

full and fruitful critical engagement. But, although the stage has been set, a full-scale critical assessment of Torrance's work will have to wait for another occasion.

With this book Paul Molnar has pretty well eliminated any excuse not to be able to have a clear, sympathetic, and comprehensive understanding of Torrance's body of theological work. As attested to by the impressive endorsements on the back of the book from John Webster, George Hunsinger, David Fergusson, Elmer Colyer, Alasdair Heron, and Iain Torrance, this work will serve as a landmark treatment that masterfully sets forth T. F. Torrance's constructive work in a way that is detailed and comprehensive and also fully conversant with current theological conventions; it is an indispensable guide.

Gary Deddo

## **THEOSIS IN THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS TORRANCE**

***Myk Habets. Surrey: Ashgate, 2009, pp. 212, £52.25***

*Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* belongs to the growing number of publications on the Scottish theologian Thomas F. Torrance, whom Alister McGrath has referred to as "the most significant British academic theologian of the twentieth century" (*TFT: Intellectual Biography*, xi). This book, however, is one of the most important works, because it is one of the few that deals particularly with Torrance's soteriology. As Habets notes, fresh secondary works with the purpose of either expounding or critiquing Torrance's soteriology are long overdue. In fact, although there has been a significant amount of doctoral theses written worldwide on Torrance's soteriology, Man Kei Ho's *A Critical Study of T. F. Torrance's Theology of Incarnation* (Peter Lang, 2008), Peter Cass's *Christ Condemned in the Flesh* (VDM Verlag, 2009), and Habets's *Theosis*, up to 2009, are probably the only published doctoral theses after Kye Won Lee's *Living in Union with Christ* (Peter Lang, 2003). For people who are interested in understanding Torrance's doctrine of salvation, this book offers a promising and substantial help.

The thesis of this book is that although *theosis* is not *the* central point of Torrance's dogmatics, the concept "is of fundamental importance" in Torrance's



soteriology in particular and “is a necessary crucial integrating theme within his overall theological *oeuvre*” in general (p. 16). Grounded in this conclusion, almost in an apologetic manner, the whole book thus shows how *theosis* can be a justifiable hermeneutical key in a presentation of Torrance’s soteriology. Habets, at an early point in the book, admits that he undertakes his project with an assumption that Torrance employs “conceptual equivalents” of *theosis* in his writings, such as “union, communion, participation, transcendental determination, reordering, humanising, personalising and atoning exchange” (p. 15). Habets is aware that Torrance rarely employed the term *theosis*, which Torrance himself admitted to be quite offensive to some (*Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 243; quoted on p. 1), so Habets’s equation of several key terms and concepts in Torrance’s writings constitutes a significant part of the weight of his overall argument.

Being aware of the ambiguity of the term *theosis*, Habets properly devotes the introduction of the book to offering a definition of the term. Albeit laconically, Habets provides the etymological root and basic English translation of *theosis* as “divinisation” or “deification,” which he points out are both inadequate and misleading (p. 5). Then he proceeds with the historical development and use of the concept, with particular attention to the Western church, arguing that the concept of *theosis* has been prominent in the theology of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Anglican theologians, the Wesley brothers, and even contemporary Pentecostalism. That Habets presents Torrance’s appropriation of *theosis* only after this brief survey seems to be deliberate, in order to show that (1) *theosis* is actually a part of the rich theological tradition of the Western church and (2) that Torrance’s use of the concept cannot be considered as a deviation from his own theological tradition.

Habets indubitably possesses an “indwelt knowledge” of Torrance’s theology (see p. 2). This book provides ample evidence of the author’s exhaustive interaction with the large quantity of Torrance’s theological corpus, and the resulting palpable comprehensive knowledge of Torrance’s theology is noteworthy. However, it is precisely because Habets is evidently well-informed of Torrance’s thoughts that he cannot be acquitted from a noticeable weakness. Ultimately, the book is all about Torrance’s soteriology, approached via the concept of *theosis*. Concerning this, the propriety of sketching Torrance’s soteriology by starting

with the doctrines of creation and theological anthropology is quite questionable (chapter 1). One wonders if Habets failed to represent Torrance's Christocentric and Trinitarian soteriology in outlining his book, consciously or unconsciously, by seemingly arguing that the first and necessary backdrop to understanding Torrance's soteriology is not knowledge of Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity but of creation and anthropology. This approach seems to be incompatible with Torrance's scientific soteriology.

Habets, however, redeems himself in the ensuing chapters. Chapter 3 constitutes the heart of Habets's arguments regarding *theosis* as a soteriological motif in Torrance's thought, for which the author prudently lays the appropriate theological foundation by devoting chapter 2 to Christology. This move contradicts Habets's earlier assessment that *theosis* "illuminates [Torrance's] incarnational view of the atonement" (p. 1), but it also rectifies the error of that conclusion. Habets rightly points out that Torrance's soteriology is founded on Christology, so that an understanding of the person and work of the incarnate Son is prerequisite in grasping Torrance's soteriological articulation, including *theosis*. This is because the person and work of Jesus Christ are one; that is, his person is his work and his work is his person. This does not imply ontological tautology. Rather, it essentially points to the inseparable relation between Christology and soteriology, and the futility of understanding the latter without the former, and vice versa. Habets beautifully refers to this oneness as "Christ's incarnational redemption" (p. 50), where every aspect of the life of the incarnate Son is essentially redemptive. In short, Christ redeems humanity not through an external transaction but rather as the God-man vicariously effects the atoning exchange between God and humanity, from the side of God as fully God and from the side of humanity as fully man in one person. The life of the God-man is not a prelude to an atoning act. Rather, the whole life of Jesus Christ is the whole atoning act. However, rather than interpreting Torrance as espousing a physicalist theory of redemption, as some critiques of Torrance do, Habets rightly considers that Torrance's view exemplifies an ontological model instead. This means Christ's salvific incarnation deals with more than the problem of physical corruption and death. Considering that the whole life of Christ is salvific, Christ assumed and redeemed all aspects of fallen humanity: the physical, the moral, and most importantly, the relational at-one-ment and reconciliation between God and humanity.

Chapter 3 examines and expounds the use of *theosis* in Torrance's soteriology by heavily relying on Torrance's understanding and use of "union with Christ." Torrance himself admits his deep indebtedness to both Calvin and H.R. Mackintosh on this particular theological theme. Throughout his discussion of Torrance's treatment of union with Christ, Habets ingeniously incorporates both Calvin's and Mackintosh's views, which is probably inevitable, considering the overlapping similarities among these three thinkers. By referring to Torrance's use of the Old Testament concepts *pdh*, *kpr*, and *g'l* at the beginning of the chapter, Habets reminds his readers that Christ's atoning reconciliation is ontologically accomplished by and in Christ. This is particularly essential in Habets's overall argument, for the atoning exchange accomplished by Jesus's incarnation is the necessary prerequisite to understanding humanity's union with Christ. God in Christ was one with humanity so that humanity might be in union with Christ, and by extension, humanity might share in the Life, love, and communion of the Triune God. *Theosis*, or deification, according to Torrance, is actually humanization. Thus, humanity as humans — not divinized humans — through Christ's ontological and atoning union with us and our consequent union with him are enabled to enter into relationship with the Triune God. To show that Torrance is still a Reformed theologian amid his use of *theosis* in his soteriology, Habets allocates the remainder of the chapter to establishing the relationship between justification and *theosis*. Habets does this by arguing that justification is not merely a forensic act. *Declaration*, or being proclaimed justified in Christ, and *deification*, or our continual union with Christ, are not mutually exclusive (pp. 117–24). In fact, Habets concludes, "justification is an aspect of the metanarrative of *theosis*" (p. 125).

That the role of the Holy Spirit in *theosis* is given attention in chapter 4 is another commendable aspect of the book. Torrance's soteriology, although it is christocentric, is essentially Trinitarian. This implies that the office of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation is indispensable. First, Habets expounds the interrelationship between the Spirit and Christ, particularly their mutual mediation. This means that in the salvific economy, the Spirit is active in the whole vicarious atoning life and work of Christ, from the virgin birth to Pentecost (p. 145). Reciprocally, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the world is also Christ-mediated. This can be understood in two ways: (1) the

Spirit became universally available for all only after Christ's vicarious Spirit-filled earthly human existence, and (2) the Spirit is mediated by and through Christ's finished redemptive activity. But the specific role of the Spirit in the world, as Habets points out, is that the Spirit subjectively actualizes *in nobis* what Christ objectively accomplished *pro nobis*. Thus, Habets calls the Spirit "the Agent of participation," for the Spirit enables us to participate in Christ's perfect knowledge, obedience, faith, and worship of the Father (pp. 151–65). Habets perceives Torrance's participation language as an evidence that *theosis* is crucial in Torrance's soteriology. What is lacking in this section, however, is an elaboration of the relationship between *theosis* and the presence of the Spirit in the world as the coming of God as God to relate with humans as humans. This failure on Habets's part leads to the neglect of an important aspect of Torrance's thought concerning *theosis*, particularly in relation to his anxiety concerning modern theology's tendency to confuse the Holy Spirit with the human spirit and spirituality, that "in the new coming of the Spirit we are up against *God* in the most absolute sense, God in his ultimate holiness or Godness" (*Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 243). This point is essential to Torrance's contention that we share in the life and love of the Triune God as fully human, and by grace alone.

Second, while Habets highlights the horizontal element of *theosis*, or of the relationship between God and humanity, he properly dedicates the remaining part of the chapter to the corporate nature of this horizontal relationship, that is, to the relationship between the Spirit and the church. Habets's decision is justifiable, for Torrance places the church under the Spirit's work. Habets quotes Torrance: "The Spirit creates not only personal union but corporate communion between us and Christ and through Christ with the Holy Trinity" (*Trinitarian Faith*, p. 9; quoted on p. 167). In relation to the Spirit's office in the world, the church, therefore, is the historical community on earth where corporate union with Christ through the Spirit takes place. Corporate worship and corporate partaking of the sacraments are integral elements in Torrance's soteriology. This is because, while our union with Christ in the Spirit is objectively rooted in Christ once and for all (baptism), it is nevertheless a union that needs to be continuously renewed (Eucharist). Furthermore, in the church there transpires both the horizontal and the vertical aspect of relation.

Overall, possessing an open mind, particularly on Habets's appropriation of the concept of *theosis* in Torrance's soteriology, will make a great deal of difference when reading this book. This means that readers should abandon the notion that *theosis* is equivalent to something like a substantial metamorphosis commonly attributed to Neoplatonic, Thomistic, and most recently, radical orthodoxy interpretations of participation in the divine nature. Rather, *theosis* in Torrance falls squarely within his relational and Trinitarian soteriology, where reconciliation is achieved by God in Christ's vicarious and atoning humanity, so that by union with Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, humanity as personalized persons and redeemed humans may share in the love, communion, and life of the Triune God. On the other hand, those who have biases concerning the term *theosis* because of the way that it has been generally conceived by Protestant theology as "divinization" or "deification" according to *essence* or *nature* will benefit from reading this book. Habets's ingenious and convincing presentation of Torrance's rediscovery of *theosis* as a relational concept as supported by both patristic and Reformation theologians has the potential of changing the general Western negative attitude toward the term and also of recovering the rich theological and spiritual orientations behind it.

This book also strengthens Torrance's already evident theological relation with the Eastern tradition. Torrance, in his lifetime, was deeply involved with the Eastern church in ecumenical dialogues, although the main themes of such dialogues were patristic studies and the doctrines of the Trinity and the church (e.g., the two volumes of *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches* [1985 and 1993]). Habets's study shows that Torrance's interest and appropriation of the main themes of Eastern theology goes beyond Trinitarian and ecclesiological concerns, but with soteriological considerations as well. As such, (1) for Torrance scholars, Habets's work should challenge more theologians for future projects, both analytical and critical, on Torrance's use and interpretation of Eastern theology; and (2) for Western theologians in general, this book should prompt more studies on the recovery of neglected themes the Eastern church has to offer for the further refinement of Christian dogmatics as a whole.

*Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* has much to offer to students of Torrance's theology. Several key elements of Torrance's thought are well-presented and integrated so that a reading of the book will provide a good insight

into Torrance's soteriology in particular and theology in general. A word of caution should be mentioned though, because as Habets himself confesses, using *theosis* in Torrance's soteriology has its own problems (pp. 195–96), particularly as there are areas where Torrance himself did not provide comprehensive discussion. One might wonder if this is deliberate in Torrance: while *theosis* occupies a place in his thoughts, it may not occupy the same weight that Habets places on it.

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**AN INTRODUCTION TO TORRANCE THEOLOGY:  
DISCOVERING THE INCARNATE SAVIOUR**

***Edited by Gerrit Scott Dawson***  
**2007 T&T Clark**

Over the past decade, many people, lay and academic, have asked me if there is a good introductory book for getting to know the thought of Tom or James Torrance. Often I have referred them to *Mediation of Christ* (1984), yet also with a bit of hesitation — for the layman, *MOC* can be a bit of an overwhelming experience; and for the scholar, its lack of footnoting can be frustrating. James Torrance's *Worship, Communion and the Triune God of Grace* (1996) is excellent, yet somewhat restricted in its dogmatic scope. Now that Tom Torrance's Edinburgh lectures (*Incarnation* [2008] and *Atonement* [2009]) have finally been published, a very readable and thorough work is on the market. But for those not ready to read two large volumes and who are comfortable with a secondary resource, Dawson's broad *Introduction* may be the best thing on offer.

*Introduction* is the product of pastors and theologians who have been deeply shaped and centred by the teaching and writing of the Torrance brothers. (Contributors include: David Torrance, Andrew Purves, Elmer Colyer, Gerrit Dawson, Douglas Kelly, Alan Torrance, Graham Redding, Gary Deddo, and Baxter Kruger.) It is an excellent book for those who want to test the Torrance theological waters, yet it also represents several pieces of thoughtful scholarship