

## **Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, "The Mediation of Revelation" (chapter 1)**

By Geordie Ziegler. [Reading Group Discussion March 4, 2021](#); Marty Folsom hosting.

### **1. CHAPTER IN A NUTSHELL**

Jesus Christ as Mediator of Revelation must be understood from within his context within Israel, for God had already been at work through his covenant history with Israel, "educating the human race" with conceptual structures through which he could faithfully mediate revelation of himself.

### **2. CHAPTER IN OUTLINE**

**The problem:** Dichotomous ways of thinking have done great damage to our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ: detaching Jesus from God, Jesus from Israel, and Christianity from Christ himself. "When this sort of thing happens, the very essence of the Christian gospel is at stake." (1)

**The solution: we need to learn how to know rightly**

Epistemology 101: To know things as they really are, a two-fold approach is needed in which we investigate both the interrelations (context) of things with other things AND the internal relations (onto-relations) of the object itself

- Progress in deepening understanding is necessarily circular.
- Progress in knowledge requires appropriate tools

**Israel was God's means of educating the human race:**

In his historical relations with Israel, God established a two-way movement: 1) an adaptation of divine revelation to the human mind, and 2) an adaptation of articulate forms of human understanding and language to divine revelation.

*(1) The covenant partnership between God and Israel involved a running conflict between divine revelation and what St Paul called 'the carnal mind'.*

- a. Revelation – revealing – uncovering...conflict – suffering – death – repentance – fire*
- b. All of us who desire to know God must go to school with Israel.*

*(2) The election of Israel by God took the form of a community of reciprocity.*

- a. Adaptation – spiralling back and forth – reciprocal – personal – responsive – prayer – two-way movement – reciprocity – both corporate and personal – Israel as a whole is 'the Prophet sent by God'*
- b. Revelation and the community called to receive and embody that revelation inseparably go together. (Foreshadow: revelation and reconciliation cannot be separated)*

*(3) God's revelation came to Israel in such a way that it intersected and integrated its spiritual and physical reality.*

- a. physically implicated – earthy – embedded – concrete – local – definite – specific – time and space*
- b. dualistic mindset – detached – surface (peel, husk, shell)*
- c. The Person and Work of Christ cannot be separated; Incarnation and Atonement cannot be separated*

*(4) God's revelation of himself through the medium of Israel has provided mankind with permanent structures of thought and speech about him.*

- a. OT constitutes "the essential furniture" – Jesus was "produced through the womb of Israel"*
- b. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles who built on the foundation ("taken up and transformed in Christ") of the OT prophets.*

- c. We 'Jewish eyes' to recognize that images which refer to the invisible God are used imagelessly.  
(20) Science is a model of this way of using language

### **3. TAKE AWAYS:**

- Observation: Torrance places the emphasis strongly on the side of God's action ("The Word of God was at work preparing the matrix..." 9), rather than man's subjective perceptions when speaking of revelation, or of existence in general.
- Observation: TFT sounds a lot more like Eugene Peterson than one would expect
- Observation: this 'historical dialogue' is one large prayer; Jesus' life was a prayer; perhaps our lives are most properly conceptualized as one long prayer.
  
- Question: While TFT gives evidence that Israel's exile from the land led to the abstract ethical religion of Judaism, is his assumption justified that the return of the Jews to the land would result in a 'reversal' of that abstraction and the emergence of 'a more embodied understanding of God' with 'a new unitary outlook'?
- Question: Where does the OT forbid 'mental' images of God? Is this a TFT addition or expansion? Or do we see evidence of this corrective already within the OT itself, or perhaps in its NT re-interpretation in Christ?
- Question: Within our theological traditions (particularly evangelicalism), how problematic is our inattention to this principle in the way the 'image' of 'separation' has been conceptualized spatially rather than relationally? Has the foundational basics of many of our theological systems made this 'rather crude mistake'? If we took Torrance's argument seriously, how would require us to reshape our presentation of the gospel message?

### **Conclusion/Summary:**

"Jesus Christ, not Israel, constitutes the reality and substance of God's self-revelation, but Jesus Christ in Israel and not apart from Israel, so that Israel the servant of the Lord is nevertheless included by God for ever within his elected way of mediating knowledge of himself to the world." (23)

- (1) The OT revelation must be understood from the perspective of its fulfilment in Christ
- (2) Jesus Christ must be understood from within the normative framework divinely developed in the OT.