

Joseph H. Sherrard, *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian: The Ascended Christ and the Ministry of the Church*

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Importing the respected name of Thomas F. Torrance into the current and ongoing discussion of the missional nature of the church might at best seem tangential. However, Joseph Sherrard amply demonstrates that this is decidedly not the case. If anything, this work demonstrates the vital contribution Torrance has to offer the ongoing missional theology conversation.

Impressively aware of the expansive breadth of Torrance's oeuvre, Sherrard adeptly brings to the fore the significance of Torrance's doctrinal consideration of the triune God, of christology and of eschatology for ecclesiology – and so, for the *missio Dei*. Sherrard helpfully brings into the conversation other theologians past and contemporary, ranging from Augustine, Calvin and Barth, to David Bosch, Lesslie Newbigin, Darrell Guder and John Webster, to mention a few. This volume also brings to light the many pieces written by Torrance on the nature of the church and the contemporary challenges it faced and continues to confront, especially in western and westernised socio-cultural contexts. These lesser known writings by Torrance, such as the two-volume work, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, the single volume *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* and articles such as 'Atonement and the Oneness of the Church' and 'Service in Jesus Christ', are not easily accessible nor often consulted. But, as Sherrard's citations show, they are essential to Torrance's thought and key to recognising that he was indeed, at heart, a missional theologian.

The volume is comprised of five chapters poised between the Introduction and Conclusion. For those familiar with Torrance, it will not be a surprise to discover that the first chapter is titled, 'Dualism and the Doctrine of God: T. F. Torrance's Trinitarian Theology and the Gospel within Western Culture'. Here Sherrard demonstrates his astute grasp of the most foundational and challenging aspects of Torrance's theological understanding of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ and the intellectual and spiritual obstacles which obscure a comprehension of that revelation. The fundamental theological roots uncovered here bear continual fruit throughout the rest of the book, as vital connections are made to the missional form and function of the church as Torrance conveys them.

The second chapter, 'The Lord of the Mission: The Threefold Office and Ascension of Jesus Christ', provides the christological grounding Torrance continually worked from in order to address matters of ecclesiology. Particularly illuminating is Sherrard's faithfulness to Torrance's conviction that the church's ministry and mission is both to be patterned after and to be an actual participation in the continuing threefold ministry of the ascended Jesus Christ who is king, priest and prophet – all on the basis of his finished work of atonement. Sherrard brings into focus how for Torrance such a christological basis gives a distinctive cast and character to the missional task of the church. This basis, Sherrard notes, is often missing or underrepresented in approaches

that rely upon pragmatic means and sociological principles to give form and shape to the call for churches to become more 'missional'. The grounding Torrance provides serves as a corrective to what might otherwise constitute a Pelagian or even deistic approach to mission.

The third chapter, 'The Mission of the Body of Christ: Ecclesiology, Mission, and the Deposit of Faith', continues to faithfully trace out Torrance's theo-logic. 'Ecclesiology emerges from the convictions about God's triune life and the nature of Jesus Christ's work and his continuing ministry' (p. 101). Such understanding argues for an intrinsic connection between the being and nature of the body of Christ and its missional character. Here Sherrard deftly explicates how Torrance biblically and theologically understands the relationship of the one body of Christ to be analogous to, and so informed by, the christological relation of the divine and human natures in the one person of the incarnate Son of God. The church is sent as the Son was sent, is constrained in suffering mission as Jesus was the Suffering Servant. The church finds its place where there is distress, need, darkness, alienation and division, that is, in the place of fallen humanity where Jesus Christ came to dwell in order to save. The church in mission is in movement towards a promised fulfilment (*telos, pleroma*) both intensively within the body of Christ and extensively to the ends of the earth and the end of the age. Additionally, this chapter includes an instructive comparison of the missional theologies of Torrance and Newbigin and offers some critique of Torrance's pneumatology.

The fourth and fifth chapters expand on the pattern of the church's participation in the threefold 'Ministry of the Ascended Lord'. Sherrard follows Torrance's own emphasis and reordering of Christ's *munus triplex* by devoting the whole of the fourth chapter to the kingly aspect of Christ's continuing ministry and then taking up the priestly and prophetic dimensions within that royal purview in the fifth. In these chapters Sherrard offers the most detailed study of the shape, priority and character of the church's mission. Highlighting the intrinsic relationship between the church's nature and mission and Torrance's reordered conceptualisation of the three offices, Sherrard's study yields significant purchase on the essential focus of church ministry both internally and externally, for worship proper and for witness (that is, for social and cultural engagement). Indeed, Torrance demonstrates how the offices serve as an interpretive matrix for the life of any congregation where members are viewed as participating by the Holy Spirit in the continuing ministry of the ascended Jesus Christ. Mission then becomes thoroughly grounded theologically in the actuality and reality of Christ's redemptive working here and now, between the times of Jesus' first and second advents.

In these two chapters we find Sherrard's most critical engagement with Torrance, in significant part charging him with inadequately following through on the implications Christ's kingly office should have for the church's mission. Bringing Oliver O'Donovan into the discussion, Sherrard raises important questions that have the potential to move the conversation of missional theology constructively forward. A pertinent question, however, is whether Sherrard's critiques adequately take into account the ecumenical contexts and very particular purposes of Torrance's varied writings on ecclesiology which were for the most part occasional, not systematic.

Sherrard makes a thorough, clear and convincing case that T. F. Torrance was indeed a missional theologian. This volume will serve as a welcome resource for anyone who has an interest in Torrance's ecclesiology, and more particularly for those looking for a thoroughly theologically grounded approach to the *missio Dei*.