

## Who Is Thomas Forsyth Torrance?

Professor Thomas Forsyth Torrance—TF to his students (to distinguish him from his brother JB), or Tom to those who knew him—was a towering figure in twentieth century theology. His prodigious literary output, translation work, edited volumes, international speaking engagements, and ecclesiastical and ecumenical endeavors cast a huge influence over theology and theologians working with him, against him, and after him. Now in the twenty-first century the impact of his work is still being felt as PhDs are completed on his work, monographs roll off the presses detailing and critiquing aspects of his theology, and societies and even entire denominations are established to disseminate central features of his thought.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the theology of Thomas Torrance, his method and content, continues to be of interest today, and for good reason.

To introduce Torrance (1913–2007), a full biography of the man and his life is not in order. Alister McGrath has done an admirable job in providing the interested reader with an intellectual biography.<sup>2</sup> However, given Torrance’s axiom that to know God we must know God in God’s act and being, it seems appropriate to apply the same methodology to our exploration of Torrance: to

1. I am referring specifically to the Thomas Torrance Theological Fellowship and its theological journal, *Participatio*, and Grace Communion International, formerly the Worldwide Church of God, which has adopted Torrance’s Trinitarian theology as the basis of its own theological trajectory.

2. Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999). A very short T. F. Torrance “in a nutshell” can be found in A. G. Marley, *T. F. Torrance: The Rejection of Dualism*, Nutshell Series vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1992). A short biography on the three Torrance brothers (Thomas, James, and David) can be found in J. Stein, “The Legacy of the Gospel,” in *A Passion for Christ: Vision that Ignites Ministry*, ed. G. Dawson and J. Stein (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1999), 131–50. A brief biography by Jock Stein and an early account of Torrance’s parish ministry can be found in *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, Thomas F. Torrance Collected Studies 1, ed. Jock Stein (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), ix–xxxii and 1–49. Autobiographical materials on his boyhood in China, student years, parish ministry, war service, and two visits to China in his later years are also available in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10.

know his theology is to know him, and vice versa. To this end we ask: Who is Thomas Forsyth Torrance?

T. F. Torrance is variously described as “an outstanding churchman and theologian,”<sup>3</sup> “one of the greatest Protestant theologians of our day,”<sup>4</sup> “undoubtedly one of the most significant Christian theologians of the twentieth century,”<sup>5</sup> or as Alister McGrath opens his biography on Torrance, “widely regarded, particularly outside Great Britain, as the most significant British academic theologian of the twentieth century.”<sup>6</sup> Donald MacLeod, in a critical assessment of Torrance’s work on Scottish theology, refers to him as “among the immortals of Scottish theology, his work on the trinity an enduring and priceless legacy.”<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps more appropriate to say, with Torrance’s American commentator Elmer Colyer, that “there is a growing consensus that Thomas F. Torrance is one of the premier theologians in the second half of the twentieth century.”<sup>8</sup> Personally, I find Torrance to be one of the most stimulating and exacting theologians of the past century. Torrance has been particularly formative for my own theological thinking by forcing me back to the Fathers, into other avenues of scientific enquiry, and in developing the doctrine of the Trinity as the ground and grammar of Christian theology. Torrance is a theologian’s theologian, and for that reason alone he rewards his commentators with stimulating and fruitful study.

Torrance was a minister of the Church of Scotland, a distinguished professor of Christian dogmatics, a patristic scholar, the chief interpreter of Barth in the English-speaking world, a faithful husband, devoted father, Christian scientist, ecumenical leader, preacher of the gospel, and son of a missionary with an intense missionary fervor himself.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the greatest accolade one could pay Torrance that he himself would welcome is that he was a Christian and one who was utterly persuaded by the truth of the gospel and sought to persuade others of this same truth. He once described himself to his

3. Daniel W. Hardy, “Thomas F. Torrance,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction*, vol. 1, ed. D. F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 71.

4. Derek Michaud, “Thomas Torrance,” in the *Boston Collaborative Dictionary of Western Theology*, <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/torrance.htm>, par. 28.

5. Brian Hebblethwaite, “Review of T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography,” *SJT* 53 (2000): 239–40.

6. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, xi.

7. Donald Macleod, “Dr. T. F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: A Review Article [on his *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell*],” *EvQ* 72 (2000): 72.

8. Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 11.

Beechgrove congregation as “a servant of Christ’s Word [here] to introduce you to the Saviour, and to help you enter into the fullness of the Christian life.”<sup>10</sup>

## FAMILY HISTORY

Torrance was born in Chengdu, in the province of Sichuan, West China, to missionary parents on August 30, 1913.<sup>11</sup> He is the second-born of six children, three males and three females.<sup>12</sup> Somewhat remarkably, T. F. Torrance’s two brothers, James Bruce Torrance and David Wishart Torrance, went on to be theologically educated and ordained as ministers of the Church of Scotland.<sup>13</sup> All three also studied at one time or another under Karl Barth in Basel. The three daughters married ordained ministers of the Church of Scotland. Adding to this already impressive family are two more ministers of the Church of Scotland and professors of theology: Iain, the son of T. F. Torrance,<sup>14</sup> and Alan,

9. Iain Mackenzie describes Torrance as “a wild preacher, whose heart and voice sang with a love for a wild Christ.” I. Mackenzie, “Let the Brain Take the Strain (or: The Hail in this Tale Falls Mainly on the Gael),” in *St. Andrews Rock*, ed. S. Lamont (London: Bellew, 1992), 82. Interestingly, Mackenzie was referring as much to Torrance’s lectures as to his preaching. Early in life Torrance wanted to be a missionary “with Tibet in mind.” The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10, “Student Years—Edinburgh to Basel. 1934–1938,” 1.

10. The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 20, “Beechgrove Church Publications. April 1949,” 3, col. 2.

11. His father, Thomas Torrance (1871–1959), was a Presbyterian Scot; his mother, Annie Elizabeth Sharpe (1833–1929), was an Anglican Brit. Both, incidentally, were published authors. Annie (“Betty”) Torrance published *How Shall We Train the Child?* and Thomas senior published *China’s First Missionaries*.

12. Alister McGrath provides a good overview of Torrance’s childhood in Sichuan in McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 3–18, based upon the autobiographical material found in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10, “My Boyhood in China 1913–1927.” The three girls are Mary (b. 1912), Grace (b. 1915), and Margaret (b. 1917); the boys are Thomas (b. 1913), James (b. 1923), and David (b. 1924).

13. James Bruce Torrance (1923–2003) was Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. He also served as a parish minister at Invergowrie (Dundee, Scotland), and as a lecturer at New College, University of Edinburgh. For a brief biographical sketch, see A. E. Heron, “James Torrance: An Appreciation,” in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*, ed. T. A. Hart and D. P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981), 1–8. David Wishart Torrance (1924–), also a brilliant student (like his elder brothers, he too was awarded the Senior Cunningham Fellowship, effectively becoming Dux of New College, Edinburgh), committed himself to parish ministry. Between 1955 to his retirement in 1991 he held three charges: Livingston in West Lothian, Summerhill in Aberdeen, and Earlston in the Borders.

14. Torrance was married to Margaret Spear, an Anglican, in 1946. All three Torrance brothers married into the medical profession: Thomas to a nurse; James to a doctor, Mary Aitken; and David to a doctor, Elizabeth Barton.

the son of J. B. Torrance.<sup>15</sup> It is no wonder that the Torrance clan is sometimes referred to as a theological dynasty!<sup>16</sup> Tongue firmly in cheek, Ian Mackenzie comments that Torrance's brain is "in a class of its own." Elaborating further, tongue not so firmly in cheek, he comments, "The Torrance brain is, of course, a reproductive brain, reproducing other Torrance brains in due season, but so far Godfather Torrance is not intellectually threatened by junior members of the neo-orthodox Mafia littered elegantly around the theological colleges of Scotland."<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, Duncan Forrester once remarked, "And what of Tom the person? We all know him as a bonny fechter [fighter]. He does not cease from mental fight, nor does his sword sleep in his hand. He is the chieftain and patriarch of a remarkable theological clan."<sup>18</sup>

Prior to teaching, T. F. Torrance spent ten years in the ministry of the Church of Scotland, both before and after the Second World War,<sup>19</sup> and later served as Moderator of the General Assembly (1976–77). During the Second World War, Torrance was an army chaplain for the Church of Scotland's Huts and Canteens Committee in the Middle East and then with the Tenth Indian Division in Italy as the Church of Scotland chaplain to one of the battalions, mostly an English battalion—The King's Own Royal Rifles.<sup>20</sup> Torrance's service

15. Iain Torrance (1949–) was Professor of Theology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2003–4. Since 2001 he has been Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen of England in Scotland, and has been the co-editor of the *Scottish Journal of Theology* since 1982. From July 2004 to December 2012 he was the president of Princeton Theological Seminary. Alan Torrance is currently Professor of Systematic Theology at St. Andrews University, Scotland, and has taught in Erlangen, Aberdeen, Dunedin, and King's College London as director of the Research Institute in Systematic Theology.

16. The word "dynasty" is used by Alasdair I. Heron, "T. F. Torrance In Relation to Reformed Theology," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 48, n. 25. Several of T. F. Torrance's grandchildren have also engaged in higher theological study (at Cambridge University and the University of Otago).

17. I. Mackenzie, "Let the Brain Take the Strain (or: The Hail in this Tale Falls Mainly on the Gael)," in *St. Andrews Rock*, ed. S. Lamont (London: Bellew, 1992), 76–77.

18. The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 15, "Speech by Duncan Forrester on the occasion of the unveiling of Thomas F. Torrance's portrait by Geoffrey Squire, New College, Edinburgh. October 3, 1991," 2.

19. In Alyth (1940–43; 45–47) and Aberdeen (1947–50), Scotland. Torrance says of his time as minister of the parish in Alyth that "it was one of the happiest times of my life in the ministry." I. J. Hesselink, "A Pilgrimage in the School of Christ—An Interview with T. F. Torrance," in *RefR* 38 (1984): 55.

20. Hesselink, "A Pilgrimage in the School of Christ," 56, and David W. Torrance, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance: Minister of the Gospel, Pastor, and Evangelical Theologian," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 16–17.

in the army was recognized in his 1944 reception of the MBE (Member of the British Empire) for bravery.<sup>21</sup>

### EDUCATION

At the University of Edinburgh Torrance studied classics and philosophy, winning various scholarships and awards. It was at this period that he also showed an interest in the philosophy of science. In 1934, after gaining his MA in Classical Languages and Philosophy, Torrance switched to New College and in 1937 gained the BD degree in theology with distinction.<sup>22</sup>

Various teachers in the divinity faculty exercised a lasting influence over Torrance. His interest in Christianity and science was further enhanced as Daniel Lamont introduced Torrance to the work of the scientist Karl Heim of Tübingen. Years later, Torrance would become a member of the Karl Heim *Gesellschaft*. From Hugh Ross Mackintosh Torrance learned the supreme importance of the centrality of Christ, the atonement and the missionary cause. Mackintosh also prompted his interest in the work of Karl Barth,<sup>23</sup> an acquaintance his mother had enhanced when she gave her son a copy of Barth's *Credo* when he entered the Faculty of Divinity at New College. It was this interest and admiration for Barth that prompted Torrance to study under him at Basel in 1937–38 as a member of Barth's little *Sozietät*.<sup>24</sup> Torrance's love for and respect of Barth's theology never waned. In one sense his entire writing career has been an attempt to critically explicate the central concerns of Barth's theological method.<sup>25</sup> Torrance would go on to oversee the translation of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* into English,<sup>26</sup> in addition to devoting several monographs to Barth's life and work.<sup>27</sup>

One should not take from this, however, that Torrance is a Barthian pure and simple. He has always rejected the title and was an appreciative critic of Barth's work, going back to his year studying with Barth in Basel. In a letter to his sister Grace in 1937 he wrote: "I am rereading just now a little book of Barth's on predestination, and so far I don't think he has got to the root of the

21. Hesselink, "A Pilgrimage in the School of Christ," 56.

22. His BD specialized in systematic theology. Alister E. McGrath, "Profile: Thomas F. Torrance," *Epworth Review* 27 (2000): 11.

23. Thomas F. Torrance, "My Interaction with Karl Barth," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. D. K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 52. Hugh Ross Mackintosh (1870–1936) was Professor of Systematic Theology and then Church Dogmatics at Edinburgh from 1904 to 1936. Torrance regards him as one of his most formative influences and often mentions him in his work. See the memorial essay, T. F. Torrance, "Hugh Ross Mackintosh: Theologian of the Cross," *SBET* 5 (1987): 160–73.

matter. I have been reading a lot of Barth this summer, and I have been growing rather critical of some things—he lacks the missionary note and the evangelistic note rather sadly. I can't quite make it out, but it is due to his idea of preaching. Barthians are not good preachers. But I will write later about this when I have thought it out more.”<sup>28</sup> In a letter to his brother-in-law Ronnie Wallace around the same time Torrance wrote: “‘Barth’ in German means a beard. Leitzman remarked that one had to be careful and not let one’s ‘barth’ grow too long! I must tell Prin. Curits that when I write him: it will tickle him no end.”<sup>29</sup> It obviously amused Torrance too!

24. Barth never thought that a student was truly theologically qualified unless he understood Latin and could read it proficiently. He set his students a test in translating a Latin text and prescribed an essay to estimate their theological acumen and ability. From them he selected a smaller group to form a more intimate seminar (the *Sozietät*), which met in his own house once a week. In a letter to his friend Eduard Thurneysen, Barth expressed his approval of “der Schotlander.” David W. Torrance, “Thomas Forsyth Torrance: Minister of the Gospel, Pastor, and Evangelical Theologian,” in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 9. Incidentally, both of T. F. Torrance’s brothers, James and David, were also part of the *Sozietät* in their respective years spent studying with Karl Barth. A firsthand account of Torrance’s experiences can be found in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10, “Student Years—Edinburgh to Basel, 1934–1938,” where Torrance calls his participation in the group “a priceless privilege” (13). In Torrance’s two semesters at Basel the group studied Wolleb’s *Compendium Theologiae*, particularly the doctrine of election.

25. Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 113–45.

26. T. F. Torrance co-edited and translated the *Church Dogmatics* with Geoffrey Bromiley of Fuller Theological Seminary. See T. F. Torrance, “Preface to New Edition,” in *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910–1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 10.

27. See his various works: *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910–1931*; “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,” *SJT* 39 (1986): 461–82; “My Interaction with Karl Barth,” 52–64; and *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990). Torrance’s correspondence with Barth can be found in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 19.

28. Letter to Grace dated October 26, 1937, from Theologisches Alumneum, Basel, in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 11, “Letters from Thomas F. Torrance to his parents and siblings, from Basel, Switzerland and Berlin, Germany, 1937–1938,” 2 (slightly altered). This should perhaps be balanced with his comments 24 years later when in a personal letter to Barth he noted: “There is little doubt that what Augustine did for centuries and centuries of the Church’s thought and preaching, your Church Dogmatics promises to do for the Church of the future, shaping and directing its preaching of the Gospel. It is after all in the service of the Gospels, as you have taught us, that theology has its true place.” The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 19, “Letter from Torrance to Barth dated January 7, 1961,” 1–2.

## SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES

Throughout Torrance's life and career a constant refrain was the various influences on his spirituality and theology, most notably Athanasius, John Calvin, and Karl Barth in theology,<sup>30</sup> and John Philoponos, Albert Einstein, and Michael Polanyi in the philosophy of science.<sup>31</sup>

Torrance was trained in classics and was a patristic scholar of some renown; his theology is richly steeped in the patristic tradition. His main patristic mentor was Athanasius the bishop of Alexandria.<sup>32</sup> As one of the main shapers of Nicene theology, Athanasius is returned to time and time again in Torrance's corpus for insight and perspective on a range of Trinitarian, christological, and soteriological issues. From Athanasius Torrance adopts the use of the *homoousion* as a heuristic device in which to navigate the epistemological waters of Trinitarian theology.

Torrance wrote theology from a broad and generous Reformed Protestant background. Throughout his life and writings he especially showed an admiration for and reliance upon the theology of John Calvin. Many concepts employed by Calvin were adopted into his own Trinitarian theology. However, while adopting much of Calvin's theological thought, Torrance was scathingly critical of the way Calvin was systematized in later Calvinism, particularly

29. Letter to Ronnie Wallace dated June 9, 1937 in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 11, "Letters from Thomas F. Torrance to his parents and siblings, from Basel, Switzerland and Berlin, Germany. 1937–1938," 1.

30. Other theological influences would include Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nazianzus, Anselm of Canterbury, Richard of St. Victor, John Duns Scotus, John Major, and H. R. Mackintosh. In terms of his patristic influences, Del Colle can correctly speak of Torrance plotting "his own course through the Greek Fathers, a Nicene-Athanasian-Nazianzen-Epiphonian-Cyrline axis to be exact." Ralph Del Colle, "'Person' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology: Conversations with Thomas F. Torrance and Thomas Aquinas," *SJT* 54 (2001): 77.

31. Other philosophical and scientific mentors include Søren Kierkegaard (a relatively unexamined influence behind Torrance's thought), Karl Heim, and James Clerk Maxwell, among others. Torrance once commented that in his study he has hung on the wall "a line portrait of Einstein . . . looking across to the desk where I work, but I also have in my study portraits of Michael Polanyi and James Clerk Maxwell, from whom I have learned so much." "Thomas Torrance Responds," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 333.

32. Torrance wrote in his little work *Christ's Words* (Jedburgh: The Unity Press, 1980), 4, that Athanasius is "my favourite theologian." There is scarcely a single publication of Torrance's in which the insights of Athanasius are not brought out either implicitly or more often than not, explicitly.

by the seventeenth-century Protestant scholastics.<sup>33</sup> Out of scholasticism (and Enlightenment science) have arisen a number of dualisms that, according to Torrance, threaten to derail or at least sidetrack much contemporary theological (and scientific) endeavor.<sup>34</sup> In Torrance's own work he set himself the task of removing all *a priori* dualisms that have crept into contemporary theology.<sup>35</sup>

Torrance saw Karl Barth as the most faithful advocate of Calvin's theology and of the orthodox faith in general. As such, Barth's doctrine of God was one of the most influential on Torrance's own exposition of the Christian doctrine of God. Like Barth, Torrance believed that nothing is or can be known of God but that which comes by God's active self-revelation. Torrance took up and consistently developed Barth's claim that what God is in God's revelation, God is antecedently and eternally in Godself (*in se*).<sup>36</sup> It is for this reason that Torrance is above all a theologian of the doctrine of the knowledge of God. This knowledge of God is available in a "scientific manner," which leads us into Torrance's "scientific theology."

Beginning in his undergraduate days, progressing through his doctoral studies, and then into his own publications Torrance consistently sought to work out a *scientific* theology. He learned this methodology from several key influences, most notably John Philoponos, Albert Einstein, and Michael Polanyi, and it was modeled for him by Anselm of Canterbury and Karl Barth. Given Torrance's epistemology of self-revelation, he argued it is only natural that this be termed a "scientific theology." Theology for Torrance is always *a posteriori*: first we encounter the active self-presentation of reality that is before us, then we press deeper to understand the order and connectedness of deeper structures of reality. In theological terms, this is a consistent and considered outworking of Anselm's *fides quarens intellectum* tradition of theological enquiry, a methodology that Torrance argues is proper to all scientific investigation,

33. Something his brother J. B. Torrance is equally concerned about. For a constructive attempt to continue this tradition, see *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church*, ed. Myk Habets and Robert Grow (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

34. At this point I am thinking of the theological dualism between *de Deo uno* from *de Deo trino*, something Karl Rahner and Torrance are equally opposed to.

35. See the little work by A. G. Marley, *T. F. Torrance: The Rejection of Dualism*, Nutshell Series vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1992).

36. Barth regarded Torrance as a faithful expositor of his ideas. In 1959, Barth presented Torrance with a copy of *Der Gefangenen Befreiung!* in which he had inscribed the words "Mit herzlichen Dank für viel Treue!" ("with cordial thanks for much loyalty"). Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910–1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 9. In the preface to his work *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), Torrance returned the compliment (xii).

not simply to theology alone. The difference between the various disciplines of theology is, in Derek Michaud's words, that "the nature of the object prescribes the mode of rationality proper to its investigation."<sup>37</sup> We shall consider these issues in more depth in the next chapter.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

Torrance earned a doctorate (Dr.Theol.) from Basel in 1946, where he studied under Karl Barth for a year (1937–38),<sup>38</sup> and a DLitt (Edinburgh) in 1970.<sup>39</sup> He was also awarded eight honorary doctorates,<sup>40</sup> the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion (1978), and the Collins Award in Britain for the best work in theology, ethics, and sociology relevant for Christianity for his book *Theological Science* (1967–69). Torrance taught theology at Auburn Seminary, New York for a year (1938–39) before returning to Edinburgh.<sup>41</sup> After two years as Professor of Church History (1950–52), Torrance held the position of Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, the University of Edinburgh, for 29 years (1952–79), after which he retired following the conferral of the Templeton Prize in Religion (1978). Torrance started the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, which he co-edited for over thirty years, founded the Scottish Church Theology Society, and served as moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1976–77. In 1969 he became a member, and from 1972 to 1981 president, of the *Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses*. In 1973

37. Derek Michaud, "Thomas Torrance," in the *Boston Collaborative Dictionary of Western Theology*, <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/torrance.htm>.

38. Torrance returned to Basel to finish his thesis, *Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (published as *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* [Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948]), and sit the *Rigorosum* in 1946 after studying at Oriol College, Oxford in 1939–40. The years after 1937–38 at Basel were spent as follows: 1938–39 lecturing at Auburn Seminary, 1939–40 studying at Oxford University, 1940–43 minister at Alyth Parish, 1943–45 war service (including the reception of an MBE in 1944), 1945–47 back to Alyth Parish, 1947–50 minister at Beechgrove Parish.

39. The DLitt was awarded by Edinburgh University on submission of five published works on theological method.

40. Degrees *honoris causa*: DD, 1950: Presbyterian College, Montreal; Dr.Theol., 1959: University of Geneva; D.Théol., 1959: Faculté Libre, Paris; DD, 1960: St. Andrews University; Dr.Theol., 1961: Oslo University; D.Sc., 1983: Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh; Dr.Th., 1988: Reformed College, Debrecen; and DD, 1997: Edinburgh University. See Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 244.

41. The theology component of the Auburn lectures are published as T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: Auburn Lectures 1938–39* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). A full collection of lecture notes, lectures, and other Auburn correspondence is contained in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Boxes 21–23.

he was a founding member, and from 1976 to 1977 president, of the Institute of Religion and Theology of Great Britain and Ireland, and in 1976 a member of the *Académie Internationale de Philosophie des Sciences*. Beginning in 1979 he was a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and beginning in 1982 a fellow of the British Academy in London.<sup>42</sup> His work on the interface of science and theology earned him international prestige.

Torrance wrote over thirty books and well over five hundred articles. McGrath has calculated that “Torrance’s list of published works contain roughly 320 works which originated during his twenty-nine year period as a professor at Edinburgh. Since retiring from that position in 1979, he has added a further 260 items, including some of his most significant works.”<sup>43</sup>

In his various sojourns to the East<sup>44</sup> as part of his scholarship in preparation for his BD degree, Torrance had his first encounters with Eastern Orthodoxy. This relationship would last for the rest of his life as he worked, throughout his teaching and writing career, to form theological bridges between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Eastern Orthodox Churches.<sup>45</sup> In 1954 Torrance called for discussions within the Orthodox Communion between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian “monophysite” traditions. Agreement between them was eventually reached in 1973. Torrance was then invited to Addis Ababa by Methodius, the Greek archbishop of Axum, the see in Ethiopia founded by Athanasius, and was consecrated as a presbyter of the Greek Orthodox Church and given the honorary title of protopresbyter. In 1970, at a session of the General Assembly in Edinburgh, the Patriarch of Alexandria conferred on Torrance the Cross of Saint Mark, which was followed

42. For a full curriculum vitae see The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 14, “Thomas F. Torrance—Curricula vitae and bibliography (to 1993).”

43. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, 107. The most complete bibliography of T. F. Torrance’s works can be found in McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, 249–96, in which 633 published works from 1941–99 are recorded. Since that time a few additions to the bibliography can be noted, especially the publication of the Auburn Lectures as *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: Auburn Lectures 1938–39*; and the posthumously published lectures on Christology originally delivered at New College, Edinburgh, from 1952 to 1978: *The Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T Walker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); and *The Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

44. The John Stuart Blackie Fellowship enabled Torrance to travel for three months to the Middle East and a further three months to Greece.

45. Torrance has also been instrumental in ecumenical discussions with the Church of England (1950–58), and the Faith and Order movement (1952–62). See Thomas F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, 2 vols. (London: Lutterworth, 1959–60).

in 1977 by his being given the Cross of Thyateira by the Greek Orthodox archbishop in London. Later Torrance proposed that the Reformed and Eastern Orthodox communions should enter into dialogue, seeking theological consensus on the doctrine of the Trinity, for agreement there would influence all further discussions. The Ecumenical Patriarch and other patriarchs of the Greek Orthodox Church responded favorably, and by 1983 all fourteen Orthodox churches were involved. Between 1986 and 1990 discussions took place resulting in the “Agreed Statement on the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,” reached at Geneva on March 13, 1991.<sup>46</sup> Torrance considered this one of the most important achievements of his lifetime.<sup>47</sup>

Later in life, Torrance returned to China twice and met with the survivors of those churches founded by his father many years earlier. He first visited in October 1984, by way of Hong Kong, the churches of the Upper Min valley. He then returned to the towns of Chengdu and Wenchuan in April–June, 1994. He carried with him a money belt bearing 11,200 yuan, part of a larger gift of money for rebuilding churches destroyed by the communist takeover in 1935.<sup>48</sup> Mention of these visits of Torrance to China, in his seventies and eighties, provides a fitting reminder that he was, first and foremost, a theologian of the church and for the church.

Torrance died on December 2, 2007. Since that time a number of his works have been published, including the two-volume Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference lectures on incarnation and atonement. In addition, the Scottish Journal of Theology Lectures, held annually at the University of Aberdeen, have been renamed the T. F. Torrance Lectures in his honor. Various conferences, themed journal volumes, edited works, theses, and monographs have also been held, completed, and published. The Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship also boasts a healthy and growing membership and the associated journal, *Participatio*, consistently produces volumes of high academic

46. Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vols. 1 & 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic, 1985, 1993). For the agreed statement see *ibid.*, 2:219–26. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

47. For an analysis and critique of the *filioque* see Myk Habets, “*Filioque? Nein*. A Proposal for Coherent Coinherence,” in *Trinitarian Theology After Barth*, ed. Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 161–202.

48. We know these details from the personal unpublished diaries Torrance kept. See Thomas F. Torrance, “The Visit by Thomas F. Torrance to Chengdu, the Capital of Sichuan, and to Weichou and Chiang Villages in Wenchuan County, the Upper Min Valley, Sichuan (October 4–18, 1986),” and “Journal of My Visit to Hong Kong, Chengdu and Wenchuan (April 22–June 3, 1994),” in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10.

standard and wide interest. His work is still the cause of lively interest and considerable debate, and his influence has cast a long shadow over subsequent dogmatics.

Missionary, scholar, world traveler, soldier, pastor, professor, husband, father, and renaissance man—from this briefest of biographies it is evident that Torrance lived a full and exciting life; a life, we may say, worthy of a spot in one of the once popular *Boy's Own Annuals* featuring the exciting lives and daring pursuits of men in the world.<sup>49</sup>

### CORE EMPHASES OF TORRANCE'S DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

Torrance's theology has several key components that together comprise his Christian dogmatics. One commentator lists fifteen basic characteristics of his theology: Reformed, Nicene, scientific, realist, relational, systematic, rational, conceptual, personal, doxological, dialogical, ecumenical, christological, Trinitarian, and biblical.<sup>50</sup> It is not germane to our study to comment on all of these areas, but some of the more distinctive aspects will provide a suitable introduction to his theological work, specifically how his theology is at once Reformed, biblical, catholic, ecumenical, christological, and Trinitarian.

#### REFORMED-BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Torrance's theology is thoroughly and self-consciously Reformed.<sup>51</sup> As an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland, an authority on John Calvin, a key representative of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in ecumenical activity, and a pupil of Karl Barth's, Torrance and his theology stand squarely within the Reformed heritage.<sup>52</sup> While Torrance viewed himself as thoroughly

49. One wishes he had published his twenty-one-page memoir of his time in the Middle East, as it is a raucous tale of bravery, stupidity, attempted murder, and naïve adventure. During this time Torrance acted as a temporary policeman, was befriended by Nazis, sentenced to death in an Arab court, and propositioned by a woman in one hotel room and a man in another in Athens! See The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10, "Memoir of Visit to Palestine and the Middle East in the Spring."

50. Colin Weightman, *Theology in a Polanyian Universe: The Theology of Thomas Torrance* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 150, and elaborated on through 155.

51. Torrance's three most important shorter writings on his relation to Reformed theology and what "Reformed theology" itself means are found in "The Deposit of Faith," *SJT* 36 (1983): 1–28; "The Substance of the Faith: A Clarification of the Concept in the Church of Scotland," *SJT* 36 (1983): 327–38; and "The Distinctive Character of the Reformed Tradition," in *Incarnational Ministry: Essays in Honor of Ray S. Anderson*, ed. C. H. Kettler and T. H. Speidell (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1990), 2–15.

Reformed, he was a vigorous opponent of Calvinism, that brand of Puritan Calvinism that resulted in the rise of Federal/Westminster Theology, or what has been termed Calvinist scholasticism.<sup>53</sup> As such, Torrance's Reformed theology and vision are what we may call catholic, broad, and generous.

Torrance believed that a genuinely Reformed theology is one in which obedience to Jesus Christ the eternal Word of God as witnessed to through the Word of God written is uppermost. The Reformed *church* is reformed according to the Word of God, and Reformed *theology* is reformed according to the Word of God.<sup>54</sup> As a direct consequence of this feature is its corollary: for Torrance all Christian theology must be biblical. While Torrance's doctrine of Scripture will be analyzed in a subsequent chapter, we can note here his commitment to Scripture as being the Word of God to humanity, the normative realization of God's revelation in Christ.<sup>55</sup> Through the Bible God continues to make Godself known to us in the articulate form of human words. As with Barth, so with Torrance, Scripture is not seen as the revelation of propositional truths than can be adopted as doctrines *simpliciter*. Rather, Scripture does not stand in isolation from Christ *the* Word who speaks through the Word written.<sup>56</sup> For Torrance, as for Barth before him, the Bible constitutes revelation in the sense that through it there is a communication of divine truth in concrete form. In simple terms, Torrance explains that "we do not believe in Jesus Christ because we believe in the Bible, we believe in the Bible because in and through the Bible we meet and know Jesus Christ."<sup>57</sup>

52. Despite the criticism of S. Rehnman, "Barthian Epigoni: Thomas F. Torrance's Barth-Reception," *WTJ* 60 (1998): 271–96. See the more conciliatory article by Alasdair I. Heron, "T. F. Torrance in Relation to Reformed Theology," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 31–49.

53. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996). A history and evaluation of the diversity that exists within Westminster Calvinism can be found in J. K. Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999). For a creative representation of the sort of Reformed trajectory Torrance stood within, see *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church*, ed. Myk Habets and Robert Grow (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

54. Thomas F. Torrance, "What Is the Reformed Church?" *Biblical Theology* 9 (1959): 51.

55. See a discussion of Torrance's doctrine of Scripture in chapter four.

56. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 134–40.

57. Thomas F. Torrance, "'The Historical Jesus': From the Perspective of a Theologian," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, vol. 2, ed. W.C. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 525.

*CATHOLIC-ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY*

Not only is Torrance's theology Reformed and biblical, it is also catholic. By catholic I mean universally orthodox, grounded in the Great Tradition, and consciously founded on the creeds of Christendom, especially Nicaea and Chalcedon. Indeed, Torrance characterizes his own theology as "deeply Nicene."<sup>58</sup> By "Nicene," Torrance refers to the theologians of the Nicene era, especially Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, his two main patristic mentors. It is to these two theologians particularly that Torrance attributes the foundational place of the Trinity in Christian theology as built upon the doctrine of the *homoousion* of Christ (and Spirit) with God the Father.

It is this commitment to a catholic theology that has expressed itself in ecumenical activity and enabled Torrance to interact so productively with the Eastern Orthodox communion along with the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions. Throughout his ecumenical endeavors the pro-Nicene doctrines of Christology, pneumatology, and Trinity occupied center stage, for Torrance believed that if agreement can be made on those points, then the heart of Christian theology is affirmed and further agreement can be reached in the future on other topics.<sup>59</sup>

*TRINITARIAN-CHRISTOLOGICAL THEOLOGY*

It naturally follows from the above emphases of Torrance's theology that the doctrines of Theology Proper—God and Christology should come to the fore. Throughout Torrance's life and work these doctrines formed the heart of his theological program. As a lifelong student of Barth, a reader of the Fathers—especially Athanasius—and a Calvin scholar, the doctrine of the Trinity forms the very *ground and grammar* of Torrance's entire theology. Such is the controlling doctrine of the Trinity in his theology that Paul Molnar simply describes Torrance as the "theologian of the Trinity."<sup>60</sup> Torrance's commitment to Trinitarian and Christological theology will become apparent in subsequent chapters.

58. R. D. Kernohan, "Tom Torrance: The Man and the Reputation," *Life and Work* 32 (1976): 14.

59. See Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*, trans. and ed. with introduction by T. F. Torrance (London: James Clarke, 1959), lxxviii; "Introduction," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), xi–xxii; and *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), especially "The Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity," 115–22.

60. Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

## SCIENTIFIC AND METHODOLOGICAL

Torrance's academic career was almost entirely absorbed by concerns over methodology, to the point that one might suggest all his career might be seen as an attempt at a prolegomena, a clearing of the epistemological ground for a starting point in theological discourse. On more than one occasion Torrance stated that his work was an attempt to clear the way for an explicitly Christian epistemology, one that took seriously the starting point for all knowledge of God in Christology, mediated by the Word written through the Holy Spirit. It was this epistemic concern that led Torrance into his interaction with the sciences—especially physics—and into a concentrated study of hermeneutics.

Torrance sought in the sciences what he sought in theological method—a common starting point. Such a starting point is the awareness of a commitment to a realistic view of the world and then the adoption of a methodology in conformity with the nature of the object under study. Torrance calls this a *kata physik* (“according to the nature of the object”) form of scientific inquiry. It is this scientific approach to reality that Torrance saw exemplified in modern scientists such as James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein, to name but two. Maxwell (1831–1879) is generally considered one of the greatest scientists of the modern era and the father of modern physics. Maxwell's experiments led to his discovery of the theory of electromagnetism. Einstein himself credited Maxwell's discoveries as the origins of his own theory of relativity. Torrance looked to the example of Maxwell and his discoveries as a conceptual basis for his own theological methodology, one that stresses continuous fields of relations over and against any mechanical system, for example. Torrance also took note of Maxwell's belief in God and how that influenced his scientific thought. It was on the basis of his Christian beliefs that Maxwell was able to move beyond the accepted scientific theories of his own day in order to develop a fundamentally different concept, which in turn helped him discover the properties of an electromagnetic field of force (what Thomas Kuhn would call a “paradigm shift”). The fact that Maxwell hailed from Edinburgh, Torrance's “home town” would also not be lost on Torrance!

For similar reasons Torrance was enamored with the thought and influence of Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the greatest scientist of them all, according to Torrance. Einstein, like Maxwell, achieved a paradigm shift in physics, but in Einstein's case it effected a revolution. Torrance repeatedly appealed to Einstein as *the* exemplar of a truly scientific method that allows the nature of the object to dictate the appropriate methods for its study. For Einstein this led to the general and special theory of relativity, as well as other things. As a lay scientist, Torrance quickly saw in Einstein's work a *method* (not

basis!) for discerning the nature of reality complementary to that of Christian theology. From Einstein's reflections on science and religion Torrance drew much inspiration for his own project in dogmatics.

In 1983 at the conferment of an honorary doctorate in science, Professor S. D. Smith, then Dean of the Faculty of Science at Heriot-Watt University, justified Torrance's suitability for the conferral by likening him to Einstein. In a creative rhetorical flourish, Smith said, "I am required to show, sir, why we in this university and in particular in this Faculty, should add confusion to this obviously already well-known situation. It would seem to be because [Torrance] has dared to tread in the ground between theology and science and been awarded the Templeton Prize to boot."<sup>61</sup> He went on to speak of Torrance's time as Moderator of the Church of Scotland:

To the physicist . . . a Moderator is a lump of graphite or a tank of heavy water found in a nuclear reactor capable of removing excess energy from over-energetic neutrons. We seek, therefore, analogies between a neutron (a sub-atomic particle) and a minister of the Church of Scotland to understand the properties of a Moderator. I have, sir, therefore, identified our particle. He is simply a stone. In fact, better expressed in the German language—"ein Stein"—the Einstein of theological science: much for the mystic, abundantly for practical theology. So, as with Einstein in physics, for our graduand's contribution to the understanding of the relationship between science and theology, I ask you, Chancellor, by the authority of the Senate, to confer on Thomas Forsyth Torrance the degree of Doctor of Science.<sup>62</sup>

Focusing specifically upon dogmatics, Torrance produced a number of articles on hermeneutics and in 1995 collated a number of these into one volume entitled *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics*.<sup>63</sup> It was Torrance's intent to produce a three-volume work on hermeneutics; however this never eventuated. The Princeton Special Collections contain a number of unpublished articles on hermeneutics that would have formed the basis of the

61. The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 15, "Program and laureation address from the conferment of the Honorary Doctor of Science to Thomas F. Torrance, Heriot-Watt University. November 12, 1983," 1.

62. "Program and laureation address," 2-3.

63. Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

other two volumes, in addition to several previous published works.<sup>64</sup> More on Torrance's scientific theology is developed in the next chapter.

#### MISSIONAL AND EVANGELISTIC

Another feature of Torrance's theology is its missional and evangelistic emphasis. Torrance continually reminded his audiences in person and in print that he was a missionary at heart and that his theology was an attempt to evangelize the scientific culture of his day. He often said that he was as much a missionary to modern theologians as he was to anyone else. Born in China to missionary parents, and originally thinking he would himself be a foreign missionary, his call to the ministry of Word and sacrament, and after this to the academy, was not seen by Torrance as a rejection of his felt call to mission. It was, rather, a channeling of such a call into a more specific context. In an unpublished autobiographical reflection possibly written in the 1990s, Torrance asserts, "I cannot remember ever having had any doubts about God."<sup>65</sup> On his vocation as missionary we read: "This orientation to mission was built into the fabric of my mind, and has never faded—by its essential nature Christian theology has always had for me an evangelistic thrust."<sup>66</sup>

The missional and evangelistic impetus behind Torrance's work is not always evident to the uninitiated in his more academic writings, but the impetus was there nonetheless. This accounts in part for Torrance's consistent focus on Christ as the center of dogmatic inquiry as Christ is the heart of faith. In an early unpublished piece Torrance remarks:

Surely the uniqueness of the preaching of Jesus demands a correspondingly special form of transmission and surely that is what we do have. That preaching cannot be handed on by mere reporters of history, for the latter cannot see the decisive factor that this

64. See The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Boxes 30–35. Proposed volumes would focus on biblical hermeneutics, patristic hermeneutics, and Reformation hermeneutics. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, Monograph Supplements to the SJT (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic, 1988). Also see the forthcoming work Thomas F. Torrance, *The Bible and Its Interpreters*, Thomas F. Torrance Collected Studies vol. 2, ed. Adam Nigh (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming). This work collects material that would have formed part of the proposed second volume of Torrance's *Divine Meaning*, studies in medieval, Reformation, and modern hermeneutics.

65. The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 10, "T. F. Torrance, 'Itinerarium Mentis in Deum: My Theological Development,'" 68.

66. "Itinerarium Mentis in Deum," 69.

Jesus discloses and authenticates Himself as the Christ—and what they can see—the Rabbi and exorcist who failed— they will hardly consider worth reporting. But in actual fact the oldest strata of the synoptic Gospels contain no mere historical reports, but reproduce the message and proclamation of Jesus Himself in the form of new preaching. The whole history of the Gospel transmission is to be understood as an evangelistic transmission of the preaching and self-discloser of Jesus, that others may believe.<sup>67</sup>

So insistent was Torrance on the centrality of mission that he often identified true belief with the impetus to mission. While a young minister at the Barony Church, Alyth, Scotland, Torrance could preach a sermon on foreign missions and a call to the Kirk to get back to Christ, which means back to missions. Here he speaks of Christ as the basis of missions:

The second thing I want you to think about this morning is the universalism of Jesus Christ. Just because Jesus Christ is the propitiation for sins, He is not only the propitiation for our sins but the sins of the whole world. Now that is about the most important thing about the Gospel. “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.” “Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.” You cannot believe in Jesus Christ and have the forgiveness of sins, without believing in Foreign Missions. If you don’t believe in Foreign Missions, you simply don’t believe in Jesus Christ. The Cross of Christ was so big and stupendous an event that it necessarily has the universe for its correlative . . . . Unless you believe that Christ came to die for the sins of the world, as well as for your own, you don’t believe in Him at all.<sup>68</sup>

Torrance was one such believer who, through his academic pursuits, attempted to persuade others of this same truth.

67. The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 16, “The Historical and the Theological Approach to Jesus Christ who is Self-Disclosed in His Preaching,” 1.

68. The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 47, “Sermon on Hebrews 2.2: Alyth December 1940,” 6.

## ACADEMIC AND PASTORAL

A final feature of Torrance's theology is the academic and pastoral nature of his work. Perhaps it would be better to say the "pastorally academic" nature of his work, for Torrance always intended his work as a product of dogmatics, not, strictly speaking, systematic theology. Dogmatics is a more disciplined and focused study of the Christian faith: centered on Christ, conducted by a believer, for the church. As Barth called his great work of dogmatics *Church Dogmatics*, so too Torrance's work was produced within the context of the church and for the church. Torrance was a church theologian, not a public theologian as such. His audience was those the Holy Scriptures call "sons and daughters of God," and he wrote as one brother in Christ to others. Dogmatics is thus the faithful witness to the reality of the triune God as disclosed in Christ by the Holy Spirit by means of the Word written, as the church gathers around the Word in faithful obedience to listen, to receive, and to perform the faith. Dogmatics is thus grounded in worship and issues into worship. It is, as Rom. 12:1 says, a form of *logike latreia*—logical worship.

In a passage highlighted later I note that, according to Torrance, theological thinking ends with our participation in the life of the Trinity as the Holy Spirit unites us to the humanity of the incarnate Christ. Ultimately, "It is as our communion with God the Father through Christ and in the Spirit is founded in and shares in the inner Trinitarian consubstantial or *homoousial* communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that the subjectively-given pole of conceptuality is constantly purified and refined under the searching light and quickening power of the objectively-given pole in divine revelation. Within that polarity Christian theology becomes what it essentially is and ought always to be, *logike latreia*, rational worship of God."<sup>69</sup>

When the pastoral intent and context of Torrance's work is not kept in mind, his work is misunderstood as overly academic and unnecessarily dense. Within this context, however, one can keep an eye on the goal of Torrance's dogmatic interests and see how each piece of his *oeuvre* contributes to and helps construct a rigorously faithful path to true knowledge of God in which we think out of a center in God and not out of a center in the self. Such knowledge issues in true worship as we participate in Christ's worship of, and obedience to, the Father.

69. Thomas F. Torrance, "Theological Realism," in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon*, ed. B. Hebblethwaite and S. Sutherland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 193.

## CONCLUSION

There is more that can be said in regard to the nature and scope of Torrance's dogmatics, but I trust enough has been outlined here to give the reader an informed entrée into the thinking, backgrounds, influences, and directions that were at play in Torrance's work. It has rightly been said that to understand one area of Torrance's thought requires familiarity with every area of his thought. His aversion to scholasticism and certain forms of systematic theology means that his works are often not as perspicuous or as analytic as they otherwise would have been, nor are they as concise as others writing in the field—although with Barth as a model, brevity was never going to be one of his virtues! However, understanding the context of his work and a number of its key themes allows the reader to more quickly imbibe Torrance's unique thought-world in order to better understand its content and intent.

The subsequent chapters each take a key theme of Torrance's work and interrogate it according to Torrance's own stated methods. Then they develop these ideas in order to retrieve aspects of his theology for contemporary theological discourse. Unless this is done, Torrance's work will only occasion dismay and disagreement, rather than critical and appreciative interaction.