

## Reviews

**Myk Habets. *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*. Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate. (x + 212 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-7546-6799-5]**

Myk Habets is Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Carey Baptist College, Auckland, New Zealand, and he offers a constructive look at Scottish Theologian, Thomas Forsyth Torrance's version of a so called 'Reformed' *theosis*. This book serves as the published version of Habets' doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Otago under Professor Ivor Davidson (now University of St Andrews). Habets' offering provides original insight into an, heretofore, undeveloped doctrine within the theological *oeuvre* of the celebrated career of Thomas Torrance. Habets summarizes the proposal of the book this way:

The Reformed theologian, Thomas Forsyth Torrance, represents an attempt to construct a soteriology that incorporates both Eastern and Western models of the atonement around the controlling metaphor of *theosis*. A close reading of his theology presents a robust and clearly articulated doctrine of *theosis* as a key way of expressing God's reconciling activity in Christ. As the true Man and the last Adam, Christ represents the *archē* and *telos* of human existence, the one in whose image all humanity has been created and into whose likeness all humanity is destined to be transformed from glory to glory. Through the Incarnation the Son becomes human without ceasing to be divine, to unite humanity and divinity together and effect a 'deification' of human nature, mediated to men and women who are said to be 'in Christ' by the work of the Holy Spirit. By means of a 'wonderful exchange' Christ takes what is ours and gives us what is his. For Torrance, this is the heart of atonement'(p. ix).

Habets starts with his Introduction, *Approaching T.F. Torrance and the Theme of Theosis*, which is necessary reading. Herein he provides preliminary definition for what *theosis* is, and then surveys the history of this pervasive doctrine through looking at key

theologians from not just the East, which would be expected, but also the West; which becomes a bridge to Habets' later development, insofar as Thomas Torrance is a Western theologian. Chapter 1, *Creation and Theological Anthropology*, enters into discussion by highlighting the import that *Christology* and *teleology* in relation to Creation play in contextualising Torrance's doctrine of *theosis*. Chapter 2, *Incarnation: God Became Human*, begins explicating the central foci which are pivotal for Torrance's *theosis*; that is, the Incarnation and the vicarious humanity of Christ. As Habets says, '[t]he Incarnation is redemptive and thus Christ's entire life is an act of 'divinisation'. Through the Word incarnate, revelation of God is given and received by means of Christ's vicarious humanity, and union with God in Christ is made a reality' (p. 16). Chapter 3, *Partaking of the Divine Nature*, serves as the touchstone for Habets' development of Torrance's understanding of *theosis*; it is here that Habets elaborates on how Torrance constructively engages a normally 'Eastern' doctrine of *theosis* by reifying it in a way that is both Reformed and Calvinian.

Chapter 4, *Community and Communion*, brings together the previously developed themes of the vicarious humanity of Christ as the *locus* wherein the divine and the human are brought together in the person of Jesus Christ; Habets does this by identifying the role that the Holy Spirit plays in Torrance's theology as the agent who brings humanity into union with Christ's humanity, the 'wonderful exchange'; it is here that ecclesiology and pneumatology are seen as central to understanding how *theosis* functions in Torrance's theology. Nevertheless, it is also here where Habets is most critical of Torrance's work. Habets identifies a particular deficit in Torrance's emphasis upon the Spirit's work, 'Had Torrance taken greater care to explain the relationship between the Spirit and Christ during Christ's earthly ministry...he would have been able to apply this more directly to the Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life of the believer in these in-between times as we await the glorious return of the risen Christ. Unfortunately, such a discussion is absent and students of Torrance are left to work out such a practical theology for themselves' (p. 191). Nevertheless, Habets believes that Torrance leaves a wealth of resources for his students, in constructive and fruitful ways.

Habets concludes his work, *Conclusion: The 'Danger of Vertigo'?*, by bringing together the heretofore developed threads into a constructive whole which provides critical ground from whence

future Torrance students can fruitfully engage his Reformed doctrine of *theosis*. Habets is clear that Torrance, himself, was not altogether critical in developing his doctrine of *theosis*; nevertheless, Habets believes, that through his reconstruction, he has established the reality that Torrance clearly offers the Christian (and Western) Church a thorough-going (albeit, revamped) doctrine of *theosis* to be critically engaged by Thomas Torrance and Reformed scholars alike (p. 198).

Here I offer a few points of reflection. First, Habets' writing style is precise, cogent, and accessible. He writes for the scholar in this book, but also for the seminary student, and even the thoughtful lay person. Second, Habets offers a compelling case for the belief that at least for one 'Western' theologian, Torrance, there is an actual doctrine (not just theme) of *theosis* articulated; and while it has Reformed pedigree, it potentially provides ecumenical resources for Eastern and Western Christians alike. Third, Habets provides substantial bibliographic and index material in the end matter of the book that should serve those interested in further research in this area. Fourth, overall, Habets' approach is measured in tone; and while he is highly appreciative of Torrance's *theosis*, this does not cloud his ability to engage Torrance on critical ground. Habets holds his appreciation and criticism of Torrance with a charitable balance on either side.

The only critique I might offer would take the reader back to the Introduction. For myself I did not find this problematic, but I think some may desire more development in regards to the proposed doctrines of *theosis* present amongst the various theologians surveyed. Though, since this section of the book only serves as preliminary and somewhat suggestive to Habets' later work; I do not find this to ultimately be a substantial weakness. Others may disagree; they will have to read the book to find out.

I highly recommend this book for scholars, Seminary and Bible College students, and the highly motivated lay person in the Church. Myk Habets offers the Church of Jesus Christ a service by unearthing a rich doctrine of Reformed *theosis* from the English speaking, Scottish born theologian, par excellence, Thomas Torrance.

**Bobby Grow**