

REVIEWS

***EXPLORING CHRISTOLOGY AND ATONEMENT:
CONVERSATIONS WITH JOHN MCLEOD CAMPBELL,
H. R. MACKINTOSH AND T. F. TORRANCE***

Andrew Purves

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Andrew Purves teaches historical theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, USA and has authored several books of pastoral theology. At the end of the book under review, he explains that the three theologians with whom he has held “conversation” in the preceding pages are the major sources behind his earlier work in pastoral theology (p. 254). The preface to *Exploring Christology and Atonement* describes his aim to enrich contemporary Christian ministry with christological and soteriological insights mined from a particular vein of Scottish Reformed theology. Purves presents his conversation partners: his former teacher at the University of Edinburgh, Thomas F. Torrance; Torrance’s own Edinburgh professor, Hugh Ross Mackintosh; and a critically appropriated influence on both Torrance and Mackintosh, deposed Church of Scotland minister John McLeod Campbell (p. 12). Purves esteems these three theologians as “doctors of the church To read them is to be spiritually and not just intellectually and theologically elevated” (p. 13).

Relying heavily on Torrance, the Introduction sketches Purves’ theological method. First, theology is rightly an ecclesial activity, meant to be practiced *within* the church and *for* the church by those who are members *of* the church. These parameters exclude, certainly not all academic theology, but theology done purely for academic reasons, amputated from the life of God’s people. Purves colorfully portrays such detached theology as “a discipline listlessly wandering the corridors of the academy whimpering for a seat at the table” (p. 19). Second,

theology's proper epistemology is critical realism. This commitment produces a posture of humble attentiveness: attentive to the self-disclosure of a reality beyond us which can truly be known, yet humble because our knowledge is ever partial (in both senses of the word: incomplete and biased). Consequently, no doctrinal construct is past correction; *semper reformanda* remains theology's watchword this side of the Parousia.

Between the bookends of the Preface and Introduction on the one hand and Chapter 7's ministry-oriented conclusion on the other, the body of *Exploring Christology and Atonement* divides into equal halves. Chapters 1-3 examine Christology from three complementary angles, with McLeod Campbell's, Mackintosh's, and Torrance's views surveyed in each chapter. Chapters 4-6 study atonement and Purves' approach shifts: rather than interweaving the three theologians' views within each chapter, he devotes an entire chapter to each theologian in turn.

Chapter 1 returns to the issue of methodology. McLeod Campbell, Mackintosh, and Torrance all ground Christ's atoning work in his incarnate person. Their starting point is the fact of the incarnation, not metaphysical explanations of how it may be possible, philosophical conceptions of generic theism, or theological discussions of predestinarian secret counsels. The three Scots reject extrinsic notions of penal substitution and imputed righteousness in favor of filial (McLeod Campbell), personal (Mackintosh), and ontological (Torrance) perspectives on atonement. Near the end of the chapter, Purves reviews Torrance's discussion of Christ's relationship to Israel. Concerning Torrance's view of Israel's vicarious rejection, Purves worries whether "Torrance has just gone a bit too far into a mystery that may be best left opaque" (p. 62).

Chapter 2 focuses on two-natures Christology. Writing as an amateur theologian, McLeod Campbell assumes more than addresses orthodox views. Mackintosh approves of Nicaea but critiques patristic metaphysical terminology. He wishes to affirm Christ's true divinity (including preincarnate existence and worthiness of worship) and true humanity without ascribing to Christ two consciousnesses, wills, or natures, especially an impersonal (anhypostatic) human nature. Instead, Mackintosh opts for a kenotic view in which the divine Logos self-contracts in the incarnation in order to relate to general human experience. This self-emptying kenosis, though, is complemented by Christ's self-fulfilling plerosis as he grows in grace throughout his earthly career. Purves appreciates Mackintosh's teaching on plerosis but finds his kenoticism more speculative than scriptural. Ironically, in seeking to escape the metaphysics of classical Christology, "Mackintosh is not thoroughgoing enough, perhaps, in

pushing kenosis backwards into God such that Christ . . . is the criterion for divinity" (p. 95). Torrance denies kenoticism and has much to say in support of Nicene Christology as crucial for a proper, non-dualistic perspective on revelation and reconciliation. Purves presents Torrance's Christology as more comprehensive and correct than his predecessors'.

Chapter 3 covers the "magnificent exchange" and union with Christ, both of which Purves wishes to hold together as two sides of the same salvific coin. Although this chapter is labeled as part of the christological half of the book, it studies McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement*, with its doctrine of atonement as "vicarious penitence," and Mackintosh's constructive critique of it. Purves himself finds McLeod Campbell's model insightful but incomplete. Like McLeod Campbell, Torrance teaches that Christ has fulfilled the divine-human covenant from both sides. What he has done *for* us is realized *in* us through our union with him. The doctrine of union with Christ appears implicitly in McLeod Campbell and explicitly in Mackintosh and Torrance. The chapter ends with Torrance's applications of the doctrine to Christian faith, worship, and service.

Chapter 4 opens with a meditation on Christ's cry of dereliction. Purves urges that the Trinity as a whole was affected but not destroyed by Christ's experiences of godforsakenness and death. Purves then turns to McLeod Campbell, sketching his ministry to parishioners bound under contractual conceptions of religion, reviewing his defense of his atonement teaching, and offering an extended evaluation of that teaching. He judges that McLeod Campbell redirected the concern of atonement theology away from the satisfaction of divine honor (as in Anselm) or divine law (as in Federal Calvinism) to the fulfillment of divine love. This is a fruitful move, although McLeod Campbell overemphasized the filial category to the total exclusion of the legal. A more balanced perspective, Purves believes, will stress the former while making a place for the latter, as Torrance does. Purves proceeds to defend McLeod Campbell against a variety of critiques, including Mackintosh's.

Chapter 5 looks at Mackintosh's volume on atonement, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*. Like McLeod Campbell, Mackintosh transposes atonement from a penal to a personal-relational key. He draws an analogy from the human experience of giving and gaining forgiveness: just as the forgiver bears the painful cost of forgiving the wrongdoer, forging renewed fellowship with the wrongdoer, so also God bears the cruciform cost of reconciling humanity, creating not a legal fiction but a fresh relationship. Purves does worry about the projectionism inherent in this analogy, presuming as it does a "shared moral order between God and humankind" (p. 177). On the previous two pages, Purves himself succumbs to a

bit of projectionism by contrasting the impassioned God who acts to forgive with classical theism's impassible, immutable, hence to Purves' mind, immobile deity. *Pace* Purves, such is hardly the *actus purus* of scholastic theology, much less the impassibly suffering God of patristic theology!¹ Projectionism aside, Purves praises Mackintosh for holding together God's love and wrath, Christ's ministry and cross, and Christian justification and sanctification within a non-penal framework. Purves repeats his desire to make one additional reconciliation: that between the personal-relational model beloved of McLeod Campbell and Mackintosh and the legal model spurned by them.

Chapter 6 explores Torrance's *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*. As in Christology, so in soteriology, Purves views Torrance as the comprehensive and corrective climax to the trajectory from McLeod Campbell through Mackintosh. Torrance engages with the biblical data to a far greater degree than his theological forebears, although Purves finds "a bit forced" the correlation of Hebrew terms (*padah/kipper/goel*), *munus triplex*, and Christ's active obedience, passive obedience, and incarnation (pp. 208-209 n. 27). He feels that Torrance's doxological tendencies indicate one (though not the only) "criterion for truth in theology": does one's doctrine evoke adoration (p. 215)? Torrance's view of justification as Christ's fulfilling the Law apart from the Law succeeds in harmonizing the legal and the filial aspects of atonement. Purves does question the consistency of Torrance's affirmation of imputed righteousness but defends his teacher's disavowals of limited atonement and universalism. In the possibility of self-damnation, as in the role for our faith, worship, and service in union with Christ, Torrance belies his critics' charges of hyper-objectivism by preserving a place for our genuine response to grace. Purves grants that Torrance's doctrine of sanctification is underdeveloped but believes that "he would encourage movement in that direction, and that a theology of human agency in Christ is properly anticipated" (p. 240).

Chapter 7 shows how the three Scots' beliefs about Christ and atonement affected their pastoral theology. All three served in parish ministry at some point during their careers — McLeod Campbell, throughout the entirety of his. He preached to call his people to faith in the unconditional love of God in Christ. Mackintosh's preaching did likewise, while his university teaching inculcated piety as well as learning in his students. Purves is particularly at pains to demonstrate

1 See, e.g., Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; repr. 2005); Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (trans. and ed. William Hendriksen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 151: "immutability should not be confused with monotonous inactivity or immobility."

that Torrance was a pastoral theologian, citing his statements about ministry and his personal recollections of service in the Alyth parish during the 1940s. Torrance's former students could supplement Purves' evidence with their own testimonials to his pastoral bearing.² The book concludes by reasserting Purves' conviction that Christology and atonement are the necessary foundations of pastoral theology.

Purves' volume provides a handy preview or review of his conversation partners' Christology and soteriology for students and busy parish ministers. Scholars heeding David Fergusson's call to attend to Torrance's Scottish theological context will appreciate Purves' demonstration that "Torrance is properly viewed as much more than the student of Karl Barth" by tracing the "family resemblances" among Torrance, McLeod Campbell, and Mackintosh (p. 239).³ It is especially gratifying to see attention paid to the rather neglected figure of H. R. Mackintosh.⁴

While Purves speaks of all three Scots as "doctors of the church" (pp. 5, 13), he clearly regards Torrance as the *doctor doctorum*. This is salutary insofar as Torrance incorporates the best insights of his predecessors within a system that has deeper roots in scripture and tradition. Occasionally, though, Torrance's influence overshadows the data.⁵ Thus Purves says that his conversation partners' theological trajectory gained inspiration from the Greek Fathers (p. 10). Torrance certainly drew from them, but McLeod Campbell cites them nary at all, while Mackintosh frowns on most patristic Christology, whether Greek or Latin, as mired in Hellenistic metaphysics.⁶ Elsewhere, the lines are indistinct regarding the differences among the three Scots' views on whether Christ assumed a

2 See, e.g., Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 54–55; Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert T. Walker; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), x; George Dion. Dragas, "T.F. Torrance a Theologian For Our Times: an Eastern Orthodox Assessment" (n.p.: Grace Communion International, 2013), www.youtube.com/watch?v=Frhvk-MY3dg, 00:31:10–00:34:10.

3 David S. Fergusson, "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian," *Participatio 2* (2010): 77–87.

4 See John L. McPake, "The Reception of the Theology of Karl Barth in Scotland," *Tyn-dale Bulletin* 47.1 (May 1996): 181–184; McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, 163–164; Robb Redman, "Mackintosh, Torrance and the Reformulation of Reformed Theology in Scotland," *Participatio 2* (2010): 64–76; Fergusson, "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian," 81–82.

5 This is a tendency among Torrance's students against which Fergusson warns in "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian," 86–87.

6 See George M. Tuttle, *John McLeod Campbell on Christian Atonement: So Rich a Soil* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1986), 73–75; H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (The International Theological Library; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913; repr. 1920), 213–215, 222, 226, 237–248, 288–303.

fallen human nature (cf. pp. 11, 63, 91) and between Torrance's and Calvin's perspectives on predestination (pp. 229, 231).⁷ Regardless of these quibbles, *Exploring Christology and Atonement* fully achieves its aim of enhancing pastoral theology through reflection on the heart of the Christian faith: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor 5:19 KJV).

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7 Evert J. Van Kuiken, "The Relationship of the Fall to Christ's Humanity: Patristic Theology as an Arbiter of the Modern Debate" (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2013), 47–58, 98–107, 225–226 (this thesis is currently being considered for publication by T&T Clark as E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Fallen or Not? Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy*); Dragas, "T.F. Torrance a Theologian For Our Times," 00:49:17–00:54:15; Alasdair Heron, "Calvin in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance: Calvin's Doctrine of Man (1949)," *Participatio* 2 (2010): 44–63, esp. 56; E. Jerome Van Kuiken, "Convergence in the 'Reformed' Theologies of T. F. Torrance and Jacob Arminius" in Keith D. Stanglin, Mark G. Bilby and Mark H. Mann, eds., *Reconsidering Arminius: Beyond the Reformed and Wesleyan Divide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 130 n. 27.