

A PASSION FOR CHRIST

The Vision that Ignites Ministry

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edited by
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CONTENTS

Introduction		
The Light of the Gospel	<i>Gerrit Dawson</i>	1
Chapter One		
The Christ who Loves us	<i>Thomas F. Torrance</i>	9
Chapter Two		
Preaching Jesus Christ	<i>Thomas F. Torrance</i>	23
Chapter Three		
Christ in our Place: the Joy of Worship	<i>James B. Torrance</i>	35
Hymn		
I Know Not How to Pray	<i>James B. Torrance</i>	53
Chapter Four		
Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ	<i>James B. Torrance</i>	55
Chapter Five		
Sharing in the Ministry of Christ	<i>David W. Torrance</i>	71
Chapter Six		
Marriage in the Covenant of Christ	<i>David W. Torrance</i>	91
Chapter Seven		
The Mission of Christians and Jews	<i>David W. Torrance</i>	115
Postscript		
The Legacy of the Gospel	<i>Jock Stein</i>	131
Selected Books		151



Postscript by Jock Stein

THE LEGACY OF THE GOSPEL

The purpose of this chapter is to tell at least part of the story of the Torrance family, in order that readers may know a little of the people behind the writing, with particular reference to the impact and influence that the Gospel had on them, and through them on others. It is more an appreciation than a biography - for example, there is no discussion of the distinct and perhaps unexpected divergence of their political views.

I am grateful to the Revd Robert B.W. Walker, who came to know the family seventy years ago and subsequently married Grace, sister to the three Torrance brothers, for much of this account, and to his son Robert T. Walker for helpful comments.

Karl Barth comments in Church Dogmatics that the Biblical idea of the family is not father, mother, son, daughter but man and wife passing on the tradition of the faith to their children, who in turn pass it on to theirs. In the Torrances we have a remarkable instance of how the faith of one particular couple was passed on to their children by prayer and Christian upbringing.

The father, Thomas Torrance was born in 1871 in Shotts, Lanarkshire, Scotland and the mother, Annie Elizabeth Sharpe in 1883 in Richmond, Surrey, England. When presented with the Gospel, each embraced it joyfully, receiving and acknowledging Christ as Lord over the whole of life and saw themselves as inheritors of a sacred legacy to pass on to others. Annie Sharpe, an Anglican, began at once, and continued to the end of her long life at the age of 96, to tell others of God's love, and Thomas Torrance too, right up to his final brief illness at 88, did not cease to do the same - either in preaching which he loved doing, or in writing, or in talking to individuals whom he met, frequently leaving them with a Gospel tract.

In time, following the call which each felt from God to serve him as a missionary to China both underwent a course of training - the one as a minister and the other as a lay worker in the service of the Gospel. They both went out to China, under the China Inland Mission (CIM), as it was then - Thomas Torrance in 1896 and Annie Sharpe in 1907 - each doing wholeheartedly whatever work was assigned to them. After a while, Thomas Torrance was able also to give assistance in the work of the American Bible Society (ABS) to which he became more and more attached. Then, when back in Scotland and attending the renowned 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, he was formally asked to take over the agency of the ABS for the large western province of Sichuan. This presented an enormous scope and challenge to his boundless energies and organisational ability and gave him a freedom not possible, under the circumstances, in the CIM. By now he had acquired a unique expertise in the language (Mandarin, spoken throughout the greater part of China), and was becoming increasingly recognised for his wide knowledge of Chinese history and literature, and as an authority on Chinese porcelain. He helped to establish the Museum of West China in Chengdu. Several of his collected items of porcelain and art were lodged in the British Museum and in the Royal Scottish Museum. His marriage to Annie Sharpe (or Betty as he called her) in 1911 gave him a greatly strengthened ministry, for she was completely at one with him in the work of the Gospel, offering constant support and encouragement, and adding her practical wisdom and other remarkable gifts to a union that, in daily devotion together and by the grace of God, brought faith in Christ to thousands of Chinese. A book by Annie Torrance, *How Shall We Train The Child?*, remarkable for its insight into how parents should bring up children in the faith, and written many years ago, has recently been published in the U.S.A., and is presently being serialised by Rutherford House in Edinburgh. One of Thomas Torrance's books is *China's First Missionaries*, in which he argues that the beliefs and customs he discovered of the Xiang tribes, in the remote Western mountains of the province of Sichuan, actually point to the tribes being of Semitic origin.

The work of the ABS under Thomas Torrance expanded rapidly and widely throughout Sichuan, involving many colporteurs and the training of converts to pass on the legacy of the Gospel to

their own people. There is so much more one could say, but it would be outwith the main scope of this account. Suffice to say that in the last year alone of Thomas Torrance's almost 40 years in China the team he had trained had distributed over a million items - of Bibles, or parts of the Bible, or his own composed tracts and leaflets!

Thomas and Annie Torrance were blessed with six children, all born in China. Long before being born they were each solemnly committed to God for his service, with the prayer request that each would be actively involved in the ministry of the Gospel. The three girls, Mary, Grace and Margaret married ministers, and the three boys, Tom, James and David became ministers - all six in the Church of Scotland. Two of the girls served as missionaries with their husbands in Central Africa, and the third had a short spell with her husband in the Lebanon. There was a very special word in Deuteronomy which they sought to follow as parents: 'You shall repeat [these commandments] to your children, and speak of them both indoors and out of doors, when you lie down and when you get up.' Family worship was held daily, with a reading of the Bible and prayer. The children were encouraged to read through the Bible regularly for themselves, and to pray before and during their reading. A scheme from their parents - three chapters a day and five on Sundays - meant reading through the whole Bible once a year, and now in retirement one at least does so twice a year. When her eyesight was beginning to dim in the closing year or two Annie Torrance, anxious lest too much reading might hasten the process, confined her reading almost exclusively to the Bible, which over the years she must have read fifty or sixty times.

The oldest son was Tom, born in 1913. His early schooling was at Chengdu. Now his mother as well as his father was gifted academically: she taught Bible and English Literature at West China University. However she put no pressure on the children, and gave them no help with their homework, desiring them simply to grow up godly, with Christian values. One day Tom, age 9, skipped school. The head teacher came to the house afterwards and interviewed his mother; he said that Tom was stupid, and still didn't know his two times table. His mother accepted this - to such an extent that even when Tom was doing brilliantly at Bellshill Academy in Lanarkshire, she commented that she could not

understand why teachers could give prizes to her son when he was stupid!

Tom continued with an ordinary MA degree, choosing not to take Honours so as to conserve limited family resources for the University education of younger members of the family. In any case he was anxious to press on to his Divinity studies, in which he graduated B.D. in Theology with distinction.

Tom went on to study and do a D.Theol. in Basel with Karl Barth, but had only been there a year when Prof. John Baillie was asked to recommend a Scot for a professorship in Auburn Theological Seminary (USA) for a year to 'pull them out of the doldrums'. So it was with some trepidation that Tom faced his first class of students, some of them much older than himself, and wondering what the youth from Scotland could teach them, but they soon learned to respect and appreciate him. On one occasion there was an interjection during one of his lectures. A student could not accept what Tom was teaching about the deity of Christ. When he received the typically direct and unexpected response that he did not believe 'because you do not want to believe' he was stunned into silence. For three days he fought with the issue, hardly able to eat or sleep, and then the light broke, as he accepted the diagnosis and became a firm believer. Needless to say, Tom's direct approach did not work with all students.

At the end of his time at Auburn other opportunities in the States presented themselves but Scotland beckoned, especially as he wanted to be back when the country was at war and after a session at Oriel College, Oxford, Tom was ordained, serving as a parish minister first in the Barony, Alyth and later in Beechgrove, Aberdeen. One of the elders in Alyth, previously accustomed to a nap during the sermon complained that under the new minister this was impossible! Between these two charges he served with the British Army in the Middle East and Italy during the war, as a Chaplain, and after demob had another semester in Basel after which he moved to Aberdeen, to his second charge. His ministries at the Barony and Beechgrove were both strengthening and fruitful, with a few from these congregations becoming ministers or missionaries. From Aberdeen he was appointed first to the Chair of Church History in New College, in the University of Edinburgh and then

after two years moved across to the Chair of Christian Dogmatics - occupying the latter post for twenty seven years.

It is quite outside the scope of this account to list all the achievements over his long and still active life, or all those of his brothers, James and David, in their different paths. For example, Tom founded the Scottish Journal of Theology and presided over many academic Societies. He wrote many books, including *Theological Science* for which he was awarded the Templeton Prize for Religion. He spent one year as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, he was awarded the MBE for war-time service, became a Fellow of the British Academy, and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a Member of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses and its President for nine years, and the Académie Internationale de Philosophie des Sciences. Tom has travelled extensively throughout many parts of the world to preach, to give lectures, to attend conferences, to help initiate and formulate plans for new work. Yet when he came out of the army he told his mother, 'I'm not cut out to be an academic'!

James, born in 1923, and David in 1924, had all their schooling in Scotland, first in Bellshill and then at James Gillespie's School and the Royal High School in Edinburgh. When war broke out, James had his last spell at school in Maybole in Ayrshire, while David went first to Maybole, then to Blairgowrie in Perthshire, and finally back to the Royal High.

James' call up to the Armed forces, in the Royal Air Force, came when he was 20, his service throughout the rest of the war being in the South of England. It was then back to Edinburgh University to complete his MA studies where he became Senior Medallist in both Logic and Metaphysics and also Moral Philosophy, gaining a First Class Honours Degree in Philosophy. The Professor of Moral Philosophy, Prof. John Macmurray, at the end of his academic teaching life, once said of him to another professor that of all his students James had been the most brilliant. Following philosophy, in the Arts faculty, came his studies in New College, in the University's faculty of Divinity where he obtained an Honours BD degree with distinction in Theology. From there he went to Marburg in West Germany to learn German and then to Basel in Switzerland to study under Karl Barth, Oscar Cullmann, Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Walther Eichrodt. Thereafter it was to

Mansfield College, Oxford, primarily to study the works of John Calvin. Just before he left, his fellow post-graduates marched round the College grounds in procession, carrying tomes of Calvin rifled from James' room and singing with gusto, 'Calvin is my darling, my darling, my darling, Calvin is my darling, my darling O!' Finally, on returning to Scotland, he was ordained, entering into the parish ministry in Invergowrie, Perthshire, where he built up a large and flourishing youth work, with a most responsive congregation and where many were brought to faith in Christ. The Bible Class for example grew from under ten to over 75.

Yet he kept the common touch. Once, neighbouring clergy were invited to a church gathering in Invergowrie. One referred publicly to James' outstanding academic record. A woman member was present and heard this. 'I never knew our minister was such a clever man', she responded, 'When you talk to him, you wouldn't think he had a brain in his head!'

After a few years it was perhaps not surprising that, with his academic attainments, his obvious teaching abilities and strong Christian grounding and vision, all equipping him for the education of intending ministers of Word and Sacrament, he was appointed first of all to a Lectureship in the History of Christian Thought and then as Senior Lecturer in Christian Dogmatics, both in his old Alma Mater in the Faculty of Divinity in Edinburgh. After sixteen fruitful years there came his own Chair of Systematic Theology in King's College, in the University of Aberdeen for thirteen years - with a period as Dean - until his retirement in 1989. During this period, his son Alan was appointed to a teaching post in the same department - only because James' colleagues arranged the interviews behind his back, as he would of course never have allowed it.

For some years he was Convener of the Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine; Joint Chairman of the British Council of Churches' Commission on the Doctrine of the Trinity; Joint Chairman of the Conversations between World Alliance of Reformed Churches (to which he was a Theological Consultant) and the Lutheran World Federation; and also for many years Joint Chairman of the Joint Commission on Doctrine, of the Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. His publications include many articles on the Doctrine of the Trinity, on the

Theology of Worship, on John Duns Scotus, Calvin, Scottish Theology, Puritanism, Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, and in Dictionaries of Theology; and his book *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*. Since retirement he has been involved to a great extent in many lecturing and preaching tours abroad and intends now to devote his time to further writing on such subjects as worship, prayer and the Trinity, and to prepare to give the Warfield lectures in Princeton.

David, in his University career, gained an Honours MA degree in Philosophy (being awarded the senior medal and prize in Logic and Metaphysics) and an Honours BD degree in Theology with distinction, both in Edinburgh, the latter in New College. The former studies were interrupted by World War II, for he joined the Army and spent his whole period of war service of nearly four years with an Indian Division, in India. Here he experienced some difficult times, but kept his sense of humour, being greatly amused on occasion with the methods adopted and the terminology of commands, instructions and explanations used by some, senior in rank, as they tried to instil army knowledge into assumed ignorant 'juniors', some of whom were far more intelligent and of higher educational attainment than they. It was a time though for which he came to be deeply grateful, a period when he had ample opportunity to meditate on the deep things of God, on what he had learned at home and come to love of the Bible, on the real issues of life and on what God wanted him to do with his life. It was a time of increasing maturity - a time that helped him over his natural shyness - critical, formative days.

Following his return to Scotland and before he started his main work in the full time Parish Ministry there were very many occasions both before, during and after his University days when David was engaged in Missions - with the University Christian Union, with New College, with D.P. Thomson and 'Tell Scotland', with Billy Graham, counselling and training counsellors. There were also the many years when, during his Parish Ministry, he led Church of Scotland Seaside Mission teams in different resorts - sometimes large teams up to sixty members and even, on one occasion of a hundred including part-timers. Many came from each of his own parish charges. There were many who found strengthening in their Christian life and witness through these

missions, or came to believe and rejoice in the love of Christ, and several are now in the full time ministry of the Church. When offered a teaching post in Scotland he declined, not feeling a call to this work. Later when invited to teach theology on three different occasions in Africa he accepted the invitation, but unexpectedly the door closed.

It is interesting that each of the three brothers effectively became 'dux' of New College, being awarded the Senior Cunningham Fellowship, as assessed over the whole three year period of their Divinity course. Yet all three had the experience of being thought unintelligent - Tom by his headmaster in China, James by a parish member, and David by his session clerk: after a whole year in his first parish, his local school headmaster came up to him and asked, 'Have you ever been to university?'

There are other interesting similarities. All three have been beekeepers and skiers, all were in the parish ministry of the Church of Scotland, all are both evangelists and theologians, and each has had to a greater or lesser extent a ministry overseas. Each has married into the medical profession - Tom to a nurse, Margaret Spear; James to a doctor, Mary Aitken; David to a doctor, Elizabeth Barton. Each has been blessed with a wonderfully supportive, gifted wife, and husband and wife have been very much at one with each other in life and work, a harmony in marriage which is a telling example and witness. Each has a family of three, all committed Christians, and with one from each family in the full-time ministry of the Church. To each the present writer owes more than he can say. Tom and James have a further similarity in that each has had a Festschrift published in his honour.

It is not within my remit to present any detailed theological assessment, even were I able, but to say something about them as people and to assess briefly their contribution in the work of passing on the legacy of the Gospel, both to their children and friends and to all who have heard them or read their works. Though indeed gripped by the Gospel, they have never been exclusively bound up with purely theological matters and out of touch with the real world. This has enabled them to see some of the implications of the Gospel and on occasion to have an impact on social and political issues, on matters of justice and compassion. I hope to give a few practical examples of their actual life, upbringing and character.

Each would acknowledge the great sense of debt they owe to their parents who from their earliest days, and even before birth, prayed for them as already mentioned, and prayed with them in daily family devotions and taught them to love the Bible and to read it daily for themselves. They came to believe strongly from their parents that God really did speak to them through its pages, as they laid themselves open to listen to him, to hear who he was, what he had done in Jesus for the world, how they should live and work for him under his leading. God for them really was present and they were secure in his love. It was in such an atmosphere they received the legacy of the Word, and appropriated it with a happiness that has never left them. Early they were encouraged to read books, and such as Robert Bruce on The Sacraments, Luther's Commentary on Galatians and many of the great missionary classics, were read while still at school. These were enjoyed and made a great impression. There was never at any time academic pressure to do well at school, and they grew up as a happy united family.

Tom had the privilege as a boy when still in China of accompanying his father on some of his itineraries, in the work of the American Bible Society, especially among the Xiang tribes in the high far Western mountains, selling or giving out Bibles or selected portions, preaching and conversing and seeing the joy of Xiang and Chinese coming to believe in Jesus. He saw too how often mere reading of the Bible, with no one to explain or interpret, brought new life in Christ. His boyhood ambition was to become like his father one day and tell others the same good news and we know that later he had an intention to return to China as a missionary. His love for them took him back there in his late 70's and even once when over 80. He paid three visits to the city of his youth, the city of Chengdu and also to the Xiang people, meeting some who remembered his father, with a gratitude and affection that had lingered for well over forty years! Part of his mission was to give support to the Church in Chengdu, as well as to encourage the Xiang people to rebuild their Church, (and not just Church buildings or Gospel houses) for in the great Communist thrust for power that swept initially through the province of Sichuan the Xiang Churches had been wantonly destroyed and their Pastors, with all their sons except one, ruthlessly slaughtered. On one of

these visits he carried with him the title deeds of a Church that his father had brought to Edinburgh for safe keeping when the Communists began to threaten the area.

In his late teens, Tom engaged with a friend in a mission in South Queensferry in the open air under the shadow of the Forth railway bridge. Audiences were generally meagre, but they preached nonetheless, even when they could see no one listening. One of the results of the mission only came to light about forty years later, when an old lady in Aberdeen told David that she and her husband, both chemists, came to faith in Christ through that mission. Other formal missions took place both in and outwith University life. Some students in the course of their studies for the Ministry, had a conversion experience, sometimes through a lecture, sometimes through personal conversation with him. His influence on others ranges from the Art College student (now my wife) who went to New College after hearing Tom speak to her Christian Union, to the current Chaplain to the US Senate (where, incidentally, you can find Tom's portrait).

Tom is widely known for his forceful proclamation of the staggering fact of the incarnation of the eternal God, and for his stress on the entry of the eternal Son into the darkness and shame of our situation, into the very midst of our rebellion and alienation, and taking our place in order not only to bring forgiveness but also to renew and restore our humanity in his own perfect humanity. The three brothers in their different ways have stressed the need for the Church to hear anew of the uniqueness of Christ, his offering to the Father for us, through his whole life and death and on into resurrection, a perfect obedience in holiness and faithfulness. In his resurrection and ascension to the Father in our humanity he has raised our human nature to participate in the eternal communion he enjoys with the Father and the Spirit. He then sent his Spirit to lift us up to participate in his victory and resurrection, and in his own communion with the Father. The Spirit is given to lift us up to Christ, to share in him and to open us up to knowing him. The Spirit thus unites us to Christ and at the same time unites Christ to us, making us know his presence with us. Then as our Great High Priest ever interceding for us, Jesus enables us in the Spirit to participate in his ongoing intercession and mission to the world, assuring us of the final consummation of all things in him when he

comes again in power and glory. In all these emphases the underlying conviction throughout has been, as with James and David also, the joyful certainty of God's self-revelation in Christ, without which we can only vainly speculate as to what God is like.

Alongside Tom's influence and attainments there is also a human touch and kindness that is ready to reach out to any who may need help. With his students there were occasions when Tom spent considerable time visiting them in hospital or patiently counselling them and answering their questions.

James too has made a very special contribution, from his own appropriation of the legacy of the Gospel, both in Scotland and in many parts of the world. In his earlier years, both as a student and post-graduate he was engaged in various missions and as IVF representative led a number of these in Scotland. Many of his students, in Edinburgh and in Aberdeen look back with gratitude for their days under his tutelage when what they learnt in their understanding of the Christian faith became the groundwork and vision of their whole future ministry. Almost universally their tribute to James would be of the extreme lucidity of his teaching and of how much easier it was, than with most other lecturers, to take away the gist of a lecture, and to retain salient points of thought.

Travel overseas as visiting Professor has been extensive and was undertaken frequently both when in New College and King's College, Aberdeen, but has continued even more widely since retirement. Visits to theological seminaries and colleges, congresses, conferences and numerous churches throughout many areas of the United States and Canada, New Zealand and Australia, as well as South Africa and Northern Ireland, sometimes for extended periods of two or three months, and even to Western Samoa, are so well received that he is repeatedly asked for a return visit. Many ministers have found their whole ministry transformed through new insights into the Gospel of unconditional grace and the continuing intercession of Christ, as expounded in his book, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*.

When the Gospel of Christ lays hold of a man or woman it gives a readiness to speak the truth and often an incisive insight into social or political circumstances. During the apartheid years when James was in South Africa during four extensive tours he frequently met staunch supporters of the apartheid system, ready

passionately to defend their position, even Biblically. In any critique of the system James took a clear Christological line during the many lectures he gave, in different Universities, in Dutch Reformed Colleges, in an International Calvin Congress. He would say that to hold out Jesus Christ to the blacks and coloured was 'not only to hold out forgiveness and salvation, but to give them their humanity and dignity'. The Incarnation meant that Christ had 'assumed our humanity, be we black or white, male or female, sanctified it, offered it to the Father without spot or wrinkle to be given back to us', and that thus God commits us to seek justice and equal rights for all. Tom in his short visit to South Africa during his term as Moderator was equally forthright, as he met prominent ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church - who for the most part supported apartheid. He also met among others the Prime Minister, and spoke so straightly to him that he said no one had ever spoken to him like that before, meaning perhaps that no one had ventured to do so. For James there was only one way for South Africa, among many proffered solutions, to solve the extraordinarily difficult problem of apartheid and his was the way that was eventually taken. David, who has a wide knowledge of the Jewish/Arab divide, was once heartily scorned by an official of the Church for suggesting, years before the 1991 War to relieve Kuwait, that the immediate key then to events in the Middle East was Iraq. That insight appears even more valid today!

James, with Tom, has been instrumental in introducing many to John McLeod Campbell, and particularly to his recently reprinted classic, *The Nature of the Atonement*.

One of the great issues, he points out, of the book was the currently accepted teaching of limited atonement - one of the main issues that brought about Campbell's deposition from the ministry of the Church of Scotland in 1831, for his opposition to it. More than 160 years later James was prohibited by the interim moderator from occupying a pulpit overseas during a vacancy - much to the dismay of many in the congregation - because he too did not adhere to the doctrine, holding as vigorously that Christ died for all and not just for an elect few. An opportunity then arose for him to address a large packed audience from the congregation on the title of a paper given earlier to the Calvin Congress, *The Concept of Federal Theology - Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?* At this gathering

he argued that John Calvin never taught a limited atonement and said that if a Church refused ordination to anyone not holding to this doctrine, then it would not have been willing to ordain Martin Luther, or John Calvin, or John Wesley!

James' emphasis on the continuing intercession of Christ came up unexpectedly one day when, as James was taking a dip on a Pacific beach, a gentleman came walking along, surprised at someone venturing into such cold water. They introduced themselves and it soon transpired that the gentleman was in a state of deep sorrow. His wife whom he loved dearly was dying of cancer. He was at that moment trying desperately to pray but was too distraught to know how to pray. His father had been a minister but he himself had drifted away from the Church. He used to pray but now found this impossible. James took him at once to Christ and certain passages of Scripture and said very simply that Christ was praying for him. He then prayed with him there on the beach. Would James, he asked, be willing to come and meet his wife and tell her the same thing that had so completely lifted his own spirit? He gladly did so, praying with them both. Some time later a letter came to say that the last remaining days together of the devoted couple had been wonderful ones in the sure knowledge of the abiding love of God.

Another theme upon which James has laid great emphasis is that of the Trinity, endeavouring to recall the Church back to its roots in this vital issue - a subject to which Tom himself has contributed so much in thought and in writing over the years, and with which David too is in full agreement. It is James who tells us that the renowned Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, on his return from many years in India, once said that the Church in the West had largely lost the great doctrine of the Trinity, and that there was a great need for the recovery of this, the Faith's ultimate foundation. As a result of the Commission, in which James was a co-Chairman, of the British Council of Churches on the Doctrine of the Trinity, representing all the major British Churches, three booklets were produced on *The Forgotten Trinity*. James has often written and lectured too on the issue of federal theology and its adverse influence on the thought and life of the Church. Other abiding emphases have been on the vicarious humanity of Christ, and particularly on the fact that God is a covenant-God, not a contract-God - a

contract, in common parlance, being in his words, 'a legal relationship in which two people or two parties bind themselves together on mutual conditions to effect some future result', while 'theologically speaking, a covenant is a promise binding two people or two parties to love one another unconditionally'. It is possibly here in driving this point home so continually and lucidly that James has had his greatest influence.

While the ministry of Tom and James has been largely in the field of academic teaching and lecturing, that of David has been predominately in the pastoral ministry with great emphasis on the practical ongoing mission of the Church, both here in Scotland and overseas.

Mention was made earlier of formative days for David in the army. At the end of the war he was still in India, with troops in a jungle division. He would soon have to make up his mind about his future and now he had to face what he had for so long felt to be the call of God to enter the ministry. He tells us he resisted this call persistently and strenuously, so much so that he even hoped at one point that he would not return from the war for he knew that then God would place him in the ministry. He would do anything to serve God but this. In prayer he offered to God to return to India as a missionary doctor and help the poor. He did not particularly want to be a doctor but was more willing for this if only to escape from the increasingly pressing, even terrifying call to be a minister. Three long days of 'turmoil' followed when he felt 'torn apart' and then alone in his tent felt in a strange but powerful way that God was there with him, almost as if he could touch him, and still calling insistently. Still he resisted but then such an alarming word came to him, telling him that if he refused he 'would never again have peace or joy', that he was utterly shaken. Kneeling there on the bare earth in the tent he prayed, 'All right Lord, I will enter the ministry, but it is your look-out!' It was, he says, a disgruntled prayer but then 'a miracle happened'. He was immediately filled with 'incredible joy and peace' and that 'joy of being a minister of the Gospel has never left me'. He returned to Scotland not only reconciled to becoming a minister but looking forward to it.

In assistantships both in Broughton Place Church, Edinburgh and in St. Mary's, Haddington, he worked with young people, and from the congregations some entered the ministry and others into mission work overseas.

All three bothers could be very direct in sharing the Gospel. In a mission once in the North of Scotland a retired major general in the army, on agreeing that serious disobedience of orders would involve a court-martial, was told that through disobedience in not attending the worship of God he was 'guilty of an act of rebellion and would be summoned to a court-martial by none other than the King of Kings! Some months later David received a lovely and gracious letter enclosing a generous donation to the work of mission. The officer had not forgotten the conversation!

Tom's memoirs of his visit to the Middle East in 1936 (after gaining the Stuart Blackie Travelling Fellowship in Greek, awarded to study Biblical languages and archaeology) or of experiences in Italy during World War II contain several hair-raising escapades. Were the daily prayers of his parents at home and other members of the family a factor in his coming home alive? A poisoned drink which he was fortunate to bring up, attacked a few times with a knife or other lethal weapon, a revolver thrust at him by an Arab accusing him of being a Jew, suddenly arrested in Iraq for 'spying' just after seeing bodies hanging up by their necks and then himself being sentenced to death, transported to Baghdad under police escort and finally deported to Syria - these are among some of the escapades.

The strangest of circumstances sometimes became the opportunity to plant the seed of the Word. By a stream one day up on the slopes of Mount Olympus and close by the Monastery, where he had had a quiet cell for the night, he was having his devotions. Along came an old monk hobbling with the aid of a walking stick. He inquired what Tom was reading and became deeply excited, hardly able to believe his eyes when he was shown a Greek New Testament. All they had apparently in the Monastery was a Lectionary. Although the monk protested at his kindness Tom gave him the Testament. The next day after climbing Mount Olympus alone he found the monk again, by the stream absorbed in his new treasure. He appeared 'completely transformed, for an inward light seemed to illumine his whole person and shine out of his eyes. That was the quickening and enlightening power of the Word of God of which I had known as a boy in China'. The experiences of that visit, over 60 years ago now, remained with him throughout his later service in the Gospel. When he left for Athens they exchanged walking sticks, Tom being given a walking

stick of stout mountain ash, which he used later in his pastoral visitation.

In Italy during the war, against the advice and in spite of the anxiety expressed by the Officer in command, Tom insisted on being with the soldiers at the very front of the advancing action. He was with the Church of Scotland Huts and Canteens, stationed with the unit and with a vehicle fitted for the purpose. Once he crossed through no-man's land to obtain a suckling piglet to give some cheer to the 'boys' at Christmas, acutely aware on the way back that grave consequences could follow a squeal! He was frequently exposed with the forward troops, not only to their rough conditions but to the deep horrors and tragedies of battle, having men near him, and once on either side of him, blown to pieces and having to gather up what was possible for burial and conduct the funeral service at the spot. At times he had to attend to the wounded, or speak to dying men as guns on either side blazed away, and lead them to faith and peace in Christ, celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper sometimes just where the men were in the open air. His soul revolted against the frightful slaughter all around, and his brother-in-law vividly remembers a letter received in Malawi at the time telling of the appalling carnage he was witnessing and how he might have been tempted to give up belief in a God of love but for the Cross of Christ that spoke louder than all the thundering guns of destruction. He found numerous opportunities to speak of the faith and often found that many, hitherto irreligious, were now, in face of the utter fragility of life and with peril so close at hand, open to the Gospel and ready to respond to the gracious word of the love of God. Tom came back deeply affected by the war, but with the incarnation and the theology of the Cross burned even more deeply into the centre of his thinking.

Fortunately David was not called to active warfare either in Europe or the Far East, though James saw something of the onslaughts and damage inflicted by the Luftwaffe in England. David was ordained as a minister of the Church of Scotland in 1955 and over a period of 36 years held three charges in all till his retirement in 1991 - Livingston in West Lothian, Summerhill in Aberdeen and Earlston in the Borders. There was an outstanding Biblical ministry in each of the parishes, where in each he was greatly loved, found many lives were changed and many deeply grateful for all he

meant and taught. As a friend and counsellor, and not just as a father in the faith to many, he was sorely missed at each demission.

One day as David stood on the pavement outside the Church Offices in Edinburgh he was suddenly arrested with the words, 'Are you a holy man?' Standing before him was an Indian. Suppressing the temptation to laugh, for the face of his questioner was so serious, he replied, 'Well, I try to be'. The Indian then told his story. He had been brought up in India as a strict, practising Hindu. He had come to Scotland to study engineering and while at University had come to faith in Christ. At first and for some time he was full of tremendous joy and recently all the joy had departed. 'What is wrong with me?', he asked. He was told only the Lord knew. David however said he might make some suggestions. Might it be lack of prayer, neglect of reading the Bible or of not continuing in Christian fellowship.... or some other reason such as failure to forgive someone who had wronged him? 'That's it! That's it!', he broke in excitedly. On being asked what he meant he said that someone had done something which hurt him and he could not forgive that person. He was told that inability to forgive would come as a barrier between him and God and would certainly take away his previous joy in the Lord, that we can only receive God's forgiveness if we are ready and prepared to forgive others what they may have done.... that forgiving others is frequently not easy and we need to ask God for the grace to forgive. Could he do that? He agreed. So standing there on the pavement they prayed, asking God to help him and give him the grace to forgive his friend. A few days later a moving letter came to say that he had gone off, sought out and forgiven his friend, and all the joy of the Lord had returned.

Further interests for David have been in the movement for Renewal in the Church through the Holy Spirit, also in the ministry of Healing and in God's purpose for the Jewish people. He believes it is in God's strategy for world mission that we must seek with Paul to take the Gospel 'to the Jew first', in the understanding that the coming of the Jews to faith in Christ will result in a great forward advance in world mission. He has served and still serves on a number of Committees of the Church, and contributes to the activities of Christian organisations, societies and conferences. A number of his articles have appeared in print or been incorporated in the books he has edited. A major work was the organisation and editing, along

with Tom, of the translation from the original Latin into English, of all Calvin's commentaries on the New Testament - twelve volumes in all. He has also contributed to and edited *God, Family and Sexuality* and similarly *The Witness of the Jews to God*. He is in constant touch with and involved in giving encouragement to 'Messianic Jews' - Jewish believers in Jesus as the Christ - who as he tells us now have many congregations, especially in Israel and in the United States. He wrote the booklet, *The Mission of Christians and Jews*, and co-authored with A.F. Lamont, *Anti-Semitism and Christian Responsibility*.

David has written of his special indebtedness to his mother, especially during the years between the ages of four and eleven when his father was on his own in China for his last term and the family were back in Scotland. Indeed all the children share this sense of enormous debt. Tom has said that she was *the* theologian of the family. Not only did they imbibe from her her love of the Bible but a great deal of her understanding of the message of the Word and its meaning for them and the world. She gave them a foundation in theology that became the grounding for their own and a love of the Gospel which became theirs to pass on. Their father too had a great influence both before and after this period, in part from his weekly letters to them from China. The whole thrust of his work told how he loved the Word but they knew this too through the way he spoke of it at home. At one time he knew by heart, both in English and Chinese, the whole of the Psalms and also much of the New Testament.

There is no doubt that each parent had a remarkable trust and understanding, and that together they provided a home and Christian upbringing which has made a deep and indelible impression on the whole family. If the Torrance brothers inherited a deep commitment they still had to make it their own, think it through in the context of their own century, and pass it on. Here Tom, in a sense, being ten years older, was the pioneer, equipping himself with a knowledge of the Fathers, the Reformation and of the history of Christian thought and relating the substance of the Christian faith, incarnation, atonement and resurrection, to movements in modern thought, particularly in science. Here he has indeed made a lasting contribution, pointing the scientist to the importance of theology, pointing the Church to the relevance of science. With his breadth of knowledge and incisive

understanding he often went right to the heart of an issue as he saw it and made his own position plain. Like the horse in Job who could smell the heat of battle afar off Tom was usually first into the theological fray! He stated things exactly as he saw them and while not meaning to wound very often he did so by being so forthright. An attack on an argument could be taken personally when it was not intended to be. And yet behind all the intense energy of his thought there lay, as J.S. Stewart said, a childlike faith. Tom prayed his theology, and when he began each lecture at New College he always opened, as did James, in a short prayer, which was a beautiful summary of the whole lecture. Some of his finest writing is contained in his two little books of sermons where his theology is distilled into simple language. Tom's intellectual contribution has been massive, and his influence may well grow greater in time. Hitherto he has often been listened to more abroad than at home, but it is to be hoped that even when people are grappling with some of his more difficult concepts they will remember that they should not be divorced from prayer or from the heart.

If Tom has been pioneer, James has been the consolidator, in close agreement with Tom's theology but adding his own considerable insights and focussing particularly on what he has felt have been the most critical areas of the Churches' understanding, the need for a return to the unconditional nature of God's love, the role of the humanity of Jesus in our salvation, and the continuing priesthood and intercession of Christ. If Tom has written on the whole range of Christian doctrine, James has focussed in his teaching on the very heart of the faith for ministers and laymen. His whole approach has been eirenic, attempting to win people, conscious that controversy can alienate them, and that through patiently unfolding the unconditional nature of grace agreement can follow. James too is no stranger to controversy, and has been uncompromising when he has felt fundamental issues have been at stake. In his preaching, as in his dealings with people he has endeavoured to reflect the unconditional love of God. In that he has exercised a considerable influence, not only here in Scotland, but wherever he has lectured abroad. It is frustrating that he has not written more.

David, as a theologian in his own right, could easily have gone also into the academic world, but felt called to the pastoral ministry,

giving particular emphasis to mission. While again sharing the same theology he has applied his knowledge of the Bible to the man or woman in the pew, to people in the ordinary tasks and situations of life, work, marriage, sickness, bereavement, and to the person outside the Church in parish visitation and mission in general. He too has been widely appreciated. There is a bulldog in his nature when it comes to standing for a truth or in contending for an issue in which he believes, and once he gets the bit between his teeth he doesn't easily let go! It is such persistence which has untied many knots and helped people through patient listening and counselling as he seeks to 'prepare people for heaven'.

This chapter seeks to paint some kind of picture of the three men behind the theology and to attempt an estimate of their influence. The various anecdotes selected are typical of their various characters. Their brother-in-law says, 'They are all different - intensely human, occasionally frustrating, but I have enjoyed immensely their friendship and the challenge of their thought, even if sometimes it goes way over my head.'

The Torrances have been widely appreciated, again perhaps sometimes more abroad than in Scotland, but they have also been widely criticised. Their theology has meant everything to some, but has been attacked by others. Did it present too much of a challenge, has the tide of secularism been flowing too strongly or was their presentation lacking? Whatever the reasons, right or wrong, for the widespread controversy or disagreement that their theology has caused it is to be hoped that they can be seen as each offering different insights and emphases, and as human. In each their theology flows from a simplicity of faith. While strongly intellectual it is never to be divorced from faith but understood out of it. In each of their differing ways they are endeavouring to be servants of the Triune God as they try to pass on the Gospel that they, in turn, have received. The passion comes from the heart of the Gospel - 'we love because he first loved us'.

For Further Reading

Thomas F. Torrance

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James B. Torrance

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