

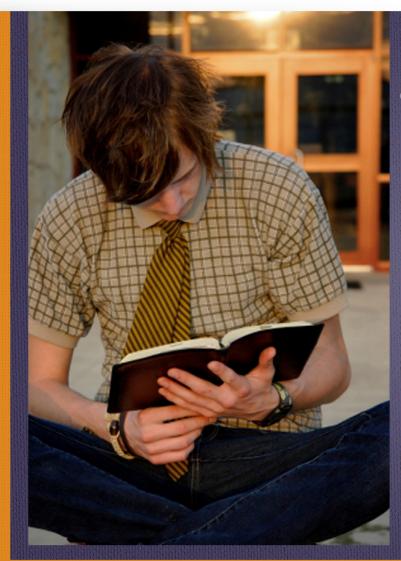
VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2 | APRIL 2013

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The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity Stephen R. Holmes

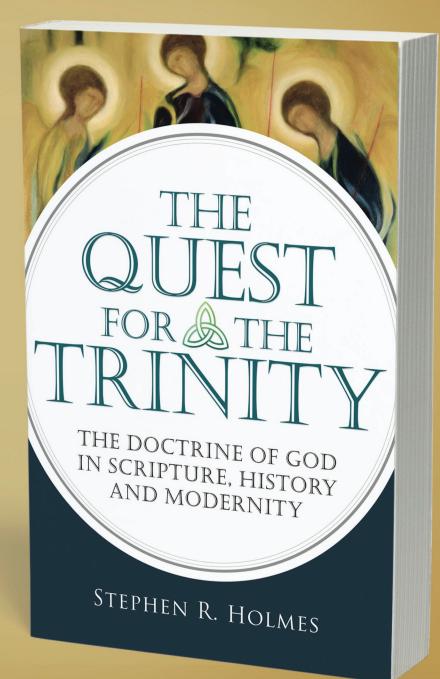
Stephen Holmes tells the saga of the Christian doctrine of God, hoping to provide some reflective distance on today's revival in Trinitarian studies. We witness the church's discovery of the doctrine from Scripture, its crucial patristic developments, its medieval and Reformation continuity and its fortunes since the advent of modernity.

"Stephen Holmes's book is brilliant in so many ways: provocative, timely, historically nuanced, theologically insightful, academically courageous and wonderfully sane."

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"In this lively and engrossing book, Stephen Holmes charts the development of the doctrine of the Trinity . . . calling into question some established conventions about the history of trinitarian theology. This is a work of considerable theological intelligence and historical discrimination; it will enjoy a wide readership."

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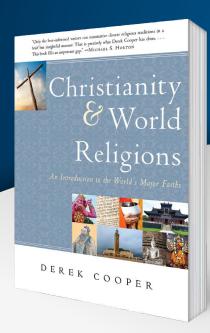






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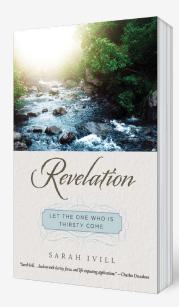


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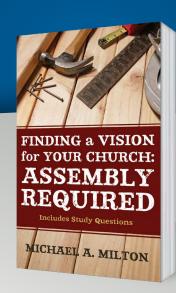
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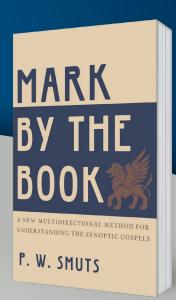
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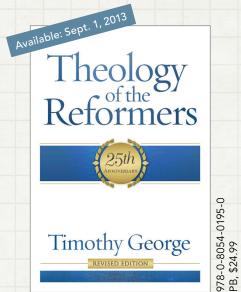
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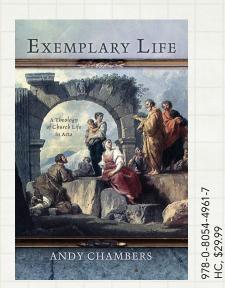
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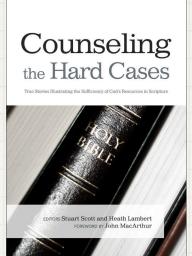
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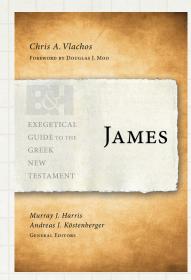
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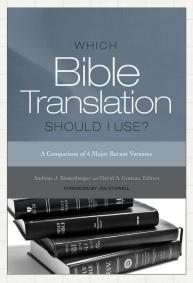
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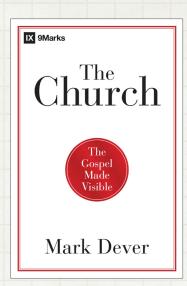


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ne of the dangers every church faces is slipping, slowly and quietly and perhaps unknowingly, into a routine where sermons are preached, songs are sung, and the Lord's Supper is consumed, but all is done without a deep sense and awareness of the Trinity. In other words, if we are not careful our churches, in practice, can look remarkably Unitarian. And such a danger is not limited to the pews of the church. As we leave on Sunday morning and go back into the world, does the gospel we share with our coworker look decisively and explicitly trinitarian in nature? Or when we pray in the privacy of our own home, do the three persons of the Trinity make any difference in how we petition God?

In this issue of Credo Magazine, we have brought together some of the sharpest thinkers in order to bring our minds back to the beauty, glory, and majesty of our triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But we do not merely want to see him as triune, but recognize why and how the Trinity makes all the difference in the Christian life. Therefore, in this issue Fred Sanders, Robert Letham, Michael Reeves, Scott Swain, and many others come together in order to help us think deeper thoughts about how God is one essence and three persons, and what impact the Trinity has on who we are and what we do as believers.

### **Matthew Barrett**

Executive Editor Credo Magazine



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### Tim Challies Sheds Light on Preaching, Pastoring and Technology in the 21st Century

Interviewed by Lucas Bradburn

### Tim, how did you come to know Christ?

I had the immense privilege of being raised in a Christian home. My parents were born and raised in secular Quebec and both came from unbelieving families. They first encountered the gospel as university students and after professing faith were introduced to the Pentecostal tradition. A short time after they got married they traveled to Switzerland and were introduced to Francis Schaeffer and L'Abri. This also opened their eyes to the Reformed tradition and they were captivated by its emphasis on truth and on the knowability of God. They never looked back.

I was raised in the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed traditions, memorizing the Bible and catechisms from a young age. I mark my conversion sometime around fourteen or fifteen, though it may well have been much earlier. It was in my mid-teens that I began to experience both the desire for and reality of greater independence. I began to understand that the choices I was making would prove whether or not I was a Christian. I began to ask myself whether I really believed in the Christian faith or if I was just

following along behind my parents. One evening from this period is particularly vivid. I was in my bedroom, reading a Frank Peretti novel (of all things) and listening to a Christian rock album when I began to weep and to pray, expressing to the Lord that I wanted to be his and to live for his glory. This was either the moment the Lord saved me, or the moment that I began to take seriously a commitment I had made as a child.

# You are a pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto. What is the most difficult part about being a pastor and what advice can you give to other pastors?

I am "the other" pastor at Grace Fellowship Church—not the one who preaches every week, but the one who does the other things. I focus on discipleship and mentoring, coordinating our small groups, and so on. I have been doing this for a couple of years now after rather unexpectedly finding myself being asked to enter into full-time ministry.

Pastoring is a joy and a privilege, and occasionally a sore trial. The aspect I have found most difficult

is carrying the burdens of so many other people. As a pastor I am entrusted with other people's greatest griefs, the things they might not dare to tell anyone else. The pastor knows what his people fear, he knows what they love, he knows the deep burdens they bear, and he bears it all with them. This affords him unique opportunities to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. Today I battle insomnia and I count it no coincidence that my inability to sleep began just at the time that I was called to ministry and began to carry the weight of so much pain and sorrow.

My advice to other pastors (and do keep in mind that I am still quite new to pastoring) is to regularly meet with other pastors. Paul Martin, my colleague at Grace Fellowship Church, has been both a dear friend and a mentor; his wise and patient counsel has prevented me from more pastoral disasters than I can count. Julian Freeman who pastors one of our church plants is another friend who has answered many of my ignorant questions. At least once a month I meet with a room full of pastors to discuss stresses, challenges, and triumphs. I can't express how much I value these times and these men.

# Do you practice expositional preaching and why is this type of preaching so important?

I suppose I do. I learned to preach by being put in front of a group of people and being told to preach to them. I don't think of what I do as expositional preaching simply because I have never seriously considered an alternative. This is the only kind of preaching I've known, the kind I've had modeled to me, and therefore, the kind I do, or attempt to do. Mark Dever's terse summary of expositional preaching has been a

helpful question for me to ask of my sermons: Is the point of the passage the point of the sermon?

I preach expositionally because I am very aware of my tendency to preach what is most urgent to me in place of what a passage actually says. Expositional preaching sets the boundaries of my preaching, ensuring that I can preach no more and no less than what the text allows. It reigns me in, it keeps me focused, it keeps me preaching God's Word rather than my own mind.

# As one who blogs every day, tell us, in light of the many online and in print resources for Christians today, how can blogging serve those in the pew as well as those preaching in the pulpit?

Blogging's strength is also its weaknesses: immediacy. In a fast-paced, always-on world, a month or six weeks seems far too long to wait to read about current events. The blogosphere allows near-instant access to news and analysis. This can be tremendously helpful under many circumstances. Unfortunately it can also be tremendously unhelpful since it often takes time and patience for all the facts to be known and for deep reflection to happen.

For the Christian in the pew, blogging can introduce him to new ideas, help him understand doctrine, and give him a sense of community around his theological convictions. For the pastor the blogosphere can keep him abreast of current events, ideas, and personalities, keeping him from having to investigate each of one of those on his own.

Interestingly, the Christian blogosphere has also become a kind of minor leagues for publishers. If a person can begin a blog and gather a significant

following, it becomes almost inevitable that publishers will extend a book offer at some point. In this way blogs are able to serve as a kind of crowd-controlled filter to determine who has a voice that others are eager to hear.

### What are some of the most dangerous temptations Christians face today when it comes to the internet and media at large?

There are some obvious temptations that every pastor is aware of-pornography and Facebook addiction, as just two examples. A more subtle temptation, and one that may be even more concerning, is sheer ignorance of the power of media in our lives. My book The Next Story began with questions like, "Do I really own my technology or does it own me?" "Why can't I think the way I used to be able to?" "Why do I find myself habitually and subconsciously checking email fifty times every day?" I came to see that digital technologies are especially captivating and that they are especially demanding. Our greatest temptation may be to downplay their impact on us and, therefore, to keep us from thinking Christianly about them. There are very few Christians who are thinking about their digital devices in a distinctly Christian way. This should not be!

### How should Christians approach the ever evolving world of technology?

A theology of technology teaches us that technology is a good gift of God and one of the ways that we are able to carry out our Creation mandate. That same theology of technology will remind us that we live in a fallen world and that

our technologies have not somehow escaped unscathed. Therefore every technology can be used in a way that glorifies God and helps carry out the Great Commission; but every technology can also be used in a way that will shame God and inhibit our carrying out of the Great Commission.

As new technologies come along, Christians will need to be constantly weighing and evaluating, constantly seeking to use these things well and wisely. I am no prophet and cannot even imagine what our next great technological advance will be, but I do know that it will introduce new opportunities to honor God and new opportunities to dishonor him.

### What two authors in church history have had the most impact on your ministry?

Francis Schaeffer has had a huge impact on my life even though I've only ever read one or two of his books (and not even his most significant works). Schaeffer was a great influence on my parents, and my mother in particular, so I was raised valuing what he valued. He was also a great influence on the people my parents loved and were influenced by-family friends like Richard Ganz and Nancy Pearcey and others. His influence in my life is largely second-hand, but probably more pronounced than any other author.

More directly, I would point to John Owen. I have not read his complete works or anything close to it, but "Overcoming Sin and Temptation" was one of the first Puritan works I read, one of the few I've read multiple times. It has shaped my thinking about the difficult, lifelong struggle of destroying sin and its influence

shows up in much of what I write and preach.

# As a student of Christianity and culture, what do you believe are the greatest issues and threats facing the evangelical church today?

I have been asked variations of this question for many years now and I always return to roughly the same answer: the sufficiency of Scripture. The battle for the inerrancy of Scripture has largely been fought and won, at least among conservative Christians. But there are all kinds of subtle challenges to the Bible's sufficiency even within the Reformed camp. We know that the Bible is without error, but a lot of people don't believe that it is enough. So many of the great threats to the church can be immediately dismissed if we simply affirm and reaffirm the sufficiency of God's Word in matters of doctrine and practice.

# Talk to us about Cruciform Press. What kind of books have you published and what future projects can our readers look forward to?

Cruciform Press began with a blog series I wrote titled "Sexual Detox." That series seemed to impact a lot of people and I determined that it would be helpful to self-publish it. I approached Kevin Meath, a friend and editor, and asked if he would edit the work prior to publication. Almost before we knew what had happened, a publishing company was born and Sexual Detox was the first book published under Cruciform Press.

One of our goals is to help convince regular

churchgoers that Christian books don't have to be big, scary, formidable things that they rarely finish and end up feeling guilty about. We try to bring in every book at about 100 pages, and we want every book to be grounded in solid theology and tightly edited so it's clear, concise, linear, and to the point. If we can't get somebody off the couch in two evenings, or even in two hours, we haven't done our job. Thanks to the web, people are reading more, but they are reading for shorter periods of time, so we want to meet them where they are and try to give them good, helpful, honest, solid material. We also try to address important subjects that may not get covered too often.

We've published about two dozen books to date. Some are from well-known authors and some are from people you have never heard of but who are just good, theologically grounded writers who had a great book idea.

As far as the standouts go, we have a book by Jerry Bridges on our identity in Christ called Who Am I? which is a great book for new believers or anyone who would like to shore up their sense of what it means to be a Christian. Lots of churches are using it for their new members program and that sort of thing. In February we were able to release it also in audiobook form, read by Alistair Begg (Bridges + Begg! Does it get any better than that?)

Greg Dutcher wrote a book for us called Killing Calvinism that got kudos from John Piper and Matt Chandler. It outlines 8 specific ways by which we undermine the very theology we claim to believe in. He is working on a follow-up that we hope to have out late this year or early next.

Al Martin, who was a Reformed Baptist at least 25 years before anybody thought it was cool, wrote

an illuminating and deeply moving book for us called Grieving, Hope and Solace: When a Loved One Dies in Christ. I have used this book in my own pastoral ministry, and it's the sort of thing most of us will need at least once in our lives, and far more often if we work in mercy ministry.

One thing we're excited about is our growing collection of books for women that emphasize solid theology and honest discussion of the struggles women face. We started with Staci Eastin's book, The Organized Heart. This was followed by one of the few truly inductive Bible studies for women by a woman. This was Keri Folmar's Joy! – A Bible Study on Philippians for Women. It's been very well received and she is now working on a follow-up study for us on the book of James. The next one is called Christ in the Chaos: How the Gospel Changes Motherhood. This is an amazingly honest and very sound presentation by Kimm Crandall. There's a Foreword by Elyse Fitzpatrick, endorsements from Lauren Chandler and Gloria Furman and Trillia Newbell, and Scotty Smith said in his blurb that it's one of the best books on parenting he's read in the past twenty years. Christ in the Chaos comes out March 1, and we fully expect it to be our most popular book for women yet.

We have other books coming down the pike that we are really excited about. Later this year we plan to publish a book called The World As It Is: A Theology of Art, by Chris Krycho, who blogs at Mere Orthodoxy. Chris wants to encourage evangelicals to think of art and to make art, in all its forms, with a primary orientation toward beauty and worship, rather than toward teaching and evangelism. Another book we hope to release this year will address complementarianism in the local church. I can't say much more about it right now except that many Credo readers will likely be familiar with the author.

# What is one thing that regular readers of Challies.com would be surprised to know about you?

To be honest, there isn't very much about me that could possibly be surprising. I live a very normal, unremarkable life. I live in a small house and serve a small church that meets in a small Christian school's small gym. Some people seem to think that I must be part of some kind of a network of Christian celebrities that shares ideas and gossip and coordinates conversation. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I live a quiet and independent life up here in Toronto, completely disconnected from the wider Evangelical world.

Tim Challies blogs at challies.com. He is also a pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto. He is the author of Sexual Detox: A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn, The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment, and The Next Story.



### WHICH CONTROVERSY SHOULD CHRISTIANS KNOW

### The Reformation

Beyond the economic and political unrest, even behind the religious celebrity and ecclesiastical tumult, we see that the Reformation was a decisive event in the long history of God's Word forming his church to hear his promise of good news. We pay attention to the Reformation because it is an instance—a jolting, jarring one to be sure—of the risen Christ's witness about himself to his people, revealing a bit more of the breadth and length and height and depth of his love for us. We listen to the testimony of the Reformation, then, because we listen to Jesus.

Michael Allen Knox Theological Seminary

### **Protestant Liberalism**

Between 1875 and 1940, the assets and structures of nearly all Protestant denominations in America were transferred from people who held orthodox Christian beliefs to people who held the new theology of modernism or Liberalism. Many who still held orthodox beliefs accepted J. Gresham Machen's conclusion that Liberalism was not only a different religion from Christianity, but actually a religion of a different kind. One cannot understand the development, eventual fracturing, and present internal strife of the evangelical world without grasping the significance of the theological issues that were first disputed with Protestant Liberalism.

Kevin Bauder Central Baptist Theological Seminary



# Y IN CHURCH HISTORY / ABOUT TODAY AND WHY?

### **Augustine and Pelagianism**

This ancient debate is not simply an old one, but is a perennial one. Every Christian in every generation has to work through this issue, or should. It is in wrestling with the question of grace and in thinking through these two traditions in particular—that one can understand the majesty and beauty of grace. Also, in working through the Augustinian and Pelagian traditions one should make sure and grasp what Augustine had to say about the reality of grace within and during the Christian life (and not just concerning grace and the beginning of, or entry into, the Christian life), which I believe is as important as any contribution Augustine made. For Augustine, God's grace does not simply initiate and bring about saving faith. Grace certainly does that. But additionally, God's grace is a grace which efficaciously moves us to seek God, to obey Him, and to persevere.

Bradley Green Union University

### **Arianism**

The Arian controversy, which dominated the fourth century, is one of the three most important controversies that gripped the Ancient Church. Since it had as its subject matter the nature of God—specifically, were Jesus and the Holy Spirit fully God as the Father is God?—it discussed what is the central issue in the Christian Faith. As Athanasius argued, if Christ be not God then we are not saved, as only One who is divine could be our Saviour. Basil of Caesarea similarly concurred with regard to the Spirit: if the Spirit is a creature, then the salvation wrought by Christ falls short of impacting us, for again only One who is divine can communicate salvation.

Michael A.G. Haykin The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



### WITH JOEY ALLEN

### HOW SHOULD WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE TRINITY?

# As parents, why is it so important to teach our children about the doctrine of the Trinity at a young age?

I am baffled that teaching the Trinity is often seen as something other than teaching about God. Parents and teachers treat the Trinity like a spare tire—it's good to have, but not necessary. Nothing could be further from the truth.

No one would argue that the gospel is optional, and yet the gospel is a trinitarian reality. The gospel becomes unintelligible without a concept of the distinct persons of God. For example, 1 John 4:14 says, "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." This simple gospel verse opens our eyes to the persons of the Trinity working together to bring about our salvation. The Trinity is more like the engine that drives our understanding of the gospel—therefore, it is utterly indispensable.

Since God is more wonderful than anything in the Universe, we want our children to experience the joy of knowing God. To know God as he really is, as he has revealed himself in the Bible, is to know him as the Father, the Son, and the Holy

Spirit. Media bombards even the most sheltered kids, teaching them explicit and implicit messages about God, themselves, and the world. If parents do not intentionally instruct their children in the truth of God, Satan will not miss his opportunity.

# The Trinity can be very difficult to understand. What is your advice to parents as they explain the Trinity to their children?

With a unanimous voice, the godly men and women of old declare that faith comes before understanding. Indeed, faith is the door that opens our understanding. So my advice would be, "Don't worry about your child's ability to understand the Trinity. Simply teach them what is true."

Adults struggle with the mysterious nature of the Trinity. Children just accept it. Children exhibit remarkable faith. My three-year old son believes that there is one God who is three persons. He has never once asked me, "How can that be?" I wonder if this isn't the kind of child-like faith Jesus said was necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven.

How can parents avoid heretical definitions of

### the Trinity in their efforts to simplify such a complex concept for their children?

Parents can avoid heretical definitions of the Trinity by not trying to simplify a complex concept. The Trinity is deep. Let it be that way. We want our children to have an exalted view of God. Ask your children if an ant can understand an airplane. In the same way, we can't come close to grasping God.

Allowing your explanation of the Trinity to be complex doesn't mean you have to go into details about the economic Trinity or the speculative

notions from contemporary scholarship. For very young children, simply teaching that there is one God who has always been the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit may be enough. As they grow, so can your explanations.

David Covington said, "Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend." The

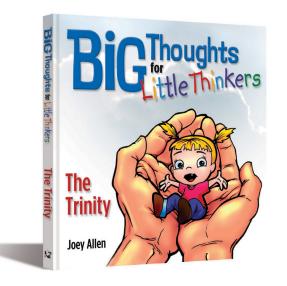
doctrine of the Trinity is mysterious, yes, but we can teach our children with confidence what Christians have always believed about God.

### What about illustrations and analogies? Should we use them when describing the Trinity to our children? Why or why not?

In my *Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers* book on the Trinity, I don't use any illustrations or analogies. I don't want children thinking God is like an egg or water. Whenever we equate God

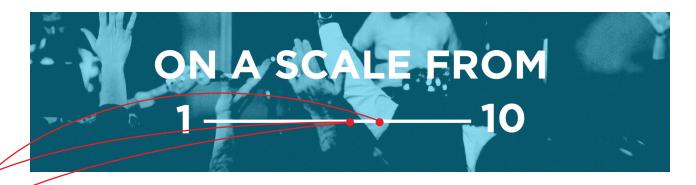
with something in his Creation, we fall into error.

I don't think illustrations or analogies are bad, as long as we clearly understand that they are only illustrations or analogies. Augustine, for example, used analogies quite freely. His meditations on 1 John 4:8, "God is love," provide some of the most profound insights into the nature of God that theologians have ever considered. I think kids can understand that love needs more than one person, so if God is love, we understand that God is both the lover and the beloved. This kind of description may help children understand the Trinity better.



The gospel itself gives us tremendous insight into the Trinity because in the gospel we see the Father sending the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to take the wrath of the Father in order to invite us into the eternal community of God. Parents who get ahold of this truth will love teaching the doctrine of the Trinity to their kids.

Joey, his wife Christy, and two little theologians Claire (6) and Joe (3) have worked in a Muslim South Asian country for over five years. Joey holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Georgia and a Master of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. Joey is the author of Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers series, which includes The Gospel, The Trinity, The Scriptures, and The Mission, published by New Leaf Press.



### DOES THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AFFECT OUR WORSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Our worship is inevitably trinitarian. The Father and Son delight in one another, in the joy of the Spirit and we get to participate in that delight (Luke 10:21-22). But often we miss out on the realization of this when it's not made explicit in the way we shape our worship. But the Trinity does impact our worship (whether we realize it or not)! Even when our worship is weak and marred by sin, the Spirit connects us to Christ our Priest who represents us before the Father in the heavenly congregation (Heb. 2:11-13).

**Tim Chester**, author of *Delighting in the Trinity* 

Recent years seem to indicate an increased awareness in the church that God is Triune and that our gatherings should reflect that. But judging from the prayers we often hear and the songs written in the past two or three decades, I don't think the church at large is generally alert to the fact that we have access to the Father through Christ in one Spirit (Eph. 2:18). Even in liturgies that are evidently triune, I'm not sure people in the congregation can always adequately express why. But I'm confident that God, out of his love for us and concern for his own glory, will always lead us into a clearer understanding of who he is and practices that more faithfully reflect his triune nature.

Bob Kauflin, author of Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God

In my experience, those planning and leading services generally do not give enough thought to engaging with God as Trinity. Some traditions rightly emphasize approaching the Father through the Son, but seem to have little place for the Spirit. Others focus on the Spirit and pray to Jesus but seem to be awkward about relating to God as Father.

**David Peterson**, author of Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship

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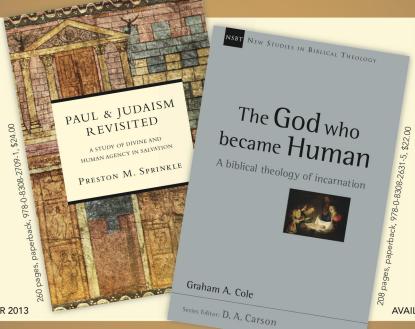
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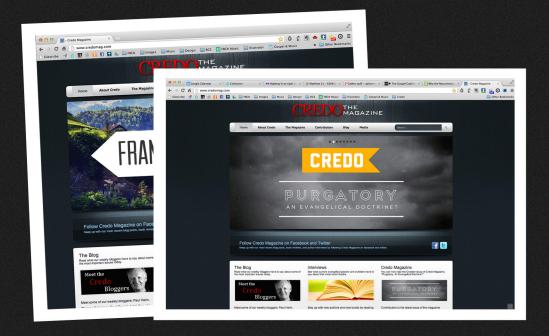
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# THE TRINITY THE GOD BEHIND THE GOSPEL FRED SANDERS

hen people get saved, they don't usually notice that something trinitarian has happened to them. But "something trinitarian" is precisely what goes on in salvation: Everyone who has saving faith has been drawn by the Father (John 6:44) and moved by the Spirit to confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). To be forgiven is to be justified by the just One when the Father put forward his Son as a propitiation to be received by faith (Rom. 3:24-5). God's great blessing to us in Christ is a single, massive, unified act of choosing us before the foundation of the world, redeeming us through the blood of his beloved Son, and sealing us with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:3-14).

Wherever you turn in the doctrine of salvation, you encounter the integrated work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the concerted undertaking of a great salvation that is purposed by the Father, accomplished through the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is never more conspicuously displayed than when we look at salvation through the lens of adoption. Here the trinitarian character of salvation shines through constantly: the Son is not ashamed to call us brothers, but brings us into that same filial relationship with the Father that he himself has. The eternal Son becomes the incarnate Son in order to

bring creatures into a sonship relation to the Father, through the indwelling Spirit of adoption. What he always has been in heaven, the one in whom the Father is well pleased, he begins to be on earth, among us, in the likeness of sinful flesh. Exalting fallen creatures into that filial relationship is not easy, and is no mere matter of course. It costs. The Father loves the world so much that he gives his Son (John 3:16), and the Son offers himself to the Father through the eternal Spirit to make this happen (Heb. 9:14). J. I. Packer has said that the theology of the New Testament can be summed up in three words: "Adoption through propitiation." The Trinity pays the price of bringing us home to God.

Jesus himself seems to have indicated this trinitarian depth of Christian existence when he commissioned his church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:20). These three names,

God's great blessing to us in Christ is a single, massive, unified act of choosing us before the foundation of the world, redeeming us through the blood of his beloved Son, and sealing us with the Holy Spirit of promise.

or rather this one divine name that points to three distinct persons, is spoken over every person brought into the church. It is

If what happens

in salvation is

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not merely a formula to be recited for its own sake, but a kind of summary of the gospel, explaining the depths beneath what every believer experiences in salvation. What Paul calls "the gospel of God" is a gospel about the one who was declared to be God's Son by his resurrection

through the Spirit (Rom. 1:1-4). When we encounter the gospel of God, the reality we come into contact with is the God of the gospel, and it is the task of the doctrine of the Trinity to explain that connection.

WARNING, THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM AHEAD

But if what happens in salvation is so thoroughly trinitarian, why don't we simply notice it for ourselves? Why does the Trinity have to be explained and expounded, always with considerable Bible study and usually with a lot of help from the classic consensus of the church fathers? Shouldn't the sheer trinitarianness of the spiritual reality spontaneously generate experiential knowledge of the triune God in all who experience it?

The answer is actually no. The reason that almost nobody moves immediately from experiencing forgiveness of sins to

> shouting "Eureka, there's a Trinity" is easily explained. Although the triunity of God is behind everything that happens in salvation, and the gospel only makes sense when it is traced back to its trinitarian foundation. the doctrine of the Trinity is nevertheless not simply

a sort of codified account of our spiritual experience, or a belief that we can read right off of our spiritual experience. It gives rise to an experience of God, but it does not derive from an experience. Trinity grounds experience rather than vice versa. The idea that we could read doctrines directly off our spiritual experience was a hallmark of classical theological liberalism, and did not normally promote the health of the doctrine of the Trinity (see the treatments of the doctrine by Schleiermacher and Ritschl, for instance).

The doctrine of the Trinity doesn't spontaneously emerge from spiritual experience; it has to be carefully taught. The believer who cries out to God may feel an experience of divine intimacy, but that experience is bound to be too nebulous to have the sharp edges and corners of trinitarian theology. We need to read the distinguishing features of the three persons of the Trinity in a text much larger than our hearts, and that book is the history of salvation. Since the history of salvation is authoritatively and inerrantly witnessed in the text of Scripture, the book we need to read is quite literally a book: the Bible.

To grasp the doctrine of the Trinity as it emerges from Scripture and impacts Christian experience, we have to expand the scope of our vision considerably beyond the horizons of our spiritual experience. There are really three steps to take to understand the Trinity's role in salvation.

READING SCRIPTURE
WITH TRINITARIAN
GLASSES

The first step is to read the entire Bible. You have to achieve some initial mastery of all the long, main lines of the one story that is the canon of the Christian Scriptures. You have to be able to think back and forth along the canon of Scripture, with figures like Abraham and Moses and David and Cyrus standing in their proper places, and with categories like temple and sonship and holiness lighting up the various books as appropriate. You especially need to see the many and intricate ways the Old and New Covenants are inwardly bound to each other.

To grasp the doctrine of the Trinity as it emerges from Scripture and impacts Christian experience, we have to expand the scope of our vision considerably beyond the horizons of our spiritual experience.

Getting comfortable with the whole volume, the full counsel of God, is the first step toward understanding the Trinity's role in salvation.

But it's only the first step. The second step is to understand the shape of God's economy of salvation. The Bible is not just a series of textual messages, but is a vast and comprehensive story about one thing in particular: salvation. God has ordered all of these words and events that are recorded in Scripture toward one end. It's not good enough just to know the content of the whole Bible, especially if you misinterpret it as a haphazard assemblage of divine stops and starts along the way to a variety of divergent goals. These are not disparate Bible stories, but the written form of the one grand movement in which God disposes all his works and words toward making himself known and present. In this great sweep of salvation history, God is making himself known.

The Bible communicates that above all.

The third and final step is to recognize the economy of salvation as a revelation of who God is. This is actually the biggest interpretive step of all. When you know the entire Bible, and understand that it presents to us God's well-ordered economy, you still

have to come to see that God is making himself known to us in that economy. After all, it is theoretically possible for God to do great things in world history without really giving away his character or disclosing his identity in doing so. Theoretically, he is free to do things that do not broadcast his character in the kind of detail that would enable us to say who he is. This final step on the way to the doctrine of the Trinity is the recognition

that God behaved as Father, Son, and Spirit in the economy because he was revealing to us who he eternally is, in himself. He wasn't messing around with that Son and Spirit stuff. He put himself into the gospel.

That is the right way to interpret the Bible.

It's also the traditional way, recognized by the church fathers and the reformers. It's also the Christian way. It yields the doctrine of the Trinity, not in scattered verses here and there that tell us a weird doctrine at the margins of the faith, but as the main point of the whole history. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son (Gal 4:4), a Son

> he always had with him in the unity of the Spirit. And having sent his Son to redeem us from the curse of the law, he sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6).

> When we know all of this, we know where the gospel came from. We know that in this work of human salvation, the character of God is made known to us. and that character is the triune character of

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Taking the big view of how we know the details of the doctrine of the Trinity helps explain the odd situation we started with: that everyone who gets saved has had this deeply trinitarian experience, but few notice the trinitarian character of it. When we get saved, we

That is the right way to interpret the Bible. It's also the traditional way, recognized by the church fathers and the reformers. It's also the Christian wav. It vields the doctrine of the Trinity, not in scattered verses here and there that tell us a weird doctrine at the margins of the faith, but as the main point of the whole history.

are immersed into a trinitarian reality, but we need to have that reality explained and expounded to us. God gives us the gift of salvation, and completes the gift by giving us understanding of it: "we have received... the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). God gives the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit without whom we do not belong to Christ, and also gives the Spirit who helps us understand the gift: same Spirit. The God behind the gospel is the Trinity, and wants us to know that.

# THE TRINITY, A CATECHIZING DOCTRINE

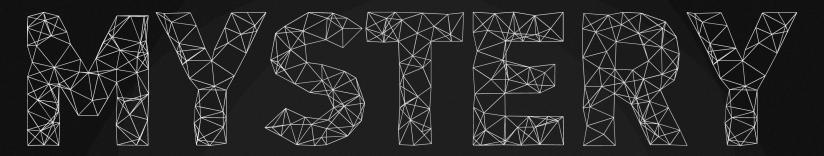
What purpose, role, and function does the doctrine of the Trinity have in the Christian life? I would argue that its chief use is not necessarily in evangelism or apologetics, but first and foremost in catechesis. The doctrine of the Trinity is the quintessential catechizing doctrine. Whenever and wherever Christian churches have understood the urgency of the task of teaching the truth to believers, the doctrine of the Trinity has thrived: think of the fourth century and the sixteenth century, both periods rich in catechetical literature and practice. On the other hand, when the practice of catechesis has fallen into neglect, the doctrine of the Trinity has lost its luster

and drifted into apparent irrelevance.

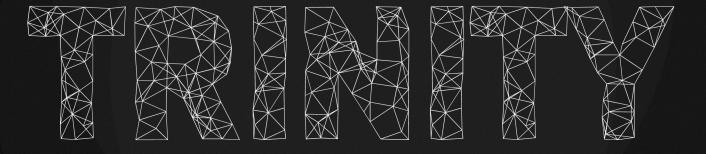
There are many promising signs that indicate the churches are reawakening to the need for catechesis, and especially a more deliberate instruction of new believers, who can no longer be assumed to have underlying worldviews that are benignly compatible with Christian faith in some way. The doctrine of the Trinity is a trustworthy tool at hand for this catechetical labor. It explains to those who have heard the gospel what the gospel has to do with God himself. It pulls together the full counsel of Scripture and articulates it very clearly, insisting that what we have in the good news of salvation is a revelation of who God is in the depths of his eternal being: God the Trinity, the God of salvation, and the God behind the gospel.

Fred Sanders is Associate Professor at Biola University in the Torrey Honors Institute. He is the author of The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything (Crossway).

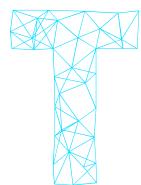
### THE



OF THE



SCOTT R. SWAIN



he doctrine of the Trinity is the most sublime truth of the Christian faith and its supreme treasure. Christian teaching concerning one God in three persons flows from the revelation of

the high and holy name of the Lord God Almighty: "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). This glorious name identifies the true and living God and, because it is the name into which we are baptized, constitutes our only comfort in life and in death. Not only does the doctrine of the Trinity identify God, it also illumines all of God's works, enabling us to perceive more clearly the wonders of the Father's purpose in creation, of Christ's incarnation, and of the Spirit's indwelling. All things are from the Trinity, through the Trinity, and to the Trinity. And so, seen in the sublime light of the Trinity, we see all things in a new light.

Sublime and supreme, the doctrine of the Trinity is also singular and self-interpreting. The doctrine is singular insofar as the truth about God as Trinity cannot be categorized among or explained by comparison with other "trinities" in creation (for example, the threefold form of ice, water, and vapor). "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" the Lord asks

in Isaiah 40:18. And the desired response is "no one." The triune God is and acts in a class by himself. For this reason, the Trinity is self-interpreting, a mystery that faith comes to grasp only insofar as the triune God interprets his identity and action to us in Holy Scripture. "No one knows the Father except the Son," Jesus declares in Matthew 11:27, "and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." The good news of course is that the triune God does interpret himself to us, presenting to Christian theology the delightful and demanding task of bearing witness to the supreme and singular reality that is the Lord our God, the reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the present article is to provide a brief overview of the doctrine of the Trinity, following the Lord's teaching in Matthew 11:25-27 as our primary guide, but also attending to ways in which this teaching is echoed throughout the Bible and summarized in the church's creeds and confessions. In the doctrine of the Trinity, as in all other doctrines, the Lord Jesus Christ is our only teacher (Matt. 23:8). He alone knows the Father (again, Matt. 11:27) and he, with the Father, gives us the Spirit that we might know the things freely given to us by God (1 Cor. 2:11-12). Therefore, if we would learn of the Trinity, we must learn from Jesus (Matt. 11:29). We must direct our attention to the place

where he speaks, Holy Scripture, and we must submit our minds to the obedient pattern of thinking which he demands. Only then will we know the doctrine of the Trinity as we ought to know it. Only then will we share the mind of Christ.

### Learning the Trinity from Jesus: Matthew 11:25-27

"At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that

you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and

no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." The revelation of the Trinity in Matthew 11:25-27 causes Jesus to rejoice. This revelation is not a puzzle we are called to solve or a conundrum devised to confound us. It is a source of joy: first in Jesus, then in those who come to know this revelation through Jesus. Unveiled at the Father's sovereign behest—"such was your gracious will" (11:26), and to an unlikely audience—

"to little children" (11:25), the mystery of the Trinity makes known the supreme life of communication and communion that is God's life as Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, official church teaching says, are "consubstantial" in one divine life, one divine action, one divine right to our faith and worship.

Jesus' teaching about the Trinity begins with teaching about the Father. Note the twofold description of God that Jesus acclaims: "I

> thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth." The first description, "Father," takes Old **Testament** the characterization of God as the father of Adam 5:1-3: Luke (Gen. 3:38), Israel (Exod. 4:22; 32:6), Deut. and the Davidic king

(2 Sam. 7:14), and gives to it a new and unique significance by applying it to God's relation to Jesus (We will return to this new and unique sense of God's fatherhood in a moment.) The second description, "Lord of heaven and earth," signifies the Father's supreme sovereignty. God is the Father who reigns "in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), with whom "all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26), from whom every blessing in nature and in grace flows (Matt. 6:25-34), and to whom belongs

eternal dominion and glory (Matt. 6:13).

Jesus' teaching about the Trinity begins with teaching about the Father but continues with teaching about his identity as the Son. Here we have a twofold description of the Son that parallels the twofold description of the Father. First, Jesus has received "all things" from the Father. This description indicates that, with the Father, the Son shares supreme divine sovereignty. Jesus has sovereign authority on earth to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6), an authority that belongs to God alone (Matt. 9:3; Mark 2:7). Jesus exercises sovereign authority over the wind and the waves (Mark 4:35-41), an authority that belongs to God alone (Ps. 107:23-32). Jesus exercises "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18)—again, an authority that belongs to God alone (Ps. 135:6). Second, Jesus stands in a unique relation to the Father, the relation of "the Son" (Matt. 11:27). Jesus is not just one son of God among many, not even in the Davidic sense of being the messianic king appointed by God to rule on earth as God rules in heaven (see Matt. 22:41-46). He is the Son of God in the full and proper sense (John 5:18), a sense that distinguishes him from all other creaturely sons of God. He is God's lordly Son, who has received all things from the Father (Matt 11:27), who with the Father reigns on God's sovereign throne (again, Matt 22:41-46), and who with the Father reveals the mystery of the Trinity to us (Matt 11:25, 27). Jesus is God's divine Son.

### Common Properties and Personal Properties

The twofold description of the persons exhibited in Matthew 11.25-27, and also in many other biblical texts, constitutes the fundamental biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible identifies the persons with characteristics that each person holds in common with the other persons ("common properties") and also with characteristics that each person holds in distinction from the other persons ("personal properties").

With respect to the first type of description, the Bible identifies each person as the one true and living God. The three persons share a single divine "name" (Matt. 28:19): the Father is the one Lord God (e.g., Matt. 11:25); the Son is the one Lord God (e.g., John 20.28; 1 Cor. 8:6); and the Spirit is the one Lord God (e.g., Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18). Furthermore, the Bible identifies each person as an agent of God's uniquely divine acts of creation, providence, redemption, and so forth (Gen. 1:1-2; Ps. 33:6; John 1:1-3; Gal. 4:4-6; etc.). These "common properties" reveal that the multiplication of persons in the Trinity does not amount to the multiplication of gods (see Eph. 4:4-6). The doctrine of the Trinity is a species

of monotheism (compare Deut. 6:4 with 1 Cor. 8:6). The three distinct persons are in common, and completely in themselves, one supreme Lord and God. Again, to borrow creedal terminology, the Son and the Spirit are "consubstantial" with the Father.

With respect to the second type of description, the Bible indicates that each person is truly distinct from the other persons. What is the nature of this real distinction? The distinction does not involve the deity

of the persons these three are one Lord God. Nor does it involve a distinction in their power, wisdom, or will-in God all these things are "one" (Deut. 6:4).

The personal names reflect the distinctive ways in which the persons share or communicate (i.e., "make common") the one divine essence that they hold in common.

The nature of the real distinction between the persons is revealed in their personal proper names: "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit." As these names indicate, the persons are distinguished by their relations: the Father is Father to the Son ("paternity" is thus his unique "personal property"); the Son is Son to the Father ("filiation" is thus his unique personal property); the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son ("spiration" is thus his unique personal property). These personal properties are not interchangeable. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Father. And the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

### **Eternal Generation**

What more can be said about these personal properties? Again, attentive to the personal names themselves, the church has recognized that these names indicate communicative relations. That is to say, the personal names reflect the distinctive ways in which the persons share or communicate

> "make (i.e., common") the one divine essence that they hold in The common. Father is Father in that he eternally communicates the one divine essence

to the Son through eternal generation: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father" (Matt 11:27). "As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26). As Adam begot Seth in his likeness, communicating human nature to him (Gen. 5:3), so the Father has eternally begotten the Son, eternally communicating the divine nature to him.

To be sure, the Adam-Seth relation is but a creaturely analogue of the Father-Son relation. Consequently, we should not

measure the latter divine relation by the standard of the former creaturely relation. Adam begot Seth in time and in so doing became a father. However, the Father has eternally begotten the Son and so has always been a Father. Furthermore, when Adam begot Seth, communicating human nature to him, that human nature was divided into two human beings. However, in eternally begetting the Son, and communicating the divine nature to him, the divine nature is not divided into two divine beings. The Father eternally communicates the simple, undivided divine essence to the Son constituting him a second divine person but not a second God.

The Son, accordingly, is Son in that he eternally receives the one divine essence from the Father in eternal generation. He is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of his person (Heb. 1:3). In terms of the Nicene Creed, the Son is "God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God." As the preceding discussion suggests, the point of eternal generation is not that the Son is a derivative deity. The point is only that his distinctive way of being the one God is as the true Son of the Father: the Father's eternal offspring, God with his Father in every way.

To be sure, eternal generation is not something that our minds can comprehend,

so determined is our thinking by the categories of time and finitude. According to Martin Luther, the doctrine of eternal generation "is not even comprehensible to the angels," and "those who have tried to grasp it have broken their necks over it." Nevertheless, he insists, it is a doctrine "given to us in the gospel" and glimpsed "by faith." The doctrine of eternal generation is, furthermore, beautiful teaching, for it indicates the kind of perfection that characterizes the Father as an eternally radiant, communicative perfection, and it indicates the kind of perfection that characterizes the Son: when we see the Son, we see deity shining forth in its full light and brilliance, supreme over all creaturely lights.

### **Eternal Spiration**

What about the Spirit? The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and of the Son (Gal. 4:6). The Spirit is Spirit in that he eternally receives the one divine essence from the Father and the Son by "spiration" or by being "breathed out." In classical Augustinian terms, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from one spirating source. The Spirit's "communicative relation" is even more difficult to describe than that of the Son. But this difficulty should not discourage us; for in fact the difficulty in perceiving his mode of procession is ingredient to

the way he reveals himself: the Spirit sovereignly "blows where he wishes" (John 3:8), characteristically directing us away from himself to the person of the Son (see John 16:13-15). When it comes to the divine light that is the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, we do not typically look at that light but through that light to the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ (see 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4, 6; 1 Cor. 2:9-16; Eph. 1:17-18). In his light, we see light (Ps. 36:9).

One further point about the personal properties is worth making. The personal properties of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit not only teach us about the distinctive ways in which the persons are God but also about the distinctive ways in which the persons act as God. While all three persons cooperate in all divine actions because they are one Lord God, their unified divine action nevertheless exhibits an order that corresponds to their distinctive personal properties. As the Father is the first person of the Trinity, neither begotten nor breathed, so he initiates all divine action. All things are "from him" (1 Cor. 8:6). As the Son is the second person of the Trinity, eternally begotten of the Father, so he acts from the Father. All things are "through him" (1 Cor. 8:6). As the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, eternally breathed out by the Father and the Son, so he acts from

the Father and the Son: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-15). All things are brought to completion "in him."

### **Trinitarian Heresies**

In light of the Bible's twofold description of the divine persons, and the doctrine of the Trinity that arises therefrom, we can better identify the root of several trinitarian errors that have plagued the church throughout history. The error of "Sabellianism" or "modalism" rightly recognizes the common properties of the persons—the properties that identify the persons as one God, but fails to recognize the personal properties of the persons—the properties that distinguish the persons from each other. The error of "Arianism" or "subordinationism" makes the opposite mistake, rightly recognizing the personal properties that distinguish the persons from each other but failing to recognize the common properties that identity each person as the one Lord God. This error not only occurs among those who deny the full deity of the Son and the Spirit.

It also occurs among those who fail to appreciate that the common properties not only identify the persons as equally divine but also as identically divine—as one Lord God. This is the error of tritheism, an error that many contemporary "social trinitarians" come dangerously close to making.

Space forbids lengthy reflection on these errors. It is nevertheless instructive to observe their common root: each of these

This is the goal of

trinitarian doctrine:

that we might rejoice

in the Father... in the

Son... in the Spirit.

trinitarian mistakes arises, to some degree, from a failure to consider what the whole counsel of God teaches regarding the persons of the Trinity. That is to say, each of these trinitarian mistakes arises

from a partial, selective reading of the Scriptures. Of course, these errors exhibit other methodological mistakes as well, for example, the attempt to measure the unlimited being of the Trinity by the limited standard of creaturely being. Still, it is their failure to consider all of God's wonderful names, both personal and common, that constitutes the root of their idolatries.

### Received by Faith, Adored with Love

When it comes to the mystery of the Trinity, Francis Turretin says, we are dealing with a topic "which neither reason can comprehend nor example prove," but which "the authority of divine revelation alone proposes to be received by faith and adored with love." This is the goal of trinitarian doctrine: that we might rejoice in the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth (Matt. 11:25); that we might rejoice in the Son, to whom the Father has given "all things" (Matt. 11:27) and through whom the Father has granted us every spiritual blessing (Rom.

8:32; Eph. 1:3); and that we might rejoice in the Spirit (Luke 10:21), who fills our hearts with the fullness of love that characterizes God's eternal, sublime life as Father, Son, and Spirit.

Scott R. Swain is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando). With Andreas Köstenberger, Swain is the author of Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel. With Michael Allen, he edits two series: Zondervan Academic's New Studies in Dogmatics and T&T Clark's International Theological Commentary. Swain is currently working on a book about the divine names. He is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America.

He and his wife, Leigh, have four children.

# Michael Reeves

# WHY A TRIUNE

# GOD IS BETTER

## THAN ANY OTHER

deep chasm of misunderstanding, dislike, and even hatred separates many Christians and Muslims today. Christian responses to Allah – understood here as the God of the Qur'an – will either widen that chasm or help bridge it. If for Christians Allah is a foreign and false god, all bridge building will suffer."

So begins Miroslav Volf's Allah: A Christian Response, an eloquent and passionate argument that Christians and Muslims worship one and the same God. His motivation is clear and understandable: wouldn't people fight less, bomb less, hate less if they knew that, beneath the cultural differences, they worshipped the same God?

Well, now. I suggest instead that the very thing that most essentially distinguishes Christianity from every other religion is the very thing that offers the true hope of peace. I am talking about the Trinity. Now the Trinity is not some superficial thing in God, some thing that can be shaved off to leave Father, Son and Spirit looking remarkably like Allah. No, the triune being of God makes the God of the Bible a radically, incompatibly different God – a different sort of God – to the gods of every other religion. And therein lies, not a problem, an obstacle to world peace, but the source of all hope, peace, love and joy.

Of course, saying that, deep down, all the gods of the different world religions are the same has an immediate air of reasonableness to it, like saying that "fromage," "ost" and "caseus" are just different words for cheese. But look closer and the idea becomes ever more preposterous.

### ALLAH: A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF GOD

Take, for example, how the Qur'an so keenly distinguishes Allah from the God re-

vealed in Jesus:

Say not "Trinity." Desist; it will be better for you: for God is one God. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son (Surah 4.171).

Say: "He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him" (Surah 112, my emphasis).

In other words, Allah is not a Father ("he begets not"), and he is not a Son ("nor is he begotten"). He is not Father, Son and Spirit. He wishes it to be known that he is a different God. And why not? Allah, after all, is one person, and not three. That's quite a difference. And it is not just incompatibly different numbers we are dealing with here: that difference means that Allah has a completely different character, motivation and way of going about things. Think about it: if Allah is truly God, the creator of all things, what is he most essentially like? A good way to think about it is to ask what he's been up to for eternity. Before he created anything, what was he doing? What was he like then, in himself? Well, one thing we can be quite sure of: entirely unlike the Father, Son and Spirit, Allah was a single person all by himself. Solitary. For eternity. So then, for eternity Allah had nobody and nothing to love. Love for others is clearly not his heartbeat. There is actually a fascinating tension at just this point in Islam. Traditionally, Allah is said to have ninety-nine names, titles which describe him as he is in himself in eternity. One of them is "The Loving." But how could Allah be loving in eternity? Before he created there was nothing else in existence that he could love (and the title does not refer to self-centred love but love for others). The only option is that Allah eternally loves his creation. But that in itself raises an enormous problem: if Allah needs his creation to be who he is in himself ("loving"), then Allah is dependent on his own creation, and one of the cardinal beliefs of Islam is that Allah is dependent on nothing.

The implications for the character of Allah are concerning, to put it mildly. Not being essentially loving, Allah is the source of all evil just as much – and in just the same way – as he is the source of all good. And while he can be described as The Compassionate, The Merciful, he can also be called The Proud, The Destroyer, and "the best of deceivers." In some twenty passages in the Koran, Allah is said to lead men astray, deceiving and perverting them (for example, deceiving the followers of Christ into believing that Jesus really died and rose again by substituting a lookalike on the cross).

Faith in Allah therefore looks decidedly different to faith in the triune God. Understandably, faith looks unsure and frightened. Even when Mohammed's successor, the enormously significant Caliph Abu

Bakr, was assured of paradise by Mohammed himself, it gave him no confidence. He knew Allah too well. "By Allah!" he said, "I would not rest assured and feel safe from the deception of Allah, even if I had one foot in paradise." He was quite right: Allah could not and cannot be trusted.

### THE ETERNALLY LOVING TRINITY

How different everything is with the triune God! (And for now we're just comparing the God of the Bible with Allah. But even if they are so incompatible and dissimilar, think how difficult is the attempt to make the Trinity the same as one of the other gods: Vishnu, Zeus or Thor.) In the triune God we do not have a God who is essentially lonely, essentially loveless. Quite the opposite: the God revealed in Jesus has been eternally loving. In John 17:24, Jesus said to his Father "Father... you loved me before the foundation of the world," and that changes everything. Unlike Allah, before he created this God was a Father, eternally loving his Son as he poured out his Spirit upon him. There has always been love with this God; it is at the root of who he is.

That means that the triune God has an entirely different nature and motivation to any other God. If God is eternally a Father, loving his Son, then God is eternally loving, and eternally life-giving (he is, after all, a father). For eternity he has been about

giving out life and love. Many theologians have therefore liked to compare the Father to a fountain, in that, just as a fountain must pour forth water in order to be a fountain, so the Father must pour forth life and love to be a true Father. In other words, this God is a fountain of love; he is love, he could not not love. Now one simply could not say that of any other God: if God were a single person, that would not be true; if the Father had ever been solitary, without his Son, that would not be true. The only God of whom one can say "God is love" is the triune God.

Therefore, God has an entirely unique motivation: love. The Father so delights in his Son that he rejoices to share his love for him: and so he creates, and so he saves, that his Son might be the firstborn among many brothers. That's in stark contrast to gods who are not eternally characterised and motivated by love. Why would such gods act or create? Imagine a god who is alone for eternity. He can only have been characterised by self-obsession and self-gratification. After all, there was nothing else to do. That, then, can be the only real motivation for such a god – unless, of course, one simply admits that the god is needy and requires something else in order to be satisfied.

#### **GODS WHO CANNOT SAVE**

In The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis captured well the difference between the devil (who is the definitive needy and solitary god)

and the living God of self-giving, overflowing love. Screwtape, a senior demon, writes:

One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures, whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in. He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over.

What a wonderfully different salvation the triune God offers! Actually, I say "different"; the truth is that no other god could actually offer anything that amounts to salvation. First, if God is not triune and so not essentially loving, then he is not the sort of God inclined to show mercy. Take Allah again: in Islam there is no word for "salvation" since Allah has none to offer; the closest one gets is the concept of "success." With Allah, paradise must be earned. Naturally. Second, if the Father had no Son to die in our place, he would have no substitute to give us. We would

have to provide the perfect offering for our  $\sin -$  and that is neither grace nor possible.

But the shape of the triune God's salvation is also beautifully unique. If the Father had not enjoyed eternal fellowship with his Son, then he is not the sort of God who really knows what fellowship is. It is certainly not something important to him. 'Personal space' and distance, not intimacy, would be his default. And so, with a single-person God, salvation could never amount to what Christians enjoy as the adopted sons of God.

The triune God does what no other could: the Father sends us what is most precious to him, his Son; and the Son, uniting us to himself by the Spirit, brings us back before his Father to share the relationship he has always enjoyed. This God shares himself; we are brought into the very life of this God; we are given the Son's own Comforter to be our own, and given the Son's own right to cry "Abba" (Gal. 4:4-6). More than forgiveness, more than paradise, Christians share the Son's own indestructible standing and intimacy before the Father. No other god could give us so much.

## **BOILED-DOWN RELIGIOUS MUSH**

One has to say, then, that it would be so much easier to be a pluralist without the Trinity. For the Trinity is the most awkward snag in the pluralist's fond idea that the gods of all

religions are basically the same. But then in the Trinity we find something so very much better. All that pluralism can offer is some boiled-down spirituality, stripped of all specific flavour; whereas in the triune God we find the only God who is love, we find a God who welcomes in the failures, sharing with them all he has to offer: his own eternal life, love, joy and comfort.

Of course, singling out "the pluralist" like that makes it easy for Christians to imagine an enemy, a heretic, out there. As if we'll be safe from the pluralist threat if we just keep a beady eye out for the mealymouthed liberal round the corner. No worries if you're a card-carrying confessional conservative. But if we only ever speak abstractly about "God," without being clear and specific about which God we mean, then our churches will be left with much the same boiled-down religious mush as if we were pluralists ourselves. John Calvin once wrote that if we try to think about God without thinking about the Father, Son and Spirit, then "only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God" (Institutes, 1.13.2). And, one might add, to the exclusion of the true gospel. For if we speak of God only in terms so hazy they could apply to other gods as much as the Trinity, then we will lose all that is so beautifully distinct about this God's ways, especially this God's salvation.

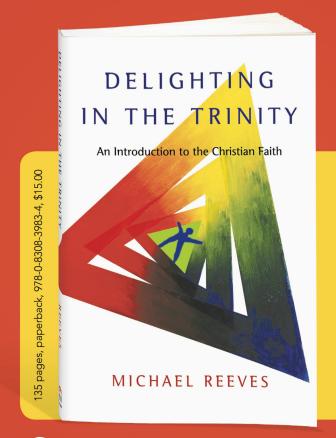
Perhaps that is just where so many of the

church's troubles today lie. The various preconceptions people have about who God is and what he is like are not being undone, for "God" is spoken of vaguely. And it will not do simply to speak more of his glory, his sovereignty, his holiness, etc., if we will not be clear which God's glory, sovereignty and holiness we are talking about. Allah could be described by the Muslim as glorious, sovereign and holy. But the triune God's glory is something utterly unlike Allah's. Allah's glory would never be found in the way of the cross, but the cross is precisely where the glory of the triune God shines most brightly. That is where the Son, the glory of his Father, undergoes "the hour" of his glorification (John 12:23). Who

God is – Father, Son and Spirit – radically shapes what we mean by all these words we use to describe him. And those qualities shine with true divinity only when ascribed to the Father, Son and Spirit. In other words, we must clearly distinguish the glory of the living God from the glory of idols.

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?" cried Moses (Exod. 15:11). None. None whatever. And therein is the sweetest good news to enjoy and proclaim.

Michael Reeves is Head of Theology, UCCF and the author of Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith.



# A BRILLIANT INTRODUCTION FROM MICHAEL REEVES

#### **DELIGHTING IN THE TRINITY**

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-DONALD FAIRBAIRN, Robert E. Cooley Professor of Early Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and author of Life in the Trinity







# TRANSFORMS WORSHIP ROBERT LETHAM

he worship of the church focuses on God, ascribing to him adoration, homage and loving submission. He alone is to be worshiped (Exod. 20:1-3, Rev. 22:8-9). But who is God? What is the distinctively *Christian* doctrine of God? I have argued elsewhere that his new covenant name is the one name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). This follows the pattern established in creation (Gen. 1:1-5, 26ff, Ps. 33:6-9, 104:29-30, John 1:1-4, Col. 1:15-20, Heb. 1:1-2), providence (Ps. 104:29-30, Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:3) and grace (OT & NT in passim), that the Son and the Holy Spirit are one with the Father from eternity. Therefore, church worship is to be explicitly trinitarian.

# THE NEGLECT OF THE TRINITY IN THE WESTERN CHURCH

Yet trinitarian theology has had a wider impact on the piety of the Eastern church. Eastern liturgies are permeated with trinitarian prayers and doxologies. In the West the trinity has in practice been relegated to the sidelines to such an extent that most Christians are little more than practical modalists. There is a paucity of hymns that are clearly trinitarian; many could equally be sung by Unitarians, orthodox Jews or Muslims. You will be surprised. Of course, we may bring to

these texts trinitarian assumptions and so interpret them, although I daresay only a very few may do so, but this is not present in the texts themselves. This is a serious deficit. In order to address it we need to grasp how the church's theology should inform and shape its worship.

#### ONLY GOD CAN MAKE GOD KNOWN AND DETERMINE HOW WE RELATE TO HIM

Naming in the ancient near East denoted the sovereignty of the one who named over the one named. Thus, for example, Adam names the animals (Gen. 2:19f), while parents name their children. However, only God ever names God. Only he has the right to name himself, for he is not subject to any other being. Contemporary human attempts to re-imagine God are simply that—figments of the imagination, idols made in a human image, without validity. It follows that God is sovereign in his self-revelation. Further, God is sovereign in granting us knowledge of himself by the Holy Spirit. The additional factor of human sin places us in total reliance on God to make himself known. Humanity's predilection for new objects and forms of worship is rebellion against the true and living God, the holy trinity. Only by the gracious action of the trinity, breaking into our darkness and death and arousing

us to new life, can we ever know him. The God who has made himself known for our salvation has revealed himself to be triune. He unfolds progressively his revelation in covenant history. At each stage he names himself. In the Abrahamic covenant he made himself known as El Shaddai (God Almighty; Gen. 17:1). In the Mosaic covenant he named himself ehveh (Exod. 3:14, cf *y'vah* 6:3). At the apex of redemptive history, Jesus fulfilled the promises of the OT. Matthew records how. as the Mosaic covenant was inaugurated with the sprinkling of covenantal blood, Jesus founds the new covenant in his own blood (Matt. 26:27-29). He adds that the nations are to be made disciples, with the new covenant sacrament of baptism in the

JESUS THE SON NAMES GOD AS THE ONE GOD WHO IS THE FATHER. THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS IS GOD'S CROWNING REVELATION—ALL THAT WENT BEFORE POINTS TO THIS.

one name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus the Son names God as the one God who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is God's crowning revelation—all that went before points to this. Retrospectively, it casts light on all that led up to it. So the triune God alone determines how we are to relate to him and approach him.

#### CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS DISTINCTIVELY TRINITARIAN

The church's worship is grounded on who God is and what he has done. The Father has sent the Son "for us and our salvation". In turn, the Father together with the Son has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the church. The focus of the Spirit's ministry is to speak of Christ the Son. This is summarized in Galatians 4:4-6, "When the fullness of time had come God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that they might receive the inheritance of sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his

> Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father.'" Here lies the basic premise of all God's actions—from Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. Not only is our salvation a work of God,

trinitarian throughout, but it is initiated by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. Of course, Augustine was right in that all aspects of this great drama of redemption are put into effect by all three persons working together in inseparable harmony. However, Calvin's description holds true that to the Father "is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity." The Father sent the Son, then following the Son's death and resurrection, he sent the Spirit of his Son.

#### BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, THROUGH CHRIST, TO THE FATHER

In Ephesians 2:18 Paul has pointed out that Christ made reconciliation by the cross (v. 14), tearing down the dividing wall between God and ourselves due to sin, and between Jew and Gentile due to the ceremonial law. Both Jew and Gentile have identical means of access to God in Christ; "through him

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH EXISTS IN AN

ATMOSPHERE SATURATED BY THE TRINITY.

[Christ] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by the Holy Spirit to the Father." Access to God is ultimately access to

the Father. This is through Christ, the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). The Spirit gives us life in place of death (cf. v. 1), raising us in Christ (vv. 6-7) and graciously granting faith (vv. 8-10). Calvin held that the principal work of the Holy Spirit is to give us faith. It is a cardinal teaching of Scripture that saving faith is the gift of God, given by the Spirit (John 6:44, Eph. 2:1-10, 1 Cor. 12:3). Here is the reverse

movement to God's actions in securing our redemption—by the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father. This encompasses our entire response to, and relationship with, God—from worship through the whole field of Christian experience.

From this it follows that prayer is distinctively trinitarian. The Christian faith exists in an atmosphere saturated by the Trinity. At its most basic level, each and every believer experiences in an unarticulated form communion with the holy Trinity. The Spirit creates a desire to pray and worship God, brings us to faith and sustains us in a life of faithful obedience. In turn, our access to the Father is exclusively through his Son, Jesus Christ—no one comes to the Father except through him (Jn. 14:6). Now that

he has offered the one perfect sacrifice for sins for all time, we have access to the presence of God (Heb. 10:19f),

and so can approach with confidence the throne of grace, knowing that our great high priest is there to intercede for us, who has experienced to the full struggles of human life in a fallen world and can sympathize with us in our weakness (Heb. 4:14ff). Indeed, Jesus introduces us to the same relation he has with the Father. He is the Son by nature, we are children by grace. We now call on God "our Father."

Moreover, the Spirit brings us into his own intercession for us (Rom. 8:26-27). Prayer and worship are thus an exploration of the character of the holy trinity.

#### IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

In John 4:23-24 the Samaritan woman's question concerns the proper place of worship, whether at Jerusalem (which the Jews insisted Yahweh required) or Mount Gerizim (where the Samaritans worshiped). Jesus supports Jerusalem, indicating that the Jews worshiped according to knowledge while the Samaritans did not. However, Jesus says, now the time has come when the distinction between Israel and Samaria.

between Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim, is superceded. True worshipers now worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

What does Jesus mean? Every reference to pneuma (spirit) in this gospel, bar two, is to the Holy Spirit. Jesus means that true worship is directed to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Again, with reference to "truth," we need to look no further than John's record of Jesus as the embodiment of truth (John 14:6), as the true light coming into the world (John 1:9), "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), who brought grace and truth into the world (John 1:17). We worship the Father in the Holy Spirit and

in the fullness of truth, his incarnate Son. In summary, Gregory of Nazianzus puts these passages in context with his comment, "This, then, is my position . . . to worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three persons, one Godhead, undivided in honour and glory and substance and kingdom."

Putting it another way, from the side of God, the worship of the church is the communion of the holy trinity with us his people. We are inclined to view worship as what we do, but it is first and foremost something the triune God does, our actions initiated and encompassed by his. The author of Hebrews refers to Christ offering himself

WE ARE INCLINED TO VIEW WORSHIP AS WHAT WE DO. BUT IT IS FIRST AND FOREMOST SOMETHING THE TRIUNE GOD DOES, OUR ACTIONS INITIATED AND ENCOMPASSED BY HIS.

> up unblemished to the Father "in or by eternal spirit," a probable reference to the Holy Spirit. Since our salvation is received in union with Christ, what is his by nature is ours by grace. Thus in his self-offering to the Father, he offers us his people in him, enabling us to share in the relation he has with the Father. Thus our worship is a participation in his, in or by the Holy Spirit. Behind this lies the incarnation (the Son of God did not simply indwell human nature

but came *as man*, permanently assuming unabbreviated human nature—sin apart), the vicarious humanity of Christ (he took our place in every way—including in worship, since as man he owed it to the Father), his full and complete obedience to the Father by the Holy Spirit, and his continuing high priestly intercession as expounded in John 17 and Hebrews. Therefore, since Christian worship is determined, initiated and shaped by, and directed to, the holy trinity, *we worship the three with one undivided act of adoration*.

## WORSHIPPING THE TRIUNE GOD

There are good reasons for worshiping in one act of adoration the three in their distinct persons and relations with one another. A living relationship with God requires that each of the persons be honored and adored in the context of their revealed relations with each other. The nature of our response in worship is to be shaped by the reality of the one we worship. We worship the Father, who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, who planned our salvation from eternity, who sent his Son into the world and gave him up for us. We worship the Son, in filial relation with the Father, who willingly "for us and our salvation" was made flesh, who submitted himself to life in a fallen world, who trod a

path of lowliness, temptation and suffering, leading to the cruel death of the cross. We worship him for his glorious resurrection, for his ascension to the right hand of the Father, for his continual intercession for us, and for his future return to judge the living and the dead, and to complete our salvation. We worship the Holy Spirit, who gives life and breath to all, who grants us the gift of faith, who sustains us through the difficulties of life as Christians in a world set in hostility to God, and who testifies of the Son. And we worship with one act of adoration the one undivided trinity, for as we cast our minds and hearts before the three persons of the holy trinity, we acknowledge the one indivisible God.

#### DIPPING TEACUPS INTO THE OCEAN

We are struck by how little we know. These are matters beyond us. We dip a teacup into the ocean. Besides the vastness of the Atlantic, the water in our teacup is infinitesimal. But yet—the water in the teacup is the Atlantic ocean, insofar as it is a true sample. We cannot know the inner workings of the Trinity. But we do know what the Son is like, that "being in the form of God, he did not count equality with God something to be exploited for his own advantage, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming

in the likeness of men. And being found in form as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). We also know something of what the Holy Spirit is like, for Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control, all of which are hallmarks of his own character on a creaturely level. We know that the Father chose that his kingdom be initiated and advanced by the

WE WORSHIP WITH ONE ACT OF ADORATION THE ONE UNDIVIDED TRINITY. FOR AS WE CAST OUR MINDS AND HEARTS BEFORE THE THREE PERSONS OF THE HOLY TRINITY, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE ONE INDIVISIBLE GOD.

Son and the Spirit, that as Jesus glorifies the Father, while the Spirit glorifies the Son, and in him the Father. We also know, as Calvin put it, that the will of the Father differs not in the slightest from what he has revealed in his word. And as we think of the three in their distinctness, we recall that they indwell each other in undivided union.

This should affect the way we treat people. Worship and reconciliation go together. Worship entails submitting to and being transformed by the one worshiped. If Philippians 2 was true of Christ the Son at all times, it must become true of us too.

Chief of all, the trinity must be preached and must shape preaching. Preaching is the high point of worship. Not only must the trinity be preached but all preaching must be shaped by the active recognition that the God whose Word is proclaimed is triune. A trinitarian mindset must become as integral to the preacher as the air we breathe. This will come only as preachers give explicit recognition in their prayers and sermons to God as triune, and so encourage their congregations to think, pray and live in

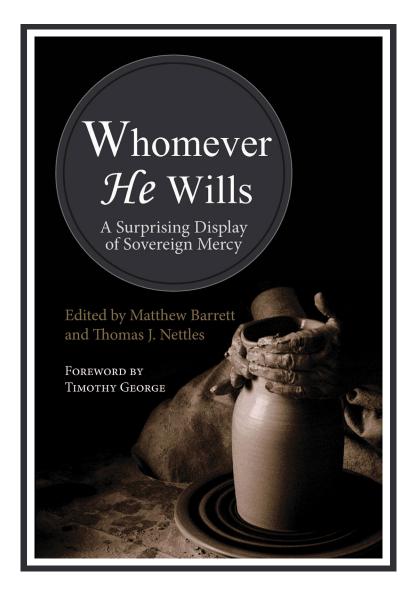
that light. The most practical preaching is that which enables us to advance in our knowledge of the God who is three persons.

Robert Letham is Senior Lecturer in Systematic and Historical Theology at Wales Evangelical School of Theology. He is the author of several books and articles, including The Work of Christ, The Holy Trinity, The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context. and Union with Christ.

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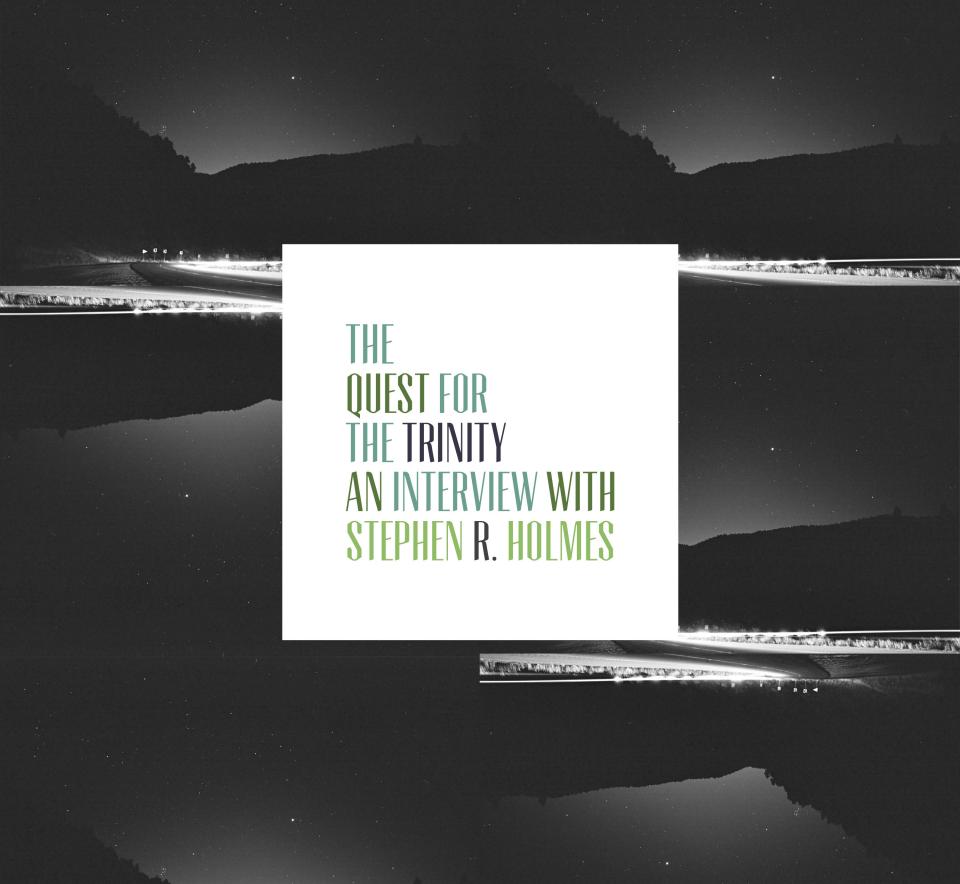
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 MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN, Professor of Church History, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Contributors include: Steven Lawson, Mark DeVine, Andrew Davis, David Schrock, Matthew Barrett, Thomas Schreiner, Bruce Ware, Stephen Wellum, Tom Ascol, Tom Nettles, Ben Rogers, Jeff Robinson, and Tom Hicks.

Edited by Matthew Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles
Foreword by Timothy George



n his new book, *The Quest for the Trinity:*The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity, Stephen R. Holmes explains the complex and controversial history of this crucial doctrine of the Christian faith. Holmes, the Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology at University of St. Andrews, was interviewed by Matthew Claridge, Credo Magazine editor and Senior Pastor of Mt. Idaho Baptist Church in Grangeville, ID. Claridge and Holmes get to the meat of trinitarian theology and explore some of the mysteries this doctrines presents.

Your book sets out to make a historical observation, rather than a theological assessment, of the "advances" made by the 20th century trinitarian Renaissance. What is the historical point you are burdened to make in *The Quest for the Trinity*?

In the later years of the twentieth century, many theologians became convinced that the true doctrine of the Trinity had been lost, and needed recovery. I argue that the doctrine recovered was very different from the traditional doctrine.

What is the difference between the "received" trinitarian theology and the common features of the purported trinitarian recovery of the twentieth century?

The twentieth-century story argued that in

the fifth century Augustine misunderstood the profound advances made by Greek theologians the previous century, and lost sight of a deeply relational vision of a tripersonal God—a true community of love. Instead, for Augustine, the Trinity was just a metaphysical mystery. I argue that Augustine was a faithful interpreter of the Greek tradition, and indeed that the church held on to the doctrine developed in the fourth century with almost no innovation right through to the birth of liberal theology. There was always a profound sense that in speaking of the Trinity we are speaking of a mystery beyond our comprehension, and so there was a great reticence to try to say too much or to over-define. Instead, the task of trinitarian theology was to say what needed to be said for the Biblical texts to be true, and then to stop in reverent awe.

One major reason why it is believed the Trinity must be recovered in our day is because of a radical parting of ways that occurred between the West and the East on the nature of the Trinity in fifth century onward. What's the force of this historical construction and what do you believe is problematic about it?

The idea was proposed by a French Catholic writer called Theodore de Régnon in the nineteenth century. I am not sure why he thought it was plausible, but it just isn't. Theologians, East and West, are cheerfully swapping texts and ideas

throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, and it never occurs to any of them that there are two different doctrines at play.

There are two later divisions over the doctrine of God between the (Catholic) West and the (Orthodox) East: in the eleventh century the "filioque," the idea that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the

Son, rather than just from the Father, becomes a part of Western confession. I do not think this was too significant in doctrinal terms but it was a bit of a disaster politically. The other occurs with the Greek Orthodox theologian Greogry Palamas, who taught a difficult distinction between 'divine essence' and divine "energies." The West rightly in my view resisted this, far more significant innovation.

Clearly, how we define a "person" is something that throws off many a student of trinitarian theology in our Modern context. On your telling, the definition of "person" within the received tradition never meant a "separate I-centre with a separate consciousness and will" but was used merely as a placeholder for the "eternal relations of origin" meaning nothing more. As such there are not three centers of divine consciousness, only one. Would you elaborate on this point, especially in reference to what Jesus experienced on the cross?

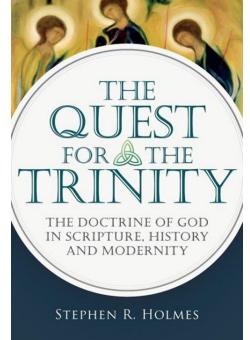
I think it is clear that the early doctrine of the

Trinity never thought that "person" implied "separat-

ed centre of consciousness and will": the unity of the divine will, in particular, becomes very important in a sixth century Christological controversy that convulsed the whole church, but no one ever thought to suggest that we should not believe in one will which the Father, Son and Spirit all share (even though thinking this would have solved the entire problem they were facing!).

Again, we need to look to Christology: is the Son re-

ally forsaken by the Father at the moment of crucifixion? Is the eternal life of God broken and ruptured by an event in time? Or do we here have the authentically human cry of Jesus of Nazareth, who was fully human, and so possessed of a truly human consciousness, as well as being truly divine. Humanly, he faced up to all the powers of sin



and death and hell, he bore the full wrath of God on the cross, and felt forsaken. As the divine Son, his eternal unity with the Father and the Spirit of course remained unbroken.

I confess, I often have difficulty distinguishing the orthodoxy of Augustine's psychological analogy or Thomas's discussion of procession (or Jonathan Edwards's trinitarian theology) from the straight-up Platonism of someone like Samuel Taylor Coleridge or "Radical Orthodoxy" proponents today. How does Christian orthodoxy and (neo-)Platonism avoid collapsing into each other?

Someone like Coleridge represents an authentically Christian tradition of Platonism, and I think we can be fairly relaxed about that. For me, the doctrine of the Trinity is a series of claims about what we must believe about God—claims I derived from Scripture. Coleridge would not disagree, but wants to argue that there is a philosophical derivation there also, that if we think hard about who God must be, we will see that it is logically necessary that he is triune. I don't think that sort of argument works, but I'm not really very opposed to people making it—until they start to bend the biblical doctrine to make it fit better with their logic, which is always the danger.

You make the argument that the great pro-Nicean defenders of the

Trinity, Basil of Casarea and Gregory of Nyssa, were more concerned about finding a "grammar" rather than a "logic" for the Trinity. Could you explain the difference and the difference it makes?

Sure. By "grammar" I mean a set of rules about how to speak properly—in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity, how to speak truthfully about God. By "logic" I mean a coherent argument that demonstrates that things must be so. What goes on in Basil, Gregory, and the rest, it seems to me, is an enormous, and astonishingly impressive, attempt to work out what things we must say about God so that everything affirmed in Scripture can be true. How can we say "I and the Father are one" and "the Father is greater than I"—not choosing between them, but taking both claims with full seriousness as biblical revelation? At its root, the doctrine of the Trinity is an answer to that question.

This means it is, in a way, something quite modest. There is much that we do not know about God's life - that's hardly a surprise, but it is something we need to remember. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a full account of who God is that enables us to build grand philosophical edifices; it is a limited set of rules about the sort of ways we must speak if our speech about God is to be faithful to the biblical revelation, and so true.



#### THE FORGOTTEN PURPOSE OF THEOLOGY

By Luke Stamps

ohn Leadley Dagg, who was the first Southern Baptist to pen a complete systematic theology (Manual of Theology, 1857), wrote the following about the purpose of studying Christian doctrine:

The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of speculation; but it should be deposited deep in the heart, where its sanctifying power ought to be felt (13).

For those pastors, teachers, students, and laypeople who are serious about theology, there is always a temptation to fall into the trap that Dagg is describing here. In other words, we can get so caught up in the minutiae of doctrine that we fail to grasp its larger purpose in service to the church of Jesus Christ. We can end up obscuring the truth rather than exposing, defending, and proclaiming it.

This point is not to be misconstrued as a polemic against rigorous theological reflection. There is a place for technical theological research and writingeven theological speculation, rightly understood. There is place for academic theologythatisnotimmediatelyaccessible to every Christian believer. Dagg himself understood the need for venturing into the more difficult and obscure territories of the doctrinal domain—provided the theologian understands his limitations and aims. Dagg argued that forming theological hypotheses and engaging in "abstruse" (that is, obscure or difficult) reasoning may be necessary in order to defend the truth against objections or to correct those who are lost within the "labyrinth" of speculation. But the "skillful theologian" understands that "there are subjects which extend far beyond the limits of his vision; and that, in laboring to explore them further than he is guided by revelation, he is in danger

of mistaking hypothesis, and deductions of fallacious reasoning for the truth of God" (v).

So theology ought to know its limitations and understand its purpose. In a real sense, theology is an end in itself. It is an exercise of loving God with our minds that our hearts might be stirred to worship:

To study theology, for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, or preparing for

a profession, is an abuse and profanation of what ought to be regarded as most holy.

WE CAN END UP OBSCURING THE TRUTH RATHER THAN EXPOSING, DEFENDING, AND PROCLAIMING IT.

To learn things pertaining to God, merely for the sake of amusement, or secular advantage, or to gratify the mere love of knowledge, is to treat the Most High with contempt (13).

Dagg then gives some provocative illustrations of his point:

A farmer should study agriculture, with a view to the increase of his crop; but if, instead of this he exhausts himself in inquiring how plants propagate their like, and how the different soils were originally produced, his grounds will be overrun with briers and thorns, and his barns will be empty. Equally unprofitable will be that study of religious doctrine which is directed to the mere purpose of speculation. It is as if the food necessary for the sustenance of the body, instead of being eaten and digested, were merely set out in such order as to gratify the sight. In this case, the body would certainly perish with hunger; and, with equal certainty will the soul famish if it feed not on divine truth (13-14).

Theology is not about culinary presentation. It is about feasting on the truth of God in Christ

so that we might be sustained in our pilgrim journey to the celestial city. Speculation, within proper bounds and in the service of appropriate goals, may be necessary in order to defend the truth in some contexts. But God's clear, revelatory word in Scripture is the source of our spiritual nourishment. And our goal, in all of our theological endeavors, remains the same: the "improvement" of our hearts through the sanctifying power of God's truth.

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# FROM ONE BAPTIST TO ANOTHER

#### WHAT IS BAPTIST THEOLOGY AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IN THE CHURCH?

BY BOBBY JAMIESON

The words *Baptist Theology* may seem an oxymoron to some, and not without reason. As Stephen Holmes points out in the introduction to his new book, Baptist Theology (T&T Clark, 2012), Baptists' theological contribution has been "much less

significant than their numbers might suggest." Further, unlike, say, Reformed theology, there is no thickly developed, self-consciously Baptist tradition of biblical interpretation and confessional commentary (1).

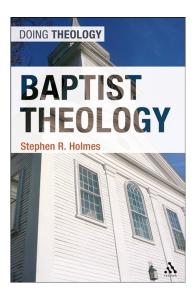
Of course, this poses certain challenges to someone who would write a volume defining "Baptist theology" in a series featuring works on Reformed theolo-

gy, Lutheran theology, and so on. Thankfully Holmes, a Baptist minister and senior lecturer in systematic theology at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland, rises to the challenge and then some.

Holmes begins by acknowledging that an introduction to Baptist theology "is inevitably both partial and creative": partial not

> just because of the cultural situatedness of the writer but also because the writer must judge what is central to the tradition and impose an interpretation on that basis; and creative "because there is no settled tradition to report" (2-3). Thus, after surveying various proposed accounts of Baptist theology, Holmes offers his own, namely, that there are "two foci around which Baptist life is lived: the individual believer and the local church."

Holmes argues that the practice of believer's baptism demonstrates "an intense individualism," and the stress on congregation-



alism by Baptists "provides a focus on that community as the context in which God has promised to be active" (6). Holmes elegantly summarizes this vision as follows:

God, through the Son and the Spirit, calls individual believers into covenanted relationship in the local church, and equips them to build up one another within the local church, and to hear and obey the ongoing missional call to make every other human person a believer. This is Baptist theology. (7)

The first three chapters of the book provide a concise overview of Baptist history. In chapter 1, Holmes treats Baptist beginnings, surveying the English Reformation, the Separatist movement, and the beginnings of the Baptist movement in seventeenth-century England. Chapter 2 is a survey of Baptists in North America from Roger Williams in the 1630s to the recent "conservative resurgence" among Southern Baptists. And chapter 3 briefly recounts Baptist history since 1800 in Britain, continental Europe, and the Majority World.

The rest of the book is more properly theological, though still with an appropriately historical bent. Chapter 4, "Baptist Perspectives on Ecumenical Theology," surveys Baptist contributions to doctrines shared with other Protestant traditions, which essentially includes everything but ecclesiology. Holmes's main point is that "on most shared ecumenical doctrines, Baptist theology is not distinctive, although the theology of individual Baptists might be" (69). Chapter 5 presents a positive statement of Baptist ecclesiology, treating believer's baptism, the primacy of the local church, congregational church government, the independence and interdependence of local churches, the role of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and church leadership. And chapter 6 offers a perceptive account of Baptist stances on liberty of conscience and religious toleration, focusing on Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, E.Y. Mullins, and Nigel Wright.

In chapter 7 Holmes fleshes out his account of Baptist ecclesiology through the tightly interwoven themes of mission and holiness. Holmes's account in this chapter of the church as the necessary context for sanctification is particularly apt and much-needed. For instance: "For Baptists, spiritual direction is an irreducibly communal activity, performed by the whole church for each member of the church, and insertion into the community of God's people is not an impediment, but a necessary spur to true holiness" (155). The book concludes by offering an apologetic for why engaging Baptist theology and identity is worth the effort. Holmes writes that to attempt to narrate Baptist theology is "also to attempt a work of purification: it is to try to identify the places where we have failed to be faithful enough

to the biblical call, to try to spot distortions that leave us conforming to the world, not the vision of Christ-like living" (162).

As I've already indicated, there's plenty to praise in this thoughtful, concise, and well-researched volume. First, I'd suggest that Holmes's overall vision of Baptist theology is descriptively accurate, conceptually balanced, and theologically promising. Holmes acknowledges that the principles of individual salvation and congregational church life can be in tension at particular times in particular places, but he rightly insists that "there is no necessary ten-

sion" (7). Further, Holmes's account of these two poles illumines not only the distinctive shape of Baptist church life, but also the

link between Baptist ecclesiology and the contribution of Baptists to the cause of liberty of conscience and religious toleration, as detailed in chapter 6.

It's also worth noting that Holmes places his account of Baptist theology on a middle ground between "maximal" and "minimal" accounts of Baptist distinctness from other Christian traditions. Some Baptists view the tradition as fundamentally possessing "a different theological genius which other traditions have little or no insight into" (7; think Landmarkism and its present-day

offspring). On the other hand, some view Baptists as simply one minimally distinct strand of Reformed Christianity. Holmes's position between these two extremes seems to both hit the mark and preserve a crucial balance which is not always present in either historic or contemporary treatments of Baptist identity. Baptists regularly face the twin temptations of sectarianism and ecclesiological accommodation, and I'd argue that Holmes's vision offers resources for addressing both of these.

Second, the first three chapters of this book provide a generally excellent introduction

Holmes's overall vision of

**Baptist theology is descriptively** 

accurate, conceptually balanced,

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to Baptist history. Within these tight confines, Holmes aptly surveys an impressive range of people, events, and debates.

Especially helpful

are Holmes's brief theological assessments of matters such as hyper-calvinism (24-26), Landmarkism(35-36), and liberal theology's appeal to nineteenth century Baptists (38). Third, as I pointed out above, Holmes offers several mature and insightful statements about the congregational character of discipleship. Here's just one more: "We seek guidance on progress in discipleship and growth in holiness not by seeking out a heroic sensei, but by coming together and trusting that Christ, by his Spirit, can and will speak to us and through us. Baptists guide and disciple one another, under the rule

of Christ" (156).

Fourth, the book is filled with pointed and provocative judgments. It would be difficult for almost any convictional Baptist to read this book

We seek guidance on progress in discipleship and growth in holiness not by seeking out a heroic sensei, but by coming together and trusting that Christ, by his Spirit, can and will speak to us and through us.

- Stephen R. Holmes

without being keenly challenged at some time or other, sometimes uncomfortably so. In my view, this is a good thing. Regarding American Baptist life in particular Holmes may be an outsider, but the scars his scalpel leaves are the faithful wounds of a friend. And, to put it mildly, Baptists in America have as great a need as any to see ourselves as others see us. This aspect of Holmes's work alone renders the book an invaluable resource, especially for Baptists in America.

Of course, that doesn't mean I agree with all of Holmes's diagnoses and prescriptions. By way of critique, I'll first mention a few minor missteps and then more substantively engage two ecclesiological matters Holmes weaves together: congregationalism and women elders.

In a few places I think Holmes's historical judgments could be improved. For instance, he flatly charges Spurgeon with a failure to perceive the difference between his own doctrine of assurance and that of his favorite Puritan authors, and he asserts that during the "Down Grade" controversy Spurgeon habitually mistook "old truths in a new register" for "true evidence for a downgrade in orthodoxy" (55-56). Both of these

assessments seem questionable. Further, Holmes equates both the Primitive Baptist anti-cooperative stance and Landmarkism with the so-called regulative principle of worship (35, 84). Perhaps the most pressing problem with this analysis is that parties on both sides of these two debates would have held equally strongly to the principle itself as they understood it; the difference arose in applying the principle.

One other minor misstep worth noting is that Holmes states, "Very few American Baptist churches at any point in history would regard questions of an open communion table and open membership as live and interesting issues" (90). That 52% of Southern Baptists favor open communion according to a recent survey would seem to suggest Holmes's claim is somewhat overstated. One could also mention the considerable ink spilled by Baptists in nineteenth century America on both sides of this issue—see, for instance, R.B.C Howell's *The* Terms of Communion at the Lord's Table (1847) and S.W. Whitney's defense of the

open position in *Open Communion* (1853).

On, then, to the more substantive issues of congregationalism and women elders. In brief, Holmes argues that the theological underpinnings of congregational polity man-

date that women can serve as church leaders, including the office of pastor or elder (116-118). Holmes admits that a Baptist account of church

gregationalism. Consider the following: "In Baptist practice, the local church is governed by the church meeting, when all members gather to seek together the mind of Christ" (100). "All the members of the local church are corporately responsible

As I read Scripture and the Baptist tradition, the primary question which leads to a congregational church polity is the issue of authorization. That is, who is authorized to include people in, and exclude people from, the church? And who is authorized to determine the standards by which this will take place?

authority which substantiates a "gender restriction on the ministry of teaching" could possibly be imagined, but he has never encountered such a proposal. I will spend the rest of this review offering just such a counterargument, though not precisely the argument Holmes envisions (118). Regarding congregationalism, Holmes and I are in essential agreement. I agree with Holmes that the local church is the visible instantiation of the universal church on earth (100), that local churches are to be formally independent though relationally interdependent (104-108), and that the congregation as a whole has final authority in matters of discipline and doctrine (100-104). On that last point Holmes might say more, but certainly not less.

However, I take issue to some degree with Holmes's theological formulation of confor discerning the mind of Christ for that people. Church meeting, however practised, is the organizational expression of this belief" (101). And again, Baptists resist postal or "proxy" voting in church meetings "because of an awareness that the task of the church meeting is knowing the mind of Christ, and a sense that this can only be done in the gathered body" (102).

Certainly I agree with Holmes that every member of the church is responsible to exercise discernment and, together with the whole church, render a judgment about matters which are constitutive of the life of the body. And I agree that a congregational meeting is a necessary practical entailment of this view. Yet I would prefer to frame the issue primarily in terms of divine authorization rather than divine guidance. That is, the essential question

congregationalism answers seems to be, "Who is responsible to decide matters of discipline?" not, "How does a church discern what they should do in any given circumstance?" The two matters are of course related, but as I hope to demonstrate, I think this distinction makes a difference.

I was slightly disappointed that in his discussion of congregationalism Holmes does not engage Scripture or any historic Baptist thinkers. As I read Scripture and the Baptist tradition, the primary question which leads to a congregational church polity is the issue of authorization. That is, who is authorized to include people in, and exclude people from, the church? And who is authorized to determine the standards by which this will take place? Scripturally, the answer to both questions seems to me to be "the local congregation as a whole." In Matthew 18:17, the final step in the disciplinary process is that the church as a whole is to act to exclude the unrepentant sinner. This is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 5:4, where Paul instructs the church as a whole to exclude the immoral man from among them, and in 2 Corinthians 2:6, where Paul says that the judgment to exclude an unrepentant member was a punishment "by the majority."

These passages speak to the crucial question of the authorization of church decisions in matters of discipline. (If space allowed, the same case could be made regarding doctrine, specifically as a standard for church fellowship.) In other words, the local congregation as a whole is authorized to determine matters of membership and discipline. By definition, then, no other group or individual is authorized to wield this authority: neither pastors, deacons, elders, bishops, presbyteries, or popes. In this light, the primary issues congregationalism addresses are authorization and accountability. The church as a whole is required to decide matters of membership and discipline and will be held accountable by Jesus for how they do so.

Of course, if this is how Christ has structured the church, then, assuming our churches are constituted by genuine believers who submit to his will, we should expect him to bless the means he has appointed and guide local bodies into the truth. But I'd suggest that it's still worth framing congregationalism primarily in terms of authorization rather than guidance. Why? Because I would argue that, under Christ, the church is primarily guided by its elders. That is, I would argue that an elder's authority to lead essentially consists in teaching and modeling the Word in such a way that the congregation's consciences are shaped properly, with the result that they are enabled to make wise collective judgments.

Yes, congregations should look to Christ as he has revealed his mind in his Word. But, under Christ, who has particular responsibility for guiding the flock into an understanding of his mind? The elders. Elders are required to be able to instruct in sound doctrine and refute false teaching (Tit. 1:9-10), are charged to shepherd the flock through proclaiming the whole counsel of God (Act 20:28), and are called to set an example, to lay down footsteps in which the congregation will walk (1 Pet. 5:3; cf. Heb. 13:7).

In other words, while it is the congregation's job to decide matters of membership and discipline, it is the elders' job to instruct the congregation so that they decide those matters rightly. The congregation's responsibility to submit to its elders (Heb. 13:17) is still operative in realms over which the congregation itself holds final authority.

The upshot of this is that congregational authority is one kind of authority, and the elders' authority is another. That is, the congregation has authority to decide matters of membership and discipline—to render judgments about who does and does not belong to the church. And yet the elders' authority, which complements rather than contradicts this, is an authority to lead, to guide, to instruct, to model, to direct. In other words, all church authority does not ultimately boil down to the authority vested in the congregation. The authority elders wield is distinguishable from this. It has its own divine authorization, it comes with its own set of qualifications, and it operates in a manner distinct from the congregation's final, judicial authority.

This brings us at last to the issue of women serving as pastors or elders in local churches. I understand the prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:12 to refer to "teaching" and "exercising authority" as something like a hendiadys: Paul here prohibits women from the exercise of ecclesially authoritative teaching. This excludes women from the office of elder, which is of course bound up with teaching. I would suggest it also prohibits women from authoritatively instructing men in the gathered congregation, though certainly not from private instruction and exhortation, or from a rich range of other roles in the gathered church.

Let's return to Holmes's argument. Leaving aside any disputable steps along the way, I'll take issue here only with his conclusion:

> The theological debate over the role of women in the church, where it remains live, at present endlessly revolves around questions of 'authority'; as Baptists, we know the answer to these questions. Authority belongs to Jesus; the authoritative interpretation of Jesus' call on the local church is to be determined by the gathered church; therefore, derivative authority belongs to all members of the gathered church—women as much as men and men as much as women (and children, should they be members of the church, as much as adults). A theological account of

church life that suggests normative male authority in the local congregation simply cannot be accepted by Baptists, therefore: it denies our fundamental polity (117-118).

In response, I would suggest that Holmes has simply confused categories. As I've explained above, the authority in which the congregation as a whole shares is simply a different kind of thing than the authority which is vested in the office of elder. Elder authority is something other than the direct line Holmes sketches from Jesus to the congregation; it's part of a more complex, three-dimensional picture.

Certainly much more work needs to be done here. And no doubt some historic Baptists have construed the issue along the lines Holmes does, and thus have excluded women from congregational voting. Yet I would nevertheless submit that there is no theological contradiction between congregational church government and an understanding of God-ordained distinctions between men and women which limit the office of elder to men. Although my counterargument does not take the precise shape Holmes anticipates one would (118), I offer it in a spirit of friendly and fraternal debate and in a sincere attempt to provoke fellow Baptists on all sides to think more precisely about our ecclesiology. Certainly complementarian congregationalists must reckon with the

force of Holmes's argument on this point, and I hope that others will continue the conversation far more capably than I could.

I intend the length of this critical engagement to testify to nothing other than the forcefulness and creativity of Holmes's arguments as well as my deep appreciation for his work as a whole. *Baptist Theology* is an acutely valuable resource for anyone who wants to think theologically and ecclesially about what it means to be Baptist. In the main, Holmes's vision of Baptist theology is one that I gladly and gratefully embrace. In my own ministry I hope to refine this vision, and commend it to others, with the same humility with which Holmes himself offers it.

Bobby Jamieson is assistant editor for 9Marks, a student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, a member of Third Avenue Baptist Church, and the author of Sound Doctrine: How Churches Grow in the Love and Holiness of God (Crossway, forthcoming).



BOOKS

#### 63. CALVIN, CLASSICAL TRINITARIANISM & THE ASEITY OF THE SON

**BRANNON ELLIS** 

Reviewed by Tyler R. Wittman

#### **67. IMAGINING THE KINGDOM: HOW WORSHIP WORKS**

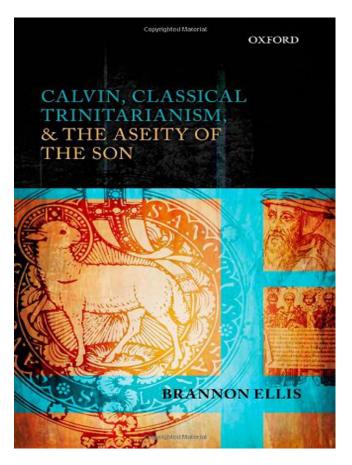
JAMES K.A. SMITH

Reviewed by Matthew Y. Emerson

#### 69. MAPPING MODERN THEOLOGY: A THEMATIC AND HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

KELLY KAPIC & BRUCE McCORMACK

Reviewed by Matthew Claridge



Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, & the Aseity of the Son

by Brannon Ellis Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

n the church's early fight against "Arianism" and Sabellianism, the faith's defenders in the pro-Nicene tradition shared a strategy of distinguishing between essence-appropriate and relation-appropriate language in trinitarian theology – two ways of speaking that are part of what we may call a "grammar of triunity." Exemplars include Basil of Caesarea (Against Eunomius) and Augustine (De Trinitate 5-7), both of whom attended carefully to such a grammar. At its heart, Brannon Ellis's book is an exploration of a tension he discerns between this grammar and the church's exposition of the Son's eternal generation. Specifically, he points up the incongruity between this ruled trinitarian grammar and the tradition's almost unanimous violation of this distinction when describing the eternal generation of the Son as a "communication of essence." This latter definition seems to collapse the two ways of speaking, thus describing God's undivided essence comparatively. Intriguingly, Ellis proposes that we best understand John Calvin's infamous assertion of the Son's aseity as a self-conscious attempt at consistently employing this pro-Nicene grammar.

Through an examination of Calvin's writings and his debates with orthodox trinitarians like Pierre Caroli and anti-trinitarians like Valentine Gentile, Ellis argues that Calvin strove to distinguish essential and

relative predication in articulating the triunity of God, thus articulating a formal distinction between the Son being God and the Son being Son. When Calvin affirmed that the Son is autotheos (God-of-Himself), he denied that the Son possesses aseity as he possesses it from the Father. Rather the Son simply possesses aseity because he possesses the same essence as the Father. Such a conclusion is nothing more than an implication of a strict, ruled trinitarian grammar: as God and thus according to his essence, the Son is autotheos; as Son and thus according to his person, the Son is from the Father. But the Son is neither from the Father according to his essence nor autotheos according to his person. This helps to show

how Calvin did not reject the doctrine of eternal generation, as some have misinterpreted him; he simply objected to what he saw as an illegitimate under-

standing of the manner of eternal generation—namely, as essential communication.

Nevertheless, Calvin's own view eventually became the "minority" view within the Reformed tradition. Before addressing this, Ellis outlines the traditional functions of the doctrine of eternal generation and draws out the root distinction between trinitarian and Unitarian ways of addressing the triunity of God. Here Ellis maps two broadly antithetical methods of construing immanent divine plurality and unity, under which he groups the approaches to the Son's aseity he discusses. The first method is that of identification, where essential and relative language are more or less collapsed into one another and thus the same. The second method is to distinguish essential and relative language as two ways of speaking about the same reality.

While within the first method, there were Unitarians who simply ruled out any distinction in God, there were also "loose" methods of identification. Ellis discusses

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two such "loose" approaches to the Son's aseity, represented by the Remonstrants and Roëllians (Herman Alexander Roëll and his followers). Simply put,

both camps conflate essential and personal language while inevitably privileging one over the other; Remonstrants privileged the persons, while Roëll privileged the essence. For the Remonstrants, the name "Son" by necessity implies some subordination to the "Father." Episcopius took this to mean that the Son possesses the essence of God derivatively from and thus with less dignity

than the Father. Taking the other route and privileging the essence, Roëll effectively elevated a concept of aseity (drawn from natural theology) above God such that he denied any procession within God. Yet at the same time Roëll and his followers maintained personal distinctions, albeit shorn of relations of origin and any taxis with regard to modes of subsistence or working.

Ellis next addresses the two Reformed traditions after Calvin from within the second method discussed above, that of "distinction." On one hand, there is the "mainstream" Reformed tradition, which distinguished essential and relative language with a significant degree of tension. Fundamental to these theologians was an account of aseity as "external, essential independence" (159). All three persons of the Trinity possess such external, essential independence—but they possess it differently in accordance with their mode of subsistence. On the whole, they said the Son is the same God as the Father by a hyperphysical, eternal communication of essence, and therefore autotheos (e.g. Voetius, Zanchi, de Moor). The mainstream theologians differed from their Roman Catholic and Lutheran peers by substituting the "self-subsistence" of the Father alone for the "aseity" of the Father alone. On this reckoning, only the Father is autotheos of himself, whereas the Son is autotheos from the Father. On the other hand, the "minority report" followed Calvin's emphases and applied the essence/ relation distinction more strictly. These theologians demurred from the idea of essential communication while still maintaining personal processions and taxis within God's immanent life (e.g. Trelcatius, Keckermann, Maccovius). Ellis argues that the difference between the two traditions was not only in how strictly they distinguished essential and relative language, but also the degree to which prior ontological commitments resolved any tension between the two ways of speaking. While Ellis does not touch upon it directly at length, it is tempting to ask whether the two traditions gave different roles to reason and analogy in trinitarian theology. Further, as a matter of history that begs explanation, it is curious that Calvin's successors in Geneva (Beza, Turretin) fell into the mainstream approach.

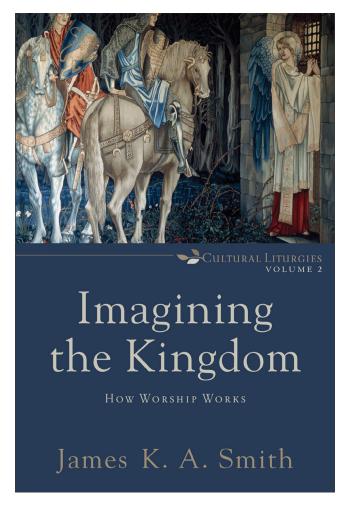
Ellis's concluding argument for constructive dogmatics contains some valuable insights that stem from his reflections on ruled trinitarian speech and the inconsistency involved in any account of the processions that involves essential communication. Among them is a critique of how theologians speak of and ground the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption). For several theologians, the distinct roles assumed by the Trinity in the economy are grounded in voluntary decisions made in eternity

such that the distinguishing properties and characteristics of the persons are, in effect, an economic undertaking. But if this is the case, then what role does the immanent Trinity play for such theologians, who are unwittingly closer to Roëll than anything in the tradition? The same critique is extended to those who speak about the Son, as God, obeying the Father. In Ellis's estimation, whatever else such views are, they represent an unwelcome violation of ruled trinitarian language, collapsing the essential and the relative as well as the immanent and the economic. Despite these welcome insights, I am yet to be convinced of the infelicity of describing eternal generation as a "communication of essence"—though much depends on what this phrase means. Perhaps the greatest weakness in Ellis's final argument is the virtual absence of any sustained exegetical engagement with the primary Scriptural loci and interpretive issues that have pressured theologians to use such language. But he is aware of his study's modest scope, which is really to open up the question and suggest that the resources for answering it lie within the tradition itself.

As a reading of Calvin and various Reformed theologians, Ellis succeeds in clarifying several difficult questions and presenting us with a compelling reading of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity. This is thus an admirable guide through some of the deepest and most daunting issues in all of dogmatics that helps us pay careful attention to the wisdom of saints who have gone before us—a welcome achievement in itself. This book deserves an audience with serious students of Calvin, the Reformed tradition, and trinitarian theology more generally.

#### Tyler R. Wittman

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Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works

by James K.A. Smith Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013

n James K. A. Smith's most recent work, Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works, he argues that we as human creatures operate with a level of knowledge that he calls the imagination. This imaginative knowing is intuitive, functioning on a sub-conscious level, and is developed through ritual and habit. Smith spends the first two chapters of the book, with help respectively from philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bordieu, demonstrating that this intuitive level of knowledge is indeed knowledge on a sub-conscious level and that it is formed and shaped through repeated practice. Building off of the first volume of his Cultural Liturgies project, Desiring the Kingdom, and in his latter two chapters, Smith again makes the point that both the secular world and the church have competing habits that shape and form the imagination. The upshot is that the church's liturgy, therefore, ought to reflect carefully on their repeated worship practices, as it is through these that holistic discipleship and the development of a thoroughly Christian (as opposed to secular) imagination occurs.

Both *Desiring the Kingdom* and *Imagining the Kingdom* offer a helpful critique of the intellectualist model of Christian discipleship. Smith successfully argues in the first volume that a human being's love, what drives and shapes him, is formed primarily by practice coupled with right understanding. In this second volume Smith again co-

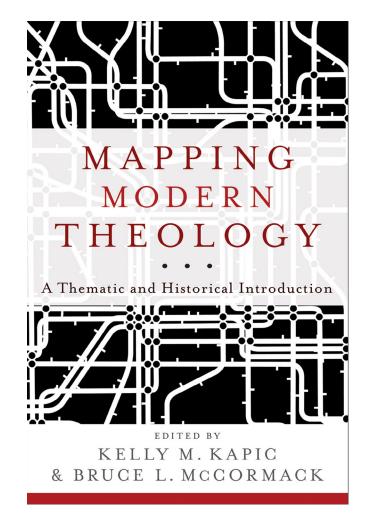
gently builds his case that this formation happens to our sub-conscious knowledge and that it happens through repeated practice. Both of these arguments helpfully call Christians away from a discipleship model that is solely focused on the intellect, on consciously knowing the "right things," and on action as an always completely conscious activity. Instead, Smith rightfully points to the way human beings work, mostly on an intuitive level, and guides the reader to the conclusion that this area of human knowledge, the imagination, must be cultivated and shaped along with the intellect in order to form the entire person for Christ.

Readers of the first volume may have been, along with me, a bit anxious about the place of right doctrine and understanding in Smith's model. At times he does seem to swing the pendulum a bit too far, perhaps coming too close to an ex opera operato view of liturgy. He balances this, though, in Imagining the Kingdom, noting in a number of places that the project at hand is one of conscious reflection on practice and that Christians who participate in the church's liturgy only benefit from it if they rightly understand what is happening (e.g. 187, 189–90). Still, one might desire to see a bit more of a dialectic approach consistently and explicitly stated throughout the work, where habits shape intellect and vice versa. Though Smith does address this toward the end of his book, it would have been helpful to hear it throughout the project.

Overall, though, Smith's work is one with which all theologians and pastors ought to wrestle. On an academic level, Smith's articulation of how knowledge and formation work is convincing, and should shape conversations about epistemology, discipleship, and worship practices. On a pastoral level, Smith's case is seemingly airtight for reflecting on worship practices. The author calls us away from doing whatever is trendy or getting people in the door at the moment to ordering our church services in ways that habitually shape the body of Christ for imaginative (intuitive) engagement with the world once the service is over. Further, for both scholars and pastors, Smith's work provides insightful critiques of modern culture and the implicit liturgies in them. His articulation of the liturgy of the iPhone is particularly striking, since I'm constantly checking mine. He also ties in his ideas with recent movies (The King's Speech; Rise of the Planet of the Apes), literature, social media, and philosophy. Although it does take some heavy lifting philosophically and theologically, I could not recommend Smith's book more highly to both theologians and pastors. He is a phenomenal writer and a careful thinker, and his argument is one that must be dealt with by those seeking to understand "How Worship Works."

#### **Matthew Y. Emerson**

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# Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introdcution

Edited by Kelly Kapic and Bruce McCormack Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012

think I can speak for many in the evangelical Reformed camp that Modern Theology often comes across as a wasteland of Ozymandias proportions. Nonetheless, the edifice of many a modern re-construction of Christian theology does have a certain appeal. The sheer ingenuity and imagination required to produce a theology the likes of Hegel or Barth can be as entertaining to read as watching a good scifi film. Of course, no self-respecting Modern theologian views their theologizing as a "game," but it is, in the modern sense, often a product of playful "genius." This simultaneous repugnance and attraction is captured well in J.I. Packer's blurb for another popular guide to Modern Theology: it's a "strange, romantic land, seemingly far off." For me, then, reading much Modern Theology need not be a frustrating experience. It can be a fantastic one. Its an exercise in imagining how things could be, but happily are not.

The title of Kapic and McCormack's recent book on Modern Theology is particularly appropriate, *Mapping Modern Theology:* A Thematic and Historical Introduction. How do you make your way around in this "Alice-in-Wonderland" world? Like trying to untangle the family tree of the Greek Pantheon, Modern theologians and their theological progeny can get easily confusing. Rather than attempting to capture everything a theologian is trying to

do and say, the editors have filtered their analysis through the classic theological loci, e.g., "Theology Proper," "Scripture," "Anthropology," "Christology," "ecclesiology," etc. Several theologians, of course, keep reappearing in each chapter, but it is certainly helpful to follow how one thread of their theology has developed and contributed to subsequent theological reflection in one particular area. Hence, this is a "thematic and historical introduction." Rather than relying on a creative outline of their own, the editors' use of the wellworn and time-tested theological loci goes a long way in clearing the fog that often attends engagement with Modern Theology.

Besides that overall positive element, we could list several other general strengths.

The contributing authors for each chapter are, for the most part, outstanding. Some chapters may be better than others, but all of them are informative and handle their material with remarkable aplomb. There's quite a list of well-

known names who have contributed to the volume: Fred Sanders, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Webster, Richard Lints, and Michael Horton among others. Frankly, this was one reason why I was eager to read the book. The most stimulating chapters in my opin-

ion were those by Fred Sanders on "The Trinity," Stephen R. Holmes on "Divine Attributes," Kelly Kapic on "Anthropology," Bruce McCormack on "The Person of Christ," and John Webster on "Providence."

The more or less Reformed perspective of the contributors is a bonus which provides at least some confessional standpoint from which to engage the vagaries of Modern Theology. It was gratifying to notice that some chapters engaged with modern "evangelical" theologians such as Herman Bavinck and Charles Hodge. I'm thankful they received a voice here. There are more dialogue partners in Modern theology than Kant, Pannenberg, and Barth. I particularly liked Fred Sanders's subtle jab at the self-importance of the Liberal academic

This is a "thematic and historical introduction." Rather than relying on a creative outline of their own, the editors' use of the well-worn and time-tested theological loci goes a long way in clearing the fog that often attends engagement with Modern Theology.

> trajectory: "What Barth accomplished was to leverage his own credibility as a decidedly modern theologian, in touch with all the right academic interlocutors and able to draw the attention of academic practitioners, in order to put the classic doctrine

of the Trinity in terms that could engage that subculture" (41, emphasis mine).

The book is designed primarily to be a descriptive analysis of Modern Theology, but personal judgment and opinion often intrudes. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I appreciated it. History books listing mere "facts" in chronological sequence are never very helpful. The best chapters in the book are often the most constructive and prescriptive. In some cases, this was a bit over done. Michael Horton's chapter on Eschatology, while still informative, is nonetheless virtually an argument for Amillenialism. Other chapters provided thought-provoking critiques of the increasingly popular "Analytic theology" movement (Holmes and Webster).

Are there some shortcomings to this volume? Perhaps a few. Overall, this "introduction" to Modern Theology is still a hefty and demanding read. It's definitely upper graduate level reading for those who have already been exposed to the ABC's of Modern Theology. The authors often assume a good deal from their readers. This is not entirely a negative; there is just as much a need for such upper level

treatments as for more basic introductions.

The only real structural flaw that stands out is the absence of a chapter on hamartiology, the doctrine of sin. To my mind, this is a fairly significant oversight. Not only is the doctrine of sin the elephant in the room in many permutations of Modern Theology, it might have helped to add a counter-balance to some sympathetic portrayals in the book. For instance, McCormack argues that Barthian Christology ties up the loose ends left frayed by the third Council of Constantinople in his chapter on "The Person of Christ" (perhaps the best chapter of the book). However, a treatment of Barth's doctrine of sin in the context of his radical supralapsarianism might well temper McCormack's conclusion a bit.

Otherwise, *Mapping Modern Theology* is a truly great contribution. It certainly deserves a place among graduate level textbooks providing an advanced introduction to Modern Theology.

#### **Matthew Claridge**

Senior Pastor of Mt. Idaho Baptist Church in Grangeville, ID

# THREE SIGNIFICANT BOOKS ON THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

#### BY FRED G. ZASPEL, AUTHOR OF THE THEOLOGY OF B.B. WARFIELD

I enjoy reminding myself and my students that in the study of God we are always in over our heads. The fact that God is infinite (Job 11:7-9), incomprehensible (Rom. 11:33), and not like anything (Isa. 40:18) necessarily leaves us in a never ending yet glorious pursuit of him. Our subject is beyond us, and although because of his gracious self-revelation we can know him truly, by the very nature of the case we will never know him completely. The pursuit is never over, and throughout this life and for unending ages to come our greatest joy is found in knowing God ever more fully. Archibald Alexander captures all this wonderfully: "What an adorable being is the Triune God! How gloriously mysterious in his being, attributes, operations, and personal acts! How little are we capable of knowing of this infinite Being. 'None by searching can find out the Almighty to perfection." And then he worshipfully adds,

> "Where the feelings of the heart are right, the incomprehensible nature of the divine existence causes no obstruction to genuine devotion. Indeed, the soul of man is so constituted as to require an incomprehensible Being as the object of worship. Profound adoration

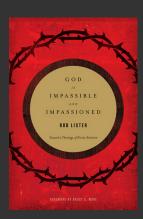
is the very feeling which corresponds with this attribute."

That is to say, although we recognize that our small minds will never fully comprehend God, our hearts are increasingly enlarged in the on-going and ever-rewarding attempt. To love God with our *minds*— to understand him in all the ways that he has revealed himself, so far as we are able, to think his thoughts insofar as he has made them known to us— in short, to "gaze on his beauty" (Ps. 27:4)— is no mere intellectual curiosity but the happy exercise of loving devotion. Indeed, nowhere else will our hearts be content.

Within the past year or so three new books on the doctrine of God have been released that help considerably in this mind- and heart-stretching pursuit. I have not taken the time to review them thoroughly, but I do want to mention them by way of hearty commendation.

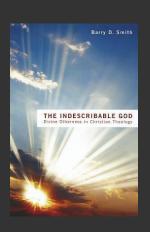
The First is God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness, by James E. Dolezal (Pickwick Publications, 2011). This is likely the finest monograph on the doctrine of divine simplicity available — contemporary or otherwise. This doctrine has stretched the

minds of Christianity's greatest thinkers since the beginning — that God, being himself ultimate, absolute, self-sufficient, and self-existent, is not a composite of other forces or principles prior to or more ultimate than he. "He alone is the sufficient reason for his own ex-



istence, essence, and attributes" (1). The subject is simply profound (pun not intended), and Dolezal systematically unpacks the meaning and the significance of this doctrine — historically, philosophically, and theologically — in forming the ground of other notions such as God's unity, necessity, immutability, self-sufficiency, independence, perfection, and infinity.

The next is *The Indescribable God: Divine Otherness in Christian Theology*, by Barry D. Smith (Pickwick Publications, 2012). Grounding his study in an examination of the biblical concept of divine "holiness" and

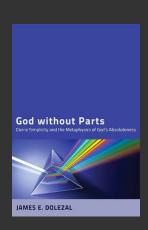


related concepts (chapter one alone is well worth the price of the book), Smith demonstrates the various aspects of God's "otherness" with illuminating and fascinating clarity, leaving the reader with a fresh appreciation of God's transcendence and greatness.

The third is *God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion*, by Rob Lister (Crossway, 2012). In what is likely the finest book on the subject Lister expounds, defends, and clarifies

the historic doctrine of God's impassibility – a doctrine that has fallen on bad times, primarily, perhaps, because of misunderstanding. The book's title states the thesis, that God is both impassible (in the historic and carefully nuanced understanding of the term) and impassioned (again, in a carefully nuanced understanding of the term). Scripture often expresses God's relation to his human creatures in terms of emotion. and if we are not careful we can tend to understand those expressions as we experience them. Yet we must be careful not to pattern God after our own image, for the fact is we do not know what it is to experience emotion as a transcendent, self-sufficient, eternal, omniscient sovereign. That is to say, although Scripture's expressions of divine emotion are to be understood as truly reflective of him, we must keep in mind

the larger structure of God's self-revelation. God is not contingent. And Lister does a masterful job of sorting through all this to provide an exposition that is marked by a theological and exegetical rigor and precision which in the end is rich in devotional impact as well.



Martin Luther once wrote in a letter to Erasmus, "Your thoughts of God are too human." We must all be on guard against this tendency also, if we would worship God as he is. These three titles provide valuable help to that end. And I suspect they will serve to keep many a pastor and teacher from mis-statements in theological discussion. Very instructive, and highly recommended.



#### SALVATION - TRINITARIAN THROUGH AND THROUGH

One of the beauties of theology is seeing how different doctrines of the faith are interconnected to one another. The theologian who tries to address one particular doctrine, only to put it aside so that he can move on to the next, has seriously misunderstood the fabric of theology. Theology is like a spider's web, where each string in the web is somehow connected to the others. If you break just one string, the consequences could be disastrous for the entire web. Similarly, when one theologizes, he must remember that each doctrine corresponds to the whole corpus of his theological system.

Consider how the doctrine of the Trinity relates to the doctrine of salvation. In Scripture, salvation is explicitly and unashamedly trinitarian in nature. For example, in John 3 Jesus says that God so loved the world that he sent his Son so that the world "might be saved through him" (3:17). And lest we think the Spirit is left out of this salvific mission, just verses earlier Jesus says to Nicodemus that it is the Spirit who, like the wind, blows wherever he pleases to bring about the new birth (3:5-8). Or consider Paul's words to the Ephesians. God the Father chose his elect before the foundation of the world, and he predestined his elect in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Believers, therefore, have "redemption through his blood" (1:7). And

then, at the proper time, those predestined by the Father (1:5, 11), redeemed by the blood of his Son (1:7), are "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" when they hear the "word of truth," the gospel of salvation, and believe in Christ (1:13).

The early church fathers knew this truth well. As Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers argued against the Arians of their day, if we deny the deity of the Son, as one who is fully divine, equal in deity to the Father, sharing fully in that one divine essence, then we are left with a Son who cannot save us. We cannot miss the connection, in other words, between Christ's deity and identity as the eternal Son, the second member of the Trinity, and the redemption he accomplishes, as the Nicene Creed states, "for our salvation." What does this mean for how we think about salvation? In short, our soteriology must be trinitarian through and through. Should we compromise the Trinity, our soteriology will look terribly dysfunctional, and vice versa.

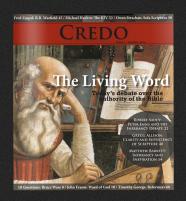
So remember, when theologizing, always ask the question: How do my beliefs about this doctrine impact other aspects of my Christian faith?

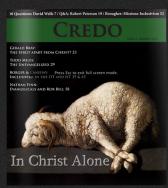
#### **Matthew Barrett**

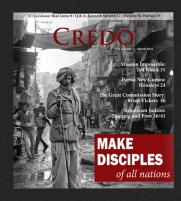
Executive Editor, Credo Magazine

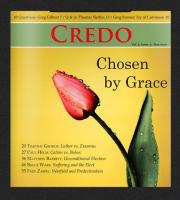
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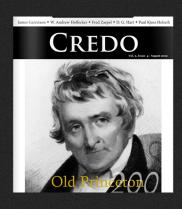
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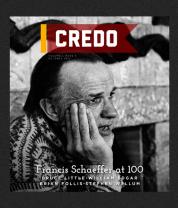














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