

[1960. Review of *The School of Faith*, by Thomas F. Torrance. *Christianity Today* 4 Jul.]

CATECHISMS AND THEOLOGY

The School of Faith, by Thomas F. Torrance (Harper, 1959, 298 pp., \$6), is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, Professor of Philosophy, Butler University.

Catechetical instruction, so despised by modern educators, finds here a staunch defender. For one thing, education always requires the impartation of information. "Unless the mind is given material to think about, it can only turn in upon itself, and this is the mark of a mental disease" (p. 27). This is all the more true of Christian education because Christianity is an historical religion. Catechisms supply the necessary information.

Doctrinal as well as historical information must be given to the pupil. The common objection to catechetical instruction, namely, that the material is beyond the experience of a child, Professor Torrance turns into an advantage by saying that catechism gives more than child can grasp as so stretches his powers. Then, too, in any subject one must learn to ask the right questions. Catechisms teach us what questions to ask. We might not have thought of them had we been left to ourselves. Thus "the Catechisms set forth Christian doctrine at its closest to the mission, life, and growth of the Church" (p. 11).

Professor Torrance has therefore reproduced the text of 10 catechisms, including Calvin's Geneva Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, Craig's two catechisms, the Latin Catechism, and the Westminster catechisms. He obviously prefers the earlier catechisms. The later ones are too scholastic and rationalistic.

Toward the end of the Introduction, the author sketches a view of Christ's ontological union with all men. It is incorrect to think that Christ's relation to mankind was merely a generic relation in that he too was man. Therefore all men are involved in Christ's death, not only on judicial grounds but also by the constitution of His person as Mediator. The author claims to find these ideas in the earlier catechisms. God is the source of all being, he says; and therefore if Christ had not come, man would have disappeared into nothing. Christ's work explains why men still exist (p. 113).

Professor Torrance rejects the universalism to which this type of argument leads. Earlier he had said that correct sequences of thought must never be allowed to cramp the expression of

truth (p. 62). So here the author, with a complete reliance on free will, asserts that man can reject God's grace. But how this is possible, he cannot understand: it is a bottomless mystery, words and thoughts fail him (pp. 113-116).

Would not this illogical outcome suggest that one should re-examine the premises on which it is based, return to the Westminster catechisms and to the Reformers, and unite federalism and the Covenant with the irresistible grace of God?

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