



Torrance, Thomas F.

Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

There is no day more appropriate for a review of Thomas F. Torrance's posthumously published *Incarnation: The Life and Work of Christ* than today, December 25, the day on which we in the West celebrate Christ's coming into the world. For those not familiar with T. F. Torrance, he was, for nearly three decades, a Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, Edinburgh. He was also a prolific author, editor, and translator who produced significant volumes on the doctrine of the Trinity such as *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (T&T Clark, 1988), *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (T&T Clark, 1996), and *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (T&T Clark, 1999). One of his greatest editorial achievements was without doubt serving as co-editor along with G. W. Bromily on the English edition of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. His death two years ago on December 2, 2007 left a void in the theological world that will not soon be filled.

Incarnation is the first of two volumes (the second being *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*) that were born out of Torrance's notes from lectures he had given to his classes on Christian Dogmatics from 1952-1978. His son Thomas S. Torrance tells us (on p. ix) that his father had wanted to publish this material much earlier but due to a stroke suffered in 2003 he was not able to engage in the necessary editing. So the task of editing was taken up by T. F.'s nephew Robert Torrance Walker and what we have before us is a mini-systematic (or dogmatic) theology that can rival any big set that's out there in terms of the depth of content. One feature of modern systematic theology sets that I've noticed is an aversion to actually doing theology.

This is nowhere more evident than in Norman Geisler's 4-volume *Systematic Theology* where all we're given is a bunch of propositions followed by selective quotes from figures in church history about those propositions. Rest assured that there's none of that in *Incarnation* (or its companion volume).

Torrance wasn't a theologian who wrote just to write or who spoke just to wax eloquent and sound sophisticated. On every page of *Incarnation* the reader can sense the deep reverence that Torrance had for the person of whom he wrote, as well as the great appreciation he had for the work of Christ and what it means for us and our salvation. Torrance saw the necessary connection between Christology and soteriology. Christ's coming into the world at his birth is the one bookend of salvation with the resurrection and ascension serving as the other. This is clearly a subject that touched Torrance in a profound way and drove his work forward as his editor and endorsers are wont to note. Torrance saw Christ as the central figure in Scripture and the center of the Biblical message. The Old Testament anticipates him and the New Testament reflects upon him as we should also while awaiting his return in glory.

The full deity and humanity of Christ are assumed, stated and expounded upon throughout the volume but not argued for. Torrance refused the bifurcation that splits Jesus into the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith.' But this shouldn't strike the reader as strange so long as they remember that this book is the product of lectures given to students of *Christian dogmatics*. This isn't to say that *Incarnation* serves no apologetic purpose or presents no apology of its own, in fact, the contrary is true. If we understand apologetics to be nothing more than giving a reason for why we believe what we believe then it becomes evident on nearly every page of the book that Torrance believed these things because the Bible states them! Robert Walker says in his introduction that "the lectures provide what is effectively an extended theological commentary on the bible." (xi)

Torrance was an effective communicator and this book is a prime example of that, being perhaps easier to read through than any of his other works I've seen to date. It's everywhere evident that Torrance had a great familiarity with patristic, medieval, and reformed theology yet this is communicated to the reader in an effortless way that doesn't leave us feeling confused or slighted but is challenging enough to leave us asking questions and seeking answers. Torrance also made regular use of Greek and Latin terms but they're not obtrusive. They're thrown in to give a sense of the technical purpose they serve and not just to show that the author knew a few languages. In short, *Incarnation* is an effective work from a pedagogical standpoint, so much so that I can definitely see it and its companion being used as textbooks for courses on Christology (the introduction to Christology in chapter 1 alone is worthy of making this a text for such settings). The front matter contains T. F. Torrance's original author's forward written in 2002 after the manuscript had initially been prepared (vii-viii), a preface from his son Thomas S. Torrance (ix),

and an editor's forward (x-xii) and introduction (xxi-lli). In addition to this there is a detailed synopsis (xiii-xx) to supplement the table of contents. One interesting editorial feature is the use of footnotes and end notes. This is only the case in chapter 1 "Introduction to Christology" but along with the footnoted references there are references to more expanded material and fuller treatments in an end notes section (257-96) which essentially functions as another chapter (or appendix) altogether. In addition to this there is a helpful glossary of theological terms (345-50; a feature more books of this nature should implement!), a general subject index (351-67), and a Scripture reference index (368-71). It's a complete book in every respect and one I'd recommend to any student of Christology in particular or Christian theology in general.