

## **TRINITY AND TRANSFORMATION:**

### **J. B. Torrance's Vision of Worship, Mission, and Society**

**edited by Todd H. Speidell**

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Of the three Torrance brothers of Scotland, Thomas, James, and David, James B. Torrance is not as well-known as the namesake of this organization, Thomas F. Torrance. Having published only one book during his lifetime (although along with many scholarly articles), that is not surprising. But to those who were mentored by James in a doctoral program at the University of Aberdeen, or sat under his warm, stimulating lectures given from Scotland, California, South Africa, to Australia, a broad smile cannot help but come over our faces. This collection of essays by his former students exploring his theological legacy reflects the deep influence J. B. Torrance had on decades of students thirsty for a theology that deeply reflected the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Among the many essays presented here, we can only mention a few. The volume has an attractive separation into "Tributes" and "Essays," but does not avoid separating James Torrance from his theology, the personality from his love of the triune God and the joy he took in theology.

One is struck by the *wholeness* of James' theology, as it was seamlessly reflected in his life. This was often seen in his strong concern for social ethics. His lecture tour in South Africa during the apartheid years is well-known, along with his critique of a Calvinism whose "nature/grace" dualism would open the door to such thinking. Roger Newell develops this thought in a masterful essay on the Stuttgart Declaration on German war guilt after World War II and the implications of JBT's running theme of repentance not being the cause of forgiveness of sin, but as flowing from grace. His "radically inclusive" view of "the triune God of grace" was reflected in his own life and sensed by those around him. A doctrine of "limited atonement" did not speak to him of the God of the incarnation. (It was surprising to learn that he was once a youth pastor working under the well-known advocate of limited atonement, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones!) James' hospitality in his own life, as Jeremy Begbie points out, reflects his belief in a hospitable God.

The influence of James Torrance's thought on covenant and contract in the work of the noted Pauline New Testament scholar Douglas Campbell is represented by an essay by Campbell himself, "Covenant or Contract in the Interpretation of Paul." This article certainly reminds us of the continuing need for dialogue between biblical scholars and theologians. Unlike many of his fellow biblical scholar colleagues, Campbell is not afraid to do so. Will theologians respond in kind?

There are some added little delights in the book. The trinitarian-incarnational diagram, which he drew countless times in class, is here ("Have you seen my diagram?" James always predictably asked a new theological acquaintance.) Of course, the diagram continues to live on in the chalkboards, whiteboards, and PowerPoint presentations of his many students who teach today! (I had one student, bless her heart, make a quilt for me of the "double movement of grace"!) The hymn that James actually composed, based on the vicarious prayers of Christ, "I Know Not How to Pray," is here. So also is the "get well" greeting from Karl Barth when James, then one of Barth's students in Basel, broke his leg while skiing! The editor is most of all to be commended, however, for including a short writing of James' himself to remind the reader of the man. One cannot do better than "The Unconditional Freeness of Grace," published obscurely in Tom Smail's *Theological Renewal*, a charismatic journal. It is a jewel that touches upon so many of JBT's major themes. In my opinion, this is the one essay to give to anyone in becoming acquainted with James Torrance.

The volume is not lacking in a few critiques of JBT's thought. Even his son Alan questions whether James was too easy on Calvin, not admitting the presence of "double predestination" as well as in the later scholastic Calvinists. Alexandra Radcliff, in her essay, "James B. Torrance and the Doctrine of Sanctification," confronts one of the crucial questions facing JBT's theology: "If everything is done for one in Christ . . . what is left then for me to do?" This is an issue that the late John Webster raised concerning one of James' favorite doctrines which he shared with his brothers, the vicarious humanity of Christ. Stephan May's related article, "'Thrown Back Upon Ourselves': James Torrance's Critique of Pelagianism in Christian Life and Worship" further explores this issue of "our response" in a masterful way, exposing how all-pervasive conditional repentance can be in our traditions and our need for the vicarious response of Christ. The short yet powerful chapter by Graham Redding on "Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ" reminds us of the importance of the priesthood of Christ in JBT's theology and its essential place in his theology of prayer as seeking "the mind of Christ." Andrew Torrance discusses the distinction between *prescriptive* "ifs" (*if you do*

or do not something, you will be blessed or cursed) and *descriptive* "ifs" (if you do something as a description of the relationship, as in 1 John 1:9, if you confess your sins, he is faithful to forgive them). The issue of conditional versus unconditional grace in Calvin and JBT is also developed in depth by Andrew Torrance, responding to many objections of scholastic Calvinists.

Essays are present that attend to James Torrance the teacher as well. "A Pedagogy of Grace" by Michael Jenkins, "Learning from Teaching" by Jeremy Begbie, and "Fifteen Years of Teaching *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*" by Kerry Dearborn, bear witness to the impact of JBT's teaching worldwide. (This writer can also testify to the impact of *Worship* on my teaching. It was the essential jewel in teaching a graduate course, "Dimensions of Worship," for over twenty years. In some ways, it may be the all-around best "first book" for those starting to study theology.)

Jeremy Begbie rightly observes that in JBT's teaching (or research and writing) he did not feel the need to cover all subjects (creation and eschatology are absent), and this frees the student from trying to master everything. Nonetheless, Tim Dearborn's essay on the implications of James' theology for missions demonstrates that some basic themes of James' theology, for example, in missions, can be used for theological exploration in the future. Dearborn has found that the "Who" before the "How" motif is particularly relevant for Missiology ("From Pragmatism to Participation: the Impact of Trinitarian Faith on Missiology").

In summary, for anyone who has ever heard or read James B. Torrance, this volume is a sheer delight. For those who have not, this is a fine introduction to his continuing legacy.

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