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During the spring of my senior year in high school I had a fairly classic and dramatic conversion experience that radically changed my life. A year and a half later, while in college studying natural science, I sensed a call to ministry. This was a bit of a shock since I had absolutely no desire to be a pastor. It created no small amount of struggle in my life until I reached the point of saying "yes" to God's call.

After answering this call to pastoral ministry, I switched my major to psychology, thinking that it would provide a more beneficial preparation for seminary study and for ministry. However, in the fall of my third year of college I took a philosophy course in which we read Plato, Aristotle and other great thinkers in the history of that discipline. I was so fascinated and even a bit disoriented by the course that I switched my major yet again to philosophy. So I had a very wide undergraduate education spanning all three of these fields: natural science, psychology and philosophy.

However, it was philosophy at a secular university. One professor in particular seemed to take perverse pleasure in exposing all the weaknesses of the rationalist evangelical expression of the Christian faith within which I had been nurtured in the evangelical sub-culture I inhabited in college. Especially troubling to me was the modern intellectual history from Descartes and Newton through Hume and Kant to Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus and Heidegger. I was also exposed to the reactionary intellectual history in critical biblical studies and modern theology that tried, unsuccessfully, to come to terms with the problems posed for Christian faith by modern science, philosophy and critical historiography.

Needless to say all of this created something of an intellectual crisis for me. I found no viable answers within my rationalist evangelical sub-culture. It was a painful time, since I had begun serving as a pastor to three small

churches my final year in college while still in the midst of an intense intellectual and personal struggle to sort out the content of my faith.

It was at this point that I encountered the theology of Donald G. Bloesch. After reading *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* in a two-day marathon after Christmas in 1980, I decided to attend the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (where I now teach) to study under Bloesch, who became my mentor and close friend.

I benefitted greatly from studying with Don. He exposed me to the Great Tradition of the Church and the evangelical impulses throughout Christian history. He provided me with an alternative way to be evangelical in contrast to the defensive rationalism that infected so much of American Evangelicalism and proved to be a rather weak and inadequate response to the problems I had encountered in the intellectual history of modern science, philosophy and critical historiography. Yet I always sensed there was something not quite right in Bloesch's own theological method and doctrine of God. I knew that the two had to be connected, but as a seminarian I did not have the intellectual horsepower to figure it.

It was at precisely this point that I first encountered the evangelical, doxological, Trinitarian and scientific theology of Thomas F. Torrance in the most unusual of places: a course on pastoral care. The professor, James Fishbaugh, a former student of Torrance, had us read, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, a book on theological method and hermeneutics that has virtually nothing in it about pastoral care. This dense little book exasperated me ~~to~~ no end, especially since I had to write a précis of it! It was really my first attempt at interpreting Torrance's theology, and a most unpleasant one at that!

Nevertheless, Torrance's work contained the most profound analysis of and answers to the methodological and hermeneutical problems posed by modern science, philosophy and critical historiography I had ever encountered, questions that had gnawed at my mind and my soul since my undergraduate studies. Torrance was the first evangelical I read who was intellectually up to the task of engaging these problems at such a sophisticated level while remaining faithful to the Gospel.

It was really hard work getting my mind around Torrance's thought; yet every so often the fog would lift for a moment and I would glimpse an astonishing theological and spiritual panorama that I had not encountered elsewhere, and that illumined what I had always believed as a Christian, while at the same time putting an end to so many of the questions concerning my Christian faith from my undergraduate studies.

I was initially attracted to Torrance's work in the area of theological method and hermeneutics. The crucial books that impacted me at that time were *Reality and Evangelical Theology*; *Reality and Scientific Theology*; *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*; and, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge*, along with a number of significant articles on related topics. Torrance provides a holistic, critical-realist epistemology that avoids foundationalism without tumbling over into so much of the post-modern non-sense prevalent these days. Torrance's holism, critical realism, critique of dualism, notion of indwelling, personal knowledge, and participation all helped me sort out the problems I encountered in modern science, philosophy and critical historiography.

However, it was only later in my Ph.D. studies that I came to grasp fully the interconnections between content and method in Torrance's theology. That is when all the pieces of the puzzle came together for me. As I worked through *The Mediation of Christ*, *The Trinitarian Faith* and later, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, in relation to the methodological works noted above, I came to see the interrelations between method and content that, quite frankly, many interpreters of Torrance's theology miss.

The difficulty here is that Torrance tended to write on content or on method and did not always bring out the interconnections between the two, though the first four chapters of *The Christian Doctrine of God* are a remarkable exception to this. Torrance's theology is extremely complex and integrated, but his publications are rather unsystematic. I remember so often thinking to myself as another piece of the puzzle fell into place, "This man is absolutely brilliant in pulling all of this together. How unfortunate that one has to spend so much time reading and rereading so many books and essays in order to figure out how it all fits together!" That was the main reason for writing my book on *How To Read T. F. Torrance*.

Often in my study of Torrance's work I have found myself on my knees *coram deo* lost in wonder, praise and thanksgiving to the glorious Triune God, overwhelmed by the power and grandeur of the Gospel. I find myself personally, spiritually and theologically transformed, yet in a way that is in keeping with—really an unpacking of—the faith I had come to know in my senior year of high school when I first "heard" the Gospel.

I spent twenty years carefully reading, digesting, and then writing about Torrance's theology. I in no way regret the amount of my time, energy and career I have devoted to mastering his theology. It has been an immensely helpful and often exhilarating experience.

As a Methodist, many people are surprised that I find Torrance's theology rather more congenial to that of John Wesley. There are, in fact, many parallels between them, including a love for the Greek fathers, a fully Trinitarian perspective, a strong emphasis on participation, and a high Christo-centric understanding of the sacraments, just to mention a few. Indeed, the American Wesleyan/Methodist tradition could greatly benefit from a reading of Torrance's work because it would help that tradition read and understand Wesley's theology better than it often does. I am simply astonished by how many American Methodists miss the Trinitarian character of Wesley's theology. I am currently working on a book on Wesley's Trinitarian understanding of Christian faith that I hope will rectify this problem.

I have found three aspects of Torrance's work especially beneficial as a Methodist. First, his understanding of the vicarious humanity of Christ is especially crucial because it deepens the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* and provides an element that is singularly missing in Wesley's theology.

Second, Torrance's conceptualization of grace provides a viable alternative to the tiresome debate between monergism and synergism with reference to the relation between divine and human agency at every point in the *ordo salutis*. I think Wesley would have liked Torrance's alternative. Indeed, I think Wesley was struggling to articulate a position like it, but without the adequate intellectual categories to do so.

Finally, Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity is a significant corrective to much of American Methodist theology which, quite frankly, has substituted

some philosophical panentheism for the true Trinitarian deep-structure of the Gospel. Torrance's perspective is interactionist: the Triune God personally interacts with the world of nature and history while remaining distinct from and free in relation to the created order, unlike in panentheism which posits an inner identity between God and the world that often conditions both.

From Borden Parker Bowne right up through John Cobb and the other process thinkers, many of the top-flight Methodist theologians have taken the regrettable panentheist turn. While some theologians will passionately disagree, I think that Trinitarian and panentheist deep-structures are in the end incompatible, despite some attempts to synthesize the two. The Wesley brothers were both thoroughly Trinitarian theologians, and their Trinitarian theologies are remarkably similar to that of T. F. Torrance, even if they do not develop their Trinitarian theology all that deeply. Much of American Methodism has been rather *un*-trinitarian, though that is changing these days.

On a personal note, I might add that Tom Torrance was gracious, kind, and most encouraging to me in all of my contacts with him about his theology over the fifteen or so years that I knew him personally. He answered many questions about his work and provided numerous articles that I could not easily obtain here in the United States. Our e-mail correspondence fills a rather fat folder. He also read my book on how to read his theology in manuscript form and offered helpful suggestions. One of the most amusing has to do with his reformulated "natural theology." In a note, I stated that I believed Torrance regretted ever calling what he was up to, "natural theology." In the margin of the manuscript, next to the comment, Torrance drew a huge exclamation point.

My deepest regret is that I did not take time to go over to Scotland and visit Torrance in his later years. David Torrance, Tom's younger brother, kept me in ongoing contact with Tom until his death last December. I also corresponded with James Torrance, the middle brother, and had a long phone conversation with him a few weeks before he died. I owe all three of the Torrances, especially Tom, a profound debt of gratitude. Their impact upon my personal life, faith, and theology are immense.