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One of my first memories of T. F. Torrance was his radiant face, which greeted me at New College in the 1960s. Similarly, when my wife had given birth to our new baby, our first visitor was Tom Torrance! Later in life it was he, together with his oldest son Thomas, who phoned me and suggested to me that I apply for my current post at Heriot-Watt University. As a teacher, he was deeply personal and pastoral. What were my recollections of his teaching?

My first impression was of a man who made a profound analysis of the needs of our culture and he spoke prophetically to Church and society, including the worlds of natural science and modern culture. In those early days I didn't understand much of what he was teaching, but recognised that what he was saying was very important. Due to his inspiration I taught myself quantum theory, relativity theory and Gödel's Theorem, concepts he often referred to in his teaching. Suddenly everything fell into place and I saw the relevance of the unitary relationship of natural and theological science.

Tom's theology was no mere dry scholasticism cut off from a warm-hearted knowledge and love of God. One of his great burdens was to show that there can be no knowledge of God, and therefore no true theology, unless we approach Him with a humble, earnest, worshipping heart open to the deeply personal revelation of Himself that He has made in the person of Jesus Christ. This indeed is the "scientific" way to know God, for it is the way appropriate to the subject matter of theology – God Himself. His message challenged us to liberate our minds from preconceived logical structures which might unconsciously impose themselves upon the subject matter of enquiry, but which are inappropriate to the object of inquiry and therefore are likely to distort the results of inquiry into its true nature.



He believed that there is only one way of knowing, whatever the object of knowledge. By that he did not mean that there is only one method of enquiry – very far from it. What he did mean was that all methods of knowing must be appropriate to the subject of enquiry, so that (contra Aristotle and Kant) enquirers must not approach the object of study with a fixed logical system into which they seek to fit the answers to their questions. Rather the subject matter itself will contain its own, at first, hidden logic or rationality, so that natural or theological scientists must seek to uncover a rationality that is inherent in the object of their enquiry.

It took Einstein to discover a deeper logic in nature in which light, space, time, matter and energy are bound together in relationships – relationships that come from the very being of their existence. That is to say, they are relationships that are not dependent on independent external and eternal laws, not unlike the covenant of love that binds two human beings together and is part of the inner rationality of theology that we so easily miss if we impose our legalistic ways of thinking upon the data of theological enquiry. Tom believed that many of the problems associated with the discipline of biblical studies could be traced back to impositions of this kind, where the nature and function of the Bible were discerned solely from the processes and phenomena that went into composing it. This false phenomenistic dualism between reality and our perception of it has bedevilled the field of biblical studies.

The dualism that he disliked most was that of a detached God and a mechanistic universe. Instead, he believed that through the pages of the Bible we meet a God who, though He created the universe out of nothing, is – through His Word and Spirit – personally and deeply related to it. This is seen especially and uniquely in the Incarnation and atonement, through which He has made Himself known to us as one among us and for us by redeeming the world from sin.

The appropriate way to respond to God's Word is by listening and answering. As we listen we find that the Word challenges us deeply, so that we cannot do theology in a detached way but must allow ourselves to be challenged and changed in our inmost being, just as natural scientists must be open to the object they seek to know, so that its hidden logic might

engage their minds and foster growth in understanding. Our problem, though, is that we cannot answer and respond to that Word from God because, as sinners, we are alienated from it. One of Tom's most central convictions was that Christ is not only God's Word but also our human response to that Word. I have personally found his emphasis on the vicarious humanity of Christ most liberating. He often tried to discourage us from examining our own faith, repentance and worship, encouraging us instead to look away from ourselves to Christ.

Tom's emphasis upon the vicarious response of Christ got him into trouble with some Evangelicals who imagined that he was saying that we don't need to repent and believe because Christ has done it all for us in our place. Of course this is not what Tom Torrance was saying. He was instead developing one of the major emphases of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ makes our response for us as Great High Priest, taking our prayers to the heaven of heavens. So when we fix our eyes upon Jesus as the originator and completer of faith, we are set free from the assurance-destroying worries so evident in both seventeenth century Calvinism and Arminianism.

Since this way of salvation is the same as the way of knowing God, it was Tom Torrance's missionary endeavour to theologians to persuade us to think in Christ so that we do not cut off our theological or biblical statements from Christ himself. He used as an example the statement: "God is love." We see the meaning of that in Christ; however, if we use it as an independent, free-standing statement from which we deduce other propositions apart from Christ, then we will reach false conclusions. Language must not be cut off from that to which it refers. This was his quarrel with what he called "rationalistic fundamentalists."

Rationalistic fundamentalists are those who think they can treat biblical statements as independent from the ultimate Being to whom they refer. Once this move is made they can then apply preconceived rational structures to fit biblical statements (such as "God is love") into a dogmatic system. But this would be to commit the error that is referred to elsewhere in this article, namely to impose our own systems of logic on the subject matter of enquiry rather than letting it teach us its own inherent logic. Such systems of doctrine tend to be legalistic constructs of our own minds where we may

seem to put grace at the center of a theological system but instead end up with a new legalistic system that does not really set people free in Christ.

A neglected but important theme in Tom Torrance's lectures and books was his emphasis on Israel. God fully and personally addressed and engaged humanity through Israel's long and painful history. Fulfilment of this relationship between God and humanity was the Incarnation and the death of Christ. Therefore, Tom Torrance's teaching about such subjects as Incarnation and ecclesiology should take into account what he says about Israel. He often said that the deepest division in the Church's life was the division between Jews and Christians, who need one another to understand God's revelation and reconciliation in our history. Tom believed that the Bible taught that Christ fulfils Israel's unique destiny from Abraham to the end of time, even if Israel itself does not recognize it.

The content of creation and redemption has always been God, people and nature, so, just as there is a chosen people - in "peculiar intensity" (Tom's often repeated phrase) - to represent all peoples, so there is a promised land to represent all lands. Therefore, a rejection of Israel is a rejection of God's way of saving the world in Christ. Some may respond to this by saying that Israel rejected Christ and, as a consequence, cut themselves off from God's purposes. Tom would respond by pointing out that much of humanity has rejected Christ but God nevertheless still includes all in his purposes of creation and redemption in Christ.

If we believe that God's relationship with his creation is purely spiritual (i.e., He does not interact with the physical space-time of this world), then we will find it difficult to believe that He is active in history so as to give the Jews a unique history among the nations - a history which now has resulted in their re-gathering. If we do hold this view (a form of deism) we must still come to terms with the remarkable uniqueness of Jewish history (this uniqueness is widely acknowledged even by the non-religious). If, however, we believe that God can, and does, act in space and time, then we will not have this theological problem with the uniqueness of Jewish history and God's continued commitment to the promised land.

If we believe that the temple and OT sacrifices (a temporary sign of the covenant) are equivalent to the "land," then we will believe (see, for

example, Hebrews 8:13) that "land" has lost its significance. If, however, we distinguish between "sign" (e.g., the temple and its sacrifices) and "content" (God, people, and land – which were the content of Creation), then we will see the continuing significance of land as part of God's ongoing redemption of creation.