

2022 Furbush Virtual Retreat
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Opening Worship: *Theology and Doxology*
Stavan Narendra John

Romans is a dense theological work, but it also seamlessly weaves theology with doxology. We read one such instance in Romans 11:33-36:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (ESV).

When Professor Thomas Torrance was asked about the very centre of his theology by *Life and Work* magazine, this is what he said:

I would claim that it is deeply Nicene and doxological (theology and worship going inextricably together), with its immediate focus on Jesus Christ as Mediator, and its ultimate focus on the Holy Trinity.¹

What I appreciate most about the theology of Torrance is this emphasis on *theology* and *doxology*. I first encountered such an approach to theology through the work of the late Sunand Sumithra, an Indian theologian who wrote a systematic theology work entitled "Holy Father: A Doxological Approach to Systematic Theology." When I initially read parts of his work many years ago, I was fascinated by the combination of theology and worship. I would not have put these two aspects together, but Sumithra wrote his whole work with the express goal of showing how theology can be studied not just apologetically, analytically, contextually, but also doxologically. This is what he explains in his preface:

In this book we have *apparently* taken a different aim, namely doxology. We mean that the study of theology should first and foremost lead the reader to glorify God. Such a doxological approach to theology is not entirely new because most theological treatises have this as a hidden purpose; we have only turned them around and have made the glory of God our express purpose, while retaining other purposes – holy character and conduct, clarification, edification etc. as secondary. So the author attempts also to praise God beyond clarifying or evaluating certain concepts or processes, as well as exhorts you the reader to do so – is this not the import of the exhortation, *hallelujah*?²

It is perhaps appropriate that before he utters a single word, he begins his systematic theology with a hymn, whose author is not named, but the words aptly capture the tone of his systematics:

¹ R. D. Kernohan, "Tom Torrance: The Man and the Reputation," *Life and Work* 32 (1976): 14.

² Sunand Sumithra, *Holy Father: A Doxological Approach to Systematic Theology* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1993), 15.

O Lord, Our God! We come to Thee
Blessed! Eternal Majesty!
Of Holier eyes than evil to see,
Loving beyond all sinners' plea!
Changeless! Unbound! All-wise! Mighty!
We bow, O Lord, We worship Thee.

When we come, Lord, and worship Thee,
We see our guilt, depravity.
Our deeds unjust, all vain, earthly,
Our words unkind, lies, trickery.
Self-love our motive, thoughts gory –
We fall, and Lord, confess to Thee.

E'en as we, Lord, confess to Thee,
Jesus, Thou givest pardon free!
Thy 'toning death on Calvary,
Hath cancelled sin's pow'r, penalty.
Justice divine! O what mercy!
We kneel, and Lord, give thanks to Thee.

Return Thou now, we cry to Thee,
Spirit divine, of pow'r! Ah, see:
The ground is parched, the soul thirsty,
The flock sickly; shepherds – they flee.
Revive us! O that even we,
May rise, and Lord, witness to Thee.

While we go, Lord, witness to Thee,
Conclude Thy saving history.

Let old and evil no more be,
Complete Thy new full family.
Then shall we, Lord, eternally,
Stand and adore, bless, worship Thee.³

Theology and Doxology are integrally connected in Sumithra's work, and when I realised that Torrance's theology had the same emphasis, I was keen on studying his work. The few years I have invested in studying his theology has encouraged me to engage in an in-depth study of his work while never forgetting that the main goal is to love and worship God. I cannot say I have done this well, but I am encouraged by Torrance's exhortation to reject self-reliance and instead depend solely on Jesus, our High Priest and mediator. Torrance puts this well when he goes on to explain the "heart of his theology" as follows:

But the cutting edge of 'my theology' would be, I suppose what I call 'the vicarious humanity of Christ'—the fact that Jesus Christ even in His humanity takes our place in faith, prayer, worship, mediating all we are and do in His name toward the Father—but really believing, praying and worshipping Him in our place in such a way that He is our worship, and our faith is a sharing in His faith and our prayer a sharing in His prayer.⁴

May we continue to engage in a theology that is doxological and may such a pursuit honor our Lord and edify his people.

As we close this opening time of worship today, let us pray. I will be reading a prayer from the first day of John Baillie's *A Diary of Private Prayer* as we close this time.

Eternal Father of my soul, let my first thought today be of Thee, let my first impulse be to worship Thee, let my first speech be Thy name, let my first action be to kneel before Thee in prayer.

For Thy perfect wisdom and perfect goodness:

For the love wherewith Thou lovest mankind:

For the love wherewith Thou lovest me:

For the great and mysterious opportunity of my life:

For the indwelling of Thy Spirit in my heart:

For the sevenfold gifts of Thy Spirit:

I praise and worship Thee, O Lord.

Yet let me not, when this morning prayer is said, think my worship ended and spend the day in forgetfulness of Thee. Rather from these moments of quietness let light go forth, and joy, and power, that will remain with me through all the hours of the day;

³ Sumithra, *Holy Father*, 4.

⁴ Kernohan, "Tom Torrance," 14.

Keeping me chaste in thought:

Keeping me temperate and truthful in speech:

Keeping me faithful and diligent in my work:

Keeping me humble in my estimation of myself:

Keeping me honourable and generous in my dealings with others:

Keeping my loyal to every hallowed memory of the past:

Keeping me mindful of my eternal destiny as a child of Thine.

O God, who hast been the Refuge of my fathers through many generations, be my Refuge to-day in every time and circumstance of need. Be my Guide through all that is dark and doubtful. Be my Guard against all that threatens my spirit's welfare. Be my Strength in time of testing. Gladden my heart with Thy peace; through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.⁵

⁵ John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 9.