

Second, Finlayson's balance is commendable. Chalmers was a scholar, teacher, pastor, public theologian, family man, in many things excelling; still, we must learn from his failures as well as his successes. A leader by word and example, having the gift of self-promotion, Chalmers was moody and impulsive, did not receive criticism well and was not always gracious in debate. Finlayson asserts, 'He could be very stubborn and possessed a formidable temper, which he displayed all too often. His pen, which he had used so successfully to promote the gospel and social change, could sometimes be turned on his foes' (p. 96). 'He could be ruthless' (p. 153).

Finlayson is not interested in hagiography; his desire is to paint a true picture of God's servant: 'Chalmers was a complex man who did much good, but at the same time he made mistakes, and it is my hope that this expanded volume will deal fairly with both his achievements and his failures' (p. 11). The content is both compact and potent. Anyone interested in church history, Christian biography or the history of preaching will welcome this volume. *Chief Scottish Man* will fit nicely beside *Letters of Thomas Chalmers* (Banner of Truth, 2007) or *The Works of Thomas Chalmers: Complete in One Volume* (Andesite, 2017). This exploration of the life, theology and method of one of history's great preachers will enable us to minister more effectively by standing on the shoulders of a giant.

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## **Paul Molnar, *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance***

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Molnar's book delineates his relentless opposition to 'Natural Theology', in any form, on any front, together with his assessment of the deleterious implicates of such theology. The ligature rendering the book consistent and coherent is Molnar's insistence that Jesus Christ, as attested by holy scripture (Molnar eschews all putative contemporary 'Christ figures') is the first and final Word, the One who is rejected as soon as he is modified or supplemented. To begin anywhere but with Jesus Christ (whose identity includes Israel as the people of God, attested by the Older Testament) is to skew theology from the outset; and unless Jesus Christ is the final Word, the sufficiency of Christ is denied. Such denial, as Molnar's exposition and critique of liberation theology illustrates, reduces the gospel to an ideology spawned by a socio-political agenda, while the mission of the church is perverted into a programme of social adjustment. Briefly, unless Jesus Christ is the first and final Word, the gospel is denatured, theology is deprived of its proper orientation and substance and the church's mission ceases to be formed, informed and normed by the truth of the God whose eternal self-naming as Father, Son and Holy Spirit admits no substitution or alteration.

While the book includes seven chapters on different themes, a consistently identifiable theology underlies each and reverberates throughout; in effect each chapter is a different angle of vision on the unvarying trajectory of the book. The foundational aspect and determinative thread of this trajectory is Molnar's insistence, following both Barth and Torrance, that God is eternally and essentially Father, Son and Spirit. God is not constituted God by God's decision to elect humankind (here he opposes Bruce McCormack); neither is God constituted as triune by God's decision to create. God's eternal being – i.e. God's eternal generation of the Son in the bond of the Spirit – ever remains distinct from, albeit related to, God's activity as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. In other words, the activity of God in the economy does not constitute God as triune. Here Molnar contradicts those (especially Jürgen Moltmann, Alan Lewis and Brandon Gallaher) who maintain that God created the world to remedy a lacuna in God; not least, that for God to be love, there needs be a world God can love, with the result that the being of God and the being of the world interpenetrate and condition each other. Such pantheism, Molnar insists, always ends in a pantheistic confusion of God and creature.

Related to Molnar's insistence on the immanent Trinity is his sensitive discussion of feminist theology's attempt at renaming God as 'Mother' or as 'Lover, Loved, and World'. While acknowledging the deplorable ravages of patriarchal oppression in the church's history, he insists that as we participate in God's life by faith in Jesus Christ we are constrained to confess God imagelessly as 'Father, Son, Spirit'. Expounding Torrance's distinction between 'Disclosure Models' and 'Picture Models', Molnar indicates why the vocabulary of 'Father' and 'Son' is necessary even as gender (specifically, maleness) is never thereby deemed to inhere in God.

In several chapters of the book Karl Rahner's 'anonymous Christianity' is seen to haunt much contemporary theology. Rahner's starting point in an analysis of human experience, together with Rahner's 'transcendental universal' (the notion that God graces/elevates salvifically all human aspiration) and Rahner's claim that the foregoing amounts to a real but non-thematic encounter with the Holy One of Israel – all of this Molnar repudiates. He identifies its problematics generally in all notions of a non-conceptual knowledge of God; specifically in such Catholic thinkers as Walter Kasper and Elizabeth Johnson. He finds Rahner's mindset presupposed in today's preoccupation with polite interreligious dialogue, which posits a non-specific deity above the Lord whom scripture attests as unsurpassable. Herein Molnar insists Rahner and those indebted to him confuse genuine human profundity with God; they confuse the undeniable mystery of the created order with the mystery of God; and they confuse finite human self-transcendence with divine, infinite self-transcendence – all of which is nothing less than idolatry, even as Molnar charitably avoids using the word.

No doubt Molnar was pained to write the chapter, 'The "New" Natural Theology', since he must disagree with a long-esteemed friend. For decades Torrance had insisted that natural theology falsely claims a knowledge of the person of God apart from the acts of God. The more recent Torrance, now schooled in advanced physics, insisted that the intelligibility of the natural world 'voiced' a question concerning its cause and significance, a question whose only answer could be the self-revealed God. Molnar carefully indicates wherein Torrance, with this move, appears to have undone the *sola gratia* that had always characterised his theology. Worse, Alister McGrath, Torrance's biographer, claims a 'new' natural theology, grounded in science, in the service of the 'old' apologetics, going so far as to state that such a theology discloses 'points

of contact' within the created order that the evangelist can identify and exploit. Molnar judiciously points out how such a notion invariably forfeits the gospel.

Following Torrance, Molnar everywhere forbids obscurantism by insisting that the structure of reason, essential to the human, survives the fall, even as the integrity of reasoning with respect to knowledge of God and knowledge of the human is devastated in the fall. Molnar's theological conviction rings throughout the book: reasoning's integrity can be restored by God's grace alone and owned by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

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