

MYK HABETS, *THEOLOGY IN TRANSPOSITION: A CONSTRUCTIVE APPRAISAL OF T.F. TORRANCE*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013. (227 PP.) [ISBN: 978-0-8006-9994-9].

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Myk Habets' *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T.F. Torrance*, is a marvellous, and unique, contribution to the growing body of literature on, perhaps, the most significant English speaking theologian of the twentieth century. The goal of Habets' work is to provide "a critical introduction to Torrance's methodological commitments"(1).

The book is divided into two parts. Part I is: *The Architectonic Nature of Torrance's Scientific Christian Dogmatics: Essays on Method*. Habets first gives a brief biographical introduction to Thomas F. Torrance the person. Yet, even in this introductory chapter, Habets' goal of exploring Torrance's method begins to unfold as the key influences and themes in Torrance's work are presented in a way that lays the foundation for the later chapters as these key themes are expounded more fully in the chapters that follow. To this end, the second chapter explores Torrance's *Scientific Theology and Theological Science*. Habets opens the chapter with the thesis: "The theological corpus of Thomas Forsyth Thomas is unique in that throughout his many published works, spanning over fifty years, a consistent methodology has been employed, which each monograph, article, lecture, and address develops and explicates" (27). This is quite the claim, but Torrance himself, after reading Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, says that he was "impressed with the architectonic structure and beauty...but the whole concept was wrong" (27–28).<sup>65</sup>

Habets' discussion of Torrance's concern for method also serves to reveal the integration of Torrance's work as it becomes clear one thing Torrance disliked in Schleiermacher is that it was not a realist account of the Christian gospel. From here, Habets guides the reader on a dense but helpful walk through "levels of theologizing" that are at work in Torrance's theological works. In short, this chapter masterfully guides the reader through the various aspects of Torrance's thought showing why the homousian is the key that allows epistemology to rest on ontology and thus be truly scientific and realist (65).

In the third chapter, Habets treats Torrance's theology of nature, which is not the same as a purely "natural theology." This chapter is important for showing that, while Torrance was indebted to Karl Barth, he is also a very independent thinker in his own right. And, yet, Habets claims that Torrance was unclear and inconsistent in his attempt to build his theology of nature that doesn't fall into the trap of building a "logical bridge to God from unaided human reason" (86).

Chapter four is a fascinating account of Torrance's realist theology given through the lens of Torrance in dialogue with American fundamentalist theologian Carl Henry. Much of the discussion centres on the nature of Scripture and whether the written word or the person of Jesus Christ is the true word of God.

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<sup>65</sup> Habets quotes Thomas F. Torrance, "My interaction with Karl Barth," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. D. K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 52.

Habets' conclusion is most helpful as he evaluates both sides and leads us to a position that does not have to take an either/or approach to the Scriptures (121). Both the Bible can be true, and, therefore, the word of God, and Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

Part II is: *Select Themes within Torrance's Theological Oeuvre: Essays on Content*. Chapter 5, the first of Part II, makes a unique claim that Torrance is a mystical theologian—a claim Torrance would have rejected. However, it is certainly true that Torrance was in dialogue with, and influenced by, Eastern Christian thinkers. This influence led to Torrance introducing theological concepts, such as *theosis* and his major emphasis on union with Christ, that were unfamiliar to the Reformed theology of his day. Whether Torrance is truly a mystic or not, he allows mystery to play a large role in his thinking. Some readers familiar with Torrance might recall his well-known interaction with Donald MacLeod at Rutherford House. During the question and answer session, a pastor asks Torrance if he should tell someone that they need to be saved or are already saved. Torrance answers, "Neither." And again, when answering a question about limited atonement and why one is saved and another is not, Torrance sounds a bit mystical when he answers, "That's an impossible question to answer!" Perhaps a further way to develop this element of Torrance's thought is to investigate how Barth's dialectical influence, along with Eastern sources, shape Torrance's mystic or mysterious thinking.

One of the major concerns in Reformed thought is the Creator/creature distinction, which Habets treats in chapter 6. Finally, in chapter 7 Habets offers, perhaps, the most fascinating chapter of the entire project as he takes up Torrance's view that the human nature of Jesus was fallen. The influence of Edward Irving and Athanasius is traced very helpfully. Habets also, rightly I think, reveals Apollanarian and Docetic tendencies in Torrance's work (166). Habets writes, "Torrance's account of Christ's fallen human nature is constructive and suggestive. But like Athanasius, Torrance fails to construct a Christology that adequately explains the functional relation between the Word, or divine nature, and the humanity of Jesus" (194).

In response, Habets does some of his best constructive work by turning to another Reformed theologian—John Owen. Habets does this to address Torrance's lack of focus on the human life of Christ. Owen is the perfect resource because his debates with the Socinians led to Owen developing the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the human Jesus.

This closing chapter is more than simply a treatment of Torrance's Christology. Habets has done both the academy and the church a great service by giving a fascinating example of retrieval theology, whereby putting theologians in dialogue leads to constructive theology in line with the tradition of the church. Anyone interested in Torrance and/or retrieval theology, will find Habets' work both a helpful and fascinating read.