

***Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology.* Edited by Paul Louis Metzger. London: T & T Clark, 2005. (225pp.)**

*Trinitarian Soundings* is an outstanding work in which seventeen scholars contribute essays which take the Trinity as the ground and grammar of theology and proceed to re-evaluate traditional systematic *loci* from that perspective. As such this volume offers a rare and much needed survey of what a systematics may look like when it is self-confessedly trinitarian and thus Christian. In addition, the volume is dedicated to Professor Colin Gunton (Kings College, University of London) who sadly passed away 6 May, 2003. Each of the contributors was a student, colleague, or beneficiary of Gunton's profound learning and influence and that is reflected directly or indirectly in each of the essays. In addition, most essays interact with the theology of Karl Barth, so much so that at points one wonders if this is a tribute to Barth or to Gunton. Upon deeper reflection Christian theology which takes seriously its trinitarian nature can hardly be discussed without interacting with Barth and Gunton, two of the key architects of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. The focus on Barth thus adds value to an already invaluable work.

Fifteen essays, a foreword, and an afterword, make up the contents of the book. The fifteen chapters are largely original essays commissioned for this volume, the exceptions to this being an essay by Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz on theological anthropology taken from his recent work *The Social God and the Relational Self*, an essay by Gunton himself on Divine attributes taken from *Act and Being*, and an essay by Miroslav Volf (Yale Divinity School), 'The Trinity and the Church', from *After our Likeness*. In the Foreword, Bruce McCormack (Princeton Theological Seminary) offers a rare personal reflection on the friendship and admiration that existed between himself and Gunton. This was especially appreciated given the fact that the various essays elaborate on how trinitarian theology must not only be rigorously rational but also robustly relational. McCormack thus provides a fitting, but brief (4pp), foreword to what follows. The Afterword, by Robert Jenson (Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology), also brief (4pp), offers a few words of polite critique in relation to some key Guntonesque themes, namely the differences between a Lutheran and a Reformed way of theologising. This mild critique, while interesting, did appear out of place in an afterword of a volume of this nature. It would have been better, in my opinion, if Jenson had turned his immense theological insights into a more articulate interaction with an aspect of Gunton's work such as *Act and Being*. But then again, perhaps he was not invited to do so.

In the Introduction Metzger states: 'Given the scarcity of systematic theologies done in a Trinitarian fashion, this multi-author exploration of systematic theology from a Trinitarian perspective suggests a path to follow in the formulation of each particular doctrine represented in the volume' (p6). By and large the essays do achieve this purpose as they range over prolegomena, revelation, Scripture, theology proper, creation, anthropology, sin and grace, christology, atonement, epistemology, church, sacraments, eschatology, and ethics. It will not be necessary to work through each *seriatum*. Instead, the following essays stood out for particular interest.

Chapter One: 'Prolegomena' by Murray Rae (Otago University) opens the volume in splendid fashion with an articulate and original exploration of a trinitarian scaffold which makes the construction of theology possible (his metaphor, p9). Through seven theses Rae develops an approach to the theological task that is more *pathos* than *poiesis* (p13), *a posteriori* than *a priori*, trinitarian and dynamic than monist and static. Evident throughout his essay is the influence of Barth and his axiom that 'revelation is reconciliation', shades of the theology of Thomas Torrance, and the unmistakable hand of Gunton. Rae offers useful definitions of theology, its task, method, and content in a chapter of only 20 pages and establishes a trinitarian prolegomena which the other essays in the volume build upon.

Paul Blackham (All Souls Church, London) contributes an essay on 'The Trinity in the Hebrew Scriptures', and while his essay does not contribute anything that can really be said to be new it certainly presents a succinct yet rich elaboration of the Trinity in the Old Testament. Blackham contends that 'When we begin from a tradition that sees a non-trinitarian divine essence as the starting point for a doctrine of God, it is no surprise that the integration of the Three Persons becomes a genuine theological difficulty' (p36). Instead, adopting the *a posteriori* approach advocated by Rae, Blackham surveys the issue of the visibility or otherwise of God in the Old Testament, especially within the writings of Moses. Blackham's study concludes that 'An unmistakeable feature of this Pentateuchal doctrine of God is that the LORD God can *appear* even though it is also stated that the Most High God may not be seen. At face value this would naturally lead to the confession that one of the divine Persons can be seen and one of the divine Persons cannot be seen' (pp39-40). From this analysis Blackham shows the legitimate exegesis of such church figures as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Martin Luther, John Owen, and Jonathan Edwards, who argue that formal trinitarian doctrine is simply a theological elaboration on the plain teaching of the Old Testament. Blackham concludes with what some may consider to be

a controversial statement: 'The Great Trinitarian theologians of the past were exegetes of these Scriptures, and it is as we sit and learn from that most brilliant and careful trinitarian theologian, Moses, that we can go further and deeper into the God of Israel who is the Most High, the appearing LORD, and the Spirit' (p46).

One of the weaker essays is that of Demetrios Bathrellos (Institute of Orthodox Theological Studies, Oxford) on the sinlessness of Jesus. The basic thesis of the chapter is that Jesus is God incarnate and thus God cannot sin, even in an incarnate state. Bathrellos concludes that 'Jesus' humanity shares in the life of the Trinity' (p114) and draws on Councils and Creeds to confirm the orthodox belief that Jesus is divine and human in constitution, and sinless; despite the fact that his incarnation was into a fallen world. Bathrellos limits Jesus' engagement with our sin to external factors; he grew tired or physically suffered, and ultimately died. The basic point Bathrellos constructs is that Jesus is God incarnate and as such is in intimate communion with the Father, and it is this which safeguards his sinlessness. What Bathrellos does say is good; it is what is not said that is disturbing. In an essay on 'The Sinlessness of Jesus: A Theological Exploration in the Light of Trinitarian Theology' one wonders where the Spirit is. Bathrellos fails to articulate the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation, the mediation of communion from the Father through or by the Spirit to the incarnate Son, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the life of Christ. While Bathrellos does make some space for the concept of anointing there is no development of what may generally be termed a mutual love model of the Trinity. At best Bathrellos presents a binitarian god. In light of the nature of the present work this article is patently non-trinitarian at best, at worst anti-trinitarian and one wonders how it may it past the editorial eye of Metzger.

The final essay I wish to comment on is that of Kelly Kapic (Covenant College, Georgia), entitled 'Trajectories of a Trinitarian Eschatology'. Kapic's approach is to ask the critical pastoral and theological question: 'How are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit united in the eschatological movement of reconciliation?' (p190). In order to focus this question one looks to the act of God *ad extra* and focuses on Jesus. 'A Trinitarian eschatological vision of communion with God...will see the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of the Christ *as the very point of eschatology* – the distinctively Christian hope in God' (p196). Kapic then moves through a discussion of the Kingdom of God, the Last Adam christology of Paul, and the nature of the resurrection body. Throughout the essay Kapic develops themes which deserve far more

attention and development and as such fulfils Metzger's stated purpose of the work as providing paths for others to follow.

With *Trinitarian Soundings* we have one of the first in what is surely to become an entire industry of books which seek to move beyond reconstructions of trinitarian models to working out the implications of starting with the Trinity in Christian theology and respecting its contents as the ground and grammar of the systematic task. This is essential reading for pastors, academics, and interested others who are looking for an accessible yet profound survey of trinitarian options in systematic theology.

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