

Offprint from:

# Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology

**sets**  
theology making a *difference*

Volume 35  
Number 1  
**Spring 2017**

---

EDITORIAL	1–3
Biblical Perspectives on Consumerism DAVID J. REIMER	4–18
‘More than the Sum of our Possessions’: Reflections on the Parable of the Rich Fool ANGUS MORRISON	19–40
The Gospel and the Marketplace ANTONY BILLINGTON	41–56
Charles Simeon: A 19th Century Evangelical Response to Consumerism RANDALL J. GRUENDYKE	57–75
Recapturing Satisfaction in a Consumer Society JONATHAN GEMMELL	76–89
Classical Trinitarianism and Eternal Functional Subordination: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections STEPHEN R. HOLMES	90–104
BOOK REVIEWS	104–135



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Highland Theological  
College

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean  
Colaiste Dhiadhachd  
na Gàidhealtachd

ISSN 0265-4539

ple of the new covenant and the new age' (p. 212). The relevant historical retrieval is this: if we follow Richard Weingart's instructive account of Abelard (*The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard*), we shall find a new covenant and new age here too, giving the lie to the familiar 'exemplarist' reading of Abelard, while not assimilating him to everything in either Gorman or Vanhoozer.

Michael Gorman certainly encourages us to tread the path of a healthy, biblically-based theological ecumenism in relation to the atonement and this is welcome. And let no misgivings about the overarching argument of this volume distract us from the challenge to cruciform discipleship, which is the heartbeat of the book.

*Stephen N. Williams, Union Theological College, Belfast*

*Encountering Reality: T. F. Torrance on Truth and Human Understanding.*

By Travis M. Stevick. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-5064-1291-7. x + 225pp. £52.99.

In this volume, the mathematician, theologian and churchman, Travis Stevick has provided a fresh and stimulating analysis of the realist epistemology of Thomas F. Torrance. One of the major contributions of this volume is to bring Torrance into dialogue with leading works in the secular philosophy of science, through which Stevick is able to explore from a new perspective the central tenant of Torrance's mode of rationality, 'the conviction that we know something authentically only when we know it according to its own nature' (p. viii). From this basis, Stevick provides a compelling account of the ontological status of truth in Torrance's thought, and the derivative status of the truth of our statements. This book is a valuable resource in facilitating further understanding of the interface between theology and the natural sciences – a theme so resonant of Torrance's own work – which will prove of significant value in challenging erroneous convictions regarding their incompatibility.

The first chapter addresses the character of authentic knowledge in Torrance's thought. Stevick rightly isolates Torrance's basic premise as the view that to know is to submit to the truth of reality, such that we know something in accordance with its own truth. This is complemented by Stevick's insightful analysis of the conditions on which such a conviction can be established, in which he prioritises the categories of the actual existence of reality independent from correlation to the knowing subject, and the demonstration of our epistemic access to that reality. These broad conditions leave unsaid (although could arguably imply) important elements of nuance regarding the actual intelligible order of reality aside from the cognitive operations of the knowing subject, which is a short-

coming relevant to weaknesses that emerge later in Stevick's argumentation. This chapter includes a significant discussion, correlating Torrance to other realist thinkers, and differentiating Torrance from significant alternatives in the philosophy of science and in epistemology more generally. By so doing, Stevick situates Torrance within a far broader field than has so far been attempted in scholarship on Torrance, which has important results both for gaining a better understanding of Torrance through establishing his thought within a wider frame of reference, but will also prove a valuable resource for those striving to articulate a distinctively Christian epistemology against alternative worldviews.

This discussion raises a question: is it legitimate to establish an epistemological conviction regarding the nature of authentic knowledge upon certain conditions, or is such an epistemological conviction inherently subjective? This is the question pursued in the second chapter, in which Stevick demonstrates that for Torrance all knowledge is established on ultimate beliefs regarding reality, but that – far from invalidating knowledge – these ultimate beliefs are the very foundation of knowledge. Crucially, Stevick dispels a myth that Torrance's ultimate beliefs are arbitrary demonstrating that they are 'beliefs that are objectively forced upon us by the fact that reality is what it is and not something else' (p. 45). For example, the Christian doctrine of creation gives the ultimate belief in the created order of the universe, which undergirds the conviction that it is a distinct reality and is knowable, which are principles that are foundational to the natural sciences. Moreover, Stevick identifies some valuable parallels in the secular philosophy of science, particularly the critical realism of Roy Bhaskar. This goes a long way to substantiate a central contention of Torrance's that the natural sciences and theology are alike in that both must account for the powerful element of *belief*. Readers with a critical interest in Torrance will find much of value in Stevick's illuminating response to Ronald Thiemann's important critique of Torrance's supposed foundationalism. In my view, this discussion is the most profound contribution of this entire volume.

The third chapter explores the intersection between Torrance's idea of objectivity and the notions of objectivity that are said to have developed in the natural sciences from the middle of the twentieth century. Stevick helpfully differentiates between Torrance's version of objectivity and formulations of objectivity characteristic of a Cartesian and Kantian frame of mind that function via the exclusion of the subject from the knowing relationship by the application of an antecedent and inertial rational schema (for example, Euclidean geometry) through which trans-subjective and uniform 'knowledge' is attained. In opposition to this, Torrance's objectivity is presented as a recovery of the personal element of

knowledge, where the subject differentiates between herself and the object but is in personal commitment to the independent truth of the object, and by knowing within a community, individualistic subjectivities are kept in check. Stevick's analysis rightly points out the challenge of Torrance's objectivity to the misleading notion of the detached 'objective' observer. Moreover, Stevick's helpful discussion of the necessity of the community of knowledge as integral to the subjective element of knowledge has implications for the integral place of the church to true Christian knowledge, drawing out Torrance's emphasis that the community of the body of Christ is the context of our knowledge of God.

Chapters four and five address the relation of language to reality. Stevick demonstrates that Torrance gave priority to the truth of a thing, and that the truth of our statements is secondary to and derivative from the truth of reality. In this, Stevick differentiates Torrance from an ultra-realist correspondence theory of truth (i.e. exact isomorphic correspondence between individual statements and reality) and a coherence theory of truth (i.e. the truth of our statements is in the validity of the inferential relations between them). However, Stevick downplays the function of inferential reasoning in Torrance's thought, which is to expose the actual structure of reality. This oversight is related to earlier limitations within his discussion on Torrance's notion of reality. Despite this, Stevick places emphasis on the function of theories to disclose reality, which Stevick argues provides the orientation in which historic issues in the philosophy of science might be resolved by re-orientating the locus of our engagement with reality, placing the emphasis on contact with reality itself rather than on any particular conceptual formulation of reality.

This volume represents an eminently worthwhile inquiry into Torrance's epistemological foundations. This book is certain to be standard reading for subsequent studies on Torrance and the interface between theology and the philosophy of science more broadly, which will be of utility to pastors, teachers and students.

*Alexander J. D. Irving, The University of Oxford*

*The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption.* By J.V. Fesko. Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2016. ISBN: 9781781917657. 436pp. £19.99.

Covenant is an increasingly popular topic in theology and biblical studies. Yet Reformed theology has a long tradition of using covenant as a framework for organising other doctrines. The covenant of redemption teaches that there is a pact among the persons of the Godhead wherein they agreed in eternity past regarding their precise roles in the economy of salvation, and the accomplishment of those roles is now assured because