

**T. F. TORRANCE ON THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH:  
A BIOGRAPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SYNOPSIS  
WITH SOME PERSONAL REMINISCENCES**

**Thomas A. Noble, PhD**  
**Professor of Theology, Nazarene Theological Seminary**  
**Senior Research Fellow in Theology, Nazarene**  
**Theological College, Manchester**  
*Tanoble@nts.edu*

**Abstract:** *Given as a lecture at the meeting of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2013, this paper celebrates the centenary of Torrance's birth. It begins with the world into which he was born and the ethos of the evangelical missionary movement to which his family belonged. Major aspects of his thinking are considered against his biographical background as they became prominent in the development of his theology: the Reformed tradition and his ecumenical endeavours, his profound analysis of the scientific method of theology in relation to the natural sciences, his focus on the Incarnation and the Atonement, his engagement with the Greek Fathers, and his place in the Trinitarian revival. The review of Torrance's thought is interspersed with personal reminiscences from several years as Torrance's student at New College, Edinburgh in the 1970s and from later contact.*

To return in thought to 1913, the year in which T. F. Torrance was born, is to return to another world. The German Kaiser, the Austrian Kaiser, the Czar of all the Russias, and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire all still ruled – not to mention his Britannic Majesty, King George V, Emperor of India, presiding over the largest empire the world had ever seen. His Royal Navy dominated the oceans of the world and had been instrumental in abolishing piracy and the slave trade for ever (or so it was thought). Imperialism, particularly the British Empire, claimed to be bringing the benefits of European civilization to the world. Outside of Europe, most of the world (except the Americas, China and



## CENTENARY REFLECTION

Japan) was ruled by the British, French, German, Portuguese, Belgian and Dutch Empires. Despite international tension between the great powers of Europe, which was to lead the next year to the catastrophe of the First World War, the ideal of enlightened progress still dominated the climate of Liberal opinion. In the theological world, the German Liberal theology of Ritschl, Herrmann, and Harnack was dominant and was shaping the ministry of the young Karl Barth who had been a pastor in the Swiss parish of Safenwil for two years. In Scotland, the more conservative theological tradition of James Orr, James Denney, and P. T. Forsyth was still strong. In China, where Thomas Forsyth Torrance was born on 30th August, Christian missions had established a bridge-head; but politically, the first crack had appeared in imperialism with the resignation of the boy-Emperor the previous year, 1912, leading to the establishment of a republic. That was the world into which T. F. Torrance was born.

What is of more specific concern for us as we celebrate his life and ministry a century after his birth, and as we try to come to an overall appreciation and assessment of his theology, is that the age of European imperialism was also the age of the greatest advance in Christian missions. The specific ethos into which he was born was that of an evangelical missionary family.

### **1. The Evangelical, Missionary Heritage**

The growth of the Christian church around the world had accompanied the growth of the European empires throughout the previous century. This was what Latourette called, "The Great Century" of missionary expansion. "Foreign missions" (as they were called) grew out of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. The world vision of evangelical Christians was promoted by Wilberforce's campaign to end the Atlantic slave trade and slavery itself. Evangelical leaders like Charles Simeon in the Church of England and Thomas Chalmers in the Church of Scotland had been the leading proponents of missions against strong opposition, and throughout the nineteenth century major figures such as William Carey and Alexander Duff of India, David Livingstone of Africa, and Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission were the most prominent of the missionary heroes who had led the advance.

Opposed at first not only by others in the churches but also by politicians and merchants intent on expanding markets, the missionary movement had fought for a place in the colonies. By the end of the nineteenth century, Livingstone's motto of "Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization," still inscribed on his statue at the Victoria Falls, had led to innumerable schools, clinics and churches

throughout Africa, India, and China. A new phase of missionary enthusiasm was launched in 1884 when the Cambridge Seven, led by C. T. Studd, offered themselves for "foreign missions" following Dwight L. Moody's mission to the University of Cambridge two years before. The Student Volunteer Movement was launched when, for the first time, large numbers of university graduates dedicated themselves to fulfil the famous "watchword": "The evangelization of the world in this generation." Brian Stanley tells us that by 1900 there were 17,000 Protestant missionaries in the world, and that 9,000 of those were British.<sup>1</sup> Today missions and missionaries come in for much criticism as agents of imperialism, but, in fact, they had championed the people of the colonies, and in 1913, and for long after, missionaries were among the great heroes of the day. This is the context within which we must understand T. F. Torrance's parents, who belonged to that great generation galvanized into world mission by the Student Volunteer Movement. That was what shaped the ethos of the family into which he was born and T. F. Torrance grew up intending to be a missionary in that tradition.

As I have tried to emphasize in sketching that historical background, those two words, "evangelical" and "missionary," go together. Thomas Torrance, Sr., a Scottish Presbyterian, went to China with the China Inland Mission in 1895 after studies at the Methodist Cliff College in Derbyshire. He came back to Scotland in 1910 in time for the epoch-making Edinburgh International Missionary Conference. Returning to Chengdu, this time with the American Bible Society, he married Annie Elizabeth Sharpe, an Anglican, in August, 1911. Thomas Forsyth Torrance, born two years later, was the second of six children and it is quite clear from his own account that the ethos of the family was strongly evangelical. "Through my missionary parents," he wrote, "I was imbued from my earliest days with a vivid belief in God." His outlook was "essentially biblical and evangelical, and indeed evangelistic." In the same passage, he recalled the evangelical spirituality of the home, the memorization of Biblical passages and the family prayers. He added: "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>2</sup>

To understand T. F. Torrance therefore, we have to understand this evangelical and missionary tradition into which he was born. This tradition crossed denominational boundaries and was marked by a particular tradition

---

1 Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 83.

2 "Itinerarium mentis in Deum," autobiographical memoir, quoted by Alister McGrath in *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 13.

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

of spirituality in which extemporary prayer and daily Bible reading played a large part. The tradition was also shaped by the temperance movement, often meaning total abstinence from tobacco and alcohol and a puritan rejection of "worldliness," but its heart was its passionate evangelism. And to be an "evangelical," committed to "evangelism" required a prior commitment to the "evangel," the Christian gospel. Since revisionist theology in the nineteenth century claimed the somewhat inappropriate term "Liberal," those who remain loyal to the evangelical theology of the Reformation have tended to accept the opposite political nomenclature of "conservative." But it might be better termed "radical" since a commitment to the Christian gospel calls for a radically critical attitude towards the secular orthodoxies which have increasingly dominated Western culture since the so-called Enlightenment. One of the notable features of the teaching of both T. F. and J. B. Torrance which I noted as their student at Edinburgh in the 1970s was that whereas other teachers even in Divinity exemplified the critical tradition of "sic et non," a cultured, sophisticated detachment which stood back in a supposedly neutral position and avoided commitment, T. F. Torrance and his younger brother, J. B. Torrance, began from a position of commitment which in fact led them to be more radically critical. It was my privilege once to be introduced to Lesslie Newbigin by T. F. Torrance at a conference in King's College, London, in 1996, and the two may well be compared in the way in which they were committed to the evangelization of Western culture at the deepest level. One cannot understand the theology of T. F. Torrance then without understanding that heritage in the evangelical tradition, committed to the *missio dei*.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A Reformed yet Ecumenical Theologian

A second point we must note is his Scottish Presbyterian heritage in the Reformed tradition. Clearly Thomas Torrance, Sr., was no sectarian. He was sufficiently broadminded not only to go to a Methodist college, but to marry an Anglican! It was the rise of the evangelical Student Volunteer Movement, led by John R. Mott and Robert Wilder, which led to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference and the launching of the ecumenical movement. Yet although not sectarian, Thomas Torrance, Sr., was a Scottish Presbyterian, and so, when political instability in China led him to bring his family back home in 1927 before returning himself

---

3 See "All in One Place or All of One Sort," Newbigin's contribution to the Festschrift for T. F. Torrance, *Creation, Christ and Culture*, ed. Richard W.A. McKinney (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 288-306.

to his task for another seven years, it was in Bellshill, a steel town in industrial Lanarkshire, that the Torrance family found a home. But it was in Edinburgh that T. F. was able to discover his Presbyterian roots.

The Church of Scotland was riding high when the Torrance family moved to Edinburgh in 1931. When Thomas Torrance, Sr., left Scotland for China in 1895, there had been three Presbyterian denominations in Scotland of roughly equal size, the established Church (the "Auld Kirk"), the Free Church, and the United Presbyterians. But by 1929, the three had united. Although the rump of the Free Church still remained committed to Calvinist orthodoxy, the newly united Kirk dominated the Scottish scene, much larger than all the other denominations put together in a land that still regarded itself as Christian.

One result of the union of 1929 was that the Faculty of Divinity of Edinburgh University (where ministers for the Auld Kirk had received their theological education) moved into the premises of the U. F. Church's New College, then the premiere Divinity school in the Reformed tradition in the English-speaking world. As a student there from 1934, Torrance was influenced by Professor Daniel Lamont, who had been a scientist and an assistant to Lord Kelvin. It was Lamont's influence, I believe, that was to lead to a significant development in Torrance's thought. But he was influenced particularly by H. R. Mackintosh, the Professor of Systematic Theology, and it was primarily Mackintosh who introduced him to his heritage in Reformed theology. Sadly, Mackintosh died in 1936 before Torrance had completed his BD degree, but Torrance always maintained a strong loyalty to him, and his influence was crucial. First, it is evident that Torrance inherited Mackintosh's perception that an evangelical theology had to be Christ-centred. Secondly, Mackintosh introduced him to the thought of Karl Barth. Yet for all Torrance's loyalty to his old professor, it appears that the theological trajectory on which Mackintosh set him took him further than Mackintosh himself went before his untimely death. First, while he embraced Mackintosh's Christocentrism and perceived that Mackintosh was moving away from the earlier influence of Ritschl in his thinking, he did not echo Mackintosh's earlier interest in a Kenotic Christology. And secondly, while it was Mackintosh who introduced him to the Patristic principle that "the unassumed is the unredeemed," Torrance was to take this into a more explicit doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ and his assumption of our fallen human nature.

The introduction to the theology of Barth was of course to be of the highest significance. Barth had published his notable commentary on Romans while Torrance was starting school in China, had helped to shape the Barmen Declaration

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

in the year that Torrance started his theological studies at New College, and the following year was dismissed from his post in Bonn and returned to his native Basel. But the prominence and influence of Barth in the 1930s raises the question of the nature of Reformed theology and of the variety of schools of thought which may be grouped under that heading.

I have in my possession a volume entitled, *Proceedings of the Fourth Calvinistic Congress Held in Edinburgh 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> July 1938*. It includes a fascinating photograph of most of the one hundred and fifty-six members of the congress taken in the courtyard of New College. Prof. Daniel Lamont and Prof. G. T. Thompson (Mackintosh's successor) were leading figures, along with Prof. Donald Maclean from the Free Church College next to New College, and Prof. Auguste Lecerf of Paris, together with other continental representatives and a few Americans. At this point, there was not a great deal of difference theologically between Lamont and Thompson of the Kirk's New College, on the one hand, and Maclean of the Free Church College, on the other. Standing in the back row together are Rev. Thomas Torrance and his son, Rev. Thomas F. Torrance, and further along that row are the Rev. J. W. Wenham and Dr. Douglas Johnson.

The presence of those two figures is very interesting. Douglas Johnson was the first General Secretary of the newly established Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Christian Unions. Beginning with the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union (CICCU), which had broken away from the Student Volunteer Movement in 1910 because of what it saw as compromise on the authority of the Bible and the deity of Christ, Inter-Varsity Fellowship included by 1938 evangelical Christian Unions in all the major British universities and was spreading through Canada to the United States and the rest of the English-speaking world and much of Europe.<sup>4</sup> John Wenham, as a student at Cambridge, was the initiator of a Prayer Fellowship for theological students of which T. F. Torrance had been secretary for 1934-35. In 1938 (the year in which this photograph was taken) Wenham initiated Inter-Varsity's Biblical Research Committee, leading some years later to the founding of the Cambridge biblical research library, Tyndale House, which has had such an immense influence in nurturing evangelical biblical scholarship and scholars. T. F. Torrance's first publication in 1941, *The Modern Theological Debate*, was a series of lectures he gave to the Theological Students' Prayer Union of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship. But these key figures

---

4 See Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A history of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: IVP, 1979); Oliver Barclay and Robert M. Horn, *From Cambridge to the World* (Leicester: IVP, 2002); see also A. Donald MacLeod, *C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007) for a biography of the key figure in Canada and the United States.

in the initiation of what was eventually to become a remarkable revival of evangelical theology and biblical scholarship were to become somewhat divided and indeed estranged over the theology of Karl Barth.

Torrance had just returned in 1938 from a year in Basel attending Barth's lectures and being chosen by Barth to be one of a smaller group which met in a seminar in his home. In later years as a professor at New College in the 1950s, he was to take over the editing of the English translation of the Barth *Dogmatics* from G. T. Thompson and to become indeed the leading advocate of Barth in the English-speaking world. Douglas Johnson on the other hand became increasingly influenced by the Welsh preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, through whom the traditional scholastic Calvinism of B. B. Warfield of Princeton became influential in British Inter-Varsity. The dismissal of Barth's theology as a "new modernism" by Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia,<sup>5</sup> prejudiced the minds of many evangelicals suspicious of "liberalism" and "modernism" and helped to prevent the careful critical appraisal of Barth which ought to have been part of seeing him (in Geoffrey Bromiley's words) as a "valuable ally" rather than "a foe."<sup>6</sup>

This suspicion of "Barthianism" was alive and well among evangelicals when I was a student at New College twenty years later in the 1970s. The Theological Students' Prayer Union was by then known as the Theological Students' Fellowship, and most of my contemporaries involved were in the Calvinist tradition and strongly suspicious of "Barthianism." As such, some of them were committed to the whole five-point scheme authorized at the Synod of Dort, including the doctrine of "Limited Atonement," or "Particular Redemption." One incident stands out in my memory. Torrance was a rather formidable figure in class. He usually wore his teaching gown (as did most professors and lecturers at the time) and in debate his piercing eyes would blaze over his half-moon spectacles. On this occasion, a student had defended the doctrine of Limited Atonement, arguing that Christ died only for the elect and not for all. Torrance's reply was devastating: "That Christ did not die for all is the worst possible argument for those who claim to believe in verbal inspiration!" As you can imagine, this student, nurtured in the Wesleyan

---

5 Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1946).

6 Letter to the author, 2004. Cf. T. A. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship: The First Sixty Years* (Leicester: IVP, 2006), 64n42. The estrangement of the Torrances from British Inter-Varsity came to a head in a confrontation between T. F. and Douglas Johnson when the Edinburgh University Christian Union, which was led by Torrance's students, was disaffiliated from IVF in 1953.

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

tradition, rejoiced in this defence of the evangelical consensus on the universal atonement.<sup>7</sup>

When we say that Torrance was in the Reformed tradition therefore, we have to specify *which* Reformed tradition. It was T. F. Torrance's brother, James Torrance, also teaching in the Department of Christian Dogmatics at New College, who mainly carried on the debate with "scholastic federal Calvinism" and its doctrine of Limited Atonement.<sup>8</sup> But the Torrances did not reject that particular version of Reformed theology because of the influence of Barth. They were consciously part of a Scottish tradition which they traced from John Knox through Robert Bruce and John McLeod Campbell.<sup>9</sup> This perspective included drawing a clear line between Calvin himself and the Scots Confession on the one hand and the so-called "Calvinism" which developed from the Synod of Dort through the Westminster Confession on the other. It seems to me however that there were some distinctions which should have been more clearly drawn.

There were three theologians whom Torrance always quoted in class with positive enthusiasm – Athanasius, Calvin, and Barth. They apparently could do no wrong! As far as Athanasius is concerned, I am not aware that Torrance had any disagreement with him whatsoever. But it might have been advantageous to the wider reception of his own theology if he had been more forthright about his disagreements with Calvin and Barth. Of course, without dispute, Calvin was one of the greatest theologians of Christian history and the comprehensive breadth and intellectual rigour of his theology, together with the fact that the *Institutes* constituted a biblical theology which distilled the insights of his commentaries on virtually every book of the Bible, make him a theologian who is unsurpassed. This Wesleyan benefitted greatly from studies specializing in Calvin under the direction of J. B. Torrance. But I recall one occasion when with great difficulty several of us extracted from R. S. Wallace, who was Torrance's brother-in-law, a confession that he actually disagreed with Calvin on predestination.<sup>10</sup> It would have been beneficial to the reception of Torrance's own theology if he had expressed that disagreement with Calvin's doctrine of double predestination

---

7 See Elmer Colyer's comments on Torrance and Wesleyan theology in *Participatio* 1 (2009):18-19.

8 For J. B. Torrance's debate with John Murray and James Packer, see T. A. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship: The First Sixty Years* (Leicester: IVP, 2006), 74-78.

9 See T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

10 R. S. Wallace, married to Mary Torrance, completed his doctoral work on Calvin at New College, published several book on Calvin and became a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA.



more openly. The trouble did not begin at Dort, but in Chapters 21 to 24 of Book III of the *Institutes*, if not indeed further back still in the Platonist individualism of Augustine. It seems to me that an open recognition of that would have enabled the wider evangelical church to accept that, despite his doctrine of predestination, Calvin was one of the greatest theologians of the church whose immense contribution should be of great benefit to many Christians who would reject what has become known as "Calvinism."

It would also have been preferable if Torrance had been more forthright about his disagreements with Barth. He belonged to the generation of research students who tried unsuccessfully to navigate the conflict between Barth and Brunner on Natural Theology.<sup>11</sup> Torrance generally took Barth's view of that debate, but he was more interested than Barth in finding a positive role for a theology of nature and had a more positive attitude to the relationship between Theology and the natural sciences. There was also a greater appreciation of the Priesthood of Christ in the doctrine of the atonement, and a clear difference on the doctrine of the sacraments, particularly baptism. To have been more explicit about his disagreements with Barth would surely have resulted in a more favourable reception of his own theology in the broader Anglo-Saxon evangelical tradition to which he and his family (unlike Barth) belonged. Traditional evangelicals were not all five-point Calvinists in the "scholastic federal" tradition – far from it. But as evangelical Christianity was recovering its intellectual strength and confidence in the second half of the twentieth century, it remained very wary of "Liberalism;" it tended to limit its focus to Reformation and post-Reformation debates with little appreciation of the Nicene theology of the Fathers; and it was conservative in outlook even to the point of suspecting any originality whatsoever in Theology. Given those features, it was very wary indeed of being swamped by this Swiss-German colossus with his original and creative presentation of a Christian orthodoxy which was not, however, the "orthodoxy" of post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism, and which could be easily dismissed therefore under the superficial title of "neo-orthodoxy." Had Torrance been more forthright about his disagreements with Barth, and had he developed a critical distance from his great and beloved teacher, it would have been easier for the broader evangelical tradition to understand that the way ahead was not the complete rejection of Barth as a "New Modernism," and certainly not becoming slavish "Barthians," but, as Geoffrey Bromiley put it in his letter to me, the critical assessment of Barth as "a valuable ally" and not "a foe." But perhaps that is a development which is now

---

11 Fruit of that attempt was T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949).

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

taking place: the critical appreciation and assimilation of Barth's theology into the Anglo-Saxon evangelical tradition and the re-shaping of evangelical theology in a way that builds critically upon Barth's insights. In that project, the related but distinct theology of Torrance is of crucial significance.

One final thought on this topic of the significance of Torrance for the Reformed tradition is that both he and Barth transcend the Reformed tradition. I recall another devastating classroom reply when a student began to remonstrate with him using the phrase, "But surely good Reformed theology would say ..." Torrance almost spat back at him: "I'm not interested in good Reformed theology! I'm interested in good *Christian* theology!" As he used to say, the aim of Christian theologians should not be to perpetuate disagreements between Christians, but to "cut behind" them to the heart of the faith which we share in order to see if we cannot resolve our differences. This reflects his ecumenical activity in the 1950s and early sixties when he was engaged with issues in ecclesiology and published the two volumes of *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*.<sup>12</sup> As we assess his legacy today, the point to note is that Barth and Torrance are figures who transcend any one theological tradition, and while they are Reformed theologians, they are more than that. They are theologians who challenge Christians to think together creatively so that the Church may present a united front to the challenge of mission in today's world of secularism and of cultures still resistant to the gospel.

### 3. Scientific Theology

Thirdly, having considered Torrance's evangelical, missionary heritage and his place in the Reformed tradition, we next consider his immense contribution to the relationship between Christian Theology and the natural sciences, and his creative, possibly even provocative, characterization of theological method as "scientific."

When I began theological studies at New College in 1973, the best summary of Torrance's theology available to us in print was his Introduction to *The School of Faith*, a collection of the Reformed catechisms. But only four years previously, he had published *Theological Science*, which at the time, therefore, was regarded as his *magnum opus*. *Space, Time and Incarnation* had been

---

12 T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vols. 1-2 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959 and 1960). For a summary of Torrance's ecumenical work at this stage of his career, see Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 16-22.

published the same year, and *God and Rationality* two years later in 1971. Most of Torrance's recently published books, therefore, at that point, were concerned with theology and science and scientific method in theology. In that Autumn Term of 1973, he lectured to the General Theology class on the first article of the creed, and the words, "I believe" were his starting point for an exhilarating introduction to theological epistemology. "God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth" was the starting point for an equally exhilarating review of the doctrine of creation and its relation to science placed in the context of current intellectual developments and rather negative remarks about biblical criticism and the social sciences. I had just come from years of teaching in a high school, including teaching classes of pupils of very limited ability on what was then called a "modified" course of study. To go from their company to listening to T. F. Torrance was an amazing first-hand experience of the range of human intelligence! But even without that contrast, I had never previously in my university studies in History and the Social Sciences, Philosophy, Literature, Education, and Psychology, encountered anything so intellectually stimulating.

As well as Athanasius and Barth, Einstein, James Clerk Maxwell, and Michael Polanyi featured prominently. I do not recall the terms, "postmodern" or "postmodernity" occurring at all in any class while I was student, but I do remember Torrance making us aware that with Einstein, a new era had developed in science in which the whole epistemology of the age of Newton was now being surpassed. But it was not till I was being interviewed years later in the 1990s for a post in the United States that I realized how "postmodernity" was the latest fashion in that academic world. And that while Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault were among the big names from continental Europe in what was sometimes called the "ultra-critical" group, Alastair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur, and Michael Polanyi were the big names in what was often classified as the "post-critical" group. What I quickly realized was that T. F. Torrance had been ahead of the curve in recognizing the importance of Polanyi's analysis of scientific epistemology. Prof. Torrance later said to me in conversation that his view of theological epistemology was not drawn from Polanyi, but rather that he recognized in Polanyi a kindred thinker. Polanyi's Gifford Lectures of 1951-52, given while Torrance was Professor of Church History at New College, and later published as *Personal Knowledge*, presumably played a large part in bringing them together.

If it is true then that the modernity of the age of Newton has given way to "post-modernity," and if it is helpful to use those labels, then twentieth-century art, architecture, philosophy and literary criticism were lagging behind with their vaunted modernism. The era of post-modernity began not with Derrida and

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

company, and not even with the later Wittgenstein, but with Einstein in physics, and (perhaps we may argue *contra* Bruce McCormack) with Barth in theology, and that the significance of that had been spelled out in the 1950s by Polanyi and Torrance.

I have already suggested that it was Daniel Lamont who sparked off Torrance's interest in the relationship between theology and the natural sciences. A dictionary article of mine, published in 1988, summed up this aspect of this thought like this:

Torrance's main thinking has been in the area of theological method, and in the relationship between theology and science. In his view, much theology (and in particular, biblical criticism) has become trapped in analytical and dualist ways of thinking made obsolescent by advances in modern physics. Instead of tearing apart "self and the world, subject and object, fact and meaning, reality and interpretation," modern science since James Clerk Maxwell (1831-79) and Albert Einstein (1879-1955) works with unitary, integrative, relational modes of thought. Thus, true scientific objectivity lies not in detachment from reality (the object of study), but in a relationship to reality in which our ideas are called into question.

So in theology we begin like any scientist with faith, which is a fully rational, cognitive, intuitive apprehension of reality. Reality in this case is the Lord God who gave himself in grace to be known in his articulate Word made flesh. God's self-revelation in Jesus is identical with God himself (for the Son is consubstantial with the Father) so that we know God only as we are reconciled to him in Christ.

Like all sciences, theology is distinctive in developing its own peculiar method appropriate to its object, and its own peculiar logic and structures. The great dogmas of the church, particularly the declaration of the Nicene Creed that the Son is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, are analogous to the great scientific constructs, such as Einstein's theory of relativity. They are open-ended structures of thought giving insight into a reality which greatly and mysteriously transcends our knowing of it.<sup>13</sup>

The question could well be asked: was Torrance's defence of the rationality of faith not a species of apologetics? Is this not a further point at which we should speak of his divergence from Barth?<sup>14</sup> It depends of course on what we mean by

---

13 T. A. Noble, "Thomas F. Torrance," *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 690-691.

14 On the way in which Torrance goes beyond Barth, see Alister McGrath, "Thomas F. Torrance and the Search for a Viable Natural Theology: Some Personal Reflections," *Participatio* 1 (2009): 66-81.

“apologetics.” It is certainly not apologetics of the “evidentialist” kind. But if it is true that the best apologetics is a good and robust dogmatics, then perhaps we may accept its immense apologetic value. And I think we may conclude that Torrance’s interest in it (fostered at first by Lamont?) arose out of his missionary concern to evangelize Western culture at the deepest level.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. “Theologian of the Trinity”<sup>16</sup>

Five years after that dictionary article on T. F. Torrance was published, I wrote another article for the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*.<sup>17</sup> That was somewhat further developed from the earlier article, but looking at it now, I see that I failed to take sufficient note of the significance of his first major book on the Trinity, *The Trinitarian Faith*, published in 1988.<sup>18</sup> As has been noted by several, Torrance did not lecture on the doctrine of the Trinity during his years as Professor of Christian Dogmatics from 1952 to 1979.<sup>19</sup> That topic was allocated to the Professor of Divinity, at first, John Baillie, and then, John McIntyre. It was only therefore when he became professor emeritus in 1979, that Torrance devoted himself to publishing his major writings on the Trinity. However, this can be viewed as the coping stone of the arch (or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say

---

15 For a recent discussion of the scientific nature of theology, see D. Paul La Montaigne, *Barth and Rationality: Critical Realism in Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

16 Cf. Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). See also Paul Molnar, “The Centrality of the Trinity in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance,” *Participatio* 1 (2009): 82-94.

17 T. A. Noble, “Torrance, Thomas Forsyth,” *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron et. al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 823-24. Prof. Torrance wrote to correct an error in that article: he had never been a student of John Macmurray.

18 That was particularly unforgivable since (as a recently rediscovered file reminds me) he had sent me the draft of Chapter 5 on “The Eternal Spirit” for my comments.

19 Although he did not lecture on the Trinity to the first or second year classes in Dogmatics, those of us who devoted all our time to Dogmatics in the honours class in the third year of BD studies did of course consider the doctrine of the Trinity in seminars and tutorials. There were six departments in the Faculty of Divinity in the 1970s, each with a Professor as head of department and three lecturers: Old Testament, New Testament, Ecclesiastical History, Practical Theology and Christian Ethics, and the two theology departments, Dogmatics with T. F. Torrance in the chair and Divinity led by John McIntyre. The latter was broadly Philosophy of Religion or Philosophical Theology, and John MacIntyre was the successor to John Baillie. But it was McIntyre and not Torrance who lectured on the Doctrine of the Trinity.

“the ground and grammar”),<sup>20</sup> for the way in which he articulated the doctrine was rooted in features of his thinking which stretched back for decades. Two particular features of his thought can be seen as guiding lights: (a), the Christocentric nature of his theology, and (b), his deep immersion in the theology of the Greek Fathers.

### **(a) The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

Elmer Colyer was perceptive when he organized his introduction to Torrance’s theology by beginning with “The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup> To his students from the 1950s to the 1970s, the most significant adjective to describe his theology was “Christocentric.” The *homoousion* of the Nicene Creed, so valiantly defended by Athanasius *contra mundum*, was pivotal. It enshrined the principle that God is in himself as he is toward us in Jesus Christ so that consequently there was “no dark predestinarian God behind the back of Jesus.” But it was only in his later writings that Torrance more fully developed the Trinitarian implications of the *homoousion*. The *homoousion* has to be seen as pivotal not only for our doctrine of Christ, our doctrine of salvation, and our theological epistemology, but it is pivotal for our understanding of God as God the Holy Trinity. “The *homoousion*,” as he wrote, “is the ontological and epistemological linchpin of Christian theology.”<sup>22</sup>

But not only was the deity of Christ pivotal: so too was his true humanity. As his students, we all had to write the famous essay on “The Relationship between the Incarnation and the Atonement.”<sup>23</sup> When Torrance was interviewed by the editor of the Kirk’s monthly magazine, *Life and Work*, before his year as Moderator of the General Assembly, he himself defined the key to his theology as “the vicarious humanity of Christ.” Further, when he came to the Nazarene College in Manchester in 1982 to give the fourth series of Didsbury Lectures, he chose to lecture on “The Mediation of Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Surprisingly in retrospect, this

---

20 T. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1980), esp. chap. 6.

21 Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

22 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 95.

23 Perhaps the definitive essay on Incarnation and Atonement in Torrance’s theology is that written by Robert T. Walker and published in *Participatio* 3 (2012): 1-63.

24 The first edition of *The Mediation of Christ* was published by Paternoster in 1983, and the subsequent edition with the fifth chapter on “The Atonement and the Trinity” by T&T Clark in 1992. Bearing in mind the witty comment about Prof. Torrance that “his incomprehensibility is legendary,” I gave our students at the Nazarene college an introductory lecture on the theology of T. F. Torrance. After his lectures, one student said

was his first published monograph on substantive Christian doctrine (as distinct from historical theology or theological method), and it was on Incarnation and Atonement. Today of course, in the two books *Incarnation* and *Atonement*, we have his main lecture course at New College over his twenty-seven years as Professor of Christian Dogmatics.<sup>25</sup>

This doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ, which is that the Son of God assumed our *fallen* humanity in order to redeem and sanctify corporate humanity in himself, has been controversial. The main opposition to the doctrine has come from the scholastic, federal Calvinist tradition within Scotland, and that is unsurprising, given the role of the “blinded eagle,” Edward Irving, as the most notable figure in the recovery of this patristic doctrine.<sup>26</sup> Irving’s version of the doctrine, that the human nature of Christ remained sinful even after his conception and birth, although his Person was sinless, naturally produced a furious reaction and was part of the reason for his denunciation. It is unfortunate that Barth cites Irving uncritically.<sup>27</sup> But with the publication in 2002 of Torrance’s early lectures in 1938 at Auburn Seminary,<sup>28</sup> it is clear that he explicitly distanced himself from Irving and taught that while the Son assumed our fallen humanity, it was sanctified in himself in such a way that he was “perfectly and completely sinless in his own nature.”<sup>29</sup> This was not always as explicit as it could have been in his later writings, but Torrance makes his position perfectly clear in a letter to the editor of the Free Church publication, *The Monthly Record*, in 1984.<sup>30</sup> He asks whether the editor (Donald Macleod) had, from an article Torrance had written in the journal, not missed the point:

The all-important point made by the great fathers of the Church like Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Cyril of Alexandria? They all held that

---

to me, “We really didn’t understand your lecture at all, but we understood him perfectly!” These lectures drew my attention to Torrance’s thinking on the role of Israel which I had not previously appreciated. See also David W. Torrance, ed., *The Witness of the Jews to Christ* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1982).

25 Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Downers Grove: IVP, 2008); Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Downers Grove: IVP, 2009).

26 Harry Whitley’s biography of Irving was *Blinded Eagle* (London: SCM, 1955).

27 *CD*, 1:2, 154.

28 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

29 *Ibid.*, 122.

30 My attention was drawn to this letter by Jerome Van Kuiken, presently completing doctoral research into the debate on the humanity of Christ.

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

in the very act of taking our fallen Adamic nature the Son of God redeemed, renewed and sanctified it *at the same time*. That was why Calvin traced the redeeming purification of our humanity in Jesus and His self-consecration on our behalf to His very conception, and why he insisted that from the moment Jesus was born He began to pay the price of our salvation. The only human nature which our Lord *had*, therefore, was utterly pure and sinless.<sup>31</sup>

The reference there to Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Cyril of Alexandria brings us to the second point about Torrance's Trinitarian theology, that it emerges from his deep immersion in the Greek Fathers.

### **(b) The Doctrine of the Fathers**

I recall being asked in an oral examination what the difference was between the way Torrance read the Fathers and the way they were read by historians of doctrine such as J. N. D. Kelly or R. P. C. Hanson. As is often the case, I did not think of a smart answer till later: that they are theological *historians*, whereas he is a historical *theologian*. If one approaches Torrance's writings with the mind-set of a historian, it is easy to think that he is reading his own theology, or that of Calvin or Barth, into the Fathers. But of course as a theologian, he is not so much interested in the contextual differences as in the great correspondences. The context and culture of the Fathers may be different from ours, but they are writing about the same God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Jason Radcliff, in his recent doctoral thesis at New College on Torrance's version of the *consensus patrum*, captures that difference splendidly when he writes that Torrance approaches the Fathers as "a dogmatician and not a patrologist."<sup>32</sup> Radcliff's central claim is "that Torrance's use of the Fathers is an imaginative and creative reconstruction of the Fathers into a Reformed and evangelical version of the *consensus patrum*, centred on Christology and involving substantial changes to his own tradition."

It is surprising, given Torrance's later focus on the Trinitarian doctrine of the Fathers, how scarce are his references to them in his earlier published works. Athanasius features for the first time in the title of a published chapter in 1965,<sup>33</sup> the Fathers play very little part in the Introduction to *The School*

---

31 Letter to the Editor of *The Monthly Record*, published in May, 1984 (the two phrases emphasised are by T. F. Torrance himself).

32 Jason Radcliff, "T. F. Torrance and the *Consensus Patrum*: A Reformed, Evangelical, and Ecumenical Reconstruction of the Church Fathers," (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2013), 92.

33 "*Spiritus Creator*: A Consideration of the Teaching of St Athanasius and St Basil,"



of Faith,<sup>34</sup> and Athanasius is only mentioned once in passing in *Theological Science* (1969). His study of the hermeneutics of Athanasius first appeared in 1970,<sup>35</sup> and his first major essay on Athanasius' theology in 1975.<sup>36</sup> Examination of his recently published class lectures reveals that there are only six brief references to Athanasius in *Incarnation* and only five in *Atonement*. When I visited him in 1981 to discuss the topic for his Didsbury Lectures the following year, I thought that he had accepted a suggestion that he lecture on Athanasius, on whom there was at that point no current critical appreciation in English.<sup>37</sup> But he decided to give lectures in dogmatics rather than historical theology. Torrance wrote in a memoir that his theological development was deeply influenced from the beginning by the Greek Fathers,<sup>38</sup> but he only began to write about them substantially later in his career.

It was his deep knowledge of the Greek Fathers particularly which was the basis for his involvement as professor emeritus in the ecumenical conversations between the Reformed and Orthodox churches. I recall a visit of Archbishop Methodios Fouyas to the Dogmatics classroom sometime in the 1974-75 school year, and in 1981, he contributed a chapter to a book edited by Torrance, celebrating the 1600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.<sup>39</sup> By that time, Torrance was participating in the Orthodox-Reformed conversations from 1979 to 1983, editing the volume produced from those.<sup>40</sup>

His first major work on Greek Patristic Theology was *The Trinitarian Faith*, published in 1988. This was the book which he said gave him the most satisfaction. It was followed in 1995 by *Divine Meaning*, a collection of pioneering studies

---

*Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 209-228. There was an earlier article, "Barth: Equal to Athanasius?" *British Weekly*, June 21, 1962; and his doctoral thesis on the Apostolic Fathers had been published even earlier: *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).

34 There is one passing reference to Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*.

35 "The Hermeneutics of St Athanasius," *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, 52 (1970), 46-68, 89-106, 237-49.

36 "Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology," *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 215-266.

37 Later publications include Pettersen (1995), Anatolios (1998), Weinandy (2007).

38 "Itinerarium Mentis in Deum: T. F. Torrance – My Intellectual Development" The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Series 2, Box 10: Autobiographical Writings of Thomas F. Torrance, Princeton Seminary.

39 Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981).

40 Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

which brought together the fields of theology, Patristics, and hermeneutics.<sup>41</sup> In the meantime, he had been the key figure in a second round of Orthodox-Reformed conversations from 1988 to 1992, working on the documents with Protopresbyter George D. Dragas. Dragas had arrived as a student at New College in the 1960s, eventually completing his doctoral studies with Torrance, and had become a key personal link among Orthodox theologians, drafting along with Torrance the working paper at the Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue which eventually became the "Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity" ratified in 1992.<sup>42</sup>

### **(c) The Trinitarian Revival**

That brings us finally then to try to assess Torrance's place in the theological developments of his time and particularly in what we may call "the Trinitarian revival" – the revival of Trinitarian theology in the late twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the names of Bultmann and Tillich dominated much theological discussion. At New College, T. F. Torrance seemed rather dated to the younger lecturers in the Faculty of Divinity. Forty years later, the scene is very different. Although Bultmann and Tillich reacted against the classical Liberalism of Ritschl, Herrmann, and Harnack, they were in fact continuing the Liberal strategy of correlation: correlating the Christian gospel, if not indeed accommodating it, to "modern thinking." Whatever is true about so-called "post-modernity" (and I remain just a little sceptical about that term), the optimistic project of the Enlightenment now appears to be running into the sand. Liberal Theology, together with the Liberal wing of the church which tried to commend Christian faith to its "cultural despisers," appears to be in serious if not terminal decline. In the universities, the perfectly valid, but different, discipline of Religious Studies appears to be pushing Christian Theology out the back door. But a new flourishing of serious biblical studies among those who number themselves as part of evangelical Christianity,<sup>43</sup> together with a new renaissance among evangelical thinkers in Philosophical Theology,<sup>44</sup> not to mention the enormous

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

42 Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993).

43 See the concluding chapter of T. A. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship: The First Sixty Years* (Leicester: IVP, 2006).

44 See Kelly James Clark, ed., *Philosophers Who Believe* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993); and Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

growth of churches in the two-thirds world which are the fruit of the evangelical missionary movement, all are signs of hope for the global church.<sup>45</sup>

In dogmatic theology, the last seventy years have seen this remarkable revival of Trinitarian theology: Barth, Hodgson, Rahner, Moltmann, Zizioulas, Pannenberg, Gunton, and Jenson may be mentioned as a selection from the influential names. Stephen Holmes has recently articulated the concern of those who say that, in fact, this is not a revival of the Trinitarian theology of the Fathers at all, but is in many respects contrary to the logic of patristic thought.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, some at least of these Trinitarian theologians seem to approach the doctrine of the Trinity from the perspective of contemporary culture and contemporary concerns. Barth's Trinitarian doctrine expounds the knowledge of God through his self-revelation in the context of modernity's epistemological concerns. Moltmann's concerns arise from the problem of suffering and from his social egalitarianism. Zizioulas approaches the doctrine from the context of modern personalism and a concern to justify Orthodox ecclesiology. Of course, Christian preaching and Christian doctrine always have to be related to contemporary concerns, but the key question is where to draw the line between contextualization and syncretism, between speaking to the concerns of the day and so accommodating Christian theology to the world that it becomes another gospel.

In this contemporary global context, the theology of T. F. Torrance is a tremendous resource for the Christian church. Like all Christian theologians, he was shaped by his context. The family ethos of the evangelical missionary movement for "the evangelization of the world in this generation," the Reformed tradition as represented by H. R. Mackintosh and Daniel Lamont, the immense intellect of Karl Barth, the ecumenical endeavours of the 1950s and 1960s, the need to relate the Christian faith to science in the age of Einstein – all of these shaped his thinking. But perhaps that is where we may see that Torrance exemplified the understanding of "objectivity" which he shared with Michael Polanyi. True objectivity is not detachment from the object of our study, but detachment from our own presuppositions, and questioning our own questions which arise out of our framework of thought. For Torrance therefore, unlike some of these contemporary Trinitarian theologians, it is not a matter of making the Fathers speak to our contemporary concerns today (the subjective pole), but a matter of digging deeply into their world of thought, not just merely to see their thinking in their contemporary context (the concern of historians), but to grasp

---

45 See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2002).

46 Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012).

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

how they unpacked the inner logic of the faith and expressed that in the Christ-centred, Trinitarian *dogma* they articulated in the conciliar documents and in their own more extended writings. In other words, truly scientific theology is not just concerned with the thinking of the Fathers seen in historical context (that *historical* task is concerned again with the subjective pole in terms of theological method), but with the God to whom they witnessed. That is the *objective* pole. To be concerned with the universe rather than merely theories about the universe is the true objectivity of the natural sciences: to be concerned with the living Triune God and not merely with our doctrines is truly objective, scientific theology.

Because of his deep immersion in Nicene theology and the profound way in which content and method is integrated in his thought, Torrance is less vulnerable to Stephen Holmes' charge of doing theology in a completely different way from the Fathers,<sup>47</sup> and he is less prone to the flights of speculation we find even (despite himself) in Barth. He is also operating at a profounder level than other theologians of the Trinitarian "revival" who are more accessible and popular writers, but whose star may wane.<sup>48</sup> Torrance's objectivity in this is not just a matter of the objectivity of the historian concerned to elucidate the thought of the Fathers. It is rather the objectivity of the dogmatician, the theologian who is not merely concerned with faithfully characterizing an ancient system of thought, but (as Jason Radcliff has emphasized) a Reformed and evangelical *reconstruction* of the Fathers. Torrance was concerned to integrate the insights of Nicene theology with the insights of Reformation or evangelical theology so that the apparently abstruse debates of the Fathers and their long wrestling with the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity might be seen to give weight and depth to the soteriological concerns of Reformation and evangelical theology. Conversely, Reformation or evangelical theology should be understood as the outworking of the implications of the Christology and Trinitarian thought of the Fathers. As Radcliff expressed it so concisely, by linking together the theology of the Fathers and the theology of the Reformers we see that the *solus Christus* of the Reformation is actually the *homoousion* of Nicaea. Torrance therefore teaches us to think together the Being of God in his Acts (with the Fathers) and the Acts of God in his Being (with the Reformers).

To put that another way, whereas other theologians are concerned to relate Trinitarian doctrine to the problem of suffering or the question of revelation or

---

47 See the argument for this presented by Jason Radcliff in a forthcoming volume to be edited by T. A. Noble and Jason Sexton.

48 For the best short summary of Torrance's Trinitarian doctrine (which we shall not attempt to reproduce here) see Paul D. Molnar, *T. F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 31-72.

the nature of the person, or some other useful area, Torrance is concerned to show the inner coherence of Trinitarian doctrine with the *gospel*. Evangelical Christianity, stemming from the theology of the Reformation, has too long taken the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity for granted. But in a post-Christian society that is no longer possible. The clear articulation of Christology and Trinitarian doctrine was an essential part of the mission of the Church in the pagan culture of the Roman Empire and has once again become an essential part of the mission of the church in today's multi-cultural society. Evangelical Christianity has to see that the evangel on which it is centred is not only a message of salvation: it is a *revelation of God*. Indeed, salvation is a matter of coming to know the true God revealed in Jesus Christ. As Dick Osita Eugenio has shown, Torrance integrated the doctrine of the Trinity with soteriology in such a way that his is a Trinitarian soteriology and a soteriologically based knowledge of the Trinity.<sup>49</sup> This truly "objective" theology is then not merely the study of doctrine – even patristic doctrine (that would be an abstract intellectual game), but it is the articulation *through* doctrine of our knowledge of the living God, whose name is "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Today this integrative theology is surely essential for the church's mission of evangelizing our culture at the deepest level.

On the centenary of his birth the world is a very different place. The *Pax Britannica* and the other European empires have long gone, and while the relationship between the great powers is much more stable than it was in 1913, the colonial empires have been replaced not only by many prosperous independent developing nations, but also by many areas of continuing poverty and increasing instability, apparently incessant local and civil wars, some failed states and the looming threat of international terrorism. The older churches of the West are shrinking and increasingly marginalized in the secular world, but the seed sown by the evangelical missionary movement has led to the enormous growth of the church in the Southern Hemisphere and parts of the East leading to a revolution in the demography of world Christianity. T. F. Torrance showed his life-long interest in the church in China by travelling back to Chengdu, the place of his birth, in 1984 and again, at the age of eighty-one, in 1994 to visit the church his father had founded and to take them financial help. But perhaps his greatest gift to the global church lies in the future. With the prospect that secularism and other faiths will begin to press upon the rapidly growing church in the rest of the world, Torrance's immense erudition and intellectual rigor and his deep grasp of Christian theology not in a superficially "relevant" way, but in

---

49 Dick Osita Eugenio, "Communion with God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of Thomas F. Torrance" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2011), shortly to be published by Cascade Books.

## CENTENARY REFLECTION

significant conversation with the frontiers of scientific knowledge, and drawing on the wells of Patristic faith and theology, are surely an invaluable resource for those still engaged in the evangelical missionary endeavour of the church around the world today.