



Participatio

Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship



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VOLUME 2: "Thomas F. Torrance's Influences and Appropriations"

(Editor's note: Torrance's influences and appropriations will constitute a continued emphasis of future volumes, including a focus on other Church Fathers and Karl Barth.)

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**THE PLACE OF ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS
IN HISTORICAL AND DOGMATIC THEOLOGY
ACCORDING TO THOMAS F. TORRANCE**

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ABSTRACT: *This essay summarizes Torrance's reading of Irenaeus' place in historical theology, and then examines Torrance's use of Irenaeus in the treatment of three distinct theological areas: (1) Christology, (2) the theology of baptism, and (3) the hermeneutics of doctrine. Assessment is offered with particular reference to Eastern Orthodox theology. Emergent from this study is a contemporary ecumenical appeal to Irenaeus as a model realist theologian, offering a unitary resolution to plaguing dualisms in historic Christian theology.*

For some recent theologians, the figure of Irenaeus has come to stand as the emblem of biblical orthodoxy, the grand measure against which to assess the history of Christian thought.¹ For T.F. Torrance, that accolade belongs chiefly to Athanasius: it is to the "Athanasius-Cyril axis"² of early conciliar Christology that Torrance would re-call his contemporaries. Yet among the

¹ Cf. Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 159; also: Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999); John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006); Douglas Knight, *The Eschatological Economy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006). A comparable centrality for Irenaeus has been argued regarding the theology of von Balthasar: see Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: an Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroads, 2002).

² Thomas Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 9 (cited hereafter as *Reconciliation*).

noted patristic forerunners to this Nicene-Ephesine standard, the most crucial touchstone for Torrance's own theological exposition is Irenaeus.

The present essay provides a summary of Torrance's reading of Irenaeus' place in historical theology and then examines his use of Irenaeus in three doctrinal themes. Assessment is offered with particular reference to Eastern Orthodox theology. Emergent from this study is a contemporary and ecumenical appeal to Irenaeus as a model "realist"³ theologian, offering a unitary resolution to plaguing dualisms in Christology, sacramental theology, and hermeneutics.

Irenaeus in Torrance's Reading of the History of Christian Doctrine

Irenaeus and the Apostolic Fathers

Torrance's interest in the second century dates from his earliest period, signaled by his dissertation, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (1948), begun at Karl Barth's suggestion in 1937.⁴ Highlighting supposed discontinuities between the NT and Apostolic Fathers, Torrance argues that a misunderstanding of the NT concept of grace took place as early as the second century, resulting "in a doctrine that is largely un-biblical, and that has been only partially corrected by the work of Augustine and the Reformers." The great mistake: "to detach the thought of grace from the *person* of Jesus Christ."⁵

³ In Torrance's description, realism entails "an epistemic orientation of the two-way relation between the subject and object poles of thought and speech, in which ontological primacy and control are naturally accorded to reality over all our conceiving and speaking of it": See T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1982), 60. Such realism critically concedes to the idealist an element of active mental composition in acts of knowledge, yet insists (against Kantian idealism) on the possibility of apprehending reality-in-itself, in a kind of mediated immediacy. It is this particular dimension of Torrance's realism which comes to the fore especially in his treatment of Irenaeus. See T.F. Torrance, "Theological Realism," in Hebblethwaite and Sutherland, *The Philosophical Frontiers of Theology: Essays Presented to D.M. MacKinnon* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 169-96.

⁴ Thomas Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1996) (hereafter: *Grace*).

⁵ *Ibid.*, v.

While Torrance's thesis deals little with Irenaeus, two comments here are noteworthy. Criticizing the Apostolic Fathers for a relapse into Hellenistic naturalism with an "idea of grace as ghostly potency . . . not very different from the deifying *charis* of Greek mythology," Torrance states:

It was only after the circulation of Paul's epistles gave the Churches an opportunity to study the N.T. Gospel that its real implications began to be grasped, as in Irenaeus. But meantime the whole Church had become thoroughly moralistic. Some of the implications of the Gospel, grace particularly, were never recovered till the Reformation.⁶

The idea of deification was taken up even by such good theologians as Irenaeus and Athanasius. Nothing could be more characteristically Hellenistic.⁷

Already Torrance discerns in Irenaeus a grasp of the radical character of the NT doctrine of grace which, he argues, is identified with the person and work of Christ, wherein God's love is actualized "in a deed of absolutely decisive significance which cuts across human life and sets it on a wholly new human basis."⁸ This emphasis will also characterize Torrance's mature reading of Irenaeus. On the other hand, Torrance's criticism of the doctrine of *theosis* as a species of Hellenistic naturalism – a reading reflecting the influence of Harnack – will be reversed. In 1964, he leveled a plea for "reconsideration by the Reformed Church of what the Greek Fathers called *theosis*."⁹ Countering Harnack in terms reminiscent of Georges Florovsky, the later Torrance asserts: "far from a radical Hellenisation having taken place . . . in making use of Greek thought-forms Christianity radically transformed them . . . not the Hellenising of Christianity but the Christianising of Hellenism."¹⁰

⁶ *Ibid.*, 136, f2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 140, f3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34 and 133; cf. 139. Cf. Thomas Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 297, for discussion of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3:11:2.

⁹ Thomas Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 243; cf. 214 (hereafter: *Reconstruction*).

¹⁰ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 68.

Nevertheless, some trace of Harnack-like thinking can still be discerned even in Torrance's mature patristic discussions.¹¹ In Torrance's 1995 collection on patristic hermeneutics, none of the figures criticized in his thesis are brought forward for re-assessment.¹² The grand exception of Irenaeus seems in part related to a belief in some unique link to Jewish tradition: Torrance even claims Irenaeus knew Hebrew.¹³ Torrance's recently published dogmatics lectures register an apparently fixed judgment: throughout the second century, "the atonement failed, on the whole, to meet with any deep understanding in the Greek world."¹⁴

Irenaeus and Melito

Together with Irenaeus, there are two contemporaries whom Torrance excepts from this judgment: the author of *Epistle to Diognetus* and Melito of Sardis.¹⁵ These he credits with overcoming Greek mythologizing tendencies to uncover the "biblical-theological understanding of the Gospel,"¹⁶ central to which is the recognition "that our salvation, and our knowledge of God, are grounded upon *divine action in time*."¹⁷ Torrance regards Melito especially as standing in the same school with Irenaeus

¹¹ As Robert Wilken observes, Torrance "underestimates the ways in which Origen distanced himself from Hellenistic conceptions. In part this is because his understanding of Origen still stands in the shadow of von Harnack, filtered through Hanson, in part because of an uncritical use of heuristic categories such as the distinction between the Hebraic (Athanasius) and the Greek (Origen) ways of thinking," Review of Thomas Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), *Theological Studies* 57 (no 4 D 1996), 743-744.

¹² But contrast the judgment of Ignatius in Torrance, *Grace*, 89, with Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 114, f7.

¹³ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 77.

¹⁴ Thomas Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2008), 292 [hereafter: *Incarnation*]. Cf. also Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 275.

¹⁵ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 292.

¹⁶ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 215.

¹⁷ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 292.

for his grasp of the all-transforming significance of Christ's death in history.¹⁸

Torrance detects in Melito and Irenaeus two approaches to this *Heilsgeschichte*. Both interpreted the Gospel in light of the unity between prophets and apostles, Israel and the Church. Yet where Irenaeus sensed more deeply their substantial oneness, Melito underscored the difference, stressing the supra-historical significance of Christ's Passover.¹⁹ Further, where Irenaeus is didactic, Melito offers a dramatic, cultic proclamation.²⁰ These two foci correspond to the Jewish *Halakah* and *Haggadah*:²¹ while Irenaeus is oriented towards Scriptural exposition of the *regula fidei*, Melito renders "a kind of 'Haggadic' proclamation" of Christ's Pasch drawn from the Exodus account and its memorial in the feast of Passover – "cultic," not in being focused on rites, but on the objective "structure of the mystery."²² As Torrance insists, these respective foci, of *genomena* and *gegrammena*,²³ "event and message, the Word and words, the Truth and truths, are intrinsically integrated, and cannot be torn apart without serious dismemberment of the Faith."²⁴ Thus, the approaches of Irenaeus and Melito are "complementary."²⁵

¹⁸ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 215. Torrance notes that the two were linked as early as Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. Eccl.* 5:28:5: "Who does not know the books of Irenaeus and Melito which proclaim Christ as God and Man?": Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 75. (Although Torrance does not note it, Eusebius' statement is a quotation from an earlier, probably third century, work entitled *The Little Labyrinth*, whose authorship has been attributed – perhaps wrongly – to St. Hippolytus of Rome.) The articles on Irenaeus' *Demonstratio* and Melito's *Peri Pascha* in *Divine Meaning* were originally delivered as a two-part lecture.

¹⁹ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 75-6. Torrance notes that this emphasis was continued later by Epiphanius, a figure whose Jewish background Torrance also makes much of: cf. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 280.

²⁰ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

²² *Ibid.*, 77-78.

²³ *Ibid.*, 57; cf. Torrance, *Reconstruction*, 39.

²⁴ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 57.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

Irenaeus and Tertullian

If Melito constitutes Irenaeus' most notable second-century complement, it is Tertullian whom Torrance singles out most for negative contrast. Tertullian offers with Irenaeus a powerful early witness to fleshly resurrection – “the redemption of man’s *perishable* form of existence” – against docetic heresy.²⁶ Beyond that, however, a sharply drawn historical typology emerges, emblemizing two divergent ways: “unitary” and “dualistic.”

Dualism is a recurrent theme in Torrance, with two chief referents: (1) separation between phenomenal and intelligible, *kosmos aisthētos* and *kosmos noētos* (Ptolemy, Plato, Philo, Clement, Origen, Augustine), observation and thought (Descartes), “contingent truths of history” and “necessary truths of reason” (Lessing), “absolute” and “relative” space and time (Newton), *phenomena* and *noumena* (Kant), *Historie* and *Geschichte* (W. Herrmann, Dilthey, Bultmann), or fact and value (positivism); and (2) separation between being and act in God (Arianism). Underlying all such “cosmological and epistemological dualism,” however, is an “ontological *monism*,”²⁷ in which the incommensurable difference between Creator and creation is obscured and confused with dualities which cut *across* the span of *created* reality. Thus, “dualism” does not preclude the same naturalism at work here as criticized earlier in the Apostolic Fathers: “the remarkable assimilation – e.g. in Tertullian – of the Christian conception of Spirit and substance to those of Stoic philosophy,” in which “grace is thus assimilated to the concept of being and there is a graduated infusion of grace corresponding to a grand hierarchy of being.”²⁸

In spite of his anti-docetism, Tertullian’s eschatology does not extend to the non-dualist affirmation of cosmic restoration found in Irenaeus.

²⁶ T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976), 72, f11, and 75, f13 [hereafter: *Resurrection*]. On this point, Torrance cites Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* II. 44.1 and V. 9.3, and Tertullian, *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione Christi*.

²⁷ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 217, 225, etc., and *Trinitarian Faith*, 85.

²⁸ T.F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 1 (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1959), 147 [hereafter: *Conflict and Agreement* 1]; cf. also, T.F. Torrance, “Ein vernachlässigter Gesichtspunkt der Tauflehre,” *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 16 (nos 10-11, 1956), 490-1 [cited hereafter as “Tauflehre”].

Tertullian envisages the return of physical creation to nothingness.²⁹ Extending a taxonomy introduced in his 1956 study of eschatology in Luther and Calvin,³⁰ Torrance regards "the Irenaean tradition" as belonging to the positive eschatology of the East, whereas he finds in Tertullian seeds of a world-denying, Western, "Augustinian" eschatology.³¹ Accompanying this is a psychological turn, particularly regarding baptism:

Whereas Irenaeus had thought of salvation in terms of the historico-redemptive acts of God in Jesus Christ, in whom we are regenerated into God, Tertullian tended to think of salvation as saving discipline in which the healing processes of divine grace and the penitential merit of men cooperate to effect man's cleansing and renewal. . . . emphasis came to be laid firmly, not on the objective act of God in the Incarnation, but upon the candidate's response . . . what *man* does and upon the awful responsibility that devolves on him in baptism, the *pondus baptismi*.³²

Torrance believes this "switch from a Christocentric to an anthropocentric starting point, evident in the difference of theological outlook between Irenaeus and Tertullian,"³³ opened the way for Donatism³⁴ and contributed later to a shift in the Western doctrine of the Eucharist, from an event integrated into the objective ground of Christ's paschal mystery, to a fore-shortened focus on the physical conversion of the elements.³⁵

Torrance detects a similar shift in the hermeneutics of doctrine. For Irenaeus, doctrine aims to disclose the order already inherent in the

²⁹ Cf. Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, 34.

³⁰ T.F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 5 *et passim*.

³¹ Torrance, *Resurrection*, 155, f19. Note the ecumenical-polemical strategy at work here: just as with regard to Eucharistic doctrine in *Space, Time, and Incarnation*, Torrance here connects Calvin with Eastern Orthodoxy and opposes both to Roman and Lutheran "Augustinianism." Cf. *Reconciliation*, 128. See also *Trinitarian Faith*, 106-7, where Torrance notes the "profound interrelation between the doctrines of incarnation, atonement and creation" in Eastern patristics.

³² Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 96.

³³ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 97 and Torrance, "Tauflehre," 491-2.

³⁵ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 122.

“organic structure” of the “body” of Christian truth:³⁶ “the canon of truth is properly the truth itself in its own self-evidencing authority.”³⁷ In contrast, Tertullian imported “dualist modes of thought” into theology, conceiving the *depositum fidei* as a system of doctrinal propositions “themselves identical with the truths they were intended to express,” thereby introducing a “nominalistic conception of revealed truth.”³⁸ As evidence of this, Torrance highlights Tertullian’s association of the *regula fidei* with a codified *lex*³⁹ and “unity of discipline,” a pattern continued in Cyprian.⁴⁰

Here the constructive, polemical stamp of Torrance’s historical taxonomy is clear. Tertullian is the proto-nominalist; Irenaeus, styled in Barthian terms, is a “realist” theologian for whom God himself is both the content and medium of revelation.⁴¹ Calvin, Barth and Vatican II are all more or less “Irenaeian”;⁴² Tertullianic propositionalism operates in Westminster Calvinism and the First Vatican Council.⁴³ Torrance avers:

³⁶ T.F. Torrance, “The Trinitarian Foundation of Truth and Authority in the Church,” in T.F. Torrance (ed.), *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 96.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 102, with reference to Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 2.4.1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁰ Cf. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 271.

⁴¹ Cf. T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (T&T Clark, 1996), 77. The description of Irenaeus’ theology in terms of some variety of “realism” goes back at least as far as P. Battifol, *Études d’Histoire et de Théologie Positive* (Paris, 1902) and F. Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte* (Halle, 1906); more recently, Hans Urs von Balthasar describes Irenaeus as “decidedly the father of the ‘realism’ of Christian theology”: von Balthasar, *Iräneus: Geduld des Reifens* (Basle, 1943; Leipzig, 1983), 9. See also von Balthasar, *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against the Heresies* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 13, and *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 45. J. Behr also expresses agreement with this description by von Balthasar: St Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. and intro. by John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 18. Torrance’s attribution of realism to Irenaeus, however, is more epistemological and less sacramental in focus than the above commentators.

⁴² Cf. T.F. Torrance, “Trinitarian Foundation,” *op. cit.*, 106, 120; “The Deposit of Faith,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* [hereafter: *SJTh*] 36 (1983), 17-19; “Ecumenism and Rome,” *SJTh* 37 (1984), 59-64. Apart from St. Augustine, Irenaeus is the Father of the Church referenced most frequently throughout the documents of Vatican II, with a total of fourteen citations.

⁴³ Torrance, “Trinitarian Foundation,” 105, 107; “Deposit,” 26.

the divergence represented by the views of Irenaeus and Tertullian, and a dualist, legalising movement of thought which tended to impose Tertullian-like ways of thinking upon the basic contributions of Irenaeus, have had very far-reaching effects . . . upon the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Churches, not least in the lasting tension . . . between what came to be called 'the substance of the Faith' and dogmatic formulations of the Faith.⁴⁴

Behind this Tertullianic "dualism" is an intellectual tendency which Torrance calls the "Latin heresy": "a habit of thinking in terms of external, symbolical or merely moral relations, which resulted in a serious loss of direct contact with reality."⁴⁵ This is associated with Christological error: Tertullian thinks "of the Word of God, not as eternally generated in him, but as an emanation from his Mind which became Word only when God spoke it in creating the world" – following the Stoic distinction between unexpressed mental word (*logos endiathetos*) and spoken word (*logos prophorikos*) which would later form a background to Arianism.⁴⁶ In Torrance's view, it is this distinction which stands behind the later notion, suggested by Augustine and espoused by Aquinas, that God and the angels converse *wordlessly*, by intelligence alone.⁴⁷ Following cues from patristic thought as well as Anselm and John Reuchlin, Torrance rejects such thinking as out of keeping with the confession of the Son as *logos enousios* – Word in the being of the Father – and indicative of a damaging dualism between *form* and *being* in the doctrine of God.⁴⁸ According to Torrance, the "nominalistic" or legal-propositional

⁴⁴ Torrance, "Trinitarian Foundation," 104.

⁴⁵ T.F. Torrance, "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," in Thomas Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 218.

⁴⁶ A distinction suggested early on in Plato, *Thaet.* 189E, and *Soph.* 263E. Although Torrance does not note it, Irenaeus also appears to reject this distinction in *Adversus Haereses*, 2:13:8.

⁴⁷ *De Trinitate*, book XV; *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q.107, a.1.

⁴⁸ Cf. T.F. Torrance: "Scientific Hermeneutics According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962), 259-89; *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Eerdmans, 1984), 316-17; "The Hermeneutics of John Reuchlin," in Bromiley and Muller (ed.) *Church, Word, and Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1987), 107-121; "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *op. cit.*, 222; *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 95-100;

approach to revealed truth exemplified in Tertullian's concept of the *regula fidei* is directly tied to this dualism: citing M. Heidegger, Torrance argues that one possible result of this "secession of logos from being" is that the "separated *logos* is turned into a sort of *nomos* . . . a set of formalistic ideas which are then imposed upon being in a prescriptive and legalistic way."⁴⁹ At bottom, Torrance's Irenaeus-*contra*-Tertullian typology implies an indictment of the Western theological trajectory as insufficiently Nicene, at points even semi-Arian – from which judgment Torrance exempts few leading Westerners after Irenaeus (notably, Hilary of Poitiers, Anselm, Reuchlin, and Barth).⁵⁰

Irenaeus, Origen and the "Athanasius-Cyril Axis"

Torrance therefore reads Irenaeus in positive relation to Nicaea and the "Athanasius-Cyril axis."⁵¹ Following a scholarly tradition well-established since Harnack,⁵² Torrance maintains that Athanasius "stands squarely in the tradition of Irenaeus, and develops the biblical-theological tradition which we see reflected in his works."⁵³ In Torrance's estimate,

[cont.] *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press), 103-105. Torrance detects this basic dualism continued in the transcendental Thomism of Bernard Lonergan and Edward Schillebeeckx: see Torrance, "The Function of Inner and Outer Word in Lonergan's Theological Method," in Patrick Corcoran (ed.), *Looking at Lonergan's Method* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1975), 101-26, and "Theological Realism," *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Historical Jesus': From the Perspective of a Theologian," in W. Weinrich, *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Riecke*, Vol II (Mercer, Georgia, 1984), 520. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Wipf & Stock, 1985), 12, 45-51.

⁵⁰ See footnote 48 above, as well as Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 392-427.

⁵¹ Contrast with Gunton, *op. cit.*, 67-8.

⁵² Adolf von Harnack, *History and Dogma* IV (New York, 1961), 141-142; E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden, 1968), 12, and *Athanasius: De Incarnatione Verbi: Einleitung, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Amsterdam, 1989), 20; J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme dans la théologie avec sa christologie* (Leiden, 1969), 8, 350, 360; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. I: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (AD 451)* (New York, 1975); K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London, 1998), 19-24, 205-206, and "The Influence of Irenaeus on Athanasius," in M.F. Wiles and E. Yarnold (eds.), *Studia Patristica XXXVI* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 463-76.

⁵³ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 179.

Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* is "a work that more than any other bridges the relation between the teaching of the Apostles themselves and that of Athanasius."⁵⁴

This assertion has the effect of downplaying the latter's dependence on Origen, which Torrance believes exaggerated by modern scholars.⁵⁵ Following the old dichotomy between Antiochene and Alexandrian Christologies, Torrance sees orthodox Christology emerging as a "middle stream of development, running from Irenaeus to Athanasius and Cyril."⁵⁶ Pre-Nicene Alexandrian thought "never really expelled the Gnostics,"⁵⁷ being beholden to a Platonic dualism which Athanasius, following Irenaeus, rejected. Ironically, however, it is precisely this rejection which enables Athanasius to develop an emphasis *common* to Irenaeus and Origen, albeit "in different forms":⁵⁸ namely, "the Irenaeian (and even Origenist) understanding of salvation as redemption of the *whole man*."⁵⁹ Only through an overcoming of the dualism between phenomenal and intelligible which Torrance believes is the characteristic flaw of Origen could Origen's concept of baptism and prayer as participation in Christ's baptism and priestly prayer achieve full force in Athanasius.⁶⁰ Thus, Torrance sees Athanasius' basically Irenaeian theology as both correcting and *complemented by* the contribution of Origen.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Torrance, book-jacket blurb for Ian MacKenzie, *Irenaeus' Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary* (London: Ashgate, 2002).

⁵⁵ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 215; cf. also *Trinitarian Faith*, 175-76.

⁵⁶ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 198.

⁵⁷ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 179.

⁵⁸ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 230.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 225: on this point, Torrance cites Athanasius' *Ad Epictetum* 7, Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* 5:9:1, and Origen's *Dialektos*. Cf. also Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 163.

⁶⁰ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 93, 186.

⁶¹ Thomas Torrance, "The Open Texture of 'Faith' and 'Godliness' in the Church's Confession," in George Dragas (ed.) *Axsum-Thyateira: A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios of Thyateira and Great Britain* (London, 1985), 149. Contrast with the general approach of Gunton and Farrow, *opera cit.*, who present Irenaeus and Origen in radical opposition.

This contribution entailed a partial reversal of Aristotelian-Stoic thinking about human reason in its relation to God, for which rationality was tied to notions of finite creaturely form: for such thinking, knowledge of the infinite would have to be irrational, and rational knowledge could only be of "a finite, limited and intra-mundane God."⁶² Further, "in line with the conception of scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) which had long prevailed in Alexandria, that exact knowledge is in accordance with the nature (*kata physin*) of what is known, Origen concentrated on developing a way of knowing God which was strictly in accordance with the nature of God as he has revealed himself to us, that is, in a godly way; and he set himself to cultivate personal godliness in reliance upon the grace of Christ and the power of his Spirit, so that he could bring to knowledge of God an appropriately godly habit of mind."⁶³ While Irenaeus offered a realist notion of "canon," in Origen, "godliness and the rule of faith became operational equivalents."⁶⁴ It is this *epistemic*, and indeed likewise *ascetical*,⁶⁵ dimension in Origen that was brought to bear upon the otherwise "Irenaeian" substance of Athanasius' thought.

This acknowledgment, however, should not be exaggerated. Torrance's appreciation of the *doctor adamantius* is cautious: as Robert Wilken observes, "he seems not to have De Lubac on Origen."⁶⁶ Positive discussions of Origen appear quite late, marking a convergence between

⁶² Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 218.

⁶³ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 37-8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38; cf. also 126. Torrance also credits Origen with breaking with ancient Greek "receptacle" notions of space in order to arrive at the "relational" idea of space crucial to Nicene Christology: see "The Relation of the Incarnation to Space in Nicene Theology," in T.F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, pp. 349-363.

⁶⁵ "Ascetical" is not Torrance's term, and indeed appears remarkably little in his *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, it is precisely an ascetic theology which stands at the heart of Torrance's notion of theological science, with its stress upon the epistemic necessity of repentance and godliness in the knowledge of God. For a rare comment on the need for "ascetic theology," see Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 26.

⁶⁶ Wilken, *op. cit.*

Torrance's Christologically-focused dogmatics and his ever-growing interest in the history of scientific epistemology, not least in Alexandria.⁶⁷

What is consistent from the beginning is an appeal to Irenaeus and Athanasius as a twofold witness to the Christological faith of the ancient Church. Here a 1957 exchange with a Jesuit interlocutor, in debate over the Immaculate Conception, is representative:

Irenaeus and Athanasius . . . held to the fundamental fact that the Holy Son of God assumed our mortal, corrupt humanity under the bondage of sin in order to heal and redeem it. The flesh which He the sinless Son took from Mary was in the likeness of 'the flesh of sin.' That principle was tersely enunciated by Gregory Nazianzen: 'The unassumed is unhealed.'⁶⁸

According to Torrance, this teaching was a core insight of Irenaeus' doctrine of *anakephalaiōsis*,⁶⁹ taught everywhere by Fathers "[f]rom Irenaeus to Cyril of Alexandria."⁷⁰ However, in the 5th century West, it was replaced by "the idea advanced by Latin theologians, probably to be traced back to the rather dualist *Tome* of Leo sent to the Council of Chalcedon, that the Son of God assumed a neutral human nature."⁷¹ Torrance believes that this latter, Christological form of the "Latin heresy" had profound consequences for Western treatment of both redemption and revelation, exemplified in the Immaculate Conception dogma ("Scotist heresy"),⁷²

⁶⁷ On the Alexandrian scientific background of "dogmatics," cf. T.F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 49-51, as well as the essays on the thought of John Philoponos in T.F. Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

⁶⁸ Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 1, 174.

⁶⁹ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 68.

⁷⁰ Torrance, "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *op. cit.*, 231.

⁷¹ Torrance, "Karl Barth and Patristic Theology," *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 203. Thomas Weinandy agrees with this reading of Leo's *Tome*, but notes a contrasting view in Leo's *Sermon 7:2*, where it is stated that when the Son "lowered himself to our condition, He not only assumed our substance (nature), but also the condition of our sinfulness": see Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 36. According to Weinandy, a position similar to Torrance's is upheld by both Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas: *ibid.*, 46-52.

⁷² Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 1, 175.

penal atonement-theory,⁷³ and the “fundamentalist conception of ‘verbal inspiration’ of the Bible.”⁷⁴

In contrast, Irenaeus and Athanasius understood the incarnation as involving God’s taking-up of an *internal relation* with actual humanity.⁷⁵ As Irenaeus made clear, God is known through God alone: in the incarnation, fallen humanity is drawn into the Son’s own knowledge of the Father.⁷⁶ It was this same way of knowing God through *internal* relations that was at stake in Athanasius’ defense of the *homoousion*. Torrance claims it was Irenaeus who first gave prominence to the statement of Mt. 11:27/Lk. 10:22, a passage crucial for that defense: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”⁷⁷ Similarly, Irenaeus anticipated Athanasius “in putting forward a doctrine of the indwelling or containing of the Son and the Father in one another.”⁷⁸

For both Fathers, this “oneness in being and agency between Christ and God” was asserted of the *incarnate* Son and, thus, in *soteriological* perspective.⁷⁹ Crucial here is the overcoming of the dualism between humanity and divinity, history and truth. Irenaeus’ use of *oikonomia* implies that God’s *eternal* purpose has been realized *temporally* in Christ, an understanding epistemologically deepened by

⁷³ See especially, Thomas Torrance, “The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order,” in Nigel Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Paternoster Press, 1992), 225-256, and Review of Leanne van Dyk, *The Desire of Divine Love: John MacLeod’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, in *SJTh*, 49 (1996), 125-7.

⁷⁴ T.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 40.

⁷⁵ Torrance, “Deposit of Faith,” *op. cit.* 8-9; *Divine Meaning*, 186.

⁷⁶ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 108-09, citing Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4:6:4, 6-7 and 4:20:7. On this basis, Torrance conceives of revelation and Scripture on analogy with the hypostatic union: cf. Torrance, review of B.B. Warfield, *The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible*, *SJTh* 7 (1954) [104-06], 106.

⁷⁷ Torrance, “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,” 214.

⁷⁸ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 67 (citing *Adv. Haer.* 3.19.2), and *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 168, n1 (citing *Adv. Haer.* 3.6.2.)

⁷⁹ Torrance, “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,” 227, and *Divine Meaning*, 67-8.

Athanasius in a realist joining of economy and truth.⁸⁰ As Torrance notes, this resembled the later Chalcedonian definition, but with a stronger emphasis upon the reality of the economy, the unity of divine *ousia* with *ta erga* accomplished in the humanity of Christ.⁸¹ Thus, in Torrance's neo-Athanasian theology, the *homoousion* is interpreted dynamically, within an Irenaean account of the redemptive scope of God's covenanted history with Israel as the actual "field" in which Christ is known,⁸² providing the "permanent structures" within which revelation is apprehended.⁸³

In further evidence of Irenaeus' anticipation of this unitary, *frühkonziliare* Christology, Torrance cites an unauthenticated fragment attributed to Irenaeus which speaks of "the Word of God become one with the flesh by a hypostatic and physical union" (*houto tou Theou logou henōsei, tē kath' hypostasin physikē, henōthentos tē sarki*).⁸⁴ Torrance's reading of this union, however, challenges Harnack's one-sided attribution of a deifying "physical" redemption by incarnation alone: "In the teaching of Irenaeus and Athanasius, there was considerable stress upon the obedience of the incarnate Son, and consequently upon the saving significance of the humanity of Christ,"⁸⁵ an aspect "often completely omitted by patristic scholars,"⁸⁶ at least as regards Athanasius. Thus, the famous dictum regarding deification from Athanasius' *De Incarnatione* 54:3 – too often quoted without regard for context! – is properly

⁸⁰ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 259-72. Torrance is particularly concerned to stress an understanding of economy as being-in-act, God's *self*-revelation, against any dualism between divine economy and truth, in which economy might be understood as "reserve" on the part of God (the latter notion which he detects in J.H. Newman: see *Divine Meaning*, 383).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁸² Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 50.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁴ Fragment xxvii in W. Harvey's edition of *Adversus Haereses*, II (Cambridge, 1857), 493; cited and discussed in "Kerygmatic Proclamation of the Gospel: Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*," Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 67.

⁸⁵ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 198.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 229; cf. also, Torrance's preface to the dissertation of G.D. Dragas, *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem* (Athens, 1985).

interpreted through the Irenaeian doctrine of recapitulation through the *human obedience* of Jesus.⁸⁷

This shared Irenaeian and Athanasian stress upon the significance of Christ's humanity⁸⁸ has another importance. Grasp of Athanasius' appropriation of the Irenaeian "understanding of salvation as the redemption of the whole man . . . makes rather irrelevant the distorting distinction between a *Logos-sarx* and a *Logos-anthrōpos* approach which some scholars have employed as a framework for the interpretation of Patristic Christology."⁸⁹ Here Torrance aims to put to rest the question of the soul of Christ in Athanasius first raised by Ferdinand Christian Bauer (1792-1860) and recently repeated with suggestions of Apollinarianism by Joseph Leibaert and Aloys Grillmeier; he is likewise concerned to counter Western scholarship's general insinuation of monophysitism in Cyril of Alexandria.⁹⁰ Interpreting Cyril's *mia physis* in the light of Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation, Torrance observes how

the distinctively soteriological understanding of the Incarnation deriving through Irenaeus . . . retained a place of centrality in the thought of Cyril. . . . It is the Irenaeian form . . . which seems to be in Cyril's mind: 'In this way the Lord has redeemed us with his own blood, giving his soul for our souls and his flesh for our flesh', for Cyril goes out of his way constantly to stress the fact that this reconciling exchange involves our rational soul as well as our flesh or body.⁹¹

In tracing here the continuity from Irenaeus through Athanasius to Cyril, Torrance suggests a non-dualist Christology "that really transcends the monophysite/diophysite contrapositions which came upon the scene later

⁸⁷ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 156.

⁸⁸ Cf. Torrance, *Incarnation*, 198.

⁸⁹ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 225, 226 f1. Torrance points particularly to Athanasius, *Ad Epictetum*, and Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5:9:1 for comparison.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 167-8. The quotation is from Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer* 5:1:2.

on,"⁹² thus pointing the way towards theological reconciliation between non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian Orthodox confessions.

As shown above, Torrance regards Irenaeus as the crucial pre-Nicene patristic source for orthodox Christology. Irenaeus overcomes the Greek dualism between "truth" and "event," securing a theologically *realist* understanding of Christ's life and death. Such realism entails the affirmation that, in the humanity of Christ, God has laid hold of our actual humanity and redeemed it by way of an *internal relation*, thus enabling man to know God himself in his own internal relations. The following discussion examines this realist appeal to Irenaeus in three major areas: (1) incarnation and atonement, (2) baptism, and (3) hermeneutics.

Irenaeus in the Theology of T.F. Torrance: Themes and Assessment

Incarnation and Atonement

Torrance claims that it was Barth who recovered for Western theology the "Irenaeian" understanding of the incarnation as an atoning assumption of *fallen* humanity.⁹³ This is ecumenically significant: Torrance regards the

⁹² *Ibid.*, 226. While not disavowing Chalcedon, Torrance distances himself somewhat from its formulations and is sharply critical of the interpretations given this council in Western theology: "There is more than a suspicion of dualism . . . in the christological formulation of Chalcedon, which was thrown into high relief by the critique of the post-Chalcedonian 'Cyrillians' who traced the problem back to the undeniable dualism of Leo's *Tome*. Western interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology is still affected, unfortunately, by this Leonine slant": T.F. Torrance, "Theological Realism," in Hebblethwaite and Sutherland, *op. cit.*, 194, n4. Nevertheless, Torrance's expansive use of the *enhypostasia* / *anhypostasia* distinction, attributed to Leontius of Byzantium and mediated through Barth, indicates his indebtedness to the post-451 Byzantine Orthodox interpretation of Chalcedon in positive, Cyrillian terms: cf. I, 242-9; *Theological Science* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 217ff, 269; *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 51; *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 125, 198-201; *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 144, 160; *Incarnation*, 64, 84, 105, 197, 212, 228. But see also F. Leron Shults, "A Dubious Christological Formula: From Leontius of Byzantium to Karl Barth," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 57 (1996).

⁹³ Cf. "Karl Barth and Patristic Theology," *op. cit.*, 202: Torrance cites Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.2: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (T&T Clark, 1956), 147ff. and 172ff.

issue as a stumbling-block between Greeks and Latins,⁹⁴ and maintains his own view reflects that of Eastern Orthodoxy.⁹⁵ Ironically, however, several leading modern Orthodox theologians hold precisely the teaching Torrance rejects as “Latin.”⁹⁶ Thus, it may be asked whether Torrance is reading Barth into Irenaeus.

Although Irenaeus never raises the question exactly in Torrance’s terms, his framing of *recapitulatio* does lend some support to Torrance’s understanding. Irenaeus holds that Christ assumed from the first a humanity which was *mortal*: “By summing up in Himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, He has also summed up its death.”⁹⁷ Nor was it only mortal, but, indeed, the very “flesh which sin had mastered and seized and dominated . . . that He might fight for the fathers and vanquish in Adam that which had struck us in Adam.”⁹⁸ *Adversus Haereses* 5:14:2-3 in particular reveals how Irenaeus regards Christ’s assumption of flesh as already an act of “reconciliation” of precisely that “alienated” humanity “which had perished” and which “had formerly been in enmity.”⁹⁹

Irenaeus’ assertion that “God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that he might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man”¹⁰⁰ *could* be read to imply the assumption of prelapsarian conditions. In context, however, this statement refers not so much to the condition of the humanity assumed, as to its virginal conception and the identity of its nature with that of the virginally-born Adam, as the locus of both disobedience and obedience.¹⁰¹ *Epideixis* 1:37-38 speaks of Christ

⁹⁴ Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 40.

⁹⁵ Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 1, 175.

⁹⁶ See below, footnotes 123 and 124.

⁹⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5:23:2; English translation: Alexander Roberts and W.H. Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, vol. II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 118.

⁹⁸ Irenaeus, *Epideixis*, 1.3.31; English translation: St Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. and intro. by John Behr (cited above), 60-1.

⁹⁹ Alexander and Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, vol. II, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3:18:7, cf. 3:21:9; English translation: Alexander Roberts and W.H. Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, vol. I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), 344.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Adv. Haer.* 3:18:7.

“recapitulating” the “old disobedience,” taking “the same place and situation in which we were when we lost life, breaking the bonds of the prison.”¹⁰² Thus, recapitulation is no simple return to a former state, but an entry into the *given* condition for the sake of its active *undoing*, from the Virgin’s obedience onward:¹⁰³ a *new* creation fashioned precisely out of the *old*. Hence, Torrance argues, Irenaeus’ profound linking of *anakephalaiōsis* and virgin birth witnesses to “the fact that, while in becoming man the Son took flesh from our fallen and corrupt humanity, he cleansed, redeemed and renewed it in the very act of his incarnational assumption.”¹⁰⁴

The text of Irenaeus is less than fully decisive, and Torrance relies here upon a much broader witness of Fathers than Irenaeus alone.¹⁰⁵ In all this, however, it is important to note that nowhere does Torrance speak of Christ as simply *possessing* a fallen, sinful humanity. Nor does Torrance affirm the Nestorianizing formula of *posse non peccare*, substantially condemned by the Sixth Ecumenical Council.¹⁰⁶ Torrance denies that Christ’s humanity was “in any sense corrupt,” that he assumed original sin, was able to sin, or resisted only on account of the Spirit (e.g. as in Edward Irving). Christ’s humanity is “perfect,” “sinless,” supremely “holy.” Yet as he “entered the sphere of our corrupted humanity,” becoming a member of our fallen race under the curse of the law, “we cannot say that his flesh was

¹⁰² Behr (trans.), *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 64.

¹⁰³ Cf. especially *Adv. Haer.* 5:19:1.

¹⁰⁴ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 68-9.

¹⁰⁵ Chiefly Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa: cf. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 153, 161-2. However, Cyril of Alexandria is particularly explicit on this point: “The Father made Him voluntarily descend into the flesh which has become subjected to sin so that by making the flesh His very own he might change it, transferring to it his own natural property of impeccability”: *In Ioannis evangelium*, Migne *Patrologia Graeca* LXXXIV, 276A-C.

¹⁰⁶ Pace Gerrit Dawson, “As Far as the Curse is Found: The Significance of Christ’s Assuming a *Fallen* Human Nature in the Torrance Theology,” in Dawson (ed.), *Introduction to Torrance Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2007), 55-74. In fundamental agreement with Constantinople 681, Torrance explicitly states in his earliest lectures that Christ was “without the *will* of fallen humanity.” It is most unfortunate that Torrance never related this to Maximus the Confessor’s treatment of the “gnomic will,” which might have obviated Dawson’s nominalistic and Nestorianizing misconstrual.

created out of nothing and absolutely *de novo*": "it was created out of fallen humanity, but without the *will* of fallen humanity."¹⁰⁷ Therefore, we must speak of Christ's humanity as "*vicarious*": the Son of God freely placing himself under the law on the ground of his incarnate union with us, in order to "judge sin in the flesh" and redeem us from the law, creating humanity anew from the old.¹⁰⁸

Torrance's concern here is with the unity of incarnation and atonement: an *ontological* – as opposed to merely forensic or moral – reconciliation worked out *within* the *person* of the Mediator. Precisely disassociation at this point, argues Torrance, led post-Chalcedonian Latin theology to conceive of salvation in terms of external forensic relations. The result: "an inevitable tendency toward a conception of the natures of Christ in which the two natures are not seen in their full unity in the one mediator," "counter balanced . . . by a tendency in the opposite direction, that is toward monophysitism."¹⁰⁹ Thus, Torrance asserts, "more actual monophysitism may be found in the West than in those who today are usually called 'monophysite.'"¹¹⁰

Although nowhere discussed by Torrance, this latent "monophysitism," which Torrance relates surprisingly to the influence of Leo's *Tome*, found its 6th century Eastern counterpart in the Aphotodocetist heresy led by Julian of Halicarnassus.¹¹¹ Julian held "that the manhood of Christ was the unfallen

¹⁰⁷ T.F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 122-3; my italics.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* One factor that makes Torrance's statements on this question difficult to evaluate is the lack of any careful treatment of sin in his mature thought. Apart from his early study, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), and the sermons found in *The Apocalypse Today* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1960), Torrance's work contains little in the way of extended consideration of ancestral sin and its relation to human *nature*. A broader consideration of evil in relation to cosmology may be found in Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 85-142.

¹⁰⁹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 199.

¹¹⁰ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 212.

¹¹¹ "Monophysitism," in that "Whereas Eutyches denied the consubstantiality of Christ's body with the human body, the Aphotodocetists denied their identity with respect to state," Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (Eerdmans, 2008), 288. Byzantine theology, in the person of Leontius of Byzantium, also regarded Julian's position as monophysite: cf. Leontius, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, II, *Patrologia Graeca* 86.

manhood of Adam,” that “his suffering and death were voluntarily chosen by him for our sakes, without any natural necessity on the part of his manhood,” and thus that “the body of our Lord was incorruptible from the moment of his conception in the Virgin’s womb.”¹¹² Julian’s teachings were attacked by Severus of Antioch¹¹³ and condemned by a non-Chalcedonian council in 728 employing terms similar to Torrance’s: “If any one affirms that it was not our mortal, peccable and corruptible body, but the body which Adam had before his fall and which by grace was immortal, impeccable and incorruptible, let him be anathema.”¹¹⁴ Significantly, while Torrance rarely cites any Eastern theologian after Cyril of Alexandria, in his last works, it is Severus and another non-Chalcedonian, John Philoponos, who are singled out most for appreciation.¹¹⁵

Precisely at this point, however, Torrance’s appeal to Eastern Orthodoxy in support for his doctrine of Christ’s *assumptio* appears most

¹¹² V.C. Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined* (England: British Orthodox Press, 2001), 268, 342.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 361, 470-71. Cf. René Draguet, *Julien d’Halicarnasse et sa controverse avec Sévère d’Antioche sur l’incorruptibilité du corps du Christ* (Louvain, 1924). Draguet attempts to clear Julian from charges of heresy.

¹¹⁴ In V.C. Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church,” *Eastern-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue, Bristol Consultation, July 1967, Greek Orthodox Theological Review, XIII, issue 2, 162.*

¹¹⁵ Cf. especially Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (full citation above). While formally upholding Chalcedon, Torrance’s theology is marked by a strong sympathy with non-Chalcedonian “miaphysite” Christology, in contrast to both the Latin and the Byzantine: “in the famous ‘Tome of Leo’ . . . Chalcedonian thought was given a dualist interpretation, which in the East led to the split between the more dualist Byzantines and the more realist ‘non-Chalcedonians’ who based their thought on Cyril of Alexandria, e.g. Severus of Antioch”: Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 159, n. 5. This is yet another point where Torrance’s patristic engagement leads him away from Barth: In keeping with a common Western historiographical reading, Barth had spoken of Alexandrian theology as being “purified at Chalcedon” – a purification Barth maintained as normative for Western theology, while mistakenly regarding the Lutheran *communio naturarum* as “a kind of remote effect of the theology of the Eastern Church”: *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part. 2*, 67-69. See George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character,” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 131ff, countering the views of Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984).

ambiguous. While Eastern Chalcedonians also anathematized Julian, the modern Orthodox witness is less certain on this point: hints of Julian's *presuppositions* reappear in so representative and careful a theologian as Georges Florovsky, with whom Torrance debated this issue at a WCC meeting in 1955.¹¹⁶ Florovsky insists that because "the Word assumes the original human nature," Christ's birth

was not yet the assumption of human suffering or of suffering humanity. It was an assumption of human life, but not yet of human death. Christ's freedom from original sin constitutes also His freedom from death, which is the "wages of sin." Christ is unstained from corruption and mortality right from his birth. And like the First Adam before the Fall, He is able not to die at all, *potens non mori*, though obviously He can still die, *potens autem mori*. He was exempt from the necessity of death, because His humanity was pure and innocent. Therefore Christ's death was and could not but be voluntary, not by the necessity of fallen nature, but by free choice and acceptance . . . Christ is the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." But He does not take the sin of the world in the Incarnation. That is an act of the will, not a necessity of nature.¹¹⁷

Florovsky's formulation weakens somewhat the actual unity of incarnation and atonement – contrasting a little with Irenaeus' assertion that "by summing up in Himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, He has also summed up its death."¹¹⁸ Torrance's claim that denial of the "Irenaeian" view implies redemption by "external relations" – either Anselm's juridicism, or Abelard's moral-exemplarism¹¹⁹ – seems to be confirmed here also. Equating substitution with the "*satisfactio vicaria* of the

¹¹⁶ Cf. Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour* (London: Epworth, 1962), and *Commission on Faith and Order. Minutes of the Working Committee, July 1955, Davos, Switzerland* (WCC).

¹¹⁷ Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1976), 97-98; cf. also 301, n. 101.

¹¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5:23:2; Roberts and Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, vol. II, 118.

¹¹⁹ Torrance, "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *op. cit.* 232; cf. *Trinitarian Faith*, 158-60. In his earlier writings, however, Torrance held that it is a mistake to

scholastics,"¹²⁰ Florovsky speaks of the cross as a symbol of divine love and "speculate[s] against substitution in a fashion reminiscent of Abelard's opposition to Anselm."¹²¹ Florovsky's insistence on the absolute freedom of Christ's pre-resurrectional human nature from necessity also conflicts, if not with Irenaeus explicitly, then certainly with Athanasius, for whom Christ's body "could not but die, inasmuch as it was mortal" (*De incarnatione*, 31.4) and Christ's death clearly substitutionary (*ibid.*, 8:4; 9.1; 10.1-2; 20.2; 37.7), in payment of the debt exacted by the Law (*ibid.*, 6.2-3; 9.5; 20.5, *passim*).¹²² Yet while Bulgakov, Meyendorff and Zizioulas¹²³ uphold positions consonant with that of Torrance, other recent Orthodox theologians incline towards Florovsky's view;¹²⁴ although Torrance's formulation enjoys firmer agreement amongst non-Chalcedonians.¹²⁵

[*cont.*] interpret Anselm "in terms of the Medieval *lex et ratio*, that is in the forensic and rational categories of feudal society," insisting that *Cur Deus Homo?* must be read together with Anselm's prayers and meditations: see T.F. Torrance, Review of F.C. Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, in *SJTh* 9 (1956) [88-90], 89.

¹²⁰ Florovsky, *op. cit.*, 102.

¹²¹ Bradley Nassif, "The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church," in Nassif, (ed.), *Three Views on Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 47.

¹²² Florovsky's formulation also appears to stand in some tension with the language of some Orthodox liturgical texts, such as the following: "Having divinely fashioned me out of the dust at the beginning . . . You extended your arms on the Cross, calling from earth *my corruptible body, which you assumed from the Virgin*" (*Oktoechos*, Sunday matins, tone I, canon, ode 1, troparion 1).

¹²³ Sergius Bulgakov, *op. cit.*, 288-91; John Meyendorff, "Christ's Humanity: The Paschal Mystery," *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 31 (No. 1/1987), 5-40, and *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 117; John Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (T&T Clark, 2008), 109. Kallistos Ware's formulation appears similar, but strikes an ambiguous, rather Mopsuestian note with its talk of "inward conflict": *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 99-100. The article of Meyendorff must be regarded as the most profound, sustained exposition by a recent Orthodox theologian in favor of the view held by Torrance.

¹²⁴ See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 142; John Romanides, comments in response to V.C. Samuel, "One Incarnate Nature of God the Word," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, X, issue 2, 1964-65, 52; Panagiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 17; Demetrios Bathrellos, "The Sinlessness of Jesus," in Paul Metzger (ed.), *Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology* (London: Continuum, 2005), 113-126.

¹²⁵ Cf. V.C. Samuel, *opera cit.*

In making use of the soteriological thought of the Fathers, twentieth century Orthodox theology has sometimes tended to react to Western juridicism by setting aside any positive consideration of law, substitution and atonement. In contrast, Torrance's "Irenaeian" approach succeeds in accounting for forensic and cultic dimensions of Scriptural language regarding the work of Christ on an *ontological* basis, while resisting both juridicism and reduction to a single metaphor. Torrance distinguishes three Hebrew roots providing background to NT and Irenaeian soteriology: (1) *pdh*, a dramatic act bringing deliverance through the offering of life for life, as in the Exodus Passover; (2) *kpr*, cultic expiation which removes the barrier between God and man through priestly sacrifice; and (3) *g'l*, debt-redemption by the *go'el*, an advocate "who is related to the person in need through kinship or some other bond of affinity or covenant love," and who thus "claims the cause of the one in need as his own, and stands in for him since he cannot redeem himself."¹²⁶

According to Torrance, it is the *g'l* mode in its *ontological* sense that supplies the framework within which Irenaeus interprets the others. Irenaeus conceives of the dramatic (*pdh*) and propitiatory/judicial (*kpr*) dimensions, as also debt-redemption (*g'l*), as operating on the ground of God's incarnational kinship with human nature and recapitulation of all mankind in covenant love (*g'l*): an *internal relation* of exchange taking place within the person of the Mediator himself.¹²⁷ As in his contributions to British legal debate,¹²⁸ so in this appeal to Irenaeus, Torrance challenges the nominalist divorce between law and nature, situating law within a dynamic ontology of nature and person: the redemptive power of Christ's obedience is grounded in God's healing and reconciling hypostatic assumption of humanity in its actual historical state – "under the law" (Gal. 4:4).¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 170-71.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 172-4.

¹²⁸ T.F. Torrance, *Juridical and Physical Law: Toward a Realist Foundation for Human Law* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1997).

¹²⁹ See "Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," in Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 1, 253-255 especially.

This insistence upon Irenaeus' dynamic interlocking of incarnation and atoning obedience challenges not only Calvinist theories of penal atonement, but also a work of no small influence on modern treatments of soteriology, both Western and Eastern: Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulen's 1930 *Christus Victor*. Aulen posits a radical opposition between a Greek patristic and Lutheran emphasis upon dramatic divine victory over death, and the "Latin theory" made popular by Anselm, hinging upon Christ's satisfactory human offering. According to Aulen, Irenaeus "does not think of the Atonement as an offering made to God by Christ from man's side . . . When Irenaeus speaks in this connection of the 'obedience' of Christ, he has no thought of a human offering made to God from man's side, but rather that the Divine will wholly dominated the human life of the Word of God."¹³⁰

Torrance shares Aulen's misgivings with the Latin stress upon "*satisfaction*" derived from Tertullian, and agrees that unless the *agent* of atonement is God himself, "atonement would have to be understood as a Pelagian deed placating God by human sacrifice." However, he objects that Aulen conceives of atonement as "a pure act of God over the head of man": "Certainly, the atonement is an act of God . . . , but that act of God is incarnated in human flesh, giving the human full place within the divine action issuing out of man's life."¹³¹ In sum, "Aulen's fault is that he has failed . . . to understand the full place occupied by the Humanity of our Lord in the divine act of reconciliation."¹³²

Against Aulen's rather monothelitic reading, Torrance agrees with a second major Swedish scholar, Gustaf Wingren, in his apprehension that, for Irenaeus, there is no dualism between divine and human action: salvation in the Irenaean teaching is a unitary act wherein God works not simply *in* man, but *as* man¹³³ – "simultaneously an act from God to man

¹³⁰ Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (New York: MacMillan, 1937), 33-34.

¹³¹ T.F. Torrance, "Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," *op. cit.*, 243.

¹³² T.F. Torrance, review of F.C. Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, *op. cit.*, 89.

¹³³ Cf. Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* (Edinburgh, 1959), 106.

and an act from man to God."¹³⁴ Torrance observes: "It is typical of Irenaeus that he could not think of our salvation in simple expressions of a mighty act of God and a powerful fiat, but in terms of the assent of humanity to God's Word in the humble obedience of Jesus, in whom God creates our Adam anew and transforms Adam's disobedience through Christ's obedience."¹³⁵

In calling attention to *Irenaeus* as witness to this unity of incarnation and atoning obedience, Torrance appears in some ways to be extending the insights of Emil Brunner¹³⁶ who, far more than Barth, sought consciously to recover a "theology of the type of Irenaeus," attacking precisely the Kantian dualism between "physical" and "ethical" which runs through Harnack's treatment of Irenaeus.¹³⁷ Unlike Brunner *or* Barth, however, Torrance affirms the Orthodox doctrine of deification suggested in Irenaeus as the ultimate *telos* of redemption,¹³⁸ appropriating Irenaeus' stress on the ascension as mankind's entry into participation in the divine life and communion of the Holy Trinity.¹³⁹ Torrance likewise favors Irenaeus' sequential figuration of Christ's *katabasis* and *anabasis* in terms of the movement from cross to ascension,¹⁴⁰ in some contrast with Barth's stress upon the simultaneity of humiliation and exaltation in the event of the Cross.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 159: On this, Torrance cites *Adv. Haer.* 3:19:6 (Latin text of Harvey; English editions number 3:18:7), which contains the following: "For it was incumbent upon the *Mediator* between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man."

¹³⁵ Torrance, "Ein vernachlässigter Gesichtspunkt der Tauflehre," full citation above. All quotations from this text are my own translation.

¹³⁶ Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (London, 1934), 222, 249-264. Torrance refers repeatedly to this work throughout his 1938-39 Auburn Lectures: *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002), *passim*.

¹³⁷ Harnack, *op. cit.*, 245, 272-5.

¹³⁸ Cf. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 189.

¹³⁹ Torrance, *Resurrection*, 133, cites Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.10.1.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 123, cites Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.1.6, 18.2, 19.3; 5.21.1, 36.3, etc.; cf. also *Epideixis*, 83f.

¹⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* V/1 (Continuum, 1977), 59.1.

Baptism

Torrance is dependent on Irenaeus for another departure from Barth: his theology of "Baptism as the Sacrament of the vicarious obedience of Christ the Servant-Son."¹⁴² This is most evident in Torrance's article, "Ein vernachlässigter Gesichtspunkt der Tauflehre," written during his involvement with the Church of Scotland's Commission on Baptism (1953-1962), and originally intended for Ernst Wolff's 1956 Barth festschrift.¹⁴³ Here, countering Barth's 1943 attack on infant baptism, Torrance appeals to "the first great biblical theologian of the Church after the apostolic period, Irenaeus,"¹⁴⁴ whom Torrance believes offered the finest theology of baptism in the early Church.¹⁴⁵

According to Torrance, Irenaeus' baptismal theology unites "a) the Johannine doctrine of the Word with the Pauline teaching regarding the Spirit, and b) the Pauline teaching of the new Adam with the Synoptic and Johannine doctrine of the birth of Christ."¹⁴⁶ Irenaeus reads John 1:13 in the singular, referring to Christ's own virgin birth by the Spirit, the summation of the old Adam and creation of the new.¹⁴⁷ Man's rebirth is accomplished already in the birth of Christ, and the Spirit's baptismal impartation to humanity tied to the Son's recapitulation of every age:¹⁴⁸

Being thirty years old when He came to be baptized . . . He also possessed the age of a Master, not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself — all, I say, who through Him are born again to God — infants,

¹⁴² Torrance, "My Interaction with Karl Barth," *op. cit.*, 135.

¹⁴³ Due to time constraints, never included: see Torrance's remarks in Elmer Colyer (ed.), *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 318.

¹⁴⁴ Torrance, "Tauflehre" (full citation above), 481.

¹⁴⁵ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 94.

¹⁴⁶ Torrance, "Tauflehre," 481.

¹⁴⁷ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 90-91. See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3:9:2; 3:11:2; 5:1:1,3.

¹⁴⁸ On this, see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5:1:1.

and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission.¹⁴⁹

Infant baptism finds its "objective foundation" in Christ's birth and growth in wisdom and grace, of which it is the clearest similitude.¹⁵⁰ Yet "Irenaeus does not think that the birth of Christ was saving in itself: the birth of the new man is not to be separated from his development and maturity as new man in the whole course of his human life." Infant baptism, inseparable "from the whole life and growth of the believer in Christ," belongs together with faith; as Torrance writes: "children who have been baptized into Christ can, in keeping with the character of the virgin birth, grow up in Christ in the holiness which his whole life, from birth to death, gives to our humanity."¹⁵¹

Crucial here is the Irenaeian stress on Christ's recapitulative – or, in Torrance's terms, "vicarious" – humanity. Virgin birth signifies a salvation wrought by "grace alone,' . . . yet worked out within our actual humanity": "the powerful act of God in the midst of our humanity in the Man Jesus Christ, through whose obedience we are freed from Adam's bondage into a life of communion with the Word and renewed to obedience in the power of the Spirit."¹⁵² By the Spirit, "what is accomplished reality in Christ becomes also reality in us":¹⁵³ "God unites us with Christ in such a way that his human agency in vicarious response to the Father overlaps with our response, gathers it up in its embrace, sanctifying, affirming and upholding it in himself, so that it is established in spite of all our frailty as our free and faithful response to the Father in him."¹⁵⁴ Baptism and the Christian life are thus an active participation in the baptism and

¹⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2:22:4, in Roberts and Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, vol. I, 197-98.

¹⁵⁰ Torrance, "Tauflehre," 485-86.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 486.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 483-4, 489.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 483.

¹⁵⁴ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 103.

obedience of Christ, in whose humanity “all the promises of God are Yes and Amen” – a vicarious Amen which, as infant baptism especially testifies, precedes and enfolds our own.¹⁵⁵

However, Torrance argues, the shift from Irenaeus’ “biblical” theology to Tertullian’s “Latin” doctrine¹⁵⁶ introduced a false objective/subjective dualism from which Western sacramental theology has yet to recover.¹⁵⁷ Tertullian recommended deferring baptism “until the child was capable of carrying the weight of baptism himself and attaining the whole faith which is necessary for redemption.”¹⁵⁸ Here baptism “is no longer a sacrament of the incarnation,” but a sealing of satisfactory repentance: a sacrament of meritorious faith, dependent “not so much on the divine promise as on our vows.”¹⁵⁹ Torrance sees a variant of this Western problematic in Barth’s sharp distinction between *Wassertaufe* and *Geisttaufe*, rejected by Irenaeus as a form of Gnostic dualism,¹⁶⁰ wherein “the meaning of baptism is found not in a direct act of God but in an ethical act on the part of man made by way of response.”¹⁶¹ Against Barth and by way of appeal to Irenaeus, Torrance lays forth a doctrine of baptism as an act of the Spirit in the Church enabling a real (not merely “symbolic” in the modern sense of the term) sacramental participation in Christ’s virgin birth and baptism, his incarnational reversal of Adam’s curse and creation of a new humanity in the resurrection: “not a separate or a new baptism but a participation in the one all-inclusive baptism common to Christ and his Church, wrought out vicariously in Christ alone but in which he has assimilated the Church

¹⁵⁵ Torrance, “Tauflehre,” 492. Torrance especially emphasizes the connection made by Irenaeus between the virgin birth and the resurrection (*Epideixis*, 38-39) as well as the eschatological conditioning of baptism inherent in the fact that, for Irenaeus, this baptismal participation in Christ’s virgin birth will be fully apparent only in the resurrection of the body: cf. “Tauflehre,” 487, citing *Adv. Haer.* 3:19:1-3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 491.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 491-2.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 490; cites Tertullian, *De bapt.*, 18 and *De anima*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 491.

¹⁶⁰ Torrance, “My Interaction with Karl Barth,” *op. cit.*, 134.

¹⁶¹ Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 99.

through the baptism of the one Spirit, and which he applies to each one of us through the same Spirit."¹⁶²

As George Hunsinger has argued regarding Torrance's Eucharistic theology, Torrance's "Irenaean" vision of Christian baptism essentially arrives at something like the *Orthodox Catholic center*,¹⁶³ while also securing certain historic Reformed concerns. Likewise, one might add, for an Orthodoxy presently enjoying an enthusiastic scholarly and popular rediscovery of ascetic theology, Torrance reminds us of an important truth, emphasized especially by a great Father whose works are included in the *Philokalia*, St. Mark the Monk, but often overlooked: namely, that it is baptism into Christ's vicarious assumption of man's "debt" and "curse" that underwrites and makes salutary Christian repentance.¹⁶⁴

Hermeneutics

The differentiated, sacramental unity between Christ and the Church observed in Torrance's treatment of baptism is extended to Torrance's hermeneutics, for which scriptural and doctrinal statements "participate sacramentally in the mystery of Christ as the Truth to whom they refer and upon whom they rely for their reality."¹⁶⁵ Here again Irenaeus is a major touchstone, providing "the most enlightening account of the Deposit of Faith."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁶³ George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁶⁴ Mark the Monk, *Bapt* 5.139-42; *Paen* 7.25-6; *Causid* 15.12-23. Thanks to Alexis Torrance for these references: see Alexis Torrance, "Repentance as the context of sainthood in the ascetical theology of Mark the Monk," in P. Clarke and T. Claydon (eds.), *Sainthood and Sanctity*, Studies in Church History Vol. 47 (Oxford: Boydell & Brewer, 2010). A similar interpretation of Christ's baptism in terms of the Divine Judge's vicariously assuming as man the judgment due to sinners is to be found in Homily IV *On Theophany* attributed pseudepigraphically to St. Gregory Thaumaturgus. Like Thomas Torrance, the Orthodox services of Matins and Vespers for the feast of Theophany also associate Christ's baptism in the Jordan with his taking on of the *forma servi*.

¹⁶⁵ Torrance, *Theological Science*, 150.

¹⁶⁶ Torrance, "Trinitarian Foundation . . .," 93.

As with baptism, so with the canon or “*kerygma* of truth” communicated in baptism,¹⁶⁷ Irenaeus’ stress (according to Torrance) falls decidedly on the *objective genitive* pole. *Kerygma* refers “not merely to proclamation about Christ but to the Reality proclaimed . . . embodying his self-proclamation in the proclamation of the Apostles.”¹⁶⁸ The “objective and dynamic core” of the *kerygma* is the *depositum fidei*, constituted as a “body of truth” (*tō tēs alētheia sōmation*).¹⁶⁹ In Irenaeus’ use, the terms *traditio*, *kerygma*, *kanon*, *regula* and *depositum* are operative variants, with differing emphases.¹⁷⁰ “In so far as the rule of faith is the rule of truth Irenaeus looks upon it as imparted to the Church by the Spirit, and in so far as the rule of truth is the rule of faith he looks upon it as formed and handed down to us by the Apostles acting under the guiding of the Spirit.”¹⁷¹ Crucial here is Irenaeus’ sense of “embodied doctrine,” marked by a unity between historical form and “charismatic principle.”¹⁷²

Regarding historic form, Irenaeus realized that Christian truth is not given “in an abstract or detached form but in a concrete embodied form in the Church.” True theological knowledge takes form, not only in doctrine, but also in “the ancient constitution of the Church;” the Body of Christ, authenticated through apostolic succession and the identity of faith mediated by it.¹⁷³ Yet this historic form is *itself* a charismatically given reality, in which the deposit “by the Spirit of God rejuvenates itself and rejuvenates the vessel in which it is lodged”: “For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-94; cf. also *Divine Meaning*, 60; *Trinitarian Faith*, 289 (cites *Adv. Haer.* 1:1:14, 20; 1:3).

¹⁶⁸ Torrance, “Trinitarian Foundation...,” 91; cf. also *Trinitarian Faith*, 260, where *Adv. Haer.* 3:9-11 is cited on this point.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, citing *Adv. Haer.* 1:1:20.

¹⁷⁰ Torrance, “Trinitarian Foundation...,” 95; on this point, Torrance cites *Adv. Haer.* 1:1:20; 1:15; 2:8:1; 2:40:1-41:3; 3:1-5; 3:11:7; 3:12:6-7; 3:15:1; 3:38:1-2; 4:57:2,4; 5. pref; 5:20; *Epideixis*.

¹⁷¹ Torrance, “Trinitarian Foundation...,” 124-5.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, cf. *Adv. Haer.* 4:40:2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 115, citing *Adv. Haer.* 4:53:2.

Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth."¹⁷⁴ Thus, Torrance points out, in the *Epideixis*, Irenaeus does not even speak of the "Church," but rather the "community of union between God and man" brought about by the Spirit.¹⁷⁵ The Church is the body of truth, yet oriented so *beyond itself* that Irenaeus does not hesitate to re-phrase Paul's statement regarding "the pillar and ground of Truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), calling "the Gospel and the Spirit of Life" instead "the pillar and ground of the Church."¹⁷⁶

The *depositum fidei*, then, spans two levels inseparably coordinated, the second governed by the first: (1) the whole incarnate reality of Christ and the resulting Pentecost-event; (2) the Church's faithful reception and interpretation of this, inseparably embodied in the apostolic ministry and scriptures. The criterion of truth at both levels, Christ is known only through Apostolic church and *kerygma*, while, contrariwise, ecclesiastical authority and doctrine function rightly only when pointing beyond themselves, through the Apostles, to "the objective self-revelation of God through Christ and in the Spirit as the actual source of our knowledge."¹⁷⁷

The *depositum fidei* is further characterized by an intrinsic order, reflecting the divine economy and therefore Trinitarian in structure. Proper Scriptural interpretation "repose[s] upon the truth itself,"¹⁷⁸ through the inherent design of its economic order. *Depositum fidei* is a heuristic instrument in this interpretation, a canon allowing the Church to demonstrate the truth's intrinsic order against perversions. Such demonstration ultimately took form in creeds, arising from the *depositum* through consensus and controlled by its implicit structure. Creedal statements are "integrated from beyond themselves in their common ground in the Apostolic Deposit and, in the final analysis, in the objective

¹⁷⁴ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 257, citing Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3:38:1 and 3:24:1.

¹⁷⁵ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 256-7: cites *Epideixis* 6ff., 31, 37f., 47ff., 98ff.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, citing Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3:11:11.

¹⁷⁷ Torrance, "Trinitarian Foundation...", 115.

¹⁷⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2:27:1.

self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ."¹⁷⁹ Theology, then, is more than the linking together of biblical statements or self-assessment of the Church's own historical mind. Doctrine is not a system of logical deductions from first principles, but a disclosure of the internal harmony of the *corpus veritatis*, inseparably conjoined to and dependent upon this body for its truth, which it expresses only "in part."¹⁸⁰

This circular hermeneutic – the deposit being at once the truth itself, the means of uncovering its internal order, and the rule of its maintenance – rests crucially upon a realist philosophy of truth as *self-evidential*. God is incomprehensible, man's knowledge limited, but in the incarnation, God opens the way to knowledge of himself through *love*¹⁸¹ – an adoptive participation in the Son's own relation with the Father. Faith is a response to truth deriving its intrinsic rationality from the truth itself: as Irenaeus writes, "And faith is produced by the truth; for faith rests on things as they truly are. For in things that are, as they are, we believe."¹⁸² Thus, Torrance observes, "the canon of truth is properly the truth itself in its own self-evidencing authority . . . and only in a secondary sense the regulative formulation of the truth."¹⁸³ Doctrine, then, can only be incomplete, an open-ended summary of the truth as it is in Jesus, the Church's ultimate rule, the *regulam ipsam veritatem*.¹⁸⁴ Torrance pointedly concludes: "Irenaeus thinks of the constitution of the Church and the rule of faith as structured together in the truth, yet in such a way that the Church always and everywhere arises out the truth itself which is none other than Jesus Christ and is always subordinate to him as the truth."¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Torrance, "Trinitarian Foundation...", 97.

¹⁸⁰ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 108-10, citing *Adv. Haer.* 2:15:3f: "ek merous" (which in turn echoes 1 Cor. 13:9, 12).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 108-110, citing *Adv. Haer.* 2:26:1, 2:13:4, and 4:12:2; 33:8.

¹⁸² Irenaeus, *Epideixis*, 3.

¹⁸³ Torrance, "Trinitarian Foundation...", 102, citing *Adv. Haer.* 2.4.1; cf. *Divine Meaning*, 115.

¹⁸⁴ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 112, citing *Adv. Haer.*, 2:28:1.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

In his interpretation on these points, Torrance has been accused of clothing Irenaeus in philosophical categories of *Hermeneutik*, "which do not fit well."¹⁸⁶ Doubtless, Torrance's reading is informed by his sophisticated critical realism: he makes explicit reference to Polanyi, Clerk Maxwell and Einstein in his treatment of the deposit of faith,¹⁸⁷ and his repeated emphasis on doctrine as a partial *disclosure* of the form *inherent* in the body of truth, rather than an imposition upon it, is driven in part by an anxiety to overcome the Kantian denial of man's ability to know reality-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) and the ravaging effect of this denial upon Christian faith and theology in the modern age.¹⁸⁸ But to those who recognize the reality of Irenaeus' *depositum juvenescens*, not imprisoned within a narrow historicism, the crucial question is rather whether Torrance does justice to Irenaeus' *objective faith*: a matter ultimately decided by agreement with the Church of all ages.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Kyle Keefer, *The Branches of the Gospel of John: The Reception of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 50.

¹⁸⁷ See Torrance, "Deposit of Faith," and "'The Substance of the Faith': A Clarification of the Concept in the Church of Scotland," *SJTh* 36 (1983), 1 and 337.

¹⁸⁸ See especially "The Making of the 'Modern' Mind from Descartes and Newton to Kant," in T.F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984), 1-60.

¹⁸⁹ A fairer criticism would be the one offered by John Behr and, in a similar vein, John Webster. Behr regards Torrance's comments on Irenaeus' treatment of the divine economy as "perceptive, but not sufficiently sensitive to the scriptural, or literary, fabric of the discussion": J. Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 130n. Likewise, Webster writes that in Torrance's work, "patristic theology is presented largely as a conceptual rather than exegetical enterprise": J. Webster, "T.F. Torrance 1913-2007," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (vol. 10, no. 4, Oct. 2008), 370. In reality, *both* concepts *and* exegesis hold a subordinate place in Torrance's theology, neither being allowed to substitute for the other or for the reality of the divine economy itself. Recent scholarly interest in the exegetical matrix of patristic theology brings many appreciable fruits. However, to insist upon theology as an exegetical but non-conceptual enterprise, disengaged from questions of objective rationality, is only to fall into the same idealist dualism and divorce between the "two cultures" of humanities and sciences critiqued by Torrance.

In this connection, an Orthodox reader cannot help noting how Torrance's *hermeneutical* appeal to Irenaeus seems to have had its origins in dialogue with Orthodoxy.¹⁹⁰ Torrance's exposition of Irenaeus on the *depositum fidei* is accompanied by a critique of propositionalism in both Roman Catholic and Protestant confessions;¹⁹¹ with Orthodox theology, Torrance is concerned to stress the primacy of the divine truth deposited in the Church over all its formulations, and the centrality of the worshipping Church, most especially in the Eucharist,¹⁹² as the locus of communion wherein the truth of God is embodied and known.

Likewise, although we have had occasion to note above one significant point of disagreement, one further observes the particularly close convergence of Torrance's interpretation of Irenaeus with that of the Orthodox Georges Florovsky.¹⁹³ Like Torrance, Florovsky employs Irenaeus to emphasize the *objective* and *charismatic* pole of tradition: "not just a transmission of inherited doctrines," but "the witness of the Spirit,"¹⁹⁴ "n'est pas seulement . . . une autorité historique imposée du dehors, mais la parole continuelle de Dieu lui-même, saisir par la foi."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ "Trinitarian Foundation..." was offered for the Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue Consultation, Istanbul, 1981; "Deposit of Faith," 1983, concludes with a call for dialogue with Orthodoxy; "The Open Texture..." 1985, was offered for a festschrift for Archbishop Methodios Fouyas; "Early Patristic Interpretation..." was published in Fouyas' Greek journal, *EKKLESIA kai THEOLOGIA*, 1988; "Kerygmatic Proclamation of the Gospel..." was offered as a lecture at Holy Cross Orthodox School of Theology, Boston, 1991. The first three items overlap significantly with one another and with *Trinitarian Faith*, 31-35; compare also *Christian Doctrine*, 75-80.

¹⁹¹ Torrance, "Deposit of Faith," 16-28.

¹⁹² Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 73-4.

¹⁹³ Most especially as in found in Florovsky's *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1972), a volume which Torrance both cited frequently and expressed his personal admiration for: see the letter of TFT to Florovsky, Oct 30, 1973, in the Princeton Firestone Florovsky archive. Torrance elsewhere praises Florovsky's "profound theological instinct, at once catholic and evangelical, and . . . [his] Christocentric and Trinitarian interpretation of Greek Patristic Theology": Torrance, *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. I, ix.

¹⁹⁴ Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 80, 46.

¹⁹⁵ Florovsky, "Le corps du Christ vivant," in Jean-Jacques von Allmen (ed.), *La Sainte Église Universelle: Confrontation oecuménique* (Neuchâtel, 1948) [9-57], 42.

Florovsky equally objects to logical-deductive approaches in doctrine: "les dogmes ne sont pas des axiomes théoretique desquels on pourrait déduire des théorèmes nouveaux."¹⁹⁶ He likewise underscores the unity of "charismatic" and "institutional" in Irenaeus.¹⁹⁷ Similar to Torrance, who appeals to Irenaeus against the imposition of Roman imperial legalism in canon law, Florovsky refuses to allow any juridical formula which might pre-validate the authority of a council, insisting instead on consensus in "*Christ: The Criterion of Truth*."¹⁹⁸ The highest authority in the Church is that of *witness*, subject to the truth: "la *potestas magisterii* n'est, au fond, que le pouvoir de témoignage, et par conséquent il est limité par le contenu de vérité témoigné."¹⁹⁹

Arguably, at the heart of this agreement is not only a common willingness to learn from Irenaeus, but a shared realist concern to transcend all dualisms between history and truth.²⁰⁰ Both theologians apprehend

the central significance of history in knowledge . . . Historical "events" are acts, mediated by further acts of interpretation . . . But this also means that Christianity is irreversibly committed to what has as a matter of contingent fact been constructed in its history: We cannot pretend that we can free ourselves of "Hellenism," or that the kerygma is directed to and from a timeless interiority . . . If we wish to go on speaking a Christian language at all, we cannot ignore or try to dismantle this set of determinations.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹⁷ Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 79.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹⁹ Florovsky, "Le corps du Christ vivant," 52.

²⁰⁰ As Torrance cites the following remark of Oscar Cullmann with respect to the theology of Irenaeus: "the historical kernel is at the same time the dogmatic kernel": "The Substance of the Faith," *op. cit.*, 337.

²⁰¹ Rowan Williams, writing of Florovsky, in "Eastern Orthodox Theology," David Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 508. See Torrance's remarks in *Theological Science*, 152-4, which resonate strongly with the core emphases of Florovsky's theology: "[Christ's] Truth is both eternal and historical, Truth who is not timeless, for He so participates in time-relations and assumes time into Himself that time is an inalienable element in His nature as Incarnate Truth. Far from the historical being but the outward symbolic draping of the

While Torrance would doubtless emphasize more strongly that the “substance” of the historical *ekklēsiastikon phronēma* is none other than the *apostolic* tradition – not a simple canonization of all historical developments in the life of the Church²⁰² – both theologians follow Irenaeus in seeking to overcome all dualism between “truth” and “event,” with the recognition that the historically-embodied mediation of truth in no way compromises a theological realism of access to the truth of God in Christ. And, on the other hand, precisely because Florovsky (again appealing specifically to Irenaeus) holds that “the true tradition is only the tradition of truth, *traditio veritatis*,”²⁰³ this evangelically-minded Orthodox can meet the orthodox-minded Evangelical on his own ground, in the recognition that “l’Église se réforme sans cesse *parce qu’elle vit dans la tradition.*”²⁰⁴

Conclusion

In the three themes surveyed above, one observes Torrance maintaining structures of differentiated unity: (1) the person of Word and his assumed humanity; (2) Christ’s baptism and Christian baptism; (3) the truth of Christ and its historical embodiment in Church and doctrine. In each case, the unity is asymmetric, with a realist stress on the direct, active agency of the first reality in our apprehension of its internal relations. At work on all levels, arguably, is a deeply “Cyrillian” Christological analogy, wherein composite elements of the divine economy are approached in

[*cont.*] Truth, it belongs to His very substance . . . eternal Truth encounters us also as *temporal fact*, requiring of us in our knowing relationship to it in time . . . Theological thinking is historical thinking; it is more than that, not by leaving the historical behind, but through participation in the eternal which has entered into the historical and gathered it into inalienable relation to the Truth in Jesus Christ.”

²⁰² This is a major concern of Torrance, particularly vis-à-vis Roman Catholic theology, leading him to a nuanced treatment of tradition and of the “ecclesiastical mind”: see, for instance, *Conflict and Agreement* vol. I, 235-6, and *Reconstruction*, 23, 42-45, 68, 129, 164, 244.

²⁰³ Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 106.

²⁰⁴ Florovsky, “Le corps du Christ vivant,” 43.

their *actual* reality as inseparable, distinguished “in thought alone” (*tē theōria monē*).

This emphasis on concrete unities and theological realism in Torrance’s reading of Irenaeus renders a powerful dynamic vision of Christology, baptism, and doctrine alike. Torrance’s notion of the vicarious humanity of Christ, moreover, must be regarded as a major restatement of the Irenaeian doctrine of recapitulation, from which Orthodox theologians today can learn much – particularly in relation to twentieth century uses of St. Gregory Palamas, which all too often failed to relate adequately the doctrine of grace as uncreated *energeia* to the humanity of Christ in anything more than an instrumental way.²⁰⁵

At this point, however, a question must also be posed to Torrance. Torrance’s undertaking represents a profound appropriation of Eastern patristic theology – up to the 5th century. Yet it could be asked whether, in some of his readings, especially of later Fathers, in his anti-dualist zeal, Torrance does not at times mistake for “dualism” what is simply duality. Why are Irenaeus’ distinctions between *propter providentiam* and *propter eminentiam* (*Adv. Haer.* 2:6:1), or *secundem dilectionem* and *secundem magnitudinem* (*Adv. Haer.* 4:20:4), acceptable,²⁰⁶ whereas the essence-energies distinction clarified by Cappadocian and later Byzantine theology is “dualist”?²⁰⁷ Torrance’s epistemological anxiety at times leads him to

²⁰⁵ This is true of Lossky especially, as well as numerous semi-popular presentations of the energies doctrine; but see, for contrast, Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984).

²⁰⁶ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 108-109.

²⁰⁷ Cf. especially, T.F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (T&T Clark, 1994), 38, f. 69. A nascent form of this distinction is not lacking in either Athanasius (*Contra Arianos*, III. 30. 61-67; *De Decretis*, II) or Cyril of Alexandria (*Thesaurus* 18, PG lxxv, 312C), a fact noted by Florovsky in two essays which Torrance cites, “St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers” and “St. Athanasius and the Concept of Creation” – the latter to which he confesses his indebtedness, even while neglecting this basic insight: cf. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1972), esp. 116-119, and *Aspects of Church History* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 39-62; Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 86 n. 43 especially (also 79, 85); *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 4, 96, 207; *Divine Meaning*, 181, 185.

elide unity into pure identity.²⁰⁸ That said, it may be that Torrance is reacting to the rather one-sided apophaticism made widespread in contemporary Orthodox thought through V. Lossky's readings of the Cappadocians, Dionysius and Palamas: Lossky's formulations do at times at least *appear* to resemble something like that idealist dualism between economy and truth which Torrance aims to resist.

These points do raise urgent questions, requiring further critical consideration; yet, as Colin Gunton remarked, "What we find in Torrance is a reopening of a major historical conversation."²⁰⁹ Thus, a student of the Orthodox Fathers can only express admiration for Torrance's momentous offering. There is good reason to repeat of Torrance in his own context what George Dragas, himself a former pupil of "Tom," has written of Newman: "he represents a concrete, living starting-point for the rediscovery of the Greek Fathers in the West today . . . he rediscovered the catholic truth of the Fathers and restated it for this time and this world."²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ A similar criticism applies to Torrance's reading of the Cappadocian treatment of the monarchy of the Father, as well as his views on the relationship between episcopacy and presbyterate, and his arguments in support of the ordination of women: Torrance at times mistakes causal differentiation and hierarchical structure for ontological subordination. Here again, Torrance's patrology reflects the unacknowledged influence of Harnack [*History of Dogma*, vol. IV (New York, 1961), 80–107], whose expansion of the theory of Theodor Zahn [*Marcellus von Ancyra. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Theologie* (Gotha, 1867)], positing a subtle shift from an original "old Nicene" triadology towards a generic notion of *ousia* in the Cappadocians, is now generally regarded as unsustainable. Though differing in its rejection of causal categories, aspects of Torrance's reading of patristic Trinitarian theology bear striking resemblance to that of John Bekkos, the 13th century unionist patriarch of Constantinople condemned by the Council of Blachernae in 1285: see Peter Gilbert, "Not an Anthologist: John Bekkos as a Reader of the Fathers," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Summer 2009, 259–291.

²⁰⁹ Colin Gunton, "Being and Person: T.F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," in Colyer (ed.), *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 130.

²¹⁰ George Dion. Dragas, *Ecclesiasticus I* (Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), 97, 101. Dragas has elsewhere exuberantly dubbed Torrance himself "a father of the contemporary church": George Dion. Dragas, "Professor T.F. Torrance on his 80th Birthday," *EKKLESIA kai THEOLOGIA* 12 (1993), 571.

**CALVIN IN THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE:
CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF MAN (1949)**

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ABSTRACT: *Thomas F. Torrance gave a great deal of attention to Calvin throughout his own theological work, without ever being a "Calvinist" in the narrow sense. The article explores his first extended published study of Calvin, Calvin's Doctrine of Man (1949) and analyzes in particular Torrance's report in his preface of how he has studied, read and interpreted Calvin. This can be seen as an important key to his attitude and relationship to Calvin throughout his theological career.*

When I first agreed to write on this subject, I had a preliminary idea that it could be interesting and rewarding to study in detail how Calvin's work was used, quoted, criticised or developed in Tom Torrance's teaching, postgraduate supervision and his own voluminous writings. As with so many other promising but still inchoate ideas, this one proved to be unrealisable under my circumstances and in the time available. This paper will therefore have to remain a more limited introductory essay; but I hope it may at least prove suggestive for work that others might attempt.

When we survey the enormous range of Tom Torrance's publications and the increasing stream of recent writing on his theology, at least four points relating to Calvin immediately come into focus. First, TFT's work was regularly (if to varying degrees) peppered with references to Calvin, not only on specific doctrinal points but particularly on topics relating to scientific method, the structure of theological inquiry and the inner coherence of dogmatic theology.¹ At

the same time it is obvious that Calvin was not the only influence or model here: on the question of specifically scientific method Torrance clearly owed more to stimuli from nineteenth or twentieth century scientists, especially James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein, or philosophers such as Michael Polanyi; and in the matter of dogmatic method, Karl Barth, Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century were arguably more decisive and of further-reaching influence than the Genevan Reformer, though Torrance was always happy to include Calvin where possible among his witnesses and did repeatedly emphasise certain key points, such as Calvin's reversal of the procedure of the medieval *quaestio* with its order of questions (*an sit, quid sit, qualis sit*) in the context of speech about God.

Second, while it is clear that TFT studied Calvin intensively, absorbed an enormous amount from him and had immense respect for the significance of Calvin's theological thought, work and witness, he cannot simply be called a "Calvinist" – neither in the sense of one who simply repeats what he finds in Calvin nor in the sense of the commonly misnamed "Calvinism" so widespread in the generations after Calvin's death and still manifest in various forms of "neo-Calvinism" up to the present day. Indeed one cannot travel far with Torrance - and the same can also be said of his brother James – without recognizing in both a marked critical distancing from "Calvinism," an aversion which was not merely emotional and certainly not arbitrary, but originated in an awareness of the great gulf yawning between "Calvinism" and the atmosphere of the warmly evangelical theology in which both had grown up and to which they remained loyal in their own rather different ways throughout their lives. This aversion found different forms and expressions in the two brothers – more intellectually

¹ There are some remarks on this in my contribution, "T.F. Torrance in Relation to Reformed Theology," in Elmer M. Colyer (ed.), *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology. Theologians in Dialogue with T.F. Torrance* (Lanham/Boulder/New York/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 31-49.

and theologically wide-ranging in TFT², more pastorally in JBT³ – but had recognisably similar roots.

Third – to make yet a further differentiation – Torrance was not chiefly a Calvin historian (after the style, let us say, of T.H.L Parker, whose numerous works are still among the finest – and best written – monuments of recent Calvin research). In fact, TFT was not so much an historian in the strict sense as an interpreter of theological ideas, certainly in an historical perspective, but primarily searching for their abiding objective reference and validity or specifically contemporary relevance. His interest was thus in Calvin's theology, in Calvin's thought, in Calvin's exegesis and hermeneutics, but much less in Calvin's person and career or in the nuts-and-bolts history of Calvin and the Swiss or Genevan Reformation, or indeed of the Scottish Reformation with its varied Calvinian and other colourings. (The same, it may fairly be said, also applies to his interest in

² Cf. e.g. the opening paragraph of the seminal article, "Knowledge of God and Speech about him according to John Calvin," in *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1965), 76-98: "It belongs to the great merit of John Calvin that he worked out the difficult transition from the mediaeval mode of thinking in theology to the modern mode, and placed the theology of the Reform on a scientific basis in such a way that the logic inherent in the substance of the Faith was brought to light and allowed to assume the mastery in human formulation of it. Calvin has not always been interpreted like this, yet if he has been misunderstood, perhaps it was his own greatness that was to blame. Calvin made such a forward advance in theological thinking that he outstripped his contemporaries by centuries, with the result that they tended to fall back upon an old Aristotelian framework, modified by Renaissance humanism, in order to interpret him. Thus there was produced what history has called 'Calvinism', the rigid strait-jacket within which Calvin's teaching has been presented regularly to succeeding generations." (*Theology in Reconstruction*, 76.)

³ James' work and the cases he deployed were also of course much more specifically focused on the history of Scottish and British reformed theology through the centuries since the Reformation. He too, however, came in for criticism from some who felt he was unjust to the tradition of Federal Theology, notably Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker in their jointly edited *Fountainhead of Federalism. Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition. With a Translation of De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* (1534) by Heinrich Bullinger (Louisville, KY, 1991). See e.g. p. 11. On this difference of views cf. Alasdair Heron, "Der Gottesbund als Thema der reformierten Theologie," *Historische Horizonte. Emden Beiträge zum reformierten Protestantismus* 5 (Wuppertal, 2002), 39-65.

the Church Fathers and the early church.) This point cannot be explored in full depth here, but it deserves to be mentioned, for it is at least related to some common criticisms of his exegetical and theological-historical work, beginning prominently with James Barr's *Semantics of Biblical Language*.⁴ The issues there come clearly to light in Torrance's later riposte to Barr in 1993, which can also serve here as a representative statement of his own position on language and reality:

Several years after [this book] first appeared it came under heavy criticism from James Barr in his book *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961) . . . because of the way in which I had used and interpreted a number of biblical terms and themes, largely under the guidance of Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* to which Barr was also rather hostile. Professor Barr is a brilliant philologist whose ideas cannot be ignored, although they are often rather exaggerated . . . His critical linguistic examination of my account of the way in which New Testament passages are to be understood in the light of the Old Testament was intended to clear away what he felt to be some serious misunderstandings of biblical teaching. Some of his criticisms I accept, but by no means all of them – in any case they do not affect at all the main thrust of the book. I believe that his basic approach and line of argument was misleading and unfortunate, for it treated language independently as something having significance in itself, to be interpreted through the interrelation of words and statements and the syntactical pattern of continuous discourse, and not

⁴ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 1961. The appearance of this publication in the same year that Barr left New College for Princeton caused something of a stir at the time but seems sometimes to have been forgotten since. E.g. Alister E. McGrath, *T.F. Torrance. An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), p. 183, only mentions Barr's later 1991 Gifford Lectures, published as *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon 1993) which are more specially directed against Barth's rejection of natural theology. However Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance. Theologian of the Trinity* (Ashgate: Farnham/Burlington 2009), 333-334 quotes Torrance's criticisms of what he perceived as Barr's "sceptical nominalism" in "Scientific Hermeneutics according to St. Thomas Aquinas," *JTS* XIII.2, 1962, 258-289; *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1965), 19; Molnar also refers to the statement reproduced more extensively here from the Preface to the second edition of *Royal Priesthood*.

primarily by reference to the realities beyond which they are meant to direct us.⁵ While this has the advantage of helping to counteract misleading subjectivist slant in interpretation, it inevitably widens the gap between language and being by reducing the semantic function of language to the syntactic relations linguistic units have with one another. This is a peculiar form of Nominalism which rejects the relation of language to knowledge and culture, and which to get any kind of sense out of theological language treats it as some kind of description of religious phenomena. It is not surprising that by denigrating the objective reference of biblical language Barr should find so many biblical theologians "obscure," for he fails by his conflation of semantics with syntactics to deal faithfully with their language in accordance with their intention in using it. He thus neglects the fundamental principle of hermeneutics advanced by the Greek Fathers that we do not subject realities to the terms referring to them, but subject terms to the realities to which they refer. The Latin Fathers followed suit with their axiom, *non sermoni res, sed rei sermo subjectus est*. This is particularly the case with biblical language for the divine truth signified lies beyond the words and statements signifying it. Hence in spite of what James Barr had to say about the biblical and theological language deployed in this book I have allowed it to appear in its original form, not because it is in no need of linguistic correction, but because I stand fully by the argument it advances and the biblical and theological truth which it attempts to set forth.⁶

Mutatis mutandis, we may perhaps apply to Torrance's approach to Calvin⁷ something of what he himself says about his study of Barth's early theology:

⁵ This sentence seems imprecisely formulated. It would, I think, read better as ". . . realities beyond, to which they are meant to direct us."

⁶ *Royal Priesthood*, 2nd edn. (London: T.& T. Clark, 1993), ix-x.

⁷ For his view of the epochal significance of Calvin himself cf. e.g. his article, "Knowledge of God and Speech about him," in *Theology in Reconstruction*, 76-98.

This work is not a compendium of Barth's early teaching, for I have not sought to expound the content of his thought so much as the course of his debate with modern theology, the "Copernican revolution" which he has initiated, and his relentless probing into the nature of scientific method in dogmatic thinking. Far less is it a manual of "Barthian theology." A "Barthian theology" is just as impossible as an "Einsteinian science," but just as there is a pre-Einsteinian science and a post-Einsteinian science, so there is a pre-Barthian and a post-Barthian theology, for the contribution of Karl Barth to theology is, like that of Einstein to natural science, so deep-going and fundamental that it marks one of the great eras of advance in the whole history of the subject.⁸

Fourth, Torrance's *oeuvre* does include a fair number of pieces – books and articles – more directly devoted in whole or in part to Calvin. These range from the earlier studies, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*⁹ and *Kingdom and Church*,¹⁰ to the post-retirement *SJT* monograph *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*.¹¹ I had some personal involvement in the production of the last of these as one of the editors of the series in which it appeared. A rather different personal connection with *Kingdom and Church* is given by the fact that on its publication in 1956 my father reviewed it for the BBC, and in the pages of his copy there is still enfolded a letter from Tom thanking him for the review and adding a little information about the origins of the book. Finally, my copy of the first of these books, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, still contains heavy pencil markings of mine dating from the time when I was teaching in

⁸ T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth. An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962), 9. One might perhaps say that T.F.T.'s interest was in what he saw as "real history" as opposed to "mere history" in the sense of the pedantic reconstruction of past historical facts.

⁹ *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957.)

¹⁰ *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956.)

¹¹ *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988.)

New College and preparing a conference paper on Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei*.¹² This led me to the thought of focusing in this paper upon these three books and upon what Torrance himself says in them about Calvin and the special motives of his own interest in Calvin.¹³ These observations could not substitute for a full survey of all the shades of TFT's occupation with Calvin, but might supply a certain initial orientation. As I worked on the paper, however, it became clear that the necessary attention to the first of these books alone would require more or less all the space available – and that such attention could also be rewarding because it can trace how TFT actually worked on and with Calvin at a relatively early and certainly quite formative stage of his post-doctoral theological research and writing.

The Preface to *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* is especially informative, for it not only introduces TFT's earliest extended study of Calvin but can also be seen as foreshadowing his future work as well. He begins by noting the works of Calvin with which he had busied himself since beginning his ministry in Alyth in 1940;¹⁴ the *Commentaries* (in a complete English edition presented to him by the Rev. R.B. Hastie of Blairgowrie),¹⁵ the (French) *Sermons* in the *Corpus*

¹² Delivered, if I remember aright, to the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses at its annual meeting in Genoa in the summer of 1980. The paper was eventually published as "Homo Peccator and the *Imago Dei* according to Calvin," C.D. Kettler and T.H. Speidell (ed.), *Incarnational Ministry. The Presence of Christ in Church, Society and Family. Essays in Honor of Ray S. Anderson* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1990), 32-57.

¹³ I would also have liked in this context to draw on Torrance's Introduction and Historical Notes to the republication of Beveridge's *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation by John Calvin*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd & Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1958), but at the time did not have these to hand.

¹⁴ The Preface is dated June 1947, when TFT was still in the parish of Alyth. Later in that year he moved to Beechgrove Church in Aberdeen.

¹⁵ Presumably this was the Calvin Translation Society edition published in Edinburgh by T. & T. Clark between 1843 and 1855. Towards the end of the Preface, on p. 9, TFT lists this edition of the *Institutes, Commentaries and Tracts, including some Sermons*, along with Tholuck's edition of the *Commentarii in Novum Testamentum* (Berlin, 1833-1834). Later he was himself to initiate and edit a complete new edition of Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries* published by St Andrew Press.

*Reformatorem*¹⁶ and the *Institute*.¹⁷ He observes:

Constant reading of these many volumes in the course of sermon preparation . . . convinced me that Calvin's own theological position was very different from the hardened system that has long passed under the name of Calvinism. It is a sad reflection that the Reformer's thought should have been crusted over for so long by a species of Aristotelianism, the very *damnosa hereditas* against which Calvin himself revolted with the full impetus of his mind and soul.¹⁸

This distancing from "Calvinism" runs like a thread through the whole Preface, as the following further excerpts will show; but TFT had other points to make as well, which are highly relevant for the way he had worked and the resulting form of his presentation:

It has been my attempt to lay bare Calvin's own thought and to present it as far as possible in his own way and in his own words. Traditional Calvinism I have studiously avoided, and have made no reference to any works on Calvin, ancient or modern, so that this presentation might be free from the imputation of partisanship in any of the different schools, such as that of the Dutch Calvinists,¹⁹ or that of W. Niesel and the

¹⁶ The list on p. 9 also includes "A. Golding's translation of the *Sermons on Job* (1584 edition), *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (1581), *Sermons on Galatians* (1574), *Sermons on Ephesians* (1577); and L. Tomson's translation of the *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (1579)." While he does on occasion cite the French text of sermons from CR (as well as other French or Latin sources reproduced there), a rapid scanning of his footnotes indicates that for the sermon quotations and references he largely drew on those available in these English translations. He himself remarks, however, "Though these translations have been most useful, I have allowed myself the freedom of altering them as occasion arose, either in order to express the original more accurately, or to erase archaic expressions."

¹⁷ It was I believe TFT himself who first pointed out to me that the title of Calvin's *Institutio* is singular; however he often followed the almost universal (mal-) practice in British and American Calvin scholarship of using the plural, *Institutes*. My own endeavours as author and editor over the last more than thirty years have been singularly unsuccessful in modifying that widely and deeply ingrained custom!

¹⁸ *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 7.

¹⁹ It is not specified here which "Dutch Calvinists" Torrance has in mind, but we may assume he has in view the revived Dutch Calvinist thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth century associated with the names of Kuyper and Baavinck.

late Peter Barth.²⁰ Consequently, the bulk of the book consists of citations gathered from all over Calvin's works, and arranged together with as little explanatory material of my own as was necessary. I am conscious that in the very arrangement of this material, as also in the exposition, interpretation has been unavoidable, but it is, I believe, in the direction in which Calvin's own thought moves as it is drawn out, particularly in its relevance to the modern theological debate.²¹

Perhaps surprisingly, Torrance does not specifically say at this point *which* "modern theological debate" he has in view here. When, however, we observe the leading role that the themes of human knowledge of self and God²², the *imago dei*,²³ perversity and sin,²⁴ and natural theology²⁵ play in the book, these are obvious pointers, which other statements by TFT elsewhere spell out explicitly. Neither Dutch Calvinists nor Peter Barth and Niesel are in view here; rather Karl Barth and Emil Brunner and their polemical debate in 1934 and 1935 on the issues of the *imago dei* in the light of the Fall, of the resultant possibility and scope of natural theology – and of Brunner's appeal to Calvin's views on the subject. That debate has since attained a kind of classical status as one of the crucial fundamental theological confrontations of the last century, but it was

²⁰ Peter Barth († 1940) and Wilhelm Niesel were the successive editors of Calvin's *Opera Selecta*, of which, however, only vol. 1 had been published by 1949: it had indeed already appeared in 1926. Vol. 2, prepared by Dora Scheuner and edited by Niesel, would only follow in 1952. In the context of the German Church Struggle in the 1930s Niesel edited the collection, *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen* and later published *inter alia* his well known *Theologie Calvins* and *Reformierte Symbolik*. TFT does not say more at this point on what exactly he means by the "school" of Peter Barth and Niesel, but one may well suspect he felt it to be too much a form of repristination of Calvin and classical Reformed theology in the face of the Lutheranism which was (and still is) numerically dominant in the German protestant churches. TFT had little more sympathy for that kind of assertive Reformed confessionalism than Barth had for the *Jungreformatorische Bewegung* in the German Confessing Church in the 1930s.

²¹ T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Eerdmans edn. 7.

²² Chapters 1; 10.

²³ Chapters 3-6.

²⁴ Chapters 7-9.

²⁵ Chapters 11-12.

TFT's conviction that in the end the proponents had talked past each other and that they had not perhaps paid sufficient careful attention to what Calvin had actually written. This is how he puts it in a much later article, "My Interaction with Karl Barth":

Back in Scotland I produced a work entitled *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* in order to cut through the tangled debate between Barth and Brunner on the relation between grace and nature, for in their appeals to Calvin they appeared to be shooting past each other.²⁶

One might add that they appeared to him to be shooting past Calvin as well! Certainly TFT devotes in this study much more closely focussed attention and extended analysis than is to be found in either Barth or Brunner to the way in which these central themes of theological anthropology are reflected in a wide range of Calvin's work. He then goes on in the Preface to emphasise the complexity of Calvin's thought:

One of the calamities of traditional exposition and interpretation of Calvin's theology has been, by means of arid logical forms, to make Calvin's own distinctions too clean and too rigid. This has resulted in an over-simplification which has obscured the flexibility as well as the range and profundity of his thought. There is no doubt that Calvin was at times himself guilty of this procedure, particularly in his more systematic treatises when he was engaged in debate, as in regard to the problems of predestination and providence, but in the vast bulk of his

²⁶ My quotation is from a typescript copy of February 1st 1985. The article was published in D. McKim (ed.), *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 52-64. Cf. the remarks of Alister McGrath, *T.F. Torrance. An Intellectual Biography*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 80: "Torrance . . . saw himself both as an heir and interpreter of the Reformed tradition, particularly in relation to Calvin. He also found time to work on an aspect of Calvin's theology which was of some importance to him – theological anthropology. The question of Calvin's understanding of human nature, and particularly the nature and epistemic capacity of human nature in consequence of it being created in the image of God, had featured prominently in the 1934 debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, and had proved to be a divisive matter subsequently. Torrance believed that Barth and Brunner were "shooting past each other" on this matter, and wanted to sort it out. The book was published in 1949 by Lutterworth Press, and is now regarded as something of a landmark in British Calvin studies."

work where he sticks closely to the Scriptures there is much profound theology that has never been sufficiently brought to light.²⁷

More is involved here than simply TFT's criticism of "the calamities of traditional exposition and interpretation of Calvin's theology"; they indeed are not the main focus of his interest and attention. It is rather his own discovery (or rediscovery) of a "flexibility," "range" and "profundity" in Calvin's thought, which have traditionally been obscured by "arid logical" systematisation. Calvin is better, profounder, richer and deeper than systematised "Calvinism," even if Calvin himself was sometimes "guilty of this procedure" under the pressure of controversy, as in the case of "the problems of predestination and providence."

In other words, Torrance is convinced on the basis of his own study of Calvin that what have long counted as the foundation and cornerstones of classical Calvinism are in fact results of an over-simplified, over-clear and over-rigid systematising tendency which is admittedly even present at times and under certain circumstances in Calvin himself, but does not adequately correspond to the real profundity, breadth and complexity of his insights or to the whole broad stream of his exegetical and theological work. Calvin, we may say, is better than "Calvin" – to say nothing of "Calvinism" – and it is the real, complex, many-stringed Calvin who needs to be rediscovered and heard through and above what we might call the reduced "Calvin," even if that reduced "Calvin" is admittedly also there in Calvin himself. TFT goes on:

This is particularly true in regard to Calvin's teaching about the *imago dei*. There is a great deal of his thought on this difficult subject which has not yet found its way into exposition, and still lies buried in the cumbrous tomes of the *Corpus Reformatorum*. This is so varied that it is not easy to reduce to a concise and orderly account. Indeed that may be quite impossible, because in the nature of the case it is not possible to put fully into clear and distinct ideas just how a human creature may image the glory of God. I have tried, however,

²⁷ *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 8.

at the cost of repetition, to give some progression to this exposition, and at the same time to present before the reader something of the actual fullness and width of Calvin's own teaching. At times, the account has necessarily been circular, but becomes clearer, I think, when the whole matter has been set forth.²⁸

Reading these sentences more than sixty years on from when they were first written I am reminded of Tom's once remarking to me (some thirty years ago when I was teaching alongside him in New College) that the same theological topics are frequently handled in Calvin's sermons and commentaries very differently from the style and treatment in the *Institute*.²⁹ That was an insight he had won from these early Calvin studies and it was one I was even then ready and willing to accept, although my own work with Calvin at the time tended to be focussed on the *Institute*. I was not then doing much first-hand research or writing on Calvin, but was using the *Institute* as a source-book for the teaching of dogmatics, particularly in Christology.³⁰

Later in Erlangen I had greater occasion to make my own acquaintance with "the cumbrous tomes of the *Corpus Reformatorum*"

²⁸ *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 8.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 73-74: "In the foregoing discussion frequent citations have been made from Calvin's Sermons on the Book of Job, where the text gives him ample opportunity to develop his teaching on the doctrine of man. Though he is constantly employing eristic, as he does in the Commentaries and in the Institutes, his discussion in the Sermons keeps very close to the Scripture, so that what doctrine we have in them is given in the form of Biblical theology. At the same time, his later sermons, particularly on Job, Deuteronomy, and on Ephesians, are of particular value in giving us his mature teaching about man. It is not always easy to reach consistency in interpreting his thought in the Institutes and in the Commentaries, but in the Sermons on Job particularly, we have in constant repetition, and without the bias due to systematic treatment, teaching which brings out in particular fullness and clarity his views about the *imago dei*."

³⁰ The *Institute* tended also to figure at least in the background of courses on Scottish theology when I took over that responsibility on the departure of James Torrance for Aberdeen; but the source texts were then from the Scottish and British development of Reformed theology in which the issue of "Calvin and/ or Calvinism?" naturally played a part.

and could at least to some degree confirm this insight for myself, though I generally tended (and still incline) to feel there was still a great degree of coherence in content between the systematic thought of the *Institute* and the stylistically very different presentations of the Sermons and Commentaries, where the flow and profile of Calvin's expositions are admittedly much more directly determined by the run of the biblical text than by the purpose he followed in the *Institute* of articulating a coherent *Philosophie Chrestienne*.³¹ Thus on the matter of predestination and providence I did not see so much of a gap as TFT would have felt between Calvin's many occasional statements, his detailed and often polemically pointed position in the *Institute* and other writings focusing directly and systematically on the topic, and what subsequent Calvinism made of it.³²

³¹ Calvin uses this term in the prefatory *Argument du present Livre* in the French editions of the *Institute* from 1541 to 1551 (*Calvini Opera Selecta*, vol. III, 7-8); ET in the McNeill/Battles edition, vol. 1 (LCC vol. XX, London & Philadelphia, 1950), 6-8 (which, however, only ascribes the *Argument* to the French edition of 1560). The *Argument* also partly reproduces the following sentences from the Letter to the Reader which was first published in the 1539 Latin edition and expanded in 1559 (ET in McNeill/Battles, 3-5). In this letter Calvin explains his view of the relation between the Institute and his commentaries: "Moreover, it has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling. For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if any one rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents. If, after this road has, as it were, been paved, I shall publish any interpretations of Scripture, I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces. In this way the godly reader will be spared great annoyance and boredom, provided he approaches Scripture armed with a knowledge of the present work, as a necessary tool. But because the program of this instruction is clearly mirrored in all my commentaries, [1559 text: from 1539 to 1554 there stood here: "But because the commentaries on the Letter to the Romans will furnish an example"] I prefer to let the book itself declare its purpose rather than to describe it in words."

³² This is not to suggest that there is *no* difference. It lies in my view, however, more in the way that Calvinism, here as in so many points following Beza, made a distillation of Calvin's double predestination the dominant cornerstone of its entire dogmatics. That further exaggerated the prominence Calvin admittedly

But then, there is also not so much difference as is often imagined between these positions and that of Martin Luther in *The Bondage of the Will* or – even more strikingly – Thomas Aquinas.³³ The important fact remains, however, that Calvin was at any rate more than just the author of the *Institute*, and while his positions there are frequently highly and subtly differentiated – even, indeed, on predestination and providence – other of his works can and do supply further perspectives and angles on these and all sorts of other questions.

In the light of this fundamental perspective, gained from Torrance's own engagement with Calvin's works over many years, and the resultant method of exposition adopted in his book, the next paragraph of the Preface also deserves to be attentively heard:

Against the constant temptation to eliminate certain elements of his thought as inconsistent with his main position, I have tried to handle these apparent contradictions as sympathetically as possible, on the assumption that Calvin could not have been as self-contradictory as he would at first appear, and that in the nature of the case a good deal of paradox was unavoidable. This procedure I have found to pay a good dividend, for again and again new passages and new ideas have come to my notice which throw light upon these earlier problems, and serve to show that in John Calvin the Reformed Church has had a theologian, with magnitude in mind and depth in understanding, second to none in the history of the Christian Church.³⁴

What kind of "apparent contradictions" are in view here? Two examples come to mind, both of which played a part in the Barth-Brunner debate. They can be combined in the form of the question, "Does the fact that according to the Bible our human nature is made in the image of God

[*cont.*] already gave to the doctrine in the polemical context of the Reformation conflicts about grace and the freedom of the will – debates originally conducted with Roman apologists such as Pighius, but increasingly in the last quarter of his life with critics within and beyond Geneva.

³³ Cf. *Summa Theologica* I, qu. 23!

³⁴ *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 8.

mean that human beings have (as it were of themselves) a natural capacity to know God?" This question can be subdivided into further detailed sub-questions, but the two fundamental issues are already apparent: What is the nature of the *imago dei* and what innate capacity do we possess by virtue of the *imago* for knowledge of God? In support of his own argument Brunner had taken up points in Calvin which indicated a high evaluation both of the *imago* and its capacities and of a potential for knowledge of God even after the Fall. On both issues Barth famously replied *Nein!*³⁵ In fact, statements of Calvin's can be adduced in favour of both interpretations, but one must then look more closely to see whether the apparent contradiction is real.

Calvin's real position is in fact, one might say, more dialectical than self-contradictory: the answer to the question in each case depends on the light in which it is being seen and the perspective in which it is being posed. Calvin praises in the most glowing terms the qualities and capacities of human nature as created by God, but emphasises correspondingly drastically the consequences of the Fall, so that the undeniable inborn capacity of our nature to know God fails to bring forth its proper fruit, and runs out instead into idolatry.³⁶ Brunner had seen the first side of that but had not perhaps attended enough to the second.

Equally (if differently) dialectical is Calvin's approach to the question of what remains of the *imago dei* after the fall. If I may quote here from the conclusion of my own study of the matter:

We dare not pride ourselves upon the broken and shapeless remains of the *imago Dei* which we can seek to trace in our own being, but must look for its remaking from beyond. Otherwise, so far as Calvin is concerned, we simply repeat and reinforce the sin of Adam. [*Inst.* II.ii.10]

³⁵ The whole debate was of course rather more complex, covered more issues, went into them in more differentiated detail, and was additionally complicated by the personal dialectical characteristics of the two opponents! But the two issues picked out here can justly be said to be pivotal for the entire disagreement.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. *Inst.* IV.

There is, however, another side to the matter, and it is fitting to conclude this account of the *imago* presented by Calvin by giving it a suitably prominent place. We dare not look to ourselves and rest in what we see there; we must look to God and to God's paternal mercy in Christ. But how should we look on our neighbour? Does the *imago Dei*, even ruined and corrupted, have anything to tell us here? Calvin is in no doubt that it does – that we must look on our fellow humans with eyes that recognize the *imago Dei* in them, because that is how God wishes us to see them. Where the angle of vision is changed in this way, it is no longer of the ruin and destruction of the *imago* that we must speak, but of the dignity with which it surrounds and ennobles even the least and most unworthy, for there the discernment of the *imago Dei* is not an inducement to pride but to love, and as such is free of the dangers Calvin is so concerned to avoid. Several passages could be gathered from his writings on this, but it will suffice here to quote the fullest and most detailed that I have found:

[*Inst.* III.viii.6, which includes such statements as “. . . we are not to look to what men in themselves deserve, but to attend to the image of God, which exists in all, and to which we owe all honour and love” or “we are not to reflect on the wickedness of men, but look to the image of God in them, an image which, by covering and obliterating their faults, should by its dignity allure us to love and embrace them.”]³⁷

In short, I wrote then, Calvin's doctrine “is much more subtle, much more dialectical, and indeed vastly more ‘human’ than the common caricatures of Calvin would suggest.”³⁸

³⁷ A.I.C. Heron, “Homo Peccator and the Imago Dei according to John Calvin,” Christian D. Kettler & Todd J. Speidell (ed.), *Incarnational Ministry. The Presence of Christ in Church, Society and Family. Essays in Honor of Ray S. Anderson* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1990), 32-57 (here 53-55). Cf. also the earlier opening remarks in this paper with reference to the Barth-Brunner controversy (and also to Torrance's study).

³⁸ “Homo Peccator and the Imago Dei,” 32.

To return now to TFT's Preface, he has one further set of observations to make. These deserve to be attended to carefully, as they serve fairly precisely to show what TFT was and was not attempting to do with this study, and also what he expected to gain from this involvement with Calvin. Both points are highly relevant for the questions to which this paper intends to serve as an introduction:

As it has been my aim to set forth Calvin's teaching on the doctrine of man in its own light, I have not attempted much in the way of criticism. Doubtless I have been at times too kind to the Reformer, though it is easy to criticize after centuries of discussion of problems which were not acute and demanded no immediate solution in the sixteenth century. Many of these questions which concern us today deal with aspects of the doctrine of man which did not greatly agitate the Reformers, but I feel sure that the modern theologian can find no better solution to them than he will reach through a careful study of Calvin's thoroughly biblical position, and his searching understanding of human nature. It has not been my business to point out here any of these solutions, but I shall consider myself amply rewarded if I have succeeded in setting before the modern student much in Calvin's thought which is seldom brought to light, but which is extremely relevant to the present hour.³⁹

The meaning of these sentences is obvious enough, but just for that reason one could be tempted to fly over them with only superficial attention. Pedantic though it may seem, it may be worth spelling the points out individually:

1. The aim of the study was to articulate what Calvin says, to "set forth" his "teaching on the doctrine of man in its own light." It was to find and present what is to be found in Calvin's own words, statements and arguments. It was therefore not to interpret Calvin in the light of another – e.g. a contemporary – context or to focus his views through the prism of a changed situation or within an altered framework of

³⁹ *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 8-9.

questions. It was to say what Calvin said in his context and hermeneutical situation, not what he might have said or would have said (or should have said!) in some other circumstances than those he faced or in view of questions he was not directly asked or asking. This may seem at first not quite compatible with what I remarked above under my opening point 3; in fact, it simply nails down more precisely what I was trying to formulate there. The foundation for any search for the abiding validity or relevance of what Calvin (or anyone else) has said is first of all to grasp as precisely as possible what he himself meant to say by it or what it meant for his readers or hearers in his setting. That was a fundamental principle of Calvin's own humanistically influenced hermeneutics, whether he was interpreting classical texts, the writings of the Bible or the documents of church history or the history of theology. And the principle remains essentially valid for all serious study of language, meaning and truth in spite of the fashion in some corners of philosophy and literature for modern hermeneutical fads which attempt to cut the Gordian knot of any search for "the real meaning" by asserting that it is a chimera, either unattainable or non-existent from the start. TFT's objective realism at any rate leaves no doubt about his stand on this point.

2. The study has "not attempted much in the way of criticism" and has "doubtless . . . been at times too kind" to Calvin. What exactly did TFT mean by these remarks? The first aspect – "not . . . much in the way of criticism" – reflects at the most elementary level the facts that, for example, no concluding systematic evaluation or critique of Calvin's teaching is offered, and that in the course of the presentation one must look very hard indeed for any trace of reservations about it, except in so far as apparent tensions in Calvin's views are in view. The second aspect may suggest a certain awareness of having interpreted Calvin – presumably in respect of such tensions – *in meliorem partem*. If such ameliorated interpretation is to be found in the study, it shows, I would suggest, in the italicised summaries prefaced to the individual chapters. Without going into detail, the general tone of these summaries

does suggest to me a Barthian⁴⁰ reading of Calvin, and one which goes further towards interpreting Calvin *via* Barth than Barth himself felt to be possible.⁴¹ But as I never took the opportunity when I had the chance to ask TFT what precisely he meant by this concession, I can only offer this (in my view admittedly valid) observation as a guess at what he meant!

3. TFT emphasises that many current questions were not directly in Calvin's view, "were not acute and demanded no immediate solution in the sixteenth century" and that Calvin should not be criticized for that. This, however, clearly also implies that Calvin is not to be seen or understood as having the last word on all the issues, so that establishing what he said and meant does not finally close the questions.

4. At the same time TFT is convinced that careful study of Calvin's "thoroughly Biblical position" and his "searching understanding of human nature" make him a most valuable guide even in current debates going beyond his horizons of enquiry and in the search for their resolution. Admittedly this key statement seems a little ambiguous. It could be taken as meaning that going to school with Calvin and following the seriousness of his inquiry will lead to further answers to questions Calvin did not directly face. It could also, however, be taken as suggesting that somehow these answers are already implicit in Calvin himself and only require to be teased out. Probably TFT would say that both can apply according to

⁴⁰ "Barthian" not in the sense of "Barth v. Brunner," but in the sense of Barth's position from *CD* II/1 (published in German in 1940) onwards. E.g. such a sentence as that concluding of the first of the chapter summaries in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 13: "The doctrine of depravity must be considered only within this doctrine of grace."

⁴¹ Cf. e.g. the Preface to *CD* II/2, dated originally at Whitsun 1942: "To think of the contents of this volume gives me much pleasure, but even greater anxiety. The work has this peculiarity, that in it I have had to leave the framework of theological tradition to a far greater extent than in the first part on the doctrine of God. I would have preferred to follow Calvin's doctrine of predestination much more closely, instead of departing from it so radically." *CD* II/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), x.

the case: one can be surprised both by how much Calvin turns out to have illuminated and by how helpful he proves in encouraging us to find corresponding answers to further questions.

5. Finally TFT emphasizes specifically that his study has not attempted to "to point out here any of these solutions" but that he will be satisfied if he has "succeeded in setting before the modern student much in Calvin's thought which is seldom brought to light, but which is extremely relevant to the present hour." That is above all a clear invitation to go to school with Calvin, and it is in that sense that Torrance offers the fruits of his own study.

These then are the results of my revisiting of *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* after a lengthy space of years. Just as this was TFT's first major study in Calvin, so it can still serve as a first introduction to his own engagement with the Reformer – and as said above, as setting the scene and tone for his future work on him.

**MACKINTOSH, TORRANCE AND REFORMULATION OF REFORMED
THEOLOGY IN SCOTLAND**

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ABSTRACT: *H.R. Mackintosh (1870–1936) was an early and profound theological influence on T.F. Torrance. A leading proponent of the “liberal evangelicalism” of the late nineteenth century, Mackintosh in the latter stages of his career came to embrace the emerging theology of Karl Barth. His influence on Torrance’s thinking can be clearly detected in their common critique of rationalist dualism and abstraction, found in both Protestant scholasticism and liberal modernism. Mackintosh’s soteriologically accentuated understanding of the incarnation and his pneumatological emphasis on the participation of the believer in Christ through the unio mystica are themes that Torrance developed much further.*

1 Mackintosh and Scottish Theology in the Early Twentieth Century

H.R. Mackintosh played a pivotal role in the development of Reformed theology in the English-speaking world in the first half of the twentieth century. From 1904 to 1936, he held the prestigious chair in systematic theology at New College, the United Free Church of Scotland theological seminary in Edinburgh. Already well known as a preacher and scholar at the time of his appointment, his influence grew steadily throughout Britain and the dominions, the continent, and the U.S.

Among Mackintosh’s many famous students, T.F. Torrance is undoubtedly the best known. And Torrance often referred to his mentor

in his books and lectures. Next to Karl Barth, Mackintosh was probably the most significant influence on the young Torrance.

When Prof. Mackintosh died in June of that year (1936), I was devastated. I had been wandering about the Middle East so that news of his death took some time to reach me. He and his teaching meant so much to me that suddenly New College seemed quite empty. As I asked myself what I had learned from him my thoughts kept returning to the unconditional grace of God freely poured out upon us in Jesus Christ his incarnate Son. The primary emphasis was on the supreme truth that it is none other than God himself who has come among us in Jesus Christ, and who in the crucifixion of his incarnate Son has taken the whole burden of our sin and guilt directly upon himself – all in such a way that the passionate holy love of God the Father enacts both the judgment of sin and the forgiveness of the sinner.¹

It was, of course, Mackintosh who introduced the young Torrance to Karl Barth. His teacher's engagement with Barth's maturing theology made a profound impression, as he sensed a transformation was going on in his revered professor's mind and heart.

During the previous academic session, 1934–35, Mackintosh's lectures had made an unusually disturbing and profound impact, and we became aware in the College that a theological revolution was in process, clearly evident in the excitement and transformation of our seniors. This must undoubtedly be linked with the impact upon New College of the first half-volume of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, which had just been translated by G.T. Thomson and published in Edinburgh by T&T Clark. This had the effect of reinforcing the strong biblical and incarnational emphasis of H.R. Mackintosh in which he had anticipated Barth's reaction to the liberal teaching of Ritschl and Schleiermacher.

Some days he would come into the lecture room clearly troubled as though still wrestling in his mind and soul the truth which he sought to express, but on other days he would come

¹ T.F. Torrance, "H.R. Mackintosh: Theologian of the Cross," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987): 162.

mastered by profound serenity of spirit which was almost awesome as we were ushered through his teaching into the presence of God.²

Mackintosh's transformation and embrace of Barth, which influenced Torrance and many other New College students of that era, is all the more remarkable when one realizes that Mackintosh was for twenty-five years the leading expositor of theological developments on the continent, particularly in Germany. He had translated the third volume of Albrecht Ritschl's *Justification and Reconciliation*, and Friedrich Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* with James S. Stewart. Additionally, he wrote dozens of reviews of other works from major and minor German and Swiss theologians.

Although he was born into the austere theological world of Westminster Calvinism, Mackintosh came of age, so to speak, during the rise of a broader "liberal evangelicalism" represented by a host of Scottish pastor-scholars, including A.B. Davidson, J.H. Hastings, Marcus Dods, Robert Rainy, William Robertson Nicoll, and Alexander Whyte. The fruit of their work can still be found in many theological libraries, including a number of encyclopedias edited by Hastings, and the journals *The Expositor* and the *Expository Times*, among others.

In Scotland, the liberal evangelical movement was fueled by a negative reaction to traditional Westminster Calvinism and a keen appreciation for developments in biblical, historical, and systematic theology on the continent, particularly in Germany. Like many of his contemporaries, Mackintosh was ambivalent about Westminster Calvinism. In his earlier years, he was often highly critical of what he termed "scholasticism." In *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, published in 1912, Mackintosh captured the prevailing attitude of liberal evangelicalism when he referred to scholastic christological formulations as an obstacle to genuine theological reflection.³ The rigidity and

² *Ibid.*, 161–62.

³ For what follows, see my study of Mackintosh's Christology and soteriology, *Reformulating Reformed Theology: Jesus Christ in the Theology of Hugh Ross Mackintosh* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 36–38.

dogmatism of the older orthodoxy in the face of scientific advances and historical criticism and high-profile heresy trials like that of John McLeod Campbell had a chilling effect on a generation of pastors and theologians who thought of themselves as theologically orthodox but open-minded on different views of creation, atonement and justification, and even the historicity of certain biblical accounts.

1.1 Reformed scholasticism

Mackintosh perceived two main problems with Reformed scholasticism. The first is what he termed an “incredible and thoroughgoing dualism” in scholastic christological formulations that separated the divinity and humanity of Christ. It created an artificiality that “leaves a profoundly disappointing sense of unethical mystery and even, in a sense, duplicity.”⁴ The humanity of Christ in particular seemed to Mackintosh to recede behind his divinity in scholastic Christology. “Always the result has been that deity and humanity in Christ are joined in ways so external that either may be contemplated and (so to speak) analyzed in abstraction from the other.” This tendency to separate the human and divine natures betrayed the confident witness of New Testament writers like John and Paul to the fullness of God in Jesus Christ.

This tendency to dualism is akin to scholasticism’s other chief weakness, namely, the tendency to abstraction. In the hands of the Protestant scholastics, basic biblical realities become bloodless propositions and dry formulations. Referring to another theologian’s treatment of humanity, Mackintosh complained, “What we vaguely call ‘human nature’ is not human nature in the least. It is at most hypothetical raw material, which . . . is no more human nature than hydrogen by itself is aquatic nature.”⁵ In particular, scholastics were prone to neglect the dynamic dimension of human personality, resulting in an “impersonal manhood” that hindered more than it helped a proper understanding of the humanity of Christ.

⁴ H.R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 294.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

Throughout his career, Mackintosh was keenly sensitive to docetic tendencies in Christology, particularly among the Protestant scholastics. In his view they clung formally to christological orthodoxy by affirming the divine and human natures of Christ but held to abstract notions of humanity that made it difficult for them to work out the incarnation as a real event in history.

1.2 Nineteenth-century liberalism

Despite his difficulties with Reformed scholasticism, Mackintosh was also deeply ambivalent about German liberalism. While he was without peer among English-speaking theologians in his knowledge of German biblical and theological scholarship, he was often sharply critical of its results, particularly of three trends or approaches.

First, the original quest for the historical Jesus and its attempts to "reconstruct" the life of Jesus "beneath" the overlay of the church's beliefs was one such approach. On the one hand, Mackintosh applauded its anti-docetic emphasis and its effort to make the humanity of Jesus more human. The quest ensured that "certain aspects of Jesus' human experience are made to stand out with extraordinary freshness."⁶ But the quest was doomed to fail in Mackintosh's estimation, following the lead of his teacher Martin Kähler, because its humanistic view of Jesus undermined the process of christological reflection by insisting that the witness of the church is at best superfluous and at worst misguided. The inflation of the humanity of Jesus Christ came at the expense of his divinity, a move that put the quest at odds with the basic nature of the Christian message. "For the apostles Christ filled the whole sphere of God, and the settlement of fundamental issues between divine holiness and human sin rested in what He was and had accomplished. Not less than for us today faith in God means faith in Jesus . . . To alter this is to alter the religion."⁷

⁶ H.R. Mackintosh, "The Liberal Conception of Jesus in Its Strength and Weakness," *American Journal of Theology* 16 (1912): 411.

⁷ Mackintosh, *Doctrine*, 288.

Second, Adolf von Harnack's magisterial three-volume *History of Dogma* was without doubt the most influential book of historical theology of the period. It represented the high-water mark of an approach that might be termed "the history of dogma as the criticism of Christology." Harnack and others believed that their genetic approach to christological doctrine would set it in the context of historical development. Mackintosh saw in this effort a thinly veiled prejudice against the church as an agent of doctrinal development. Here Mackintosh followed the lead of his Marburg mentor Wilhelm Herrmann in appealing to the vital experience of the church as the foundation of doctrine. "Explaining away a doctrine, however successfully," he observed in a review of a book by Harnack's disciple Gustav Krüger, "is not the same thing as disposing of the *experience* in which the Christian mind has always felt itself to possess a real basis for doctrinal assertion, and out of which doctrine spontaneously arises."⁸

Third, the history of religions school offered yet another approach to christological reflection, and its results were the most difficult for Mackintosh to accept. In much the same way that the Harnackian historical theologians sought to account for the development of christological doctrine, the history of religions school sought to explain the development of Christianity itself as a purely historical phenomenon. To scholars like Otto Pfleiderer and Ernst Troeltsch, Christianity was essentially a syncretistic religion that assimilated ideas and beliefs from a variety of Near Eastern sources. But they went even further, advancing an extreme form of historicism to match their extreme relativism. Locked into a closed universe, from which God must be excluded, Christian faith could only be accounted for from the flow of human events. Traditional Christology can only be mere wish projection, since modern man knows that God cannot become human and dead men don't rise. For Mackintosh, this was too much. "For my own part,

⁸ H.R. Mackintosh, "Review of Gustav Krüger, *Das Dogma von der Dreieinigkeit und Gottmenschheit*," *Expository Times* 17 (1905-6), 302.

I feel this is an exceedingly grave charge to bring against the Christian intelligence. It is much . . . if the charge does not cover Jesus himself, since it is conceivable that he shared the church's error. Taken all together, suggestions of this sort come tolerably near an impeachment of the providential order."⁹

Interestingly, Mackintosh's rejection of the excesses of liberalism came early in his career. By 1912, he had concluded that there was little in the quest, the Harnackian approach to the history of doctrine, or the history of religions school to guide christological reflection in the twentieth century. No wonder, then, that a little more than a decade later, Mackintosh enthusiastically welcomed Karl Barth's full-scale assault on the liberalism of the nineteenth century:

To a Humanism which understands itself, the ideas of God, sin and death have lost all importance, except as symbols which proved of temporary advantage in the past, Barth replies that there is a living God, and that God has spoken. With a volcanic vehemence – feeling that passion alone is suited to the occasion – he is endeavouring to draw the Christian mind of his generation back to the truth in which all other truth that counts is embraced, viz., that in the Bible God has uttered His absolute and ineffably gracious will.¹⁰

Mackintosh and Barth were thus of one mind in rejecting the radical and extreme tendencies of religious humanism and affirming traditional Christology from the New Testament on.

2 Features of Mackintosh's Theology

Mackintosh's christological and soteriological thinking was characterized by two primary themes, which, as we will see later, had a lasting impact on Torrance. They are his resolute emphasis on the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and his call to rethink our participation in the atonement, death, and resurrection of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

⁹ Mackintosh, "Liberal Conception," 417.

¹⁰ H.R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1937), 317–18.

2.1 The humanity of Christ

Mackintosh was troubled by the docetic character of traditional Reformed scholasticism and sought to account fully for the humanity of Jesus in his Christology. However, it was not strictly speaking an attempt to reconstruct Christology “from below,” as some have concluded. He did not, for example, subscribe to the notion that “high Christology” in the New Testament is late and that “low Christology” reflects the earliest strata. He did distinguish between “immediate utterances of faith” and the “transcendent implicates of faith” in his textbook *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, but this distinction does not correspond to either a high or low Christology.

The more germane issue for Mackintosh was the reality of God in Christ. The earliest church was confident, as Paul proclaimed, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. It is in this regard that we can appreciate Mackintosh’s development of the *kenosis* motif. Unlike much kenotic theorizing of the nineteenth century (particularly in Germany), Mackintosh understood *kenosis* primarily as a soteriological principle rather than a christological theory.

God in Christ, we believe, came down to the plane of suffering men that He might lift them up. Descending into poverty, shame, and weakness, the Lord was stripped of all credit, despoiled of every right, humbled to the very depths of social and historical ignominy, that in this self-abasement of God there might be found the redemption of man. . . . Hearts have thrilled to this message that Christ came from such a height and to such a depth! He took our fragility to be His own. So dear were human souls to God that He travelled far and stooped low that he might thus touch and raise the needy.¹¹

The *kenosis* motif, then, was not a theory that explained how the incarnation happened within the limitations of space and time and human personhood but was rather a declaration of divine

¹¹ Mackintosh, *Doctrine*, 466–67.

accommodation that underscored the unity of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ, a hitherto problematic theme in Reformed Christology.¹²

2.2 Participation in the atonement

Mackintosh was uncomfortable with both the Reformed scholastic approach to the atonement and the liberal attempts to replace it. The traditional penal substitution theory, with its notion of imputation of our sin to Christ and his righteousness to us, seemed to regard salvation as a forensic transaction rather than an actual event. At the same time, the moral influence theory lacked sufficient biblical warrant. Mackintosh was, however, cautiously appreciative of John McLeod Campbell's bold view, offered a generation earlier, of the atonement as a vicarious sacrifice.

For Mackintosh, the key to a proper understanding of the atonement was to be found in the biblical motif of the *unio mystica*, the believer's spiritual union with Christ through the Holy Spirit.¹³ The relationship between Christ and the Christian is a real spiritual relationship; the New Testament depicts it as an experiential reality, not symbolic or metaphorical. Mackintosh thus deepened the traditional view of penal substitution by viewing it from the perspective of our union with Christ rather than the other way around. And Mackintosh managed to keep Christ and the Christian together in such a way that an experiential reconciliation takes place on the objective basis of the historical crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J.T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 2.6.1. Donald Baillie's complete misreading of his teacher's position on *kenosis* is hard to understand. See *God Was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber, 1961), 96–97. Baillie's protégé John McIntyre unfortunately followed suit in *The Shape of Christology* (London: SCM, 1966), 133.

¹³ Mackintosh developed this in a programmatic essay, "The *Unio Mystica* as a Theological Conception," *The Expositor* 7, no. 7 (1909), 138–55; and in *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet, 1927).

3 Torrance and the Influence of Mackintosh

Summarizing Torrance's christological and soteriological thinking in a few paragraphs is risky; the way in which he frames his understanding of the person and work of Christ in the larger contexts of historical and ecumenical theology and the dialogue with natural science often leaves his readers feeling overwhelmed. But we can highlight a few key features of his thought that bear the distinctive marks of Mackintosh's influence.

3.1 *Incarnation in space and time*

Torrance deepened Mackintosh's emphasis on the centrality of the incarnation by thinking it out in the light of new insights into the nature of space and time suggested by modern science, particularly physics. Torrance joined modern physicists and philosophers of science in rejecting the receptacle view of space and time as an absolute framework independent of what is contained in it. With this assumption, God is restricted by space and time and must accommodate himself to its limits if he is to enter into it.

Instead, Torrance adopts a relational view of space and time, in which they are relative and dependent upon events occurring within their framework. On this view, God is the creator of space and time, which is contingent upon him, although he remains free of spatial and temporal necessity in relation to his creation. Thus space and time are created in such a way that they allow for his incarnate presence in the world without violating the limits of space and time and without violating God's freedom.

On the basis of this relational view of space and time, Torrance can speak of the incarnation as "the place in all space and time where God meets with man in the actualities of his human existence, and man meets with God and knows him in his own divine being."¹⁴ Although the incarnation is located in a specific time and place, it nevertheless has universal significance without disrupting the structures of space and time because it is God who meets humanity in Jesus Christ. This position reflects (albeit

¹⁴ T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1969). 75.

in a more satisfactory form) Mackintosh's understanding of *kenosis*, which is not a limitation of divinity in order to fit somehow into space and time but rather presupposes a dynamic understanding of the relationship between God and creation.¹⁵

3.2 Incarnation in history

Torrance inherited his teacher's allergic reaction to docetic tendencies in modern Christology. The incarnation is not a metaphor but rather God's arrival within history, in particular, in the context of God's historical interaction with Israel. The Old Testament provides a twofold context for the incarnation. On the one hand, the Old Testament reveals the pattern of divine interaction with humanity. In loving-kindness, God moved ever closer to Israel, which in turn led Israel to become increasingly rebellious and unfaithful.¹⁶ On the one hand, in a mysterious and paradoxical way, Israel's rejection of her Messiah becomes her salvation, since Christ has taken that rejection upon himself and thrust himself into the void of Israel's lostness. On the other hand, the Old Testament prepares the way for the incarnation by providing the conceptual tools with which the incarnation and atonement are to be understood. Its language and concepts are not in themselves the final form of divine revelation, yet without them we are unable to grasp adequately the fulfillment of God's promise to be God with his people.

3.3 The unity of the natures in Christ

Although Torrance was a leading advocate of Reformed theology, he moved away from Reformed scholasticism on several points, including the older concern for the sharp distinctions between the divinity and humanity of Christ. Instead, following Mackintosh, Torrance favored a

¹⁵ I have argued at length in *Reformulating Reformed Theology* that Donald Baillie badly misunderstood his teacher on this point, imputing in *God Was in Christ* to Mackintosh a view of *kenosis* that reflects a receptacle view of space and time.

¹⁶ T.F. Torrance, "Israel and the Incarnation," in *Conflict and Agreement in the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959), vol. 1 :291: "The self-giving of God in holy love not only revealed Israel's sin, but intensified it."

renewed emphasis on the unity of the natures on soteriological grounds. Against Harnack and other historians of early Christianity, Torrance argued that the *homoousion* does not represent the hellenization of the gospel but rather the evangelization of Greek thought, the transformation of Greek concepts to serve the gospel.¹⁷ The ultimate significance of the term *homoousion* for Torrance is soteriological, since the unity of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ ensure that the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are really divine acts. Unless Christ and God are of one being, Jesus's words of forgiveness are merely human words without any connection to divine pardon. In words that are strongly reminiscent of Mackintosh, Torrance wrote: "Then Jesus Christ, even in the midst of our death which he made his own, even in the midst of our betrayal of him, is the Word and Hand of God stretched out to save us, the very heart of God Almighty beating with the pulse of infinite love within the depth of our lost humanity in order to vanquish and do away with everything that separates man from God."¹⁸ The soteriological significance of God in Christ – their essential identity – and its implications for the Christian understanding of God were central themes in Torrance's theology throughout his career, as they were for his teacher.

3.4 Union with Christ

Without a doubt, Mackintosh's understanding of the *unio mystica* had a profound impact on Torrance. Like Mackintosh, Torrance worked christologically from the unity of divine and human natures in Christ and also soteriologically from the spiritual union between Christ and the Christian. But while Mackintosh tended to view union with Christ in terms of the individual believer, Torrance expanded its emphasis to include its ecclesiological significance as well. Through the Spirit, the church is founded on the person and ministry of the historical Jesus; his career of preaching the kingdom, healing, and forgiving is not merely an example

¹⁷ T.F. Torrance, introduction to *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), xii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xv.

for the church; it is the reality in which the church shares.¹⁹ Torrance never tired of insisting on the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in mediating Christ to Christians in an ecclesial context: "In coming upon the Church the Holy Spirit constitutes it the Body of Christ on earth in union with its Head, the risen and ascended Lord."²⁰ In this way, Torrance was able to draw ecclesiology into the sphere of the incarnation and atonement even more thoroughly than Mackintosh had been able to do.

4 Conclusion

In this brief article it has been possible only to highlight the most obvious features of Mackintosh's theology in their relation to Torrance's theology. While Barth was a far more comprehensive influence on Torrance, it was the key christological and soteriological insights he learned from Mackintosh that enable him to move beyond Barth in those areas. It is beyond our scope to determine whether Torrance was a Barthian. But we can say with confidence, however, that he carried forward his New College teacher's most vital concerns until the end of the century in which both flourished.

¹⁹ T.F. Torrance, "The Foundation of the Church: Union with Christ through the Spirit," in *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 204–8.

²⁰ T.F. Torrance, "Come, Creator Spirit, for the Renewal of Worship and Witness," in *Theology in Reconstruction* (see note 19), 249.

TORRANCE AS A SCOTTISH THEOLOGIAN

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ABSTRACT: *While the theology of T.F. Torrance is properly recognized for its catholic and ecumenical range, less attention has been devoted to the importance of its Scottish sources. These are significant not only for understanding Torrance's development but for an appreciation of the distinctive setting of his mature theology. Attention is devoted here to his Edinburgh teachers, most notably H.R. Mackintosh, to his various ecclesiastical commitments and to several key works on the history of Scottish theology. These shaped inter alia his reading of the Reformed tradition, his reception of Barth, his account of church and sacraments, his understanding of our union with Christ as an objective and subjective reality, and his mature work on theological science. By setting these in their Scottish context, a stronger contextual reading of his work is enabled.*

Tom Torrance was a Scottish theologian. Of course, this is a truism if one considers his upbringing in Lanarkshire from the age of fourteen, his education in Arts and Divinity in Edinburgh, his distinguished ministry in the Church of Scotland, and his subsequent academic career in the Faculty of Divinity at New College, Edinburgh – where he took up a position in 1950 and, after almost thirty years of teaching, retired in 1979. It is significant that, apart from a brief spell at Auburn Seminary, he chose to remain in Scotland throughout his academic career. Apparently, he had attractive offers from Basel and Princeton but he remained in Edinburgh despite his frustration with aspects of life at New College, not least the public attack upon his work by his colleague James Barr in *Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961).

Nevertheless, in most of what has been written about Torrance too little has been made of his Scottish context. This is hardly surprising. Born in China to missionary parents, he was a pupil of Karl Barth and, with Geoffrey Bromiley, translated the *Church Dogmatics*. He was also instrumental in the translation of Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries*, participated extensively in ecumenical dialogue – especially with the Greek Orthodox Church – and wrote frequently on many of the leading thinkers in the history of the church: the Apostolic Fathers, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, Duns Scotus, Calvin and Barth, among many others. His theological writings are replete with references to theologians from across the classical traditions of the church. On one occasion, when asked whom among modern theologians he found to be most helpful, he replied, "Athanasius." Throughout his life, he was a committed ecumenist and deplored all narrow nationalist sentiment. Rejoicing in his birthplace, he also celebrated gladly the Anglican influence of his mother and wife. While Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, he aroused public controversy by attacking some strains within Scottish nationalism. His output obviously reflects global, catholic and ecumenical influences, and yet it also evinces a more local milieu reflecting a rootedness in and steady devotion to the traditions and writers of Scotland. Attention to these influences may enable a better positioning of his work, while also facilitating clearer interpretation and more accurate lines of criticism.¹

Studies in Scottish Theology

Torrance's work indeed contains a very substantial body of material belonging to the study of Scottish theology. In addition to other works discussed below, one might cite the following:

¹ For further details of Torrance's life and development, see the studies by Alister McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) and Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance; Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

1 *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959)

A compilation of the most influential catechisms used in the Church of Scotland since the Reformation, this volume also includes a substantial introduction from Torrance. Here he outlines both his theological method and central doctrinal emphases. While including the Genevan and Heidelberg Catechisms, *The School of Faith* also contains more indigenous works, especially John Craig's Catechism of 1581. These are compared favorably with the later Westminster theology, which Torrance attacks with typical ferocity. He assails, for example, Westminster's abstraction of the doctrine of predestination from the person of Jesus Christ and its deficient doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which leads to a deleterious re-centering of the human subject. This tendency to set the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century against its later federal developments in the seventeenth century is a recurrent theme in Torrance.

There can be little doubt that the conception of God in the Westminster theology suffers from some of the serious faults in the pre-Reformation teaching. Its 'God' appears to lack the kindness, humanity, familiarity of the 'God' of the Reformation, for tendencies towards impersonality, abstraction and even harshness are to be noted in the Westminster conception of God, although in the Catechisms there is a grand sense of the Holiness, Majesty, and Faithfulness of God coupled with that of his mercy to the elect.²

2 *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* (London: James Clarke, 1958)

The sermons of Robert Bruce (c1554–1631) were known to Torrance through his family upbringing and then under the tutelage of H.R. Mackintosh at New College. Preached in the Kirk of St. Giles in 1589, they rank among the finest devotional literature in Scottish theology. In his 1958 volume, Torrance provided a fresh English translation from the original Scots. It is not difficult to understand the appeal of Bruce for

² *The School of Faith: The Catechism of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), lxxix.

Torrance. Bruce's exposition of the sacrament is evangelical yet almost mystical. Christ gives himself to us in the sacrament, the whole Christ both flesh and blood. In the conjunction of sign and thing signified, the grace and mercy of God are sealed for us. Bruce writes, "In this union Christ Jesus, who is the thing signified, is as truly delivered to the increase of our spiritual nourishment as the signs are given and delivered to the body for our temporal nourishment."³ Torrance discerns here an account of the saving and sanctifying union with Christ, an objective and subjective reality, which is the hallmark of Calvin and the early Scottish reformers.

3 Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996)

The last of his productions, this book represents the late flowering of Torrance's lifelong interest in the theologians of Scotland. Sympathetic treatments of Knox, Leighton and McLeod Campbell are offered, while the polemic against Westminster theology and its Latin antecedents is sustained. This is the most substantial monograph on Scottish theology to appear for a generation, and it reveals Torrance as a scholar with intimate knowledge of some quite obscure episodes and writers in the Scottish church. It is interesting to compare his work in this volume with the output of the Church of Scotland's Special Commission on Baptism, which Torrance convened for a decade from 1953. The Commission produced a series of weighty reports largely reflecting Torrance's own distinctive doctrine of baptism. In particular, the reports of 1958–59 deliver a careful analysis of a series of key Scottish theologians in historical sequence from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century. These reports include several thinkers and themes, which would reappear almost forty years later in Torrance's 1996 study.⁴

³ *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* (London: James Clarke, 1958), 106.

⁴ *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1958 & 1959), pp. 689–762; pp. 631–661. For a critical analysis of the work of the Special Commission, see David F. Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Critical Studies* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 301–308.

Finally, in assessing his own output, we should not overlook Torrance's important contribution in founding and co-editing (with J.K.S. Reid) the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, which from 1948 provided an outlet for important scholarship on Scottish theology. While the journal quickly established itself as a leading international periodical, it has provided throughout its history a steady focus on local and indigenous traditions.

Scottish Influences

In examining several of the characteristic themes of Torrance's theology, we can discern more proximate influences: his teachers and colleagues, writers belonging to earlier periods of Scottish theology whom he often valorized, and the socio-political context of the mid-twentieth century Church of Scotland.

Take, for example, the dominant stress upon "union with Christ," which governs Torrance's thinking about the hypostatic union, the vicarious work of Christ, and the significance of the sacramental actions of the church. Much of this can be traced to the influence of his teacher, H.R. Mackintosh (1870–1936). Torrance never tired of extolling Mackintosh and his significance, and on revisiting his work one can see why. Mackintosh was deeply immersed both in the Calvinist traditions of the Free Church of Scotland but also in the kenotic Christology and liberalism that had taken hold of much German and British thought in his day. His theology sought to repair much of what he found lacking in these, and his proposals surrounding the union of the believer with Christ were central to this strategy. This enabled him to overcome, as he saw it, the harsh effects of exclusively forensic approaches to the work of Christ, while also escaping the moralism and historicism that he detected in liberalism. In an early essay Mackintosh defended the "*unio mystica*" against the standard charges of liberal Protestantism,⁵ while in his mature work on Christian forgiveness he writes of how "all Christianity comes down to two companion

⁵ H.R. Mackintosh, "The Unio Mystica as a Theological Concept," *Expositor*, 7, (1909), pp. 138–155. See also Robert R. Redman Jr., *Reformulating Reformed Theology: Jesus Christ in the Theology of Hugh Ross Mackintosh* (Lanham, MA: University of America Press, 1997), 183–200.

truths – God in Christ for us, and we in Christ for God. It is part of Christian experience at its highest, that what may perhaps be designated an ‘organic’ connection is felt to subsist between Christ and His people.”⁶ While Torrance expounded this idea in closer contact with the theology of the hypostatic union that he discerned in the Fathers, his theological convictions never strayed far from this dominant theme about our union with Christ, which he imbibed from Mackintosh’s lectures and writings. Theologies which threatened this were roundly criticized for dealing in abstractions, for resorting to logico-deductive terms that prescinded from this central conviction. Torrance’s relentless criticism of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the subordinate standard of the Scottish Kirk, must be seen in this light.⁷

The doctrine of union with Christ is also evident in Torrance’s strong sacramentalism, which places him at the Catholic end of the Reformed spectrum. Again, we can see this emphasis emerging from a distinctively Scottish context. Torrance was committed to the work of the Scottish Church Society, which was founded in the late Victorian period by leading figures such as William Milligan, Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism in Aberdeen, whose work on the significance of the ascended Christ in worship Torrance frequently commended.⁸ The goals of the Scottish Church Society included a more Catholic reading of the Reformed tradition that sought liturgical renewal, frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and a Calvinist (as opposed to a Zwinglian) account of sacramental grace and the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements. It is this configuration of influences that enabled Torrance to move beyond Karl Barth in some important respects. In particular, his commitment to the ministry of the ascended Christ made present by the Holy Spirit led to a stronger ecclesiology, sacramentalism and eschatology than we find in Barth himself. This is apparent in works such as *Royal Priesthood*, as well

⁶ *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet, 1927), 223–4.

⁷ For Torrance’s assessment of Mackintosh, see H.R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 71–94.

⁸ See William Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord* (London: Macmillan, 1894).

as in those mild criticisms he ventures of Barth. In recalling their last conversation, Torrance wrote,

I then ventured to express my qualms about his account of the ascended Jesus Christ in CD IV/3, in which Christ seemed to be swallowed up in the transcendent Light and Spirit of God, so that the humanity of the risen Jesus appeared to be displaced by what he had called "the humanity of God" in his turning toward us. I had confessed to being astonished not to find at that point in Barth's exposition a careful account of the priestly ministry of the ascended Jesus in accordance with the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews about the heavenly intercession of the ascended Christ.⁹

An indicative text here is the revised version of Witherspoon and Kirkpatrick's *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, which Torrance produced with his ministerial colleague and friend, Ronald Selby Wright. Originally produced in 1920 as part of the Scoto-Catholic movement, this book was an attempt to develop a particular strand of the Reformed tradition that it identified as catholic, and therefore closer to Roman Catholic and Anglican doctrine than some evangelical commentators would hold. Throughout the 1950s, Torrance was involved in a series of bilateral and multilateral theological dialogues, from which many of his own contributions were later gathered into the two volumes of *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*. In 1957, he was a supporter of the so-called Bishops' Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Had this been approved it would have introduced bishops into presbyteries, thus preparing the way for the union of the Church of Scotland with the Church of England. Despite the support of Torrance, John Baillie and other leading churchmen of the day, the proposals were eventually defeated after a campaign by

⁹ "My Interaction with Karl Barth," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, (ed.) Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 62. Torrance's theology of the priestly ministry of the ascended Christ informs his treatment of ordination in *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1955). The book is dedicated "To the Church of England, the church of my mother and my wife, and to the Church of Scotland, the church of my father, in the earnest prayer that they may soon be one." A second edition was published in 1993.

the Scottish Daily Express, which championed opposition to episcopacy as vital to Scottish identity. Not surprisingly, Torrance was deeply suspicious of Scottish nationalism thereafter.

By 1960, Torrance not only recognized the importance of a new edition of *The Manual of Church Doctrine* but was actually willing to amend and add new sections to it. A research student somewhere needs to compare the Torrance edition with the original to ascertain what he changed and added with Selby Wright, and why they chose to do so. But there is clearly an explicit commitment to a strong sacramentalism in the revision, not least in Torrance's addition of a new chapter on the sacraments of the Old Testament – circumcision and Passover – that foreshadow baptism and the Lord's Supper. "The Sacraments," we read, "result from the fact that Salvation operates by Incarnation; and they import that our relation to Christ is a living relation embracing our whole nature, bodily as well as spiritual."¹⁰ This sacramental theology with its focus on our union with Christ is supported with a range of excerpts from Calvin and other Reformation writers, including Robert Bruce.

By the mid-1960s Torrance was intensely engaged with his theological science, a project that explored the methodological relations between the natural sciences and Christian theology. In many ways, this took him beyond anything that Barth had attempted, although Torrance remained anxious to show the continuity of this work with that of his Basel teacher. In other respects, his work in theological science developed earlier convictions that owe something to the influence of Daniel Lamont, another of his teachers. For Lamont, there was important apologetic work to be done in showing the consistency of Christian faith with the best insights of other disciplines. Yet this work took place from within faith – Lamont uses the analogy of viewing the stained glass windows from inside rather than outside the cathedral walls – and it proceeded from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In this respect, the subjectivity and

¹⁰ H.J. Wotherspoon & J.M. Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine according to the Church of Scotland*, revised and enlarged by T.F. Torrance and R. Selby Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960) 15.

initiative of God had to be respected. Some of this adumbrates Torrance's later work.¹¹

An important influence in Torrance's mature work on theological science was the philosophy of John Macmurray, his colleague in Edinburgh. Torrance seems an unlikely ally of Macmurray. Yet his writings from the 1960s onwards are replete with references to his older philosophical colleague. These reveal a borrowing from Macmurray's work that has seldom been properly recognized by recent studies of Torrance.¹² This is particularly evident in his 1969 publication on *Theological Science*. The constant tilting at the deleterious patterns of dualist thought is redolent of Macmurray's work, particularly the subject-object split. The claim, presented tirelessly, that the mode of knowledge must be appropriate to the nature of the object as it discloses itself to us, is drawn largely from Macmurray albeit with significant input also from Michael Polanyi. Torrance writes, "It is Professor Macmurray's contention that knowledge in action is our primary knowledge, for the knowing Self is an agent having his existence in time where he is active both in pre-scientific and in scientific knowledge."¹³

Torrance goes on to assert that a new logical form of personal activity "may be developed in which the theory of knowledge occupies a subordinate place within actual knowledge, and in which verification involves commitment in action."¹⁴ In theological terms, this means for Torrance that the knowledge of God is always and only shaped in a life of faith and obedience to the divine Word that becomes incarnate. The strongly realist cast of this theology is here reinforced by epistemological arguments that draw from Macmurray. It is also linked to an anthropology that insists upon the embodiedness and sociality of human life, themes

¹¹ See Daniel Lamont, *Christ and the World of Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1934).

¹² This applies also to the teaching of his brother James B. Torrance who had studied as an undergraduate philosophy student under Macmurray in Edinburgh and later held the Chair of Systematic Theology in Aberdeen from 1976–89.

¹³ *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 3-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

that are strongly Hebraic and that also find support in Macmurray's writings.¹⁵

Commentators on Torrance's theological science have often stressed the influence upon his thought of patristic writers, especially Athanasius and John Philoponos, of John Calvin and the other Reformers, and of modern scientific thinkers such as Clerk Maxwell and Einstein. But if this reading of his writings on theological science is correct, then we have again to reckon with more local influences, including that of John Macmurray. Torrance himself offered a glowing eulogy to Macmurray after his death in 1975, describing him as the "quiet giant of modern philosophy, the most original and creative of savants and social thinkers in the English-speaking world."¹⁶

Conclusion

The institutional shaping and proximate influences of his Scottish heritage upon Torrance's work will need to be taken into account by scholars seeking to place him more clearly in historical context. This is not merely a matter of the location and place of his work, nor is it an attempt to discern a partisan national identity in his work that he rightly would have deplored – the currency of theological ideas must surely be ecumenical and international. Nevertheless, a reading of his output in its Scottish context offers a significant critical opportunity for the reasons following.

Partly as a result of its sheer erudition, Torrance's work often presents a somewhat timeless reading of the Christian tradition with allusions gathered from early and modern sources. At times, it is as if Athanasius, Scotus, Calvin and Barth were all affirming and denying the same things by being transported into twentieth century conversations. And partly as a result of its comprehensive scope, Torrance's theology comes as a

¹⁵ See David Fergusson, *John Macmurray in a Nutshell* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Quoted by Jack Costello in David Fergusson & Nigel Dower (eds.) *John Macmurray: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 34.

complete package that is difficult to unwrap and sift. Students often used to remark on this.

His theology is so powerful, systematic and wide-ranging that one is confronted with a stark choice: either to submit to it in its entirety or to be cast out as a radical dissident unable to subscribe to its fundamental tenets. This makes it harder to assimilate critically, to revise and adapt, to offer a sympathetic reading of its strengths and weaknesses as we are taught to do elsewhere in our academic training. The force of Torrance's personality coupled with the magisterial quality of his work make it quite hard for students to be appreciative, while also maintaining a critical distance that enables them to develop their own lines of enquiry and distinctive contributions to the problems and challenges facing the church in their own generation. But a more contextual reading of his work – the originating impulses, the influential figures, the formative movements, the particular controversies in which he was embroiled – all these might help us to see better those ways in which his work might be challenged, criticized and appropriated in our own day. None of this is in any way to diminish his significance. He now takes his place among the great theologians of the Scottish tradition, many of them among his own heroes – Scotus, Mair, Knox, Bruce, Rutherford, McLeod Campbell and Mackintosh – and he would be proud to stand alongside them. Indeed, it is hard to think of another theologian in the history of New College whose work rivals the spiritual force, intellectual erudition and theological energy of Tom Torrance.

**TRIBUTE: Professor George Hunsinger
Named Recipient of 2010 Karl Barth Prize**

On 17 June 2010, the Union of Protestant Churches (UEK) in the Evangelical Church of Germany announced Professor George Hunsinger as the recipient of the 2010 Karl Barth Prize, an award in recognition of exceptional theological scholarship and ecclesial witness exemplifying the spirit of Karl Barth's own work and witness. In the announcement, the UEK praises Professor Hunsinger for his "exemplary theological thinking, for his political testimony and his ecclesial teaching in the sense of a truly 'generous orthodoxy,' a world-oriented interpretation and practice of Church Dogmatics."

Professor Hunsinger is an international authority on Barth's theology, and his books are regarded as essential reading for students of the Basel master. Hunsinger, who is a member of the editorial board for *Participatio: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, was acclaimed by Torrance himself as "one of the ablest and most perceptive theologians in the world and the finest theologian of his generation in the United States."

Professor Hunsinger has also worked assiduously for the cause of ecumenical theology, negotiating unity through appeal to the shared Nicene heritage of the Christian churches. His commitment to the life of the ecclesial community is also reflected in his contribution to the crafting of the new Presbyterian catechism. In recognising Professor Hunsinger's achievements, the UEK highlighted his steadfast political testimony and action. For Professor Hunsinger, political action flows from theological commitment.

**GEORGE HUNSINGER, *THE EUCHARIST AND ECUMENISM*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 350 pp.)**

**Review by John P. Burgess
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George Hunsinger, Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, is well-known to North American theologians for his penetrating work on Karl Barth's theology. Hunsinger has also made important contributions to his denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including service as principal writer for a new catechism. More recently, Hunsinger has spoken boldly to wider American society by organizing the National Religious Campaign against Torture. In his most recent book, Hunsinger makes a significant contribution to ecumenical dialogue, offering proposals that he believes can bring divided churches closer to eucharistic fellowship.

Hunsinger's argument has four parts. In part 1, Hunsinger retrieves the patristic notion of "traselementation" to try to break the historical impasse over how Christ is present in the eucharistic elements. In part 2, Hunsinger argues that language of eucharistic sacrifice need not be church-dividing – and indeed is essential for keeping the Christian faith rooted in the Paschal history of Israel – but must be qualified by a proper understanding of Christ's agency. Part 3 explores issues of Eucharist and ministry, and how the priority of Christ's ministry removes any suggestion that the status or work of the priest supplements what Christ is doing at the table. Part 4 demonstrates the significance of the Eucharist for Christian social responsibility and offers a spirited defense of how Nicene Christianity, contrary to its critics, has sustained practices of peace and justice both within the church and in the church's witness to society.

Hunsinger writes primarily to a Reformed audience, urging it to reconsider positions that were forged in reaction to medieval Catholicism.

At the same time, he hopes that Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, and members of other Reformation traditions will find his proposals acceptable. He helpfully differentiates “enclave theology” (which argues for the superiority of one Christian tradition over others) and “academic liberal theology” (which in the name of modernism and historical consciousness rejects all confessional norms) from “ecumenical theology,” which asks every major Christian tradition to open itself to insights from other branches of the Christian family, without violating its own sense of theological integrity.

Hunsinger is convinced that church unity is so central to Christian faith that every Christian tradition must rethink or even abandon church-dividing views because they inevitably set up false contrasts and fail to respect the richness of the faith, which exceeds any one Christian tradition yet comes to expression in each. He is nevertheless careful to insist that the search for church unity be more than just a commitment to civil conversation or an appeal to some supposedly common human experience of the divine. Church unity can only be grounded in Nicene theology (specifically, Chalcedonian Christology, although he acknowledges that a longer book could also develop the trinitarian grounding of his arguments). The goal is not organizational unity for its own sake but rather greater faithfulness to the work and person of Jesus Christ, as known according to the witness of the Scriptures and the church fathers.

Hunsinger carefully examines the documents of key ecumenical dialogues, insightfully explicates major theological figures of the past, and draws from an impressive range of twentieth-century and contemporary theological conversation partners. As in his earlier work, he consistently demonstrates a spirit of “generous orthodoxy.” One of his key moves is to demonstrate resonances in the eucharistic theologies of the Reformed and the Orthodox (especially by way of Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann). Because the Roman Catholic Church finds the Orthodox understanding of the Eucharist acceptable, a Reformed-Orthodox convergence should help Catholics and Reformed (and presumably other Reformation traditions) draw closer to eucharistic fellowship. Another of Hunsinger’s key moves is to draw on T.F. Torrance’s Christology, including

Torrance's affirmation of transelementation, his insistence on the unity of Christ's person and benefits, and his understanding of the asymmetrical but real union of the living, resurrected Christ and the church.

Only Catholic and Orthodox theologians will be able to properly judge whether or not Hunsinger's proposals are acceptable to their traditions, but there is no question that the Reformed will benefit greatly from his insights. Especially persuasive is his call for a renewed understanding of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Carefully explicating medieval and Reformation positions, Hunsinger makes clear that the eucharistic sacrifice is not a sacramental reenactment or repetition of Christ's death. Nor is it a priestly act that merits grace or whose efficacy depends on communicants' piety. Rather, the eucharistic sacrifice is Christ's act alone, and Christ does not merely invite us to remember it but also enables us to participate in it because he unites us to himself and all that he has done. Says Hunsinger, Christ's "eucharistic presence, under the aspects of his body and blood, includes the real presence of his expiatory sacrifice" (176). The continuing benefits of Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice on Calvary belong together with the reality of his continuing personal presence to his people as both the crucified and risen Lord. Following Torrance, Hunsinger also argues that the eucharistic sacrifice is a trinitarian act. As we participate in Christ's sacrifice, the Spirit lifts us up as a living sacrifice before the Father.

Hunsinger's discussion of Eucharist and ethics will be of special interest to Reformed theologians. Although these chapters do not always pick up directly on the eucharistic theology that Hunsinger has developed in part 1, they nevertheless demonstrate the integral relationship among theology, worship, and moral practice. A richer eucharistic theology will contribute to a deepening of the church's liturgical life, and this eucharistic theology and practice will inevitably deepen the capacity of Christians to live out their faith in the world.

At the same time, Hunsinger's discussion will likely raise questions for Reformed churches in three areas: (1) the relationship of eucharistic theology and practice, (2) the relationship of the Eucharist to church order, and (3) the relationship of the Eucharist to other means of grace

entrusted to the church. In each case, I wish to demonstrate the significance of Hunsinger's challenge to Reformed churches, as well as particular points at which they may wish to hear more from him. I discuss the first point in greater detail and then turn more briefly to the other two.

Eucharistic Theology and Practice

Liturgical theologians remind us that theology and practice interact in complex ways. New theological understandings can bring about necessary revision of established church practice, and church practice may either block or make possible Christians' acceptance of new theological insights. The church's theology is not only its official doctrines but also – and sometimes more importantly – the functional theology that the church expresses in its actual worship of God or witness to the world. (For a very helpful summary of these issues, see Martha L. Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology*, 2008.) Hunsinger recognizes these complex dynamics, and church leaders will need to explore them further if his proposals are to find traction on the ground. A glance at how Hunsinger develops his notion of transelementation demonstrates both the practical opportunities and difficulties.

Hunsinger argues that there is a *koinonia* between the eucharistic elements and the body and blood of the resurrected Jesus. This *koinonia* need not be explained with philosophical categories, such as medieval Catholicism attempted with its notion of transubstantiation. Rather, the transelementation of the eucharistic bread and wine is best understood in analogy to the relationship of Christ's humanity and divinity as defined by Chalcedon. On the one hand, the bread remains bread, the wine, wine – just as Christ's two natures remain distinct. On the other, within the context of the eucharistic celebration the elements become instruments of the Spirit and offer us communion with the living, resurrected Christ – just as those who had fellowship with Jesus on earth experienced communion with him not only as a man but also as the God revealed to Israel. (Hunsinger also notes the limits of the analogy – only the two natures of Christ are hypostatically united.)

HUNSINGER BOOK REVIEW

Hunsinger skillfully traces the origins of the term *traselementation* in patristic thinking and its appropriation by Peter Vermigli at the time of the Reformation. Hunsinger shows that for Vermigli, in an analogy also known to Thomas Cranmer,

the image which illustrated traselementation was that of an iron rod thrust into the fire. Just as the iron was transformed by its participation in the fire, so was the consecrated element transformed by its sacramental union with Christ's flesh. . . . Just as the iron did not cease to be iron, or the fire fire, so the bread did not cease to be bread, or Christ's flesh his flesh. In the mystery of their sacramental union they formed a unique distinction-in-unity and unity-in-distinction. (41)

Hunsinger then demonstrates that traselementation is congenial to Calvin's eucharistic thought, even though Calvin himself does not use the term. Hunsinger also shows that traselementation should be acceptable to other Christian traditions that affirm a real encounter between humans and the living, resurrected Christ in and through the meal, as made possible by God's Spirit. Through a careful rereading of Thomas Aquinas, Hunsinger even opens up new possibilities for a Reformed-Catholic convergence in eucharistic theology. Hunsinger argues that the notion of traselementation might enable the Reformed to accept a qualified understanding of transubstantiation, since Aquinas made clear that the presence of Christ in and through the elements does not violate his local presence at the right hand of God.

Having made his theological case, Hunsinger demonstrates that traselementation has practical consequences for the church's eucharistic liturgies and liturgical gestures. One of his concrete proposals is for an epiclesis in which the church prays for the Spirit to bless not only those about to communicate but also the very elements of bread and wine. In addition, he demonstrates how traselementation could support gestures of revering the elements, at least during the eucharistic celebration and perhaps even after it ends (as in reserving the elements for the sick).

I fear, however, that Hunsinger's proposals, as necessary as they are theologically and liturgically, will find limited resonance among the

Reformed, given their churches' actual eucharistic practice: infrequent Communion, abbreviated liturgies, lack of preparation for receiving the elements, and a perceived time crunch on Communion Sundays. The problem is that North American Reformed churches are largely Zwinglian in their practice, with the meal as remembrance and thanksgiving but not as means of grace whereby the Spirit lifts us up to the risen Christ. Hunsinger himself acknowledges that he may be better able to convince the high sacramental churches of his position than his own Zwinglian Reformed brothers and sisters, no matter that their churches' official teaching is often closer to Calvin (and Hunsinger).

A richer eucharistic theology and practice somehow depend on, even as they point to, a deeper experience – or what previous generations used to call a deeper *piety* – of the Lord's Supper. It is striking that Calvin sometimes steps away from theological explication of the Lord's Supper and instead offers sheer confession of the mystery that he experiences when he receives the Eucharist:

For, whenever this matter is discussed, when I have tried to say all, I feel that I have as yet said little in proportion to its worth. And although my mind can think beyond what my tongue can utter, yet even my mind is conquered and overwhelmed by the greatness of the thing. Therefore, nothing remains but to break forth in wonder at this mystery, which plainly neither the mind is able to conceive nor the tongue able to express. (*Institutes* 4.7)

I am overwhelmed by the depth of this mystery, and with Paul am not ashamed to acknowledge in wonder my ignorance. . . . Let us therefore labor more to feel Christ living in us, than to discover the nature of that communion. (*Commentary on Ephesians* 5.32)

The challenge for Reformed churches is how to recapture the divine mystery of the Eucharist. Hunsinger's theological proposals make a critical contribution to a new piety of the Lord's Supper. But, paradoxically, for his proposals to make sense on the ground, Reformed churches will also have to make the actual celebration of the Eucharist more central to their life again. They must pray rich eucharistic liturgies (recent denominational

worship books provide good models) and perhaps even explore liturgical gestures that do not come naturally to them.

Here Hunsinger touches on tough questions that church leaders must think through further. How might the Reformed show respect to transelementated bread and wine in a way that resists what the Reformed have traditionally viewed as superstitious adoration and yet recognizes the elements' unique status? The eucharistic piety of high sacramental churches includes gestures of bowing, crossing, and prostration before the consecrated elements. What might the Reformed learn from this piety? Where can such practices help us acknowledge the mystery of the Eucharist, and where will we necessarily raise critical questions about them?

Similar issues arise around the question of how to dispose of eucharistic elements after Communion, or of how to respond to accidental spilling of the elements during the eucharistic service. Hunsinger argues that the notion of transelementation provides for Christian unity while allowing individual traditions appropriate latitude in these questions. But on the ground it is not always clear when divergent eucharistic practices are a matter of adiaphora and when, by contrast, they express divergent theologies that make eucharistic unity elusive. (Anyone who has seen what happens when the elements are accidentally spilled in a Russian Orthodox Church will know what I am talking about. An emergency situation ensues that is scarcely imaginable to a Calvinist, let alone a Zwinglian.) Theology shapes practice, but practice also shapes theology, and the Reformed (as well as other churches) will want further discussion of the implications of Hunsinger's proposals from both angles.

Eucharist and Church Order

A second major area for reflection relates to Hunsinger's proposal that the Reformed rethink elements of eucharistic ministry. Specifically, he says, the Reformed should require ordination in the apostolic succession that Catholics and Orthodox (and some Protestants) claim to have maintained, recognize the unique authority of the pope, and affirm three ordained offices: bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Hunsinger rightly notes

that these issues have proved even more contentious and intractable in ecumenical dialogues than questions of “real presence” or eucharistic sacrifice, and his own proposals in this area are more tentative than elsewhere.

In brief, Hunsinger argues that the cause of church unity should take priority over organizational distinctives that can be modified or abandoned without violating Nicene trinitarian theology or Chalcedonian Christology. Not only would the Reformed have to make major concessions; but also for their part, the high sacramental churches (and especially Rome) would have to agree: (1) that the need for ordination in the apostolic succession neither disqualify the ordination of those who currently serve without it, nor reduce their churches to defective ecclesial communities; (2) that the Christian churches make decisions in a conciliar manner, with the bishop of Rome leading by example of service rather than by universal jurisdiction; and (3) that each of the historic three offices be open to women as well as men, and indeed to any whom the church sets apart for these functions, for all Christians are called by virtue of their baptism to participate in Christ’s ministry.

Hunsinger’s proposals about eucharistic unity will help the Reformed take his proposals for church unity more seriously than they might otherwise. Yet, as Hunsinger himself acknowledges, obstacles remain. Reformed churches will likely want a fuller rationale than Hunsinger is able to provide here for just why the laying on of hands in a (supposedly) unbroken apostolic succession; or the unique status of the pope as the head of the church; or three ordained offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon are more biblically warranted and theologically responsible than other historical patterns of ordination and ministry. Of particular concern to the Reformed will be the status of the ruling elder.

Eucharist and Means of Grace

The third area for reflection can be stated more briefly. In taking steps toward church unity by emphasizing the Eucharist, Hunsinger necessarily pays less attention to the role of the church’s other ministries in setting forth the living Christ (although in part 3 he does offer insightful

reflections on how Word and sacrament complement each other). Reformed churches will likely want to know more from Hunsinger about the place of the Eucharist alongside and in the context of these other ministries. The Reformed tradition has emphasized not only Eucharist, and not only Word and sacrament, but also prayer and practices of disciplined life in community (what Bonhoeffer called “life together”). Each is an essential instrument whereby the Spirit deepens our life in Christ. Each is a form of church ministry that draws us more deeply into life in Christ, just as each calls us to witness to him as Lord and Savior.

All three of these points – eucharistic theology and practice, the Eucharist and church order, and the Eucharist and other means of grace – ultimately raise the question of what makes the church the church. Here the ecumenical challenge squarely stands before us again. Catholics and Orthodox ask Protestants to revise their understanding not only of the Eucharist and ordained office but also of the very nature of the church. Is it true, as John Henry Newman claimed, that the Catholic Church with its development of doctrine has best preserved the theological legacy of the early church? Or is it true, as Alexander Schmemmann believed, that the Orthodox churches have best preserved the gospel by means of their rich and ancient liturgies? Or did the Reformers recover essential gospel truths that Catholics and Orthodox continue to obscure? Such questions move us beyond Eucharist to discussion of Marian devotion, the cult of the saints, prayers for the dead, and doctrines of justification and sanctification, among other matters.

These areas for further discussion nevertheless confirm just how rich and provocative Hunsinger’s presentation is. Catholics, Orthodox, and Reformed alike will learn from his arguments even as they wrestle with them. And more: his irenic spirit, nuanced analyses, and commitment to a generous orthodoxy teach all of us something about the possibilities of an ecumenical theology that brings glory to God and invites different churches into deeper conversation – and even *koinonia* – with each other.