

## **THOMAS F. TORRANCE: A EULOGY<sup>1</sup>**

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Thomas Forsyth Torrance (1913-2007), who died of a heart attack in Edinburgh on December 2, was arguably the greatest Reformed theologian since Karl Barth, with whom he studied, and an eminent 20th century ecumenist. Having served for 27 years as Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1976; and in 1978, he was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion for his contributions to the emerging field of theology and science.

In theology, he generally placed himself somewhere between Calvin and Barth, though also moving well beyond them. An accomplished patristics scholar, he devoted himself to Eastern Orthodox-Reformed dialogue, being highly esteemed among the Orthodox for his ecumenical spirit and his grasp of primary sources in the original languages. He once surprised me by saying that his favorite theologian was Athanasius, whom he placed in illuminating relationship with Barth. An icon of the great Alexandrian appears as the frontispiece to his *The Trinitarian Faith* (1988), an exposition of the Nicene Creed, which remains perhaps the most accessible of his numerous learned works.

Besides the theologian, the ecumenist, and the church leader, there were at least three other Torrances: the translator, the interdisciplinary theologian, and the historian of doctrine. English-speaking theology stands greatly in his debt for his monumental efforts in editing and translating not only Calvin's New Testament commentaries but also Barth's voluminous dogmatics. His interest in Einstein and modern physics from the standpoint of Nicene Christianity has yet to be adequately assessed. Least well known,

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perhaps, is his work as an intellectual historian. Scattered throughout many journals are essays on virtually every major figure in the history of doctrine, though alongside Athanasius he had a special fondness for Gregory Nazianzen and Hilary of Poitiers.

In breadth of learning, depth of scholarship, quality of output, ecumenical conviction, and devotion to the Nicene faith, theology and church will not soon see another like him.