadvertently provide more justification for the leaders Smail has in mind to define their leadership in these terms – in contrast to Jesus, who views leadership as essentially an exercise in servanthood.[362]

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[359] *FF*, 17.
[360] *LFLS*, 161.
[361] In a very different ecclesial context, Chrysostom Koutloumousianos draws a link between Trinitarian conceptions that tend to super-ordinate the Father with authoritarian structures: 'Given that such [personalist] interpretation includes a kind of subordination of the Son to the Father – albeit without degrading the Son's ontological status – it is most likely that the oppressive and totalitarian element, which the personalist strives to avert, would eventually enter the scene in a more subtle way' (Koutloumousianos, *One and Three*, 6).
[362] E.g., Mark 10:42-45.

2. A more effective pastoral approach?

Classical Trinitarian theology has not identified the Father's hypostatic property as *authority-over* the Son. Rather, it has identified him as the unbegotten source of the Triune life. His hypostasis is *life-for*, and this has not included notions of *authority-over*.[363] It is entirely counterfactual to consider what difference it might have made to Smail's success in fulfilling his aims if he had focused on this traditionally held view of the Father's hypostatic identity. However, the exercise is useful insofar as it highlights, by contrast, the weakness of EFSS.

Smail could perhaps have built common ground with the Renewal, affirming the gifts it had received, but leading it from the peripheral phenomena that he critiqued to the ultimate source of its gifts. That source is the Father who, Smail could have demonstrated, is hypostatically identified as the Giver. Having presented the Father this way, Smail might have led his readers to observe how he gives life to the Son both in the divine processions and in the incarnation. He might then have surveyed the Father's provision for the incarnate Son in life, death and resurrection, pointing out that the essence of sonship is to receive everything from the Father. Further, he could have stressed that in the incarnate Jesus, as in the adopted children after him, this life is enjoyed in a humble trust that leaves no room for authoritarian pride, and by an obedience that converts us from an obsession with satisfying our self-centred needs.

Whether that is a better pastoral approach is a matter of subjective judgement. However it is clearly very different to Smail's presentation, which under the influence of EFSS *summons* rather than *allures*[364] the Renewal to the Father. Yet, whilst we have argued that Smail's doctrine of God the Father is weakened by his commitment to EFSS, we draw this thesis to a close with recognition that it remains a rare offering: it brings deeply considered Trinitarian theology to bear on the life and challenges of the church.

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[363] '[The Father is] the giver of the divine fulness to the Son through eternal generation' (Emery, *Trinity*, 115).

[364] The choice of this verb is prompted by Ashley Null's comments on its prominence in Reformation discourse. Null describes it as 'the Reformers' favorite verb to use with the gospel,' citing its occurrence in the writings of Katherine Parr, Martin Luther, Thomas Cranmer and others. Null, A. and Yates, J.W III, *Reformation Anglicanism: A vision for today's global communion* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), Kindle edition, Loc 1696.

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