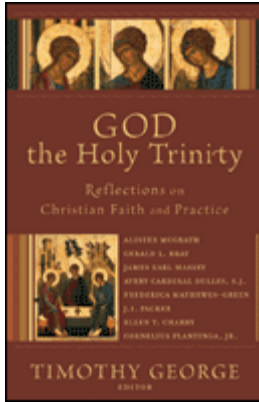


God the Holy Trinity

Timothy George, ed., *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 175 pp.



This little volume draws together nine papers originally presented at a Beeson Divinity School symposium on the Trinity. The papers, edited by **Timothy George**, represent a wide range of ecclesial traditions: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Baptist, Holiness, and Presbyterian. The collection aims not at conceptual discussion of trinitarian theology, but rather at elucidating the relationship between that doctrine and the concrete life of Christian faith and worship. Thus the crucial question addressed is: “How does the doctrine of the Trinity shape the ways of the Christian life, its worship and prayer, its service and mission?” (p. 13).

In the opening paper, Alister McGrath emphasises the fundamental *mystery* of trinitarian dogma: “The doctrine of the Trinity represents a chastened admission that we are unable to master God” (p. 20). McGrath thus wonders whether some contemporary trinitarian thought has become too speculative and too detached from the witness of Scripture. His target here is especially social doctrines of the Trinity, which leave one “with a sense of bafflement” at how “a series of rather ambitious social and communitarian doctrines [can be deduced] from the mystery of the Trinity” (pp. 31-32). In contrast, McGrath follows Robert W. Jenson in arguing that the doctrine of the Trinity “*identifies* and *names* the Christian God,” so that the doctrine functions as “an instrument of theological precision, which forces us to be explicit about the God under discussion” (pp. 33-34).

McGrath's paper sets the stage for the rest of the collection, since the remaining essays focus on the significance of the Trinity for the concrete practices and experiences of Christian faith. Gerald Bray argues that the doctrine of the Trinity did not arise from philosophical speculation in the early church, but "from the realities of Christian spiritual experience" (p. 55); and James Earl Massey offers a fascinating account of the underlying trinitarianism of the African-American spirituals. Avery Dulles emphasises the ecumenical significance of the concept of the divine processions of the Son and Spirit, while J. I. Packer gives an account of John Owen's Puritan trinitarian piety. Timothy George highlights the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for inter-faith dialogue between Christianity and Islam, and Ellen Charry seeks to revive the notion of the divine perfections by emphasising their practical and soteriological significance.

The most enjoyable chapter, however, is Frederica Mathewes-Green's reflection on Rublev's **icon of the Trinity**. Mathewes-Green is a popular Eastern Orthodox writer rather than a theologian; but she offers a beautiful, concise meditation on Rublev's depiction of the Trinity. As in much iconography, Rublev "distort[s] perspective in order to give us a sensation that the scene is bursting out toward us, with the chalice in the center pressing itself our way"; as the scene rushes towards us, this distorted perspective gives us a sense "of being off-balance in an unfamiliar, powerful world" (p. 89). Most significantly, though, Mathewes-Green observes that none of Rublev's three figures is *speaking*: "The tranquillity of their silence is sufficient" (p. 90).

Finally, the volume closes with a moving sermon by Cornelius Plantinga: "From all eternity inside God, inside the mystery of God ..., the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit make room for each other, envelop each other, call attention to each other, glorify one another. It is the ceaseless exchange of vitality, the endless expense of spirit upon spirit in eternal triplicate life. The only competition in glory of this kind is to outdo one another in love" (p. 155).

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