

Foreword

T. F. Torrance's lectures were exhilarating. In the early seventies, he, as Professor of Christian Dogmatics, and his colleague, John McIntyre, the Professor of Divinity, lectured to the General Theology class, the first-year class for B.D. students at New College, Edinburgh. McIntyre's lectures on theological epistemology were incisive and witty: Torrance's were expansive and exhilarating. That was true, at least for those of us who were already graduates, but B.D. studies had been opened to students without a first degree, and they must have found it daunting! Athanasius and Einstein, the Cappadocians and Polanyi, patristics and nuclear physics all featured in a series of breath-taking lectures on the Apostles' Creed.

At this point, Torrance's main publication was *Theological Science*, a truly stretching examination of theological method, arguing for its scientific status. The case was argued from a deep knowledge of philosophy of science, and although the first-year lectures were on the Creed, method and content were not divorced. Torrance would enter in his teaching gown (as most still did in the seventies) and appeared to lecture extemporaneously, transfixing us with his penetrating gaze over his half-moon spectacles. Questions and discussion were soon provoked, and since the class included graduates from the Faculties of both Arts and Sciences, the conversation was rich and thought-provoking. Discussion bridged the division between what C. P. Snow had called "the two cultures."

Forty years later, the theological world at large is only beginning to appreciate the abiding strength of Torrance's thinking. He was not the kind of fashionable theologian of the day who leapt on the latest bandwagons and sold pop-theology, much of which is now outmoded. His comprehensive grasp of historical theology enabled him to put the current fashions and moods in perspective and to dismiss what he called mere "paper theology." The historical perspective made him aware of the deeper cultural movements. While the now-fashionable word "postmodernity" was not then in

common use, Torrance's grasp of the cultural and epistemological implications of Einstein's thought in physics, made him aware that the Newtonian era of the Enlightenment was over. In alliance with the Hungarian chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, he dismissed the myth that the physical sciences were totally "objective" while theology was merely "subjective."

But it was only after his so-called "retirement" that most of Torrance's major theological works were written, and it is only in the last twenty years that a fuller appreciation of his theology has begun to emerge. Several writers, including Elmer Colyer, Alister McGrath, and Paul Molnar, have written introductions to his thought as a whole, and a series of monographs has appeared on different aspects of his thinking—his links with Polanyi, his doctrine of Christ, his Trinitarian soteriology, his view of *theosis*, and so on. It was also only after his retirement that he wrote most extensively on the Trinitarian theology of The Fathers. In this book, Dr. Jason Radcliff focuses on his patristics, his account of the *Consensus Patrum*. This is most obvious in his major book, *The Trinitarian Faith*, marking the 1600th anniversary of the Council of Constantinople of AD 381.

It was always evident to his students that Torrance's greatest loyalty was to Athanasius. He did in fact have differences with his other two main mentors, Calvin and Barth (although, out of immense respect perhaps, these were not made evident), but it is doubtful whether he had any disagreement at all with Athanasius! The *homoousion* of the Nicene Creed, which Athanasius defended *contra mundum*, was the "lynchpin" of the Christian faith without which the gospel collapsed into incoherence. Irenaeus and Hilary were also to be studied, and (with some reservations) the Cappadocians, but at the heart of the *Consensus Patrum* was the "axis" from Athanasius to Cyril of Alexandria.

Dr. Radcliff places Torrance's enthusiasm for The Fathers in the context of other attempts to recover patristic theology—from Newman and Harnack through Eastern Orthodox scholars to the evangelical theologies of retrieval in the late twentieth century. What distinguishes Torrance, however, from some who abandoned their own evangelical traditions for Orthodoxy or Catholicism, is that he presented a "Reformed, evangelical, and ecumenical reconstruction of the church fathers." The word, "reconstruction," is significant, for Torrance is not merely a historian or patrologist. Some have criticized him for reading his own theology into The Fathers, but Radcliff argues that we have to understand what he is doing. He is not an antiquarian. Rather he takes The Fathers as authoritative thought-partners for today.

That has its dangers of course, and Radcliff accepts that in Torrance's hands Athanasius can begin to sound rather like Barth! But overall,

Torrance's presentation of the *Consensus Patrum* is an enriching one for today's church. For the sake of mission today (and Torrance, as the son of evangelical missionaries, was always concerned with mission), the riches of patristic theology must be mined. In today's multi-cultural world, the foundational work of The Fathers in their multi-cultural world on Christology and Trinity are needed to give an essential foundation to the focus on salvation in the evangelical traditions stemming from the Reformation. The way forward is "towards an evangelical patristic theology" and this book, adding a new and essential dimension to the ongoing study of Torrance's thought, helps us to deepen our understanding of what that should look like.

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