

## EDITORIAL

**Daniel J. Cameron, Ph.D.**

**(Kings College,  
University of Aberdeen)**

**Senior Theology Teacher**

**Head of Bible Department**

**Chicago Hope Academy, IL USA**

danieljordancameron@gmail.com

**Myk Habets, Ph.D.**

**(Otago University)**

**Senior Lecturer in Theology**

**Head of Theology**

**Laidlaw College, New Zealand**

mhabets@laidlaw.ac.nz

At the heart of practical theology is the relationship between theory and practice. In the academy, throughout history, this relationship has been tenuous at best. Ray Anderson argues that the bridge between practical theology and what he calls "pure theology" is one way in which the academic discipline of theology ("pure theology") informs the practical, but the practical does not have anything to offer the academic. He goes on to say that while practical theology was permitted into the university as a necessary application of theory, "practical theologians ordinarily did not carry union cards admitting them to the theological guild."<sup>1</sup> Anderson is right about this historic divide, but thankfully, this has begun to change in recent years. The bifurcation of theory and practice is becoming a thing of the past, and the bridge is becoming a two-way street between the "academic" and the "practical" in which both can and must learn from each other.

The origin of practical theology (*die praktische Theologie*) as a methodological sub-discipline is often attributed to Friedrich Schleiermacher when,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 7. Alistair Campbell argues along similar lines that the term 'practical theology' to the "theological outsider must sound remarkably like a contradiction in terms, whilst to the professional theologian it may carry undertones of an unscholarly pragmatism or a tendency towards liberal theology." Campbell, "The Nature of Practical Theology," in *Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Woodward and Steve Pattison (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 78.

in 1811, he published his *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, which served at the time as the first reflection on practical theology as a field of inquiry within the university.<sup>2</sup> However, “practical theology” as a description of the theological task is much older than this. In fact, theology applied to practical issues facing the church was one of the main tasks of the theological agenda in the early church. This “inclusive use” of the term practical theology ended with the rise of the Medieval university in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

Practical theology found its way back into the university around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though not in its present form. Practical theology at this time could be more accurately defined as a type of pastoral theology in which “theoretical” theology was “stripped of all the disputation,” leaving a “simplified summary of academic theology” which was given to those students who did not plan on studying academic theology further, what Maddox refers to as “mere pastors.”<sup>4</sup> By the seventeenth century, practical theology became an actual discipline within the university with the establishment of, what appears to be, the first chair of Practical Theology sometime around 1776–1777 in Vienna,<sup>5</sup> but the discipline still remained as a form of pastoral theology looking more like the application of Systematic Theology rather than an actual discipline itself. This model of Practical Theology dominated the academy through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it has only been in the last 50 years or so that Practical Theology has been revisited as something more than mere “application.” Practical Theology, as a discipline, can be better understood as the extension of systematic theology into the life and practice of the church. It is not merely a cognitive exercise but cognition put into practice. As John Swinton notes, practical theology is “whole person knowledge. Human beings are lovers and worshipers as well as thinkers and all of these aspects are potential sources of

---

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, 3rd edition, revised translation of the 1811 and 1830 editions, with essays and notes by Terrence N. Tice. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Randy L. Maddox, “Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 159.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Edward F. Capuchin, “Siblings or 2nd Cousin-once-removed: A relational taxonomy for Practical theology,” *New Theology Review* 26:1 (2013): 11–20.

theological knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> Practical Theology is not the “practical” counterpart to the “impractical” nature of Systematics. Rather, Practical Theology should be the natural *telos* of Systematics.

An over-simplistic reading of Thomas F. Torrance’s work may lend itself towards an interpretation that can easily seem to uphold the above-stated bifurcation of the theoretical from the practical. However, students of Torrance’s writings can see his ecclesial and pastoral commitments shining through the complex theological themes of his work. Ray Anderson, an actual student of Torrance at the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s, reflects on his time with Torrance saying that he “came to appreciate even more the deeply devotional, even pietistic, life of faith that lay hidden behind his often-forbidding erudition and the semantic thicket of his writing.”<sup>7</sup> This volume of *Participatio* continues this method of theology in such a way that the theoretical and the practical are in proper relation to each other.

The essays constituting this volume of *Participatio* endeavour to interrogate aspects of Thomas F. Torrance’s theology — systematic and practical — and apply them to issues facing Christians today. The six contributors clearly find the theology of the vicarious humanity of Christ as a fecund idea, able to be applied to a range of church and social issues facing Christians around the world. It is perhaps this idea, the vicarious humanity and ministry of Christ, that is Torrance’s enduring legacy to practical theology, and each of the contributors offers compelling pastoral and practical theology as ways of applying the idea.

In the first essay, Korean theologian Hakbong Kim explores the vicarious humanity of Christ as it relates to the sacramental action of the church and develops a form of social ethic applicable to the church today. Kim rightly understands how to read the work of Torrance in order to see how it is not simply theological or esoteric, as John Webster, for one, once argued. Instead, Kim shows how Torrance’s Trinitarian and Christocentric theology is the ground and grammar of applied theology and in the process, offers an implicit critique of practical theologies

---

<sup>6</sup> John Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships, and Mental Health Care* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ray S. Anderson, “The Practical Theology of T.F. Torrance,” *Participatio* 1 (2009): 50.

that are neither theological nor practical. As Kim writes, "for Torrance, the church's participation in Christ through the Spirit becomes a means of grace to fulfill its mission, that is, a communion of reconciliation amidst a distorted and divisive society. This reflects Torrance's theological approach to the particular social ethics of the church." The church would do well to heed these words afresh.

The second essay, by Indian theologian Stavan John, is a trenchant clarion call to acknowledge the reality of the ongoing humanity of Christ in his ascension. Here, the vicarious humanity of Christ is tethered, if we can speak that way, to the actual Christ, risen, ascended, glorified, and seated at the right hand of the Father in glory from which he reigns and will come again. John reminds us that Christ is alive and well, human and embodied, our great High Priest and mediator of our humanity even in the heavens. John writes, "The salvific import of the doctrine of the ascension in Torrance's thought is a generative insight that can dialogue with proposals in mission theology that are calling for a paradigm shift from a cross-centered theology to one that is centered on the ascension, especially with respect to missions and evangelism." In the often-overlooked doctrine of the ascension, we find a foundation for Christocentric ministry today that far outstrips the rather facile appeal by many today to 'incarnational ministry,' as if we could do ministry and mission today simply in imitation of Christ and not in full participation.

The third essay, by emerging American scholar-pastor Chancellor Stillwell, offers an insightful and profound reflection on the vicarious humanity of Christ as it applies to the event of preaching. Torrance's preaching and theology of preaching have come in for scant attention, but with this essay, Stillwell changes the game. No less Trinitarian or Christocentric than recent Reformed accounts of preaching, Stillwell finds in Torrance's theology a way beyond the often-glib accounts of Christocentric preaching, and in its place, he finds a way for the preacher to find ways to appeal to the Gospel and to offer an invitation to respond, in ways which don't push people back upon themselves for their salvation. In similar ways to Torrance's preaching, Stillwell appeals to the faith of Christ as our only sure means of salvation. This is Reformed and evangelical homiletics at its best.

Paul Metzger's essay is the fourth in the volume. A well-known American theologian, Metzger seamlessly blends the theology of Torrance with his own very

personal account of living amidst trial and tragedy in order to offer a Christocentric theology for pastoral and palliative care. This is not an easy read emotionally, but it is a profoundly moving insight into just how theology is practical when it is understood and applied rightly. As Metzger writes, "The article highlights the tangible theological significance of Torrance's in-depth pastoral theological offerings, as the author provides holistic care for his minimally conscious adult son who endured a catastrophic brain injury. The same model can prove promising for pastors and chaplains operating in other critical care settings." We need this kind of chaperone for theologically informed pastoral care, and Metzger is a sure guide for others to follow.

Continuing the application of Torrance's theology, especially the vicarious humanity and ministry of Christ, to the practical and pastoral issues of today, the fifth essay in the volume by Australian academic Jenny Richards, a law lecturer by trade, offers a hard-hitting and timely exploration of how the work of T. F. and James Torrance can resource the difficult issue of how to respond to women experiencing domestic and family abuse. Unfortunately, domestic abuse is not simply a social issue; it is also a church issue, as Richards points out, and providing a resource for pastors on how to respond to domestic and family violence is important as this is an issue of justice. Richards writes, "Beyond informing pastoral church responses, this work can conceptualize justice in a way that holds its theological and legal meanings together and reframes understandings of and responses to the impacts of violence." T. F. and J. B. Torrance were tireless defenders of godly justice, and this work by Richards, a legal specialist and one who has written on the difference between a covenant and a contract, is a welcome resource from someone qualified to speak on this difficult topic

The final essay in the volume is by Orthodox scholar Emmanuel Gergis and furthers the important work on ecumenism that T. F. Torrance was so committed to. Gergis focuses on the Coptic Church tradition in order to see the connections between this tradition and the theology of Torrance, finding many comparisons and touch-points between them, not the least of which is Torrance's unitary approach to theology. Gergis writes, "Torrance's theological synthesis invites a deeper, more inclusive ecumenical dialogue between Christian traditions, especially fostering an

ecumenical bridge between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches, underscoring the significance of the miaphysite understanding of Christology, in which Christ's divine and human natures are united in one reality without confusion, separation, or change." Any move toward further ecumenism is one to be celebrated.