The Sound of (Theological) Science: T. F. Torrance between Barth and Barthes, Calvin and Calvino

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ABSTRACT
This essay argues that while T. F. Torrance's argument in *Theological Science* (1996) is internally consistent and unfailingly logical, it can be questioned in terms of its ultimate applicability—in contrast to, for instance, a comparable thesis extolling a *theological aesthetics*. In short, I show that while Torrance's argument is "valid," it may not be "sound." The impetus for such a meta-critique emerges from within the text itself, where the author suggests the limits of a purely *formal* logic and points towards the possibility of a more fully *divine* (and thus, more fully *human*) logic. I argue that Torrance's argument stands or falls on a particular use and understanding of certain key terms (certain "tropes," to use the language of literary criticism) like "reason," "objectivity," and most crucially, "realism." Furthermore, when these terms are clarified and the assumptions behind them unmasked, his project is opened up to critique from the sphere of aesthetics and literary theory. It is my contention that, in fact, a literary-aesthetic approach to the problem of understanding and apprehension in theology is more truly "scientific"—i.e., more fitted to its object—than Torrance's "scientific theology."

I have shown how natural science, mathematics and technology mutually interpenetrate each other. All the arts are similarly interwoven; while the arts and the methods of science penetrate each other in the domain of the humanities. Religion has even more comprehensive affinities: it can transpose all intellectual experiences into its own universe, and has also served, in reverse, most other intellectual systems as their theme. The relation of Christianity to natural experience… is but a thread in the network of mutual penetrations.
– Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*

In 1968, Roland Barthes proclaimed a distinction between literature and science in the way they use language: whereas literature is "aware" that language *is* language, science is prone to use language as a "neutral utensil" to say something else; i.e., to convey a "meaning," "fact," "thought," or "truth." Barthes maintains that, in fact, literature is *more* scientific than science, because literature "knows that language is never naïve, and knows that in writing we cannot say anything extraneous to writing, or express any truth that is not a truth having to do with the art of writing" (Calvino 1986a, 29). In other words, science, in adopting a "container theory of language," blinds itself to the way this particular "utensil" really works, that is, in multiform and often "unscientific" ways. Barthes's thesis strikes a remarkable parallel with that of Thomas F. Torrance in his masterwork, *Theological Science*, published a year after "Literature and Science" appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Torrance suggests, like Barthes before him, that science, while holding the keys to the kingdom of knowledge, has been led astray, but that it is *theology*, in this case, that can show science what it really means to be "scientific."

In this essay, I argue that while Torrance's argument in *Theological Science* is internally consistent and unfailingly logical, it can be questioned in terms of its ultimate applicability, in contrast to, for instance, a comparable thesis extolling a *theological aesthetics*. In other words, I will show that while Torrance's argument is "valid," it may not be "sound." The impetus for such a meta-critique emerges from within the text itself, where the author suggests the limits of a purely *formal* logic and points towards the possibility of a more fully *divine* (and thus, more fully *human*) logic. As I show, Torrance's argument stands or falls on a particular use and understanding of certain key terms (certain "tropes," to use the language of literary criticism) like "reason," "objectivity," and most crucially, "realism." Furthermore, when these terms are clarified and the assumptions behind them unmasked, his project is opened up to critique from the sphere of aesthetics and literary theory. It is my contention that, in fact, a literary-aesthetic approach to the problem of understanding and apprehension in theology is more truly "scientific"—i.e., more fitted to its object—than Torrance's "scientific theology."

Science: Heuristic or Apology?
In his discussion of "Literature and Science," Italo Calvino notes the irony of a rigorous and "scientific" writer like Barthes proclaiming himself the "enemy" of science. But Calvino misses the point: Barthes and his fellow semiologists, for all their talk of *jouissance* and *plaisir*, felt no small amount of what can be called, to borrow and adapt term from critic Harold Bloom, the anxiety of scientific influence. That is, Barthes's "criticism" of science is also a none-too-subtle recognition of the power of scientific rigor and method, and the hold of such over the popular (and scholarly) imagination. Reading Torrance's work, one feels the same pull, a kind of attraction-repulsion towards science, which is at once extolled (as a model) and bracketed (as an ideal "fallen" from its noble origins, and thus limited). It is my task in this essay to evoke this "anxiety" and its repercussions, or *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Again, such is an examination not of the *validity* of *Theological Science*, but rather of its meaning in relation to the contemporary society in which it proclaims itself as a text. In short, this is an examination of the *soundness* of Torrance's project. ("Soundness" itself will be examined on several levels, in relation to historical or present "effects," and to the "sound" of the theological text as a work of "literature".)

The so-called "war" between science and religion, which reached its apogee in the United States between the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and the Scopes Trial (1925), is largely over, without a real victor being proclaimed. Both sides eventually realized that they were talking past each other, and so largely agreed to disagree,

or agreed that their disagreements were due to differing goals and irreconcilable perspectives. Yet in terms of the popular imagination, the winner is clear: science—or, to be more accurate, *scientism*—the conception that science not only has all the answers but asks the only relevant questions for us, "modern" people. The irony, which is (implicitly) elucidated in Torrance's writings, is that, since Einstein, Heisenberg, and Gödel, and especially since Kuhn, Polanyi, and Feyerband, "real" science no longer accepts the certainties and the absolute truth-claims it once held with such aplomb. The bombast is largely missing in twentieth-century science.

Thus Calvino is quite right, in one sense, to criticize Barthes's stereotyped view of science. This is an important issue, in terms of *Wirkungsgeschichte*: what do terms like "science," "objectivity," and "rationality" mean, in terms of present (secular or faith) communities in the United States? What is the *pragmatic meaning* of *theological objectivity*? *Pace* Calvino, Barthes reminds us of the lingering power of science as a world-view, not just a method or discipline of knowledge, while at the same time pointing to an alternative "model" or analogy from which to build a "cultivated theology" (Karl Barth) for our times.

Torrance insists that he is building upon a foundation that is more truly "scientific" that the popular understanding of science, in order to develop a more truly "theological" theology. The foundation stone of this tower is a *new objectivity*. Yet Torrance, like his contemporary Barthes, clearly feels the pull of "science"—the prestige of its surplus of meaning is certainly not lost on him. Indeed, upon reading the author's insistence that his project is not in any way meant to be an "apology" for theology in a world (especially in 1969) dominated by the scientific world-view, one feels that "the gentleman doth protest too much." Torrance wants to "preserve" theology against "impurities" (presumably meaning "non-scientific" elements like Tillich's "aestheticism", as well as the encroachments of "philosophy of religion"). Yet the almost obsessive attempt to see theology "regain" its status as "a science in its own right" evokes nothing less than father Freud's desire to push his infant psychoanalysis through the same forbidding portal.

Of course, Freud's ambitions were not new. The so-called war of science and religion is a mere skirmish compared to the long battle between philosophy and art, or reason and inspiration. At the end of the *Republic*, Plato resorts to an incantation in order to rid his Ideal City of the danger of poetry—which, despite the divinely inspired power of Reason, cannot be combated successfully on Reason's own ground. It is not the *weakness* of poetry (as "third-order imitation" of the Ideal forms) but rather its *strength*, its potential transfigurative capacity and awe-ful primordiality, which renders it anathema to a virtuous life, both private and public. Philosophy, and "philosophical theology," felt compelled to distinguish itself from the corrupting power of "inspiration" (whether poetic or mystical) at the moment of its inception in the classical world. In Christian times, Augustine and Aquinas both warned of the uncontrolled use of music in the mass. As for "our Reformers," we have a lot to be silent about on that issue, but theirs is a legacy that lingers.

Despite Torrance's debt to the work of Michael Polanyi, he could be charged with lapsing into what Polanyi calls "pseudo-substitution": the use of certain key terms like "order," "simplicity," and "objectivity" to "play down man's real and indispensable intellectual powers for the sake of maintaining an 'objectivist' framework which in fact cannot account for them" (Polanyi 1958, 16–17). For Polanyi, this is the attempt to deny the "passionate" or "personal" aspects of knowledge, but it could be extended to include the "non-rational" or "aesthetic" aspects of knowledge as well. Torrance uses terms borrowed from a rationalist-scientific discourse, and while expanding these terms beyond their usual scope, does not allow for the full surplus of meaning that they may in fact engender, or which remain latent and unexplored. Is personal knowledge still scientific? If so, where does the boundary of science end and the boundary of art begin? Or are there boundaries at all?

One premise underlying *Theological Science* is the (Karl) Barthian attempt to get rid of "subjectivity" in religious understanding and theology especially. The connection between the specifically religious and the scientific drive for a containment of subjectivity is obvious, and is alluded to by Charles Taylor, who remarks that the scientific ideal of objectivity is really a new variant of the "aspiration to rise above the merely human, to step outside the prison of the peculiarly human emotions, and to be free of the cares and the demands they make on us"—"a novel variant of this very old aspiration to spiritual freedom" (Taylor 1985, 112). Of course, Torrance is quite clear that his "objectivity" is not the objectivity of, say, Ignatius of Loyola—nor is it the "mythical" objectivity of pre-modern science in which the subject is not at all implicated in the encounter with the object of investigation. Torrance searches rather for what we might call a New Objectivity, albeit one that, he insists, has precedents both in the Reformation (and more specifically, Calvin's *Institutes*) and in the origins of Western science. Before going further, we must get a better sense of what Torrance's project entails. This is laid out quite explicitly in the Preface to *Theological Science*.

Theological Science

Scientific theology is not passive contemplation, but "active engagement in that cognitive relation to God in obedience to the demands of His reality and self-giving" (*TS*, ix). It is, in short, a matter of opening up our minds to allow "God's own eloquent self-evidence" to shine through. Of course, Torrance admits, we cannot communicate with God directly—that is not the way human language works. Yet we can use language to refer others to something that is beyond ourselves; that is, not to "express" but to "show." The limits of language are not absolute, reducing us to silence; rather communication *can* (and *must*) take place, but only indirectly, through a "triadic relationship" of reference. Torrance, who, it would seem, has little time for mystical apophatism, favors a pragmatic or kataphatic appreciation of human language. Thus, for communication to "work," we must presuppose that the things of which we speak are capable of "rational apprehension and semantic designation" (x).

In order to properly "know" things, argues Torrance, our inquiry must be reflexive; that is, our presuppositions must be brought into question (or, in Husserlian terms, "bracketed"). Our interpretive framework itself must be constantly realigned to more properly fit with the nature of the "object" of our inquiry. Though this is a difficult and unceasing task, we must continue refining and elaborating methods (as Heidegger

might say, *unterwegs* or "along the way") that will carry in themselves "self-correcting devices" even as they lead us onwards and upwards. In this sense, says Torrance, the project of theological science is committed to dialogue with the other sciences, as well as with philosophy and ordinary experience. Torrance concludes his preface by suggesting that this project is, indeed, "the great story of modern thought": humanity's attempt to find a balance between the pursuit of knowledge and the requisite "fidelity" towards the object of pursuit. This balance is, for Torrance, *genuine objectivity*.

Torrance's "authorial intrusion" in the preface is significant in revealing some of the assumptions and presuppositions underlying *Theological Science*. One question that can be raised is Torrance's use of the term "rationality." Why, exactly, does "the presence and being of God "convince the author of God's rationality? Does this mean that God's reality is so *evident* that God must be "rational" to disclose Godself so plainly? Or rather does it mean that *belief* in God is rational because of God's overwhelming "presence"? There seems to be some confusion here over what would appear to be a key term in Torrance's work. It seems that, for the author, God is the ultimate arbiter, or even the ground, of Reason itself. Yet, as he goes on to say, in terms suspiciously like those of the *via negativa*: all "knowledge" of God is flawed, because it is ultimately "human"—i.e., the self gets "in the way." While this connects with Torrance's call for a "genuine objectivity," it seems to run against *any* attempt to gain knowledge about God. At what point, we might ask, does one come to the realization of one's *in-the-wayness*?

Along similar lines, a mystic or poet might question Torrance's seeming conflation of reason/rationality and presence/reality. "If the nature of things were not somehow inherently rational they would remain incomprehensible and opaque and indeed we ourselves would not be able to engage into the light of rationality" (*TS* x-xi). Even allowing for the archaic note of any talk of the "nature" of things, to locate "rationality" in the nature of things seems a strange turn indeed. What about nominalism, or the linguistic turn in philosophical thinking? Couldn't we rather say that rationality resides in 1) the human mind, or 2) language? Torrance continues in what appears to be a Buberian vein, emphasizing the relationality of "God-talk":

> Scientific theology is active engagement in that cognitive relation to God in obedience to the demands of His reality and self-giving… [it] is that in which we bring the inherent rationality of things to light and expression, as we let the realities we investigate disclose themselves to us under our questioning and we on our part submit our minds to their intrinsic connections and order (*TS* xi).

This last line, consciously or not, evokes Heidegger's conception of truth as *aletheia*: unconcealedness.

Calvin's Legacy

In the final part of the preface, Torrance makes the bold assertion that not only modern theology, but modern science and indeed, the whole modern project, can be seen as an attempt to work out three revolutionary seeds planted by John Calvin in his *Institutes*. Briefly stated, these three criteria were: 1) we must start with the question: "what is the nature of the thing"; i.e., with *actuality*, not *possibility*; 2) we must recognize that the knowledge relation between God and humans is inescapably "mutual"—i.e., that knowledge of the Object and the human subject cannot be separated; 3) given the last, we must strive to distinguish knowledge of God from knowledge of ourselves, by way of methods like *analogia fidei*: i.e., the movement of thought in which we trace our thought back to its "ground," thus testing its "fidelity" (*TS* xiii-xiv).

The problem of modern theology, Torrance concludes, is that the second theme of Calvin's project has gotten "out of hand," allowing "gross personalism" to take over, and the slippery slide from theology to anthropology. This, one might conclude (particularly given Torrance's debt to Barth), is a reference to Schleiermacher and his legacy, from Liberal Theology to the work of Paul Tillich. However, theology is not alone with its problems: modern science as well has had to face Calvin's three principles. In science, the problem is that the third of these has been over-emphasized, culminating in the quest for pure objectivity.

Since the revolutions of the early twentieth century, science has had to rethink the place of the subject, which has become something of a "stumbling-block" in the objective quest. Of course, for Torrance this is the wrong way to react to these "paradigm shifts"—what they presage is rather a necessary readjustment to the mutuality of the Subject-Object encounter. Indeed, it is the Subject-Object relationship that is the *only* forum for a "genuine" objectivity.

Once again, at issue, for both theology and science, is *balance*: "how to refer our thoughts and statements genuinely beyond ourselves, how to reach knowledge of reality in which we do not intrude ourselves distortingly into the picture, and yet how to retain the full and integral place of the human subject in it all" (*TS* xvii). Torrance's New Objectivity walks a fine tightrope between the pitfalls of pure subjectivity (typified by post-Schleiermacherian theology, or rather, anthropology) and pure objectivity (where the *ganz Andere* becomes an Object without "incarnation" or "presence"—a danger mitigated by a return to christology). The following section examines whether or not this tightrope act can be sustained, and later, whether an entirely different act may be more relevant, entertaining *and* safe.

Theology and Modern Science: Rationalism and Realism

In the first chapter, Torrance brings out one of his key theses: Barth's re-examination of theology, his bypassing of the philosophical tools of the scholastics, Reformation, and early modern period, was, at least in part, spurred by the revolutions in philosophical and scientific thought of the early twentieth century. In fact, Barth's positive and dynamic theology is remarkably parallel to quantum physics, not least in its criticism of the old antimonies and their handling. This thesis, which is, in my estimation, a valid one, raises a number of important questions.

One involves the point made by Torrance's about criticism of Barth's "anti-rationalism." It is a pity, he says, that Barth's attack on rationalism (understood here as "abstract reason") should be misunderstood as a critique of rationality proper. Like the existentialist misreading of Kierkegaard, this is ironic, given Barth's attempt to "restore to reason its true rationality through overcoming Cartesian dualism and romantic irrationality" (*TS* 9, n.2). What is at stake is Barth's "realism" against the "idealism"/"subjectivism" of his critics.

But how does Torrance slide so deftly from the quest for a "genuine" rationality/objectivity to "realism"? Is the author's concern over these terms related to their popular connotations (i.e., one must be both "rational" and "realistic" in order to be of any worth)? Or is he using them in more specific ways? If so, they call for clarification.

Moreover, this raises the question, once again, about God's "rationality," which Torrance addresses on page 11. Torrance's first "preliminary observation" (i.e., pre-supposition) about the knowledge of God is that it is a *rational event.* It is, he says, not concerned with anything that is sub-rational or irrational. This bold assertion seems to stand in the way of a substantial tradition within Christian thinking, dating back at least to Tertullian's *Credo quia impossible*, and progressing through the mystics (including Luther) and Pascal to Otto and Eliade in our own times. With one bold stroke, a significant body of theological insight is rendered invaluable and irretrievable.

Language

At this point we must raise the issue of language; more specifically the theory of language that underlies *Theological Science*, turning back to Barthes's critique of the "container theory of words." Theology means, quite literally, "God-talk." But for Torrance God-talk seems to be "rational talk"—conflating language and "reason" such that expressive/ poetic/symbolic theories of language are implicitly rejected as being inferior or even useless. In a footnote, Torrance says that it does not seem to him "helpful" to speak of God as "supra-rational," for such a statement is senseless, given that we can have no rational knowledge of such. But this is faulty logic: to make a claim—to express something—in language need not entail a rational understanding of what such a claim might "mean." For Torrance, "to know God is to know that He is more fully rational than we are." But how can we possibly *know* this? Moreover, what is the point of extending the concept of rationality in such a way?

"Reason," he goes on to relate, "is our ability to recognize and assent to what is beyond it" (*TS* 11). But isn't this what Tertullian called "faith," restated so as to raise the position of reason, while ostensibly admitting its limits? To posit, with John Macmurray, that "[r]eason is the capacity to behave consciously in terms of what is not ourselves," is to make reason into a very different beast from the way it is commonly used. This might not be a concern, were it not so important to Torrance's thesis in *Theological Science.* Again, Torrance's use of language, and his theory of language that underlies this use, seems to be so pivotal to his argument, that to put these into question is to render the entire work unsound.

My main concern, however, is the thesis about "genuine" rationality or objectivity, which arises from the "appropriate" collision of Subject and Object. This crucial trope hinges on the precise sense of the term "appropriate," as well the criteria for demarcating such (we are, after all, accepting nothing less than "rigorous, exact thinking"). But what are such criteria? Can they be conceptualized at all? Moreover, is "science," even a purified or renewed scientific *method*, the most adequate form by which to proclaim this encounter?

In chapter six, while remarking on the similarities between theology and the other "special sciences," Torrance seems to undermine his argument in a footnote. (Clearly, he is too honest a scholar in his footnotes, to the extent that they sound like a "conscience" in dispute with the narrator of the text itself). His point here is that theological science, like the other special sciences, does not operate with a "preconceived metaphysics." Though he notes that theology, by virtue of being in (a) language and (a) culture, will be "laden" with such, scientific procedure must strive to eliminate all preconceptions, in order that "authentic metaphysical thinking" may arise as we engage with new conceptions "thrust upon us" by objective reality (*TS* 288). As German poet and critic Hans Enzensberger insists: reason/rationality must remain *topological*—a constantly changing *facsimile* of the world, not *metaphysical*—a static and immovable *blueprint*. Only as such will rationality or science be open to the refashioning (or paradigm-shifting capacity) that is required of it. (Calvino 1986a, 25–26)

But this whole issue strikes me as rather naïve, however well intentioned (as Max Weber, and Nietzsche before him, well knew). Where will this "authentic metaphysics" come from? From what, other than our language, culture, traditions, even idiolects, will these new concepts and conceptions arise? From the side of the object, is, of course, Torrance's answer, but this does not seem sufficient, for whatever impulse or vision we may have thrust upon us must be "translated" into communicable words and concepts—must be made "human." And this "new" metaphysics will have preconceptions, lingering biases and human prejudices, of its own. Again, the question of the possibility of a "pure" science of theology may be raised. Here Torrance's citation of A. D. Ritchie is instructive: "if the scientific man thinks he can [escape from metaphysics] he is simply repressing it" (*TS* 289, n.2). Simply replacing one metaphysics with another will not solve the problem of the "obstruction" of our reasoning and our apprehension of things. This is a singularly "progressive" mentality, one that has been questioned in science, and is just as questionable in theology. Thus it is too simple to say that science must be topological rather than metaphysical; rather, as Calvino might insist, science—or scientific discourse—must be aware of its *tropological* character as well; i.e., its status as "literature."

Kant: Temptations and Misreadings

The twin Reformed doctrines of *accommodation* and *election* uphold both sides of human knowledge—object and subject. According to Calvin, to know the Truth is to be an active participant in it, so that our activity in knowing the Truth is part of its content. But it was the other side—conformity of divine to human—that led to the kenotic christologies of the nineteenth century, and was transferred into scientific knowledge. In his Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant says: "We must… make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge" (*TS* 88). Torrance replies: "while Kant sought to give firm philosophical expression to the objectivity upon which the whole of science rests, he also sought to do justice to the spontaneity and productive activity of reason in wresting objective knowledge from nature" (89).

Kant's revolution, in Torrance's view, lies in his assertion that we do not know the object except insofar "as it conforms to the power of reason in knowing it" (*TS* 88). Though this sounds like Bacon's *activa inquisitio*, Kant placed emphasis on *conforming of the object*—on the a priori elements that allow for its being known. Kant's *Ding an sich*

is fundamental to his understanding of scientific knowledge. It is, in a sense, a *via media* between a total lack of given reality and a reality that is "transparent"—i.e., completely knowable. The object is, in Kant's formulation, at once opaque and hidden, and can only be known through "coercive questioning and experimental inquisition" (89). While giving pride of place to the productive powers of reason, Kant also sought to show the limitations of reason, in the distinction between what reason can "know" (real appearance) and what it cannot (the thing in itself). This is Kant's "Great Boundary."

Torrance has a twofold reaction to Kant. On a purely theological level, he cannot accept Kant's identification of the categorical imperative with the "self-legislating ego" (earlier Torrance had stated that this was merely a displacement of the Lutheran sense of the authoritative Word of God). More important for Torrance's thesis, however, is his concern with Kant's "sloppiness" in allowing for the *Ding an sich* to wither away to the point where it is discounted as a "mythological projection" of little relevance. Such a turn presages the loss of genuine objectivity, and has ramifications in both post-Kantian science and theology.

Once again, for Torrance, it is a matter of balance—here stated neatly in terms of the Reformation ideal of *humility* and the Renaissance ideal of *autonomy*. Torrance explains the degeneration of the Kantian synthesis by suggesting that the anthropocentrism and individualism of the Renaissance latched onto the Kantian principle of the conformity of the object of knowledge and distorted this into a kind of subjective idealism, which was far from Kant's intention, yet which is nonetheless understandable given the strong emphasis on "coercive inquisition."

The author of *Theological Science* admits that "scientific laws are expressions of our modes of cognition as well as realities in themselves" (94)—and that this twofold aspect muddies any distinctions made in the subject-object relation. He goes on to say that we cannot project our formulations of nature onto nature itself; "[r]ather are they to be understood as noetic constructions that reflect and point to ontic structures in nature, and as such they are both like and unlike these structures" (94–5). Torrance warns against abandoning these "noetic constructions"—for it is only through such that we come to know the "ontic structures" of nature. But if we cannot step out of our thought framework, how are we to speak meaningfully about "actual laws inhering in nature"? What does it mean to make such a conceptual distinction, only to admit it is virtually unsustainable?

Perhaps Kant's answer can be found in the third *Critique.* Torrance's noetic pointers act like symbols in the Kantian-Romantic sense. Kant distinguishes between *symbolic* and *schematic* a priori concepts: the former contain indirect, the latter direct, "exhibitions" of the concept. Symbolic hypotyposes "transfer… our reflection on an object of intuition to an entirely different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond." Particularly significant is Kant's next assertion:

> If a mere way of presenting [something] may ever be called cognition (which I think is permissible if this cognition is a principle not for determining the object theoretically, as to what it is in itself, but for determining it practically, as to what the idea of the concept ought to become for us and for our purposive employment of it), then all our cognition of God is merely symbolic. Whoever regards it as schematic—while including in it the properties of understanding, will, etc., whose objective reality is proved only in worldly beings—falls into anthropomorphism, just as anyone who omits everything intuitive falls into deism, which allows us to cognize nothing whatsoever, not even from a practical point of view. (*Critique of Judgment*, §353)

Kant's notion of symbolic a priori concepts is suspiciously akin to Torrance's "genuine objectivity." It seems that Kant here will allow for nothing other than "symbolic" relations to God. How would Torrance react to this, given his mistrust of "romanticism" and of any discussion of "symbolic activity"? What is we were to play devil's advocate, crossing out the "n" in "noetics" and substituting a "p"? After all, the Greek *noetikos* comes from *noeo*, to "apprehend"—which does not immediately connote intellect of abstraction, but rather *awareness* or *meeting.*

All this leads to the question of alternative modes of knowing; i.e., besides the rational/scientific/objective. I will grant that Torrance "redefines" these latter terms, and in quite prodigious fashion. But there are still lines to be drawn between Torrance's approach and others more influenced and driven by "aesthetic" concerns. Is there any place in Torrance schema for such, or is he, like Kant before him, in danger of succumbing to dogmatic rigidity, to the point where only a revolution can break the self-imposed chains of the system?

Symbolic Theology

In his remarks on the similarities between theological science and the other special sciences, Torrance speaks of the difference between theology *in se* and *in nobis*, where the former is the "pure science" and the latter the "human understanding" of the substance of truth. In the formulation of Christian dogmas, he says, we must not identify them with the "transcendent form and being" of divine Truth. This much the reader may readily grant (though it is difficult to conceive what the "pure science" of theological thinking may be). Torrance goes further, however, to deny the equally grave error of treating dogmas as "symbolic expressions of our encounter with reality" (*TS* 288). Why this is an error is not altogether clear, though it follows necessarily from the author's past remarks on Tillich, and relies on a particular—and, I will show, limited—conception of the meaning of "symbol."

Torrance is quite right to note that we can never completely disentangle the two aspects of form ("systematic" and "empirical"), as our conceiving and expressing are enmeshed in the web of language. The reduction of all forms to linguistic forms is, he says, a mistake, for it assumes "that we can state in statements how statements are related to what is stated, and so reduces all relations to linguistic relations" (*TS* 223). But to deny Tillich's attempt to overcome the "cleavage between subject and object" through the development of an aesthetic or symbolic relation in which the conceptual distortion of reality is eliminated, and wisdom (*sapienta*) is substituted for knowledge (*scientia*), is neither a necessary nor a warranted conclusion. Torrance notes, quite rightly, that Tillich's turn involves an "expressionistic" notion of language which *seems* to deny any sort of referential

relation and which bypasses the problem of logical relation. Yet this "aesthetic" stratagem of Tillich, which has precedents in the work of Schleiermacher, Jakob Fries, and Rudolf Otto, not to mention the *Critique of Judgment*, is not necessarily a-referential; such is a simplification of the effects of symbols and "expression."

Expression and its Discontents

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method* (502–5) speaks at some length of the misuse of expression by the Romantics and Dilthey, who transmuted it into something more subjective and less rhetorical (i.e., "self-expression"). A proper understanding of expression and the symbol actually reveals them to be in harmony with Torrance's own "perspicuous forms"—i.e., the working of analogues or models as "transparent mediums" of revelation. As Tillich says, "the Spirit-determined language of theonomy does not dispense with the language which is determined by the cleavage between subject and object, so Spirit-determined cognition does not contradict the knowledge which is gained within the subject-object structure of encountering reality" (*Systematic Theology* III, 256).

This is not a mystical flight into irrationality, but rather a recognition, as in Torrance's own work, that all talk and knowing in theology is ultimately (over-)determined by the presence and power of the object, such that, while it may be useful, it is necessarily restricted. Yet theology is both *more* and *less* dependent upon language and expression than science. *Less* in that, as stated above, human language will always be limited in "speaking of" the divine; while there is less of a gap between words and the objects of scientific understanding. But also *more* in that theology cannot point to a prior "level" of reality (as scientific discourse can point to scientific "work") and thus must rely on its *lalia* to present its *logos*.

> As we already have seen, God as being-itself is the ground of the ontological structure of being without being subject to this structure himself. He *is* the structure. That is, he has the power of determining the structure of everything that has being. Therefore, if anything beyond this bare assertion is said about God, it no longer is a direct and proper statement, no longer a concept. It is indirect, and it points to something beyond itself. In a word, it is symbolic (Tillich 1987e, 166).

This is where kataphatic wariness about "language" must open up to the aesthetic aspect of all "literature." In a word, this is where Barth meets Barthes, and Calvin Calvino.

Gadamer (1986d, 128) argues that the imitation in proper mimesis "has nothing whatever to do with the relation between copy and original, or indeed with any theory for which art is supposed to be an imitation of 'nature', that is, of that which exists in its own right." Rather, mimetic relation involves showing or presentation of the "object," in which the showing "points away from itself" (128).

> We cannot show anything to the person who looks at the act of showing itself, like the dog that looks at the pointing hand. On the contrary, showing something means that the one to whom something is shown sees it correctly for himself. It is in this sense that imitation is a showing. For imitation enables us to see more than so-called reality…It is no longer just this or that thing that we can see, but it is now shown and designated as something. An act of identification and, consequently, of recognition occurs whenever we see what it is that we are being shown. (128–9)

This understanding of "representation" is akin to what modern literary critics would call "magic realism"—or, in the artistic tradition, New Objectivity (*neue Sachlichkeit*).

Neue Sachlichkeit: Belief-ful Realism

In an article entitled "Realism and Faith," Tillich develops the concept of "belief-ful" or "self-transcending realism" (STR), and relates this "style" to the birth of *neue Sachlichkeit* out of the ashes of expressionism in Europe. Expressionism, he relates, along with Cubism and Futurism, was a necessary rebellion against the naturalistic-critical, as well as against the idealistic-conventional wing of realism, and it also went beyond the limits of the subjective-impressionistic realism from which it came. "Things were interpreted by the expressionistic painters in their cosmic setting and their immeasurable depth. Their natural forms were broken so that their spiritual significance could become transparent" (1987b, 68). Expressionism in art was "confirmed" by developments in other realms, including science.

Yet by the third decade of the century, during the tumultuous interwar period, expressionism was challenged by a turn towards "new objectivity." This was not a return to pre-expressionistic style, but rather a repudiation of the romantic subjectivism of the preceding period without giving up its depth and cosmic symbolism (Tillich 1987b, 68). In short, the post-expressionistic new realism was not so concerned with the "natural" form of things as their "power of expressing the profounder levels and the universal significance of things" (68). Rather than turn expressionism (or the earlier realism) on its head, the new "belief-ful" realism tried to point to the spiritual meaning of the real by using its given forms.

Tillich attempts to "universalize" his notion of STR, insisting that it is neither a "merely" theoretical view of the world nor simply a practical discipline for life; rather it is a form of *praxis* that expresses itself "in the shaping of every realm" (1987b, 68). Essentially, STR combines two elements: 1) emphasis on the real, and 2) the transcending power of faith. Thus it maintains the tension otherwise dissolved into rationalism (or "self-limiting realism") and mysticism ("idealism"). "Reality" under the eyes of STR has become something "new." It is no longer merely "self-subsistent" as it once may have seemed, but has become, in Tillich's terms, *theonomous*. Of course, Tillich is aware that this is not an event in nature, "although—as always in spiritual matters—words and pictures have to be used which are taken from the spatial sphere" (1986b, 78). Most important is the fact that this is a relation or encounter of faith, in which we are "grasped" by "the unapproachable holy which is the ground of our being and breaks into our existence and which judges and heals us" (78).

Tillich's use of the symbol and his exposition of self-transcending realism are part of an attempt to understand theological knowledge and apprehension in terms of the discourse of aesthetics, a program which, while seemingly antithetical to Torrance's own project, clearly intrigues him.

Moreover, it is an attempt that has much to say to the Torranceian program itself, if not by way of a direct critique, then in terms of a necessary nuancing–, what might be literally called a *sounding* (i.e., "testing of depth by dropping a weighted line").

Theological Literature

What exactly is "theology"? Is it really "God-talk"? Or does this term more aptly refer to sermons and public addresses? Theology, the bulk of it at any rate, is the *written word*. As such it partakes of all the pleasures and the pitfalls of any written text, of "literature." This is a crucial point, and one from which we can draw an important distinction between theology and science, a difference which makes a difference in terms of method as well as content. "Science" is not primarily the written description of hypotheses, but rather the "work" itself (whether experimental or calculational). *Scientific writing* certainly is "literature" in the broad sense, even if it is often unaware of itself as such. Theology, like literature in the strict sense (fiction) is not a "representation" of something more fundamental or primary—neither God, nor personal revelation or *Gefühl*, nor even the revelation of Jesus Christ in scripture or sacrament. There is no prior "experimentation" or "encounter"—the encounter is in the doing (and doing here may be both the writing and the reading/reception) of theology, in the word (*lalia*) making the Word (*logos*) flesh.

Bonhoeffer (1988, 90) once remarked that "(i)n every theological statement we cannot but use certain forms of thinking. Theology has these forms in common with philosophy." T. F. Torrance would no doubt disagree with Bonhoeffer's easy conflation, and would charge that theological statements have more in common with scientific than philosophical utterances. It is my contention that both Bonhoeffer and Torrance miss what Barth (and Tillich in communion with him) realized: ultimately, theological language reflects the "language" of art.

It may of course be charged that art has no "method" to speak of, and thus is hardly a valuable paradigm for theology. But Torrance has simplified "method" to its barest minimum: *an openness to the self-revelation of the truth of the Object, with correspondent openness to mediation in the process of knowledge itself by virtue of the object*. Suchwise, art has as much claim to "method" as science or theology; and a claim more familiar to the latter because of the transformational capacity of the "object"—and also because of its non-corporeal "presence." As Polanyi (1958, 279) puts it:

> Religion, understood as an act of worship, is an indwelling rather than an affirmation. God cannot be observed, any more than truth or beauty can be observed. He exists in the sense that He is to be worshipped and obeyed, but not otherwise; not as a fact—any more than truth, beauty or justice exist as facts. All these, like God, are things which can be apprehended only in serving them.

Truth, Beauty, God: *All "things" which can be "apprehended" only in service—in an openness to the truth of their being.*

Art and the Emptiness of Certainty

In one of his writings on Schleiermacher, Barth speaks of the "school" of eighteenth-century theologians known as "orthodox rationalists," who, in the wake of the Enlightenment, were convinced that much could be known through reason, and that even those revealed truths that were beyond reason were not necessarily *contrary* to reason. This school, which was in combat with the pietist "spiritualists," was eventually displaced by a "new rationalism" in which the rational the non-rational were divided into separate spheres; thus establishing the Kantian Great Divide.

Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, novelist, theologian, and social reformer, stands firmly within the orthodox rationalist tradition, and exemplifies the "blessed rage for order" which persists among many religious spirits to this day. Tolstoy countered the "supernatural" and "mystical" tendencies of Christianity, insisting that Christ's message was a (or rather *the*) Theory of Life, and above all, *rational*. Tolstoy, like T F. Torrance, sought a new sense of reason which would conform to the "old" faith, but he never fully succeeded in establishing such on rational grounds, and remained haunted by the spectre of his arch-rival and nemesis Dostoevsky, who revelled in the paradoxes and mysteries of Christian revelation. Instructive here are the differing images of the sacred held by the two Russian novelists. Tolstoy's image of Jesus was a Blakeian-rationalist one: Jesus as the great ethical teacher and moral sage; Dostoevsky gloried in the Suffering Servant Christ, as depicted the art of Hans Holbein and, most explicitly, the Crucifixion of Matthias Grünewald.

On a third wall of Karl Barth's study, perpendicular to the parallel portraits of Calvin and Mozart, hung a reproduction of Grünewald's Crucifixion. This portrait was Barth's favourite, and could be said to express, just as Mozart expressed the eternal Yea!, the inescapable Maybe that, according to Pascal, Tillich, and others, is essential to Christian faith.

> Take away doubt, sin and anguish and Christian faith turns into a caricature of itself. It becomes a set of false and largely meaningless statements, accompanied by conventional gestures and complacent moralizing. This is the forbidden endpoint of all Christian endeavours: its relapse into emptiness" (Polanyi 1958, 280)

—the emptiness of certainty. The Isenheim Crucifixion is an offense, a scandal, not only to reason but also to faith itself. Clifford Green (1991, 11) comments that the Grünewald Crucifixion points to "the central theme of Barth's theology: the God who encounters us in Jesus Christ is 'the One who loves in freedom'." Repeating Barth's comment that "(r)evelation means the giving of signs," Green (26) suggests that "(m)ost notably these signs and forms are human language and speech…Like the elongated figure of John the Baptist [in Grünewald's painting], these signs, which do not lose their human, earthly character, point beyond themselves"—just as in Gadamer's and Tillich's "new realism."

The connection with Dostoevsky is evocative, as Barth, by the 1930s, recognized the danger of merely "standing Schleiermacher on his head" and thus allowing renascent rationalism in the back door. This is a real danger, because rationalism (or the "style" of scientism) can reside in the subtle but pervasive extirpation of linguistic meaning.

Moreover, it is a danger very much present in *Theological Science*, despite the author's attempt to found a New Objectivity and a new realism on the foundations of reason and faith. Torrance's project is by no means undermined by a subtler recognition of the way language works, and more specifically, the way "literature" works. One could say, in fact, that it is made stronger by such, even if the term science in the title and the text must wither away.

Epilogue: Barth's Dream of the Holy Spirit

My last point concerns the Holy Spirit. The Third Person of the Trinity does not get much airtime in *Theological Science* as a whole, but makes a rather surprising entrance near the end of Torrance's work. "The direct and personal action of the divine Being upon through the Holy Spirit" is an inescapable part of the Christian encounter, yet, "(t)he Holy Spirit does not take us out of the subject-object relations; He does not make us *ecstatic*" (*TS* 294). Torrance uses "ecstatic" in its literal sense—to "stand outside of"—but there is no doubt a *double entendre* here; this remark is a pre-emptory attack on the mystics or aesthetes who would disturb Torrance's grand vision by bringing up terms like "ecstasy" and "mystery."

For Tillich, who dwells upon the idea of ecstasy at some length in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*, ecstasy is a kind of necessary escape valve from the rigidity of life's structures, be they rational, moral or ecclesiastical; it is "another way of formulating 'self-transcendence,' …the drive toward the infinite or 'ultimate concern' that is immanent to all being and process" (M. K. Taylor 1987, 30). The Spirit thrives only where structure and ecstasy are united. In addition, it is Tillich's contention that the notion of the Holy Spirit is absolutely central to Barth's theological project, even though it was (for Barth) an "impossible possibility," for reasons similar to the Kantian agony over the Great Divide between God and the world. But as we have seen, perhaps this paradox is not so pronounced as Tillich suggests; perhaps the Kantian's agony is assuaged, if not absolved, by an ecstatic-aesthetic understanding of the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Barth himself makes a rather surprising admission with regard to the Holy Spirit in his "Concluding Unscientific Postscript of Schleiermacher." "I would like to reckon, " he says, "with the possibility of a theology of the Holy Spirit, a theology of which Schleiermacher was scarcely conscious, but which might actually have been the legitimate concern dominating even his theological activity" (1991b, 89). This in itself is enough to give a Barthian pause, but Barth goes even further to suggest that the Holy Spirit might exonerate not only Schleiermacher but also the pietists, enthusiasts, mystics and spiritualists who preceded him. "Could it not be that so many things which for us were said in an unacceptable way about the church and about Mary in Eastern and Western Catholicism might be vindicated to the extent that they actually intended the reality, the coming, the work of the Holy Spirit, and that on that basis they might emerge in a positive-critical light?" This incredible supposition, the seemingly impossible possibility, is, Barth quickly admits, only a "dream," but it is a dream that might be worth pursuing, so long, that is, that it truly *is* the work of the Spirit.

Appendix A: Theological Music

By way of a concrete example of the use of art in theology, or the power of art to express theological "truth," one need look no further than Karl Barth's study, where, on an eye to eye level with a portrait of Calvin, hung a portrait of Mozart. Mozart was Barth's favourite composer—his favourite artist—and much more: he was, for Barth, one of the greatest *theologians* to have ever graced God's green earth:

> It is possible to give him this position because he knew something about creation in its total goodness that neither the real fathers of the church nor our Reformers, neither the orthodox nor liberals, neither the exponents of natural theology nor those heavily armed with the 'Word of God', and certainly not the existentialists, nor indeed any other musician before and after him, either knew or can express and maintain as he did. (Barth 1991d, 323)

It seems as though only Mozart was able to present or proclaim God's resounding "Ja!" to correspond with Calvin and Barth's "Nein! Mozart works for Barth at another level as well. In juxtaposing the three giants of classical composition, Barth suggests that whereas Bach exudes exemplary adherence to divine order and ecclesiastical structure, and Beethoven embodies personal confession or Gefühl, Mozart is the only one to merge the two in a truly "free play"—a musical opening-up to the Logos. Mozart's proclamation is, for the kerygmatic Barth, superior to Bach's structured greatness and Beethoven's dionysian fury because it is a proclamation under no "strictures"—whether ecclesiastical or personal. The Catholic and Freemason Mozart once said (and Barth quotes him approvingly) that Protestants had their religion "in their heads." With this in mind, we might see the kerygmatic note of theology as a warning against logical or rational (or linguistic) strictures. And if it is true, as Walter Pater proclaimed, that all art aspires to the condition of music, then "literature" itself is, in a sense, always on-the-way to ineffability, not in a simplification of language but rather in its explosion of signification.

The power of modern literature lies in its willingness to give a voice to what has remained unexpressed in the social or individual consciousness: this is the gauntlet it throws down again and again. The more enlightened our houses are, the more their walls ooze ghosts. Dreams of progress and reason are haunted by nightmares. Shakespeare warns us that the triumph of the Renaissance did not slay the ghosts of the medieval world who appear on the ramparts at Dunsinane or Elsinore. At the height of the Enlightenment, Sade and the Gothic novel appear. At one stroke Edgar Allen Poe initiated the literature of aestheticism and the literature of the masses, naming and liberating the ghosts that Puritan America trails in its wake. Lautréamont explodes the syntax of the imagination, expanding the visionary world of the Gothic novel to the proportions of the Last Judgment. In automatic associations of words and images the Surrealists discover an objective rationale totally opposed to that of our intellectual logic. Is this the triumph of the irrational? Or is it the refusal to believe that the irrational exists, that anything in the world can be considered extraneous to the reason of things, even if something eludes the reasons determined by our historical condition, and also eludes limited and defensive so-called rationalism?

– Italo Calvino, "The Uses of Literature"

Notes

1. Ortega referred to himself as a "writer" or a "theorist" in most instances, shunning what he thought were the strictures placed upon philosophers, sociologists, and political theorists.

2. "The relation of the individual to village, town, and city; the relation between city and countryside; the impact of authority or dislocation of authority upon human life; the pursuit of the sacred; the torments of anonymity and alienation: all of these are to be seen as vividly in the novels, dramas, poems, and paintings, even in the musical compositions, of the ages as they are in the works of the sociologists from Tocqueville and Marx on" (Nisbet 4).

3. The misconception that the logic of discovery *can* be summoned by obeying the rules of the logic of demonstration, says Nisbet, can result only in "intellectual droth and barrenness" (Nisbet 5).

4. "The greater scientists," says Nisbet, "have long been aware of the basic unity of the creative act as found in the arts and sciences. A large and growing literature attests to this awareness. Only in the social sciences, and particularly, I regret to say, in sociology, the field in which the largest number of textbooks on 'methodology' exist, has awareness of the real nature of discovery tended to lag" (Nisbet 1976, 5).

5. Nisbet claims to have been "struck repeatedly" by the number of instances in which visions, insights, and principles native to sociology in its classical period were anticipated, "were set forth in an almost identical shape and intensity, by artists, chiefly Romantic, in the nineteenth century" (Nisbet 1976, 8). Nisbet cites Burke, Blake, Carlyle, and Balzac as just a few writers whose reactions to the democratic and industrial revolutions "created a pattern of consciousness that sociologists, and others in philosophy and the sciences, fell into later."

6. The clarion call for the use of literature in philosophy, as a valuable and nearly inexhaustible source of perspectives on the human condition, has been picked up more recently by American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, who believes that it is literature, and not philosophical speculation or natural science which alone has the ability to promote a sense of human solidarity. Using Read's term, the "iconicism" of literature and the arts, the illumination of certain aspects of (social) reality from various perspectives, is more crucial to social theory than is often supposed, allowing as it does for a recognition in us of the "humiliation and cruelty of particular social practices and individual attitudes" (Rorty 1989, 3). In contrast, or in tension with this is the relevance of the "ironic" perspective on the human condition *vis-à-vis* the private level of existence. "A truly liberal culture," proclaims Rorty, "acutely aware of its own historical contingency, would fuse the private, individual freedom of the ironic, philosophical perspective with the [iconic] public project of human solidarity as it is engendered through the insights of and sensibilities of great writers" (202).

7. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, another exiled dissident, wrote in 1993 an article for *The Guardian* newspaper entitled "The Wrong Stuff," condemning the Cult of the New in art and academics. Arguing for a more 'balanced' perspective in creative writing, Solzhenitsyn argues "the loss of a responsible organising force weakens or even ruins the structure, the meaning and the ultimate value of art." A "raucous, impatient, avant-gardism," pursued at any cost, may well be a dangerous thing, dismissing all artistic and cultural achievement on a predetermined pursuit of originality. Solzhenitsyn's "healthy conservatism," with its flexibility to the claims of the Old and the New, comes very close to Burke's argument in *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* when the latter warned of the Terror that became a grim reality in the proceeding years.

8. "[T]he Spaniard of the future, rejecting the passionate embattled ego of Unamuno's personalism and the self-absorbed sensualism of the man in the street, must instead become a modest participant in the total view of reality constructed from the multiple viewpoints of all men and women" (Gray 1989, 83).

9. Ortega speaks at some length about "The Historical Significance of the Theory of Einstein" in *El tema de nuestro tiempo,* interpreting it as a justification of his own perspectivist approach. "The fact of the matter," says Ortega, "is that one of the qualities proper to reality (and revealed by Einstein) is that of possessing perspective, that is, of organizing itself in different ways so as to be visible from different parts" (Ortega 1972, 144). In sum: "The theory of Einstein is a marvellous proof of the harmonious multiplicity of all possible points-of-view. If the idea is extended to morals and aesthetics, we shall come to experience history and life in a new way."

10. Not only Ortega and Unamuno, but nearly all modern Spanish thinkers (Azorín, Ganivet, Machado, Fuentes) fall back upon Cervantes and/or Quixote in illuminating a wealth of different aspects of Spanish reality in the Modern Age.

11. "Things and objects came forth into order only with the intentional perspective of a purposeful being who gave coherent shape to his surroundings, thus making culture from the raw material of mere impressions and wresting meaning from the brute, resistant force of circumstances" (Gray 1989, 93).

12. Peirce, alarmed by the semantic confusions of "pragmatism" (and the attacks on James), preferred to call his theory "pragmaticism," guessing correctly that the very unwieldiness of the term would discourage possible usurpers.

13. *Lebensphilosophie* was a polemical affirmation of the rights of life contra other things and other valuations, whether they be reason, abstract thought, cosmic nature, the spirit, and so on.

14. Jamesian pragmatism, though less obviously vitalist, relies upon a method that is somewhat anti-rationalist. Marías criticizes pragmatism by suggesting that, like *Lebensphilosophie,* "it had to seek the unfolding of its possibilities by going beyond itself to other deeper and more radical forms of theory (i.e., Dilthey, Bergson)" (Marías 1970, 81).

15. Dilthey's was a particularly forceful type of vitalism; he considered the very reality of nature to be "irrational." Dilthey's theory was eventually overtaken by phenomenology.

16. Ortega cites Kierkegaard as one who had a penchant towards biting sarcasm, often, according to Ortega, unjustified.

17. Ortega: "One such perspective was that of Descartes, and though it had bulked inordinately large in the reasoning of succeeding generations, it was not ultimately privileged as a viewpoint on life" (Gray 1989, 16).

18. Here we might note a parallel with Gadamerian hermeneutics in terms of the latter's emphasis on "prejudice" and "foreunderstanding."

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