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Review: The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church

John D. Morrison
Liberty University, jdmorrison@liberty.edu

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Yet I must make some criticisms. Through much of his analysis of Barth, Bockmuehl makes little of the developmental stages in Barth's thinking, stages that resulted from Barth's continued study of Scripture. It may be that this was not Bockmuehl's point—i.e. not a study of Barth as such but of Barth's influence. Nevertheless I found the belated distinctions problematic. There are a number of passages that, no matter how they were reread, seemed to make little sense. These were sometimes coupled with odd illustrations that proved to be of little help. There seemed to be an equation of knowing the problem and its cure with an automatic change in the reality of the situation. But Bockmuehl really only opens the door to the answers to the modern dilemma. Coupled with T. Torrance's reconstuctive efforts to overthrow theological dualism, there is much in this book to commend. But Bockmuehl's last chapter seems sometimes shallow, even falling occasionally into the dilemma it seeks to overthrow. Having said that, however, I recommend the book.

John D. Morrison
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church. By Thomas F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988, 345 pp., n.p.

Classic expressions of the history of doctrine have usually followed the broad sweep of the development of thought and theology, breaking up the course of discussion only to give attention to this or that important segment. This has been true of recent excellent works as well (e.g. Kelly, Pelikan). By comparison, however, one old and effective way of doing theology is to set forth one's exposition within the structure of an ancient creed of the Church, particularly the Apostles' Creed (Barth's *Dogmatics in Outline* is one recent expression), and yet this is rarely done today. In the volume under review, Torrance has brought together the doing of theology and the history of doctrine within the strict confessional guidelines of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the swirling torrent of controversy surrounding it in the third and fourth centuries.

Torrance's purpose within the confines of this highly significant and formative historico-theological context is above all to grasp hold of and to bring forth one central issue, one preeminent theological concern: the coherent nature of God's interactive relatedness to and with and in the space-time world. This relatedness arises within the Godhead, within the intratrinitarian relations, and is expressed most fully in the movement from God to man, in the "Word made flesh" who "dwelt among us," whose glory we have beheld. Of absolute importance to this purpose in Torrance is the critical term *homoousion* and its many profound theological implications. In his helpful foreword Torrance says that he wants to make an "integrated presentation" of the "coherent character of Nicene theology" and to show the "inner theological connections which give coherent structure to classical theology," thereby overcoming the distorting "influence of *dualistic* ways of thought derived from Hellenism." This rejection of dualism means that mankind can have genuine access to the Father (that is, to the knowledge of God as he is in himself) because "his incarnate reality has been made the supreme Principle of all God's ways and works within the order of creation and redemption alike, and the controlling Principle of all our understanding of them" (pp. 1–3). This focus or thesis is drawn out and amplified throughout the work.

For those who have read Torrance before, this particular theme will not be new. For at least thirty years his long-term theological program has been to correct false thinking in theology, false thinking derived from substructural or presupposed cosmological or epistemological dualism (cf. Descartes, Kant, Newton), and to reconstruct the bases and superstructure of a true and scientific theology that is in accordance with its object, the movement of God to mankind, especially in Jesus Christ. Since his *Theological Science* (1969) and *God and Rationality* (1971) Torrance has worked to overcome those damaging dualisms (ancient and modern) so that we may truly know God as he is in his own intratrinitarian relation. The point that God is in himself as he is toward us in creation and redemption in Christ is central to Torrance's agenda, just as it was to Athanasius and the Nicene fathers. In most of his works since *Theological Science* Torrance has pointed especially to Athanasius as well as to Cyril of Alexandria and other Nicene and post-Nicene fathers as paradigms for the doing of modern theology and as guides to fulfilling the theological need in the Church. As the ancient Church fathers rejected and overcame the prevailing dualisms of their age, so too must we if we are to maintain the gospel in accordance with the actual coming of God to us in Christ. This "scientific" theology, this theological thinking that is deliberately conformed to the self-disclosure of the peculiar object of theology—God personally self-revealed, self-given, in Jesus of Nazareth—is Torrance's point, goal and ever-present emphasis. Yet it is only in this present work that he gives his full attention to the critical points of Nicene thought (especially the *homoousion*) and to its development to and through Constantinople and Chalcedon. Torrance here repeatedly directs our attention to the truly theological thought of these fathers and to their theology done under the impact of the self-disclosure of the peculiar object of theology.

As noted above, Torrance's book is a markedly theological discussion wherein the critical-historical setting forms the backdrop for analysis of the primary affirmations of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Indeed the basic format follows (like older theological expositions of the Apostles' Creed) a step-by-step and point-by-theological-point investigation and exposition of the issues, concepts, terms, debates, implications and epistemological-soteriological consequences related to the Creed in its volatile historical setting.

The foundational concern for the fathers (and therefore for Torrance's analysis) is the nature of God's salvation of sinful and estranged humanity in Christ. Therefore the chapter headings reflect the progressive expression of the saving faith "once for all delivered to the saints," a faith that the Church must grasp, live and proclaim. In the face of the distorting dualism of the Arian, Sabellian, Eunomian and Apollinarian heresies, each of which damaged the coherent, saving reality of "God with us" one way or another, the crucial concern of the Nicene theologians was to tie everything to the redemptive movement of God from within himself toward us in Jesus Christ. This movement is esteemed by Torrance to be the key to doing theology as it must be done. Only by living and thinking in this way is salvation and the knowledge of God, which is life eternal, assured.

Assessing Torrance's monumental work is not easily done. It is clearly well-organized, and it follows the progressive theological elements of confession/affirmation in the Creed itself. Each point and chapter is almost self-contained, and yet Torrance draws the necessary connections throughout. Furthermore he makes extensive use of the original sources. His background and continuing interest in patristics and patristic theology is reflected here. His footnotes are a resource in themselves. Torrance also brings to greater clarity the issue of contention regarding the so-called Hellenism of the theology of the Greek fathers. Torrance shows with some effectiveness (as have others) that (contra Harnack *et al.*) the Greek fathers

did not foist an alien conceptuality upon the gospel and upon Christianity, a conceptuality divergent from its Jewish roots (cf. M. Hengel). Rather, says Torrance, they sought (and largely accomplished) real clarification of the truth of God and of God's dynamic, personal, interactive and loving movement/economy toward humanity in Christ. The Greek fathers thought in accordance with the real self-disclosure of God in Jesus in an active and deliberate repudiation of the deadly dualisms manifested both within and without the Church.

But for all its excellence there are problems that must be pointed out—though not so as to detract from its greater positive importance and contribution. First, the work is at many points unduly repetitive. This may have been necessitated by the format: to tie the various parts together and to bring clarity and emphasis to the central theological thesis. But the problem of repetitiveness is one found in most of Torrance's works. Further, the question increasingly arises (not just here but in other works as well) as to the extent to which the thought of Athanasius and the other prominent Greek fathers is truly being expressed or whether they have in some measure become mere paradigms or even mouthpieces for Torrance's own program of "scientific" theology. Has the whole story of their thinking been accurately and comprehensively expressed here? How much picking and choosing has gone on? Clearly the Greek fathers sought to elucidate a radically new perspective, that of "God with us," that of "the Word made flesh" in Jesus. They did so with faithfulness, but Torrance's own explanations of their thought for the sake of its principle may be somewhat fuller than their original intent or agenda would justify. Torrance also falls too easily into a "good guys/bad guys" schematization, though this is in keeping with the spirit and fervency of the fathers themselves. Finally, while the footnotes are extensive and very helpful, the index is barely adequate.

The Trinitarian Faith is an important and even timely analysis and reexpression of the basic ecumenical creed. It is a work that sets forth in a new format two of Torrance's greatest concerns: the Church's need to do scientific theology, and the need for ecumenical progress through a proper understanding of the theological-confessional roots of all Christians via the ecumenical Creed. This is also simply an important study of the fathers, of their energetic and even brilliant work to preserve and clarify the truth of the gospel. As such it is indirectly a paradigmatic call to the often beleaguered Church of the late twentieth century to do likewise here and now as it stands before Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

John D. Morrison
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Twentieth Century Shapers of American Popular Religion. Edited by Charles H. Lippy. Westport: Greenwood, 1989, xxv + 494 pp., $65.00.

Lippy and a team of primarily younger, less prominent contributors have produced a solid reference tool that fills a real gap in the scholarly literature about modern American religion. They examine an extremely diverse group of more than sixty preachers, writers of popular religious literature and music, and religious media personalities. *JETS* readers will immediately recognize subjects like the Bakkers, J. Falwell, the Gaithers, B. Graham, H. Lindsey, O. Roberts, C. I. Scofield and J. Wallis. Other figures that are included (W. Aberhart, H. Bosley, M. Kaplan, F. Oursler, Wovoka) are not so familiar. Thus the book nicely documents the wide range of influences on popular religion in North America.

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