

Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, Ch. 1: "The Biblical Concept of the Resurrection"

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Chapter Summary:

This opening chapter of *STR* lays the biblical foundation for subsequent chapters' theologizing, in light of the Resurrection, about the person and work of Christ, his ascension and *Parousia*, and the implications for our understanding of space and time in dialogue with the natural sciences.

Outline:

Intro: Uniqueness of the biblical concept of resurrection (27-28)

- Contrast with nature religions' dying and rising gods tied to the seasons (in spite of the syncretism that's brought Easter eggs and other pagan symbols into the Church!) (27)
- Contrast with modern historians' view of history as cycles of decline and renaissance (28)
- Against these immanentist views, the biblical conception is of a transcendent Creator acting in the world and its history to redeem it. (28)

Question: Torrance operates with an *oppositional* model of pagan vs. biblical resurrection. What about C.S. Lewis's *fulfillment* model: "myth became fact"? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each model? Are they irreconcilable?

1. The Teaching of the OT (28-30)

The OT's teaching is only rightly discerned in light of Christ's resurrection. (28)

- a) Basis of resurrection: God's covenant fidelity to his people (28)
- b) Corporate restoration-thru-judgment of Israel (28-29)
- c) Promises that God will *raise up* a savior: a prophet like Moses, shepherd-king like David, the (self-sacrificial) Isaianic servant of the Lord (note the *munus triplex*) (29)
- d) God as Kinsman-Redeemer (*goel*) even from the realm of the dead (*sheol*) (29-30)
- e) Later OT: personal resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous; Apocryphal/Pseudepigraphal Lit: "apocalyptic aspect of resurrection" (30)
- f) Absence in Judaism of an "anticipated resurrection as an event in history." (30)

Questions:

1. Torrance starts his coverage of the OT data with the (Mosaic, Deuteronomic) covenant. What's the value of starting there? Does he miss anything important by not starting with Genesis (e.g., the creation accounts, the binding of Isaac, the Joseph cycle)?

2. What patterns of progressive revelation do you discern in Torrance's 6-point summary of the OT and intertestamental development of the doctrine of resurrection? (E.g., given the Israelites' origins out of Egypt, which had a sophisticated understanding of personal afterlife, why did the doctrine of personal resurrection appear so late in Israel?)

3. How legitimate are Christian theological constructs like the *munus triplex* or the theological interpretation of scriptural idioms like "raising up" leaders as foreshadowing Christ's resurrection? Do they elucidate or impose upon the OT data?

2. The Teaching of the NT (30-45)

2.1 "In the New Testament the resurrection is altogether a dominant concept." (30)

- It's not cyclical or tied to nature but is an inbreaking divine act of new creation in the midst of history. (31)
- In relation to *time*, the Resurrection sets in motion the start of the consummation of all things.
- In relation to *space*, the Resurrection claims "every square inch" (a Kuyper quote, not a Torrance quote!) for the new heavens and new earth. (31)

Question: How does this material build on the introductory part of the chapter above?

2.2 Because the Resurrection is an event that requires "new modes of thought and speech", Torrance examines the NT's language for it. (31)

- *Anistēmi*
- *Egeiro*

Both are used of raising up or rising up in Greek (32).

"The use of *egeiro* in the New Testament to speak of the raising up of the sick is an indication that the miraculous acts of healing are regarded as falling within the orbit of the resurrection, and as belonging to the creative and recreative activity of God in incarnation and resurrection. In these miracles the resurrection is already evidencing itself beforehand in signs and wonders." (32-33)

a) OT language of the raising up of a savior is taken over by the NT, so that Christ is not only raised up from the dead but is raised up as Messianic Prophet, Priest, and King. (33; note the *munus triplex*)

b) "The peculiar semitism, *raising up seed*, is also involved in the New Testament accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. He is raised up as a root out of the dry ground, the shoot of the vine, after it had been cut down to the ground. It is a miraculous act, in line with the raising up of seed out of the barren womb, in the cases of Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth, etc. This idea also plays its part in the accounts of the virgin birth of Jesus, but here we see already how the birth and resurrection of Jesus are linked, for together they constitute, in the understanding of the New Testament, the raising up of the new seed in whom all nations will be blessed, the First-born of the new creation." (33)

c) Christ's personal resurrection is the first-fruits of a corporate resurrection. (34)

d) Christ's resurrection—not any immortality inherent in human nature—is the basis for the general resurrection. (34-35)

e) Christ's resurrection is unto immortality, unlike the raisings of Lazarus and other biblical characters. "If the distinctive language used of the resurrection of Jesus is also used to speak of other incidents or events, it is only because the resurrection has so transformed the whole picture that they have to be seen as falling within the field of its impact." (36) Thus also the NT applies to believers the language of being raised with Christ, for his resurrection spills over into their lives. (36-37)

Questions:

1. In the parallel section above on the OT, Torrance took a more diachronic and conceptual approach, narrating the historical development of the doctrine of resurrection. In this section on the NT, though, he takes a synchronic and terminological ("word study") approach. Why the different approaches to the two testaments? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?

2. Torrance seems to see NT terminology for raising up as applying *primarily* to Christ's resurrection and only by *extension* to the raising up of the sick and the other dead. Is this the case or is the opposite true: that NT terminology applies primarily to healings and resuscitations and only by extension to the ultimate and unique raising of Christ? (Parallel cases: In relation to human kingship and fatherhood, is God "King" and "Father" primarily or by extension?)

3. Torrance thinks together the various uses of "raising up" language in order to bring together the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, Christ's healing ministry, the *munus triplex*, etc. How does this way of working through the biblical data enrich our theology of the Resurrection?

2.3 The NT Doctrine of Resurrection and Epistemology/Methodology:

- We can't interpret the Resurrection within the old, ordinary framework used for interpreting life, but only within the transformed framework created by the Resurrection itself. Torrance appeals to Polanyi's epistemology of "indwelling": only one who indwells/participates in the framework set up by the thing to be known can know it properly. (37-38)

- But we can't collapse the objective event of Easter into its subjective counterpart in the Easter faith of the disciples. This German NT scholarly move trades on a Cartesian-Kantian dualism that divides the world into outer fact accessible to the hard sciences vs. inner meaning, *Historie* vs. *Geschichte*, and the apparent detachability of "meaning" (timeless, spaceless, expressed in symbol and myth) from "fact" (the time-space world of nature and history). (39-41)

- Proper hermeneutics demands we be self-critical about our interpretive assumptions and methods. We must take care to interpret ideas and events within their own context rather than transplanting them into a different context. That's what happens when the Resurrection is interpreted in terms of Hellenistic or gnostic notions instead of within its proper Israelite religious context. Too many modern biblical scholars fall short here. This modern dualistic interpretation echoes the ancient Hellenistic dualism that led to the equal and opposite Christological errors of Docetism and adoptionism. (41-42)

- Interpreted within its Israelite context, that is, in a nondualist manner, the Resurrection sparked the rethinking of the doctrine of God: if God is personally involved in the Resurrection, then God is personally involved in Christ's preceding life and indeed in the world at large to create and redeem. Hence God is not aloof. (42-43)

- How then are we to interpret the Resurrection "*for ourselves* in such a way as to remain faithful to its basic character and content?" (44)

- Since the Resurrection is an event in space and time, we need to interpret it as such, accounting for the difference between ancient and modern views of space and time. We must avoid forcing modern thought-forms onto the event of the resurrection but rather "allow the resurrection in its own integrity to come to view and understanding within modern forms of thought and speech." (44)

- Historical precedent: the ancient church interpreted "incarnation and resurrection within the thought forms of classical Graeco-Roman culture only in such a way as to reconstruct the foundations of that culture, developing radically fresh notions of space and time accordingly. And that is the task of modern theology and indeed of theology in any and every age." (44)

- Our advantage: science has gone through a revolution against dualism; "we are in the process of developing a non-dualist outlook upon the universe, and basic to all that is the non-dualist understanding of space and time resulting from relativity theory. . . . [W]e are emancipated in a remarkable way from the tyranny of dualist modes of thought which have throughout the history of biblical interpretation done such damage, for example, in the allegorizing of the ancient and mediaeval Church and in the demythologizing of modern scholars from Strauss to Bultmann. But it also means that here we have being developed new, relational notions of space and time which are astonishingly similar to those which classical Christian theology found itself forced to develop" (44-45)

- Torrance ends by calling for dialogue between natural sciences and theology regarding space, time, and the Resurrection, but only after we've understood the Resurrection within its own frame of reference. (45)

Questions:

1. To what degree is Polanyi's participatory epistemology helpful? To what degree might it lead to elitism, fideism, or epistemological relativism ("Truth is in the eye of the beholder")?

2. Torrance is concerned to hold together *both* the objective event-nature of the Resurrection *and* its subjective reception by believers (both in the 1st century and today), *both* theology *and* natural science as legitimate, independent disciplines yet as sharing common ground. How do dualist vs. nondualist frameworks affect all the above? What are the theoretical and practical implications of Torrance's approach?