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BOOK REVIEW

Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, eds. *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 198 pp. Pbk. ISBN 0310517095.

This book is a compilation of papers presented at the annual Los Angeles Theology Conference, with contributors varied in geographical and theological provenance. Situating the effort of the conference alongside Gordon Kaufman's division between expositional and constructive theologies, the editors posit the following overarching thesis of the volume:

One can do expositional and constructive theology, taking into account the findings of thinkers of the past and of biblical and creedal witnesses, while also attempting to formulate a way of articulating in a contemporary context the faith once delivered to the saints. It is just this balance between retrieval and construction, exposition and reflection, that informs the papers contained within the covers of the present volume and the theme of the conference at which they were originally delivered (14).

The book is fundamentally successful in furthering the discussion of trinitarian theology, seeing chapters appropriate Jonathan Edwards (Kyle Strobel), Karl Barth (Darren Sumner and R. Kendall Soulen), and Thomas Aquinas (Stephen R. Holmes). Two chapters in particular capture the constructively expositional ethos of the book. First, Karen Kilby's chapter, "The Trinity and Politics: An Apophatic Approach," considers lingering interest in the social model of the Trinity (esp. Miroslav Volf) in light of the overwhelming criticism against it. The failure of the model is in some respect inevitable, says Kilby, so long as the Trinity infinitely transcends the intellect, which creates a need for an amodel model. The extremities of perverse social-political structures based on religion could be

corrected by considering the mysterious and apophatic nature of the divine, which necessitates an intellectual and therefore political asceticism.

Second, Stephen Holmes's chapter "Trinitarian Action and Inseparable Operations: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections" is the most theologically remarkable contribution in the volume. Consenting to the genuinely novel issues raised by Karl Rahner, namely the relation of God in himself and in history (and thus his economic activity with his immanent life), Holmes defends the thesis that the doctrine of inseparable operations was further developed by pro-Nicene theologians (Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus). However, the Fathers do not provide all that the present requires. The most poignant articulation comes in Thomas Aquinas's view of trinitarian "real relations," or persons in subsistent relationships. The notion of ontological relations offers, says Holmes, the best theological resource for viewing the unity of operations in God's "economic" history. It should be noted that Milbank and Pickstock argued exactly the same thing in 2001 (John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*. London: Routledge, 2002, 52–76).

A few chapters, while important in their own way, deviate from the book's attempt to unite the past with the present to constructively retrieve trinitarian theology. Thomas McCall's chapter, "Trinity Doctrine Plain and Simple" sets out to do the admirable thing of defending the doctrine of divine simplicity, that is, within the corpus of patristic literature, before the criticisms of certain analytical theologians. The modest conclusion simply suggests accepting one of three versions of the doctrine that at least do not contradict the tri-unity of God. The interdisciplinary effort is stunted by a too naive understanding of the commonality between analytical philosophy and the patristic-medieval theological heritage. Consequently, the argumentation is inattentive to the uniquely dynamic character of the divine nature, which would already conflict with the analytic method here presented (Ayres's response within the volume repeats the same sentiment). Lewis Ayres, a reputable patristic and Catholic historical theologian, turns his attention to the biblical witness. His chapter, "'As We Are One:' Thinking into the Mystery,"

evaluates the patterns of trinitarian thinking employed throughout the New Testament (especially the prologue to the Gospel of John and Romans 8). The canon, he argues, unapologetically and quite intentionally speaks in paradox (agency between Father, Son, and Spirit being “confused”), the intention being a further invitation into humanity’s theological unknowing. By mostly limiting attention towards biblical text, the thesis is easily affirmed without detailed explication. Ayres’s description of the “analogical” relationship between God and humanity, which makes an infinite epistemological distance possible, could use the detail of Augustinian or Thomistic philosophy.

Advancing Trinitarian Theology is an academic contemplation of the topics directly and indirectly pertaining to the Trinity. It may not contribute much as an original research document, directly influencing the academy. But it does situate issues of trinitarian theology within contemporary issues, which makes the book relevant to theological students, academic, pastoral, or otherwise. The reader is here introduced to a variety of traditions, methodologies, and resources that will enrich anyone’s pursuit of theological reflection on the Trinity.

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