

## Review article: Trinitarian Theology

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***The Message of the Trinity: Life in God (The Bible Speaks Today: Bible Themes)*, Brian Edgar, IVP, 2004, 336pp, £11.99**

***God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice (Beeson Divinity Studies)*, Timothy George (Editor), Baker Academic, 2006, 176pp, £12.99**

***The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*, Robert Letham, P&R Publishing, 2004, 551pp, £18.99**

***Trinitarian Theology for the church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, Daniel J Treier & David Lauber (Editors), IVP, 2009, 270pp, £14.99**

***The Church as the Image of the Trinity: A Critical Evaluation of Miroslav Volf's Ecclesial Model (WEST Theological Monograph Series)*, Kevin J Bidwell, Wipf & Stock, 2011, 282pp, £19.00**

***Systematic Theology (Volume One): Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church*, Douglas F Kelly, Christian Focus Publications (Mentor), 2008, 640pp, £22.99 (HB)**

‘The Christian faith is faith in the Triune God’,<sup>1</sup> so affirmed the first Charismatic systematic theologian nearly fifty years ago. And he was correct. A British evangelical theologian puts it more strongly: ‘Without the Trinity there is no Christian Faith’<sup>2</sup>. Uncompromising words which may shock some. Other theologians have made similar statements. Professor Donald Macleod emphasises that ‘The doctrine itself is of vital importance to Christians... It is crucial to our understanding of both God and man.’<sup>3</sup> Professor Kevin J. Vanhoozer, another evangelical theologian, affirms: ‘At the heart of the Christian Faith lie neither principles, piety nor practices but rather the work of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.’<sup>4</sup> That is another hard-hitting statement. Notice that Vanhoozer refers to ‘the work of three persons...’ as being at the heart and centre of our faith. By their ‘work’ Vanhoozer is particularly emphasising the way in which the persons of the Trinity work out together their ‘plan’ of salvation for the elect (Ephesians 1:10) and that is basically what we mean when we refer to the ‘economic’ Trinity.

By using the term ‘ontological’ Trinity, we are denoting what the three persons are in their inner relations with one another. The terms ‘economic’ and ‘ontological’ Trinity, therefore, refer to the same glorious Trinity of Divine Persons; the distinction is used for our own benefit in order to distinguish between the unique and glorious relations of the Three Persons within the Godhead and then their work together for our redemption. And what is important to appreciate is that God’s self-revelation of himself in the Word majors on the economic Trinity, that is, the three Persons working together for our redemption. That is what the Bible majors on from Genesis to Revelation.

But one other comment on Vanhoozer’s statement is required, namely, the term ‘Person’. There is only one God but there are also three that are God. As Stuart Olyott remarks, ‘the difficulty comes when we ask, “Three WHAT”. We can’t say they are three “parts” of God. That is not true. Nor are there three Gods. So how do you refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? They are three... what?’<sup>5</sup> That is what the church has struggled to explain. Greek writers have talked about *hypostasis* while in

the West and Latin side the terms 'persona' and 'substance' have been used but none of them are ideal. So we need great care in using the term 'Person' because they are not independent, separate, unrelated as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What we are referring to, then, are 'personal self-distinctions within the Divine Being', each of whom can say of themselves, 'I' and refer to the others as 'He' or 'You'. But God cannot be divided or mixed up in three ways or be a collection, an aggregate or a committee of individuals. But I repeat the point again: With the doctrine of the Holy Trinity being so central to the Christian Faith, it is expected that Christians, especially preachers and church elders, study the doctrine carefully and keep abreast of some of the valuable books being published.

The aim of this review, therefore, is to sample a few of the more recent publications which I deem helpful and enriching for preachers particularly to read and constantly refer to in their ministries.

### **Repent of our neglect?**

One contemporary writer observes: 'For many Christians, the Trinity has become something akin to their appendix: it is there, but they are not sure what its function is, they would get by in life without it doing very much, and if they had to have it removed they would not be too distressed'!<sup>6</sup> And Bob Letham expresses the same concern, that 'For the vast majority of Christians, including ministers and theological students, the Trinity is still a mathematical conundrum, full of imposing philosophical jargon, relegated to an obscure alcove, remote from daily life'<sup>7</sup>. If that is really how we, or Christians generally, regard the Trinity, then how can we fulfil our 'chief end', namely 'to glorify God and enjoy him for ever' if we are indifferent to what he has revealed in the Word concerning himself as the Triune God?

Doctor Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in the early 1960s, wondered why we have emphasised this doctrine of the Trinity so little. His answer was blunt: 'I fear it is another example of the laziness that has come upon us – the desire for comfort, and the tendency to rest upon experiences, and to avoid anything that demands intellectual effort.'<sup>8</sup>

Today, however, we need to add the fact that people read less and even pastors, when they read, tend to go for lighter and easier books of a devotional or biographical nature. 'But', Lloyd-Jones warns us, 'if we have neglected the doctrine of the Trinity, shame on us! It is... the most exalted and the most glorious of all doctrines; the most amazing and astonishing thing that God has been pleased to reveal to us concerning himself'. But there are clearly other reasons for this neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity in our situation which we can identify.

One reason, as Lloyd-Jones himself also acknowledged, is the perception among Christians that it is a profound doctrine, including technical terms which the church and its theologians have used and debated over the centuries.

While the doctrine of the Trinity has had a bad press from the old Liberal theology, also the cults, there is the more worrying general indifference amongst many Christians towards Christian doctrine. The general line is that this and other doctrines are difficult, if not impossible to understand. It is true we can never fully understand how God, who is one, is also three. And it remains a mystery yet this eternal, triune God has revealed himself in the Word so we need humbly in response to search the Scriptures to see more of himself there as the One-in-Three and Three-in-One. However, we must not allow the profundity of the doctrine to deprive us of knowing what the Scripture actually reveals of the Triune God. And that in itself will lead us to worship him more and appreciate how glorious he is.

Another reason for the neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity, I suggest, lies at the door of preachers, namely, their failure to read in depth and open up adequately the riches of the Word for their congregations. This is clearly a generalization but sadly it is widely true of pastors/preachers. My personal observation is that the level of reading of many pastors is extremely basic and restricted, often limited to devotional/historical/biographical books with the occasional excursion into doctrine. Even the bible commentaries used often are only basic for sermon preparation. We desperately need to read more, to get more deeply into the Word, and engage with biblical and systematic theology.

There are very few sermons preached on the Trinity but also only occasional references are made to the Trinity in weekly sermons. For example, I have asked Christians over the past couple of years when last they heard a sermon on the Trinity and none of them could remember hearing such a sermon in the past 2-3 years at least, or even longer. A further example confirms my own suspicions: An American theologian conducted extensive research in the States as to how frequently the Trinity is preached and then as to what is preached about the Trinity. The researcher reviewed the subject and Scripture indexes of 13 volumes of *20 Centuries of Great Preaching* and volumes 34-76 of the *Pulpit Digest*. The researcher also checked all references to the Trinity or to Trinity Sunday and to 15 biblical texts usually associated with the Trinity. It was a fairly thorough piece of research. And the result? Only twenty sermons on the Trinity were found, with three preachers represented by two sermons each. A few sermons were found which made a passing reference to the Trinity or that occasionally had a Trinitarian structure. But the content of these few sermons on the Trinity was also disappointing. Even a sermon on the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 did not include an exposition and was not particularly Trinitarian in its message. Other sermons on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 even failed to draw attention to the Trinity, although the three Persons are mentioned there! And as a consequence congregations may well be justified in thinking of the Holy Trinity like the way we regard our appendix – it is there, but not essential. Preachers – what about it? How Trinitarian is your own preaching?

Professor Vanhoozer understands the biblical Gospel in terms of a drama rather than a story – the ‘greatest drama ever staged... a cosmic stage and a covenantal plot’.<sup>9</sup> He describes the Holy Spirit as the ‘primary director of the drama’ with the pastor as an ‘assistant director’ but helped by theologians. Ideally, he adds, the pastor is also a theologian and therefore must keep to the text and communicate it to people. Vanhoozer then refers to a ‘masterpiece theatre’ – the seven creeds of the church as summarising biblical teaching and also historical theology for the universal church. He talks, too, of the ‘regional theatre’ which he understands as confessional theology, based on Confessions from the Reformation onwards. These are distinctive especially in that they are more limited in their acceptance by churches. But what I want to emphasise is the ‘local theatre’ which for Vanhoozer is the local congregational theology, where the pastor instructs members in the theo drama. If pastors neglect Scripture then they become disorientated and lose out on the Gospel. And if they neglect creedal and confessional theology they also dispossess themselves and their congregations of the accumulated richness of the church’s involvement and experience in the theo-drama over the centuries.

### **Renaissance**

Over the past sixty years or more there has been emerging a renaissance of Trinitarian theology among theologians, which has been taken up by the academic world. Earlier in the twentieth century, Karl Barth wrote vigorously in defence and elucidation of the doctrine (as well as the deity of Christ) and this against the background of an arrogant liberal, sceptical theology in Protestantism which was bent on discarding the major doctrines of the Faith. Others have built on his contribution, with theologians from the Western as well as the Orthodox churches seeking to articulate and promote the doctrine of the Trinity. In the UK in the late 1970s, there were some valuable

ecumenical contributions made in a series of three books under the title of *The Forgotten Trinity* where the influence of Professor Colin Gunton was significant. Many others have contributed since in this Trinitarian renaissance with some good material having been written and helpful insights provided into the doctrine of the Trinity. In this respect, Bob Letham laments the fact that 'this torrent of activity has yet to percolate through to the pulpit or the pew'<sup>10</sup> which in turn reflects the fact that pastors are not acquainted with contemporary systematic and biblical theology in this area.

### **Biblical**

What is most encouraging in recent years is the fact that some valuable work has been done in order to establish the biblical nature of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. I was thrilled, for example, some years ago to find James Packer's stimulating chapter, *The Trinity and the Gospel*<sup>11</sup>. Here he undertakes a study of John 3:1-15 and in what Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'the Trinity is presented in quite a different light – not now as the linchpin of orthodox belief (which nonetheless it is) but as, literally and precisely, the sinner's way of salvation'. In fact, Packer claims further: 'As one learns the Christian gospel and enters by faith into the riches of fellowship with God that it holds forth, one is, in fact, mastering the mystery of the Triune God.' Surely there are rich gleanings here for Christians and preachers!

A more oblique biblical approach is attempted by Max Turner in his *Towards Trinitarian Pneumatology – Perspectives from Pentecost*<sup>12</sup>. Turner argues from the biblical text that Pentecost 'not only provides what is perhaps the firmest basis for the New Testament's divine christology... but also gives pneumatology a strong push in a trinitarian direction'. This again is well worth reading as well as the immediately preceding chapters.

And I thoroughly enjoyed Brian Edgar's *The Message of The Trinity*<sup>13</sup>. He is convinced that 'the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity is fundamentally simple, thoroughly practical, theologically central and totally biblical'. Rather than attempting a 'proof-text' approach and depending on one or two biblical texts to prove the doctrine, Edgar claims 'It is something found in the whole testimony of Scripture concerning the story of salvation and is an unavoidable implication of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit'<sup>14</sup>. He further describes the doctrine as being 'comprehensible', 'logical', 'practical', 'foundational', 'essential', 'structural', and 'biblical'<sup>15</sup>. And in a readable, warm and helpful way, Edgar majors on expounding a range of key biblical passages in establishing that we can know and experience God in his awesome three-in-oneness.

The biblical passages he majors on include 2 Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 1:1-14 ('A Trinitarian Blessing'), the Trinity in the Old Testament such as Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ('The Lord our God is One'), Proverbs 8:22-31 ('The Wisdom of God'), Ezekiel 37: 1-14 ('The Spirit of God'). This is followed by a long but key section on 'The Trinity in the experience and teaching of Jesus' which repays close attention and study. He rightly affirms that although the word 'trinity' does not appear, yet 'there are few descriptions of the inner, trinitarian life of God as profound and as important as the words of Jesus recorded in John 14'<sup>16</sup>. Then the final and extensive section of the book is devoted to 'The Trinity in the Experience and teaching of the early church', including the crucial passage of Acts 2:1-47, Romans 8:1-17, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Galatians 3:26-4:7, Ephesians 4:1-16 and Jude 20-21. I heartily commend the book to serious readers who want to grapple with Scripture and appreciate its teaching concerning the Holy Trinity.

Encouragingly, therefore, some theologians writing on the Trinity are devoting more attention to the biblical teaching on the subject and that is a welcome development. Perhaps I can refer to two further examples.

Gerald Bray provides a stimulating chapter entitled 'Out of the box: The Christian Experience of God in Trinity' in an interesting book, *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*<sup>17</sup>. Bray believes that 'we can expound the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as an extended commentary on the meaning of this verse in Galatians (4:6), which not only reflects the earliest stage of the Christian message but also defines the most characteristic feature of that message'<sup>18</sup>. Bray suggests also that in Galatians 4:6 Paul 'lays the groundwork for his assertion about the persons of the Trinity in a short phrase that readers often overlook – "Because you are sons"<sup>19</sup>. His work here deserves your attention!

But other chapters in this book are variable. I enjoyed Alister E. McGrath's chapter in which he reflects on the doctrine of the Trinity<sup>20</sup>, seeing the doctrine as 'our admission... that we simply cannot fully grasp all that God is' and he welcomes the recent emphasis on the concept of *mystery* in this context. But McGrath has at least two concerns which can be mentioned here. One is that a considerable amount of theological discussion on the Trinity 'has lost its moorings in Scripture'. That is arguably true but there is a welcome return now to a more biblical approach. Two, he questions whether it is legitimate to refer to the doctrine of the Trinity 'as playing a foundational role in theology, when it is... something that we infer from other foundations'<sup>21</sup>. Over the following eight pages he fleshes out these two concerns in a provocative way but I would modify some of his statements. Why not read what he has to say?

Packer's chapter on 'A Puritan Perspective: Trinitarian Godliness according to John Owen'<sup>22</sup> is well worth reading as is Timothy George's 'The Trinity and the Challenge of Islam'<sup>23</sup> who emphasises with Bishop Kenneth Cragg that 'bare monotheism is ultimately barren.' Teaching about the Trinity, he insists, 'is not peripheral; it is essential to our understanding of the character and nature of the one true God'. This is a MUST read for those involved in Muslim evangelism and dialogue. The other chapters I found disappointing but the book is well worth buying if only for the chapters referred to above.

I must refer to Bob Letham's helpful volume, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*<sup>24</sup>. This is a competent, wide-ranging, scholarly but warm and doxological study and exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. Needless to say, pastors should make themselves familiar with this book and theology students can use it with profit as a key text for their studies in Trinitarian theology. Again, what is pleasing is that Letham spends Part One of his book examining the 'Biblical Foundations' of the doctrine and does so over three chapters with an excursus on 'Ternary Patterns in Ephesians'. The first chapters major on the Old Testament Background, Jesus and the Father then The Holy Spirit and Triadic Patterns. The author should have provided an even more extensive biblical section, yet there is considerable food for thought in these chapters and scope to develop further what are key, foundational strands of biblical teaching. Another advantage of this biblical section is that Letham does not confuse his methodology and stays within Scripture in laying some of the foundations for this important doctrine.

Part Two of the book provides an outline of the historical development of the doctrine. He bridges the N.T with the second-century Logos Christology – a critically important period – before dealing with the Arian controversy, Athanasius, the Cappodocians, the Council of Constantinople, Augustine, East and West: the Filioque Controversy, then the schism, and finally in this section an absorbing but brief chapter on John Calvin. Considering Calvin within the context of historical theology, Letham begins his focus on Calvin with the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* concluding that 'the Trinity IS his doctrine of God. It contains nothing expressly on God other than a section on the Trinity. Here is a major departure from Aquinas's separation of his discussion of the one God from his discussion on the Trinity; this is more in line with Peter Lombard's approach in his *Sentences*. So much is the Trinity integral to his understanding of God, that the whole work has a trinitarian structure'<sup>25</sup>.

Against this helpful background, the reader is better placed in Part Three to follow the description and assessment of more recent theologians like Barth, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Bulgakov, Lossky, Staniloae and T F Torrance.

Part Four picks up some critical issues regarding the incarnation, worship, creation and mission, then persons. I found all these chapters suggestive and helpful. I hesitate, however, within the scope of this article to open up on each of these issues, but allow me one reference. Chapter eighteen on 'The Trinity, Worship and Prayer' will challenge you in your approach to worship, hymns, prayer, the Lord's Supper and preaching. Letham here has some trenchant criticisms to make and I support him as 'most Christians are little more than practical modalists'<sup>26</sup>. There is, therefore, an urgent need 'to refocus Western hymnody' while, 'chief of all, the Trinity must be preached and must shape preaching... A Trinitarian mind-set must become as integral to the preacher as the air we breathe'<sup>27</sup>.

The remaining chapters in this final section equally deserve your attention. Better still, read the whole book, but thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Another useful book on the Trinity is *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*<sup>28</sup>. The book is divided into three parts. Part One is that of 'Scripture: The Bible and the Triune Economy'. The second part is entitled 'Community: The Trinity and Society' while the third and final section is 'Worship: Church Practices and the Triune Mission'.

However, if only for the two opening two chapters by Kevin Vanhoozer on the '*Triune Discourse*' this book is well worth reading. In wanting to ground the doctrine of the Trinity more thoroughly in the Scripture then it is encouraging to find Vanhoozer highlighting the implications of Trinitarian theology for the way we come to, and use, the Bible. He first seeks to relate the doctrine of biblical inerrancy with that of the Trinity, while in his second chapter he underlines the fact that the one God speaks but also that 'speech activity is appropriated to each of the three persons'<sup>29</sup> and he explores this helpfully. His conclusion is that the Trinity 'is our Scripture Principle' which is equivalent to insisting that the church's supreme authority in all areas of faith and practice 'is the triune God speaking in the Scriptures'<sup>30</sup> but this involves demanding challenges for us. I urge you to read these two key chapters. Personally, I found the remaining chapters variable in their quality and appeal, although I was stimulated by some of them.

For example, I appreciated Mark Husbands' chapter 'The Trinity is Not Our Social Program: Volf, Gregory of Nyssa and Barth'. The chapter aims to show that social trinitarians such as Miroslav Volf are misguided in believing the Trinity to be *our* social program. Such theologians, Husbands claims, and Volf especially, 'have misread the Cappodocian fathers at crucial points'<sup>31</sup> so it would be improper for us to follow them. One 'basic rule' Husbands suggests for measuring whether proposals and statements regarding the Trinity are consistent with both the Bible and the Nicene Creed is that they 'must preserve an ontological distinction between God and humanity in order to maintain an order consistent with their distinct natures'<sup>32</sup>. He sees an example of a theologian breaking this rule in Catherine LaCugna's book, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. This is an extremely important chapter and I will refer shortly to Volf in another context but we need to be alert to the errors and questionable uses being made currently in what is popularly referred to as social trinitarianism .

There is a strong mission emphasis in this book and some readers may be helped by reading Keith E. Johnson's, 'Does The Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions?' and Robert K. Lang'at's 'Trinity and Missions: Theological Priority in Missionary Nomenclature'. Both chapters express concerns regarding the way in which Trinitarian doctrine is being used currently.

The latter writer, for example demonstrates clearly how 'evangelical understandings of mission have frequently been dislocated from their properly trinitarian home'<sup>33</sup>. The final section of this book on Worship explores, for example, the Lord's Supper as participation in the Life of the Triune God<sup>34</sup>

The very last chapter makes suggestions as to 'What to do with our Renewed Trinitarian Enthusiasm'. Emphasising the fact that 'an astonishing trinitarian renaissance has taken hold in many Christian traditions, he notes that 'we now have a shelf of books written to summarize all this recent work'<sup>35</sup>. Like other writers, he refers again to the 'lack of trinitarian awareness... often reflected in Christian worship and offers some suggestions for addressing this need. Should you read and buy this book? Well, I did and have not regretted doing so!

It is a joy for me to commend Kevin J Bidwell's *The Church as the Image of the Trinity: A Critical Evaluation of Miroslav Volf's Ecclesial Model*<sup>36</sup>. This book is the substance of his doctoral dissertation at WEST in partnership with the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. I regard the book as a major, original contribution to contemporary Trinitarian theology. In terms of the importance of the subject, Robert Letham is justified in claiming that it 'can hardly be overestimated'<sup>37</sup>. Volf is a leading academic theologian, hailing originally from former Yugoslavia but his studies led him to Zagreb then to Fuller Seminary before undertaking doctoral studies then post-doctoral studies under Professor Jürgen Moltmann at the University of Tübingen. The latter's influence on Volf has been profound and Bidwell describes fairly the extent of this influence in terms of two key words, namely, *liberation* and *Trinity*<sup>38</sup>. Volf then employs his understanding of the Trinity to build his own distinctive egalitarian ecclesiology through using the ideas of the early English Separatist leader, John Smyth.

Chapter one sets the scene in terms of the resurgence of interest in the Trinity during the second part of the twentieth century before providing an overview of Volf's key work, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*<sup>39</sup>. Volf wants his readers to journey with him and uses liberation slogans to insist, on behalf of the people that 'We are the church', rather than any kind of hierarchy. He interprets the early English Separatist leaders like John Smyth and Henry Ainsworth as being anti-clerical and opposed to any monarchical and hierarchical structures and ideas in the church. Volf then places this protest within a Trinitarian framework, while pursuing radical ecclesiastical reform. It is not surprising that he is critical of Roman Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies, longing for a community in the local church which reflects the community of the Triune God. In the contemporary world, Volf observed a shift away from hierarchical models of the church to a 'process of congregationalization' of Christianity with increasing lay participation so it is no surprise when he indicates that for him the Free Churches are more appropriate for the future.

Chapter two identifies and opens up the presuppositions underlying Volf's theological paradigm, especially Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity, including the 'pivotal issue' of 'hierarchy' versus 'equality'. Volf then aims to 'develop a non-hierarchical but truly communal ecclesiology based on a non-hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity'<sup>40</sup>. Moltmann's influence was pivotal; Pannenberg's influence was significant also, while Volf has some affinity with the trinitarianism of the feminist Catholic theologian Catherine Mowry LaCugna and, to an extent, his own wife, Judith Gundry-Volf. His own theological paradigm is articulated in chapter four, with Bidwell safely concluding that Volf 'embraces a hermeneutic that views all theology, including a doctrine of God, the church and society, through an egalitarian window'<sup>41</sup>. His chapter five is of major importance as he describes and evaluates Volf's employment of John Smyth, the early English Separatist, as his chosen ecclesial representative (pp57-86). Bidwell rightly challenges Volf's use of Smyth as 'the voice of the Free Church tradition' which at best was a complex, fluid movement, while Volf also fails to do justice to Smyth's own developing and changing theology. This is a valuable critique.

Over the next two chapters, Volf is studied in dialogue with Joseph Ratzinger (the current Pope) and the Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas whom Volf regards as important representatives of hierarchical ministry. Chapters ten to fourteen are extremely valuable chapters which in turn provide Bidwell's own critical evaluation of 'The Ecclesiality of the Church', 'Faith, Person and church', 'Trinity and Church' then the 'Structures of the Church' and 'The Catholicity of the Church'. Without pursuing the many important details in this extensive evaluation, the author concludes that the 'social doctrine of the Trinity' of both Volf and Moltmann 'exhibits a departure from both Eastern and Western understandings of the Trinity, the Reformers, historic creeds and the church fathers'<sup>42</sup>.

As I indicated on a blurb for the book, 'This is research at its best and must be read by church ministers and academics'; an important book indeed.

I cannot conclude this sample of recent books on Trinitarian theology without referring to Professor Douglas F Kelly's *Systematic Theology (Volume One): Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church*. I personally treasure my copy and enjoy dipping into it often and I look forward to the publishing of volumes two and three. Without exaggeration, Professor Kelly is one of the most prominent, contemporary Reformed theologians who brings to his writings expertise in the biblical languages, Patristics, Reformation and Post-Reformation theology, yet who retains a warm, passionate love for the Lord and a commitment to godly service.

Chapter one (pp13-127) deals with the 'Knowledge of God: God reveals Himself', and ends with two appendices on some traditional theistic proofs, then Thomas Reid's answer to David Hume on causation. However, the bulk of the book majors on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Chapter two (pp129-222) covers the 'Knowledge of the Triune God through Creation and Conscience'. Here, as in the rest of the volume, Professor Kelly gives detailed attention to the biblical text as, for example, Romans 1:18-23, 2:12-16, Acts 17:16-31 as well as the extensive Old Testament witness and often with insights from historical theology.

Chapter three (pp223-271) discusses the 'Western Rejection of God's Testimony to Himself in Creation and Conscience' but, while helpful, is largely historical and concentrates on the impact of the Enlightenment. Once again, this is rich, relevant material for us.

Chapter four (pp273-313) deals with the oneness of God under the title, 'God Who Is: the Holy Trinity as One Lord'. This chapter is enhanced by a lengthy but very helpful appendix on 'The Distinction in Eastern Orthodox Theology Between God's essence and His Energies' (pp295-313).

Chapter five (pp315-385) on 'What Kind of Lord he is: His Transcendence, Beauty and Majesty mean that His Sovereign Control is "Good news"' combines historical contributions with some stimulating contemporary and biblical work. But please do not miss the three most valuable appendices (pp353-384) which are most relevant and rich in their usefulness to us today in ministry. Subjects covered here are: 'Contemporary Challenges to God's Lordship' (where he affirms that 'the chief attack upon the lordship of the Triune God has come in the denial of creation out of nothing')<sup>43</sup>, 'Attempts To Know the Lord outside the Community of Faith' and also the vital subject of 'Feminist Theology and the Fatherhood of God'.

Chapter six (pp387-446) has as its theme, 'The Triune God Makes Himself Known in the Covenant of Grace'. An extensive biblical approach here is strengthened by a section on the church's right interpretation of the Scripture. The thrust of the chapter is hugely important, namely, that 'we know the LORD only in and through the Covenant of Grace that he establishes'.

Another two chapters which merit reflection are Chapter seven, 'The One Lord Exists as Three Persons' (pp447-483) and Chapter eight (pp485-528), 'The Christian Church Thinks Through how God is One Being and Three Persons'. Yes, a new, contemporary theological vocabulary became necessary, so Kelly explains carefully terms like 'homoousios' (the Father and Son are of the same substance but distinguishable) and 'perichoresis' (mutual indwelling or co-indwelling) in an attempt to clarify the significance of the term 'Person' and how the One God has 'eternal inter-trinitarian relationships'. Incidentally, there is a good appendix to Chapter eight on 'The differing Approaches of the Cappodocians and Augustine to the Trinity' (pp519-528) which will prove a useful summary and evaluation for pastors as it impinges so much on contemporary Trinitarian writing.

Chapter nine (pp529-577) pursues the subject in emphasising 'The Full Co-equality of the Trinitarian Persons: No Subordination'. Here Kelly shows that the Church Fathers, medieval Scholastics and Protestant Reformers all affirmed that the 'Son and Spirit are equally ultimate and original as is the Father in the Godhead'<sup>44</sup> yet time was needed to clarify and secure this 'pivotal doctrine'. I found the chapter helpful if only for purposes of revision and re-assurance and I particularly enjoyed the final pages in the chapter dealing with the practical application of Trinitarian doctrine. The Chapter, as well as the book, ends with an appendix 'On The Filioque' with a brief history before discussing its theological aspects and contemporary status.

Kelly's book is a gem in many ways and it is one which you will want to refer to often with profit. Make sure you read it soon!

But a final appeal to preachers: Is it possible for us to reform our corporate worship AND preaching in order to make it consistently Trinitarian? Such a reform is urgently needed in order to deliver us from, at best, our binitarianism and, at worse a subtle expression of unitarianism.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 83

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Leicester: IVP) 246

<sup>3</sup> Donald Macleod, *Shared Life: The Trinity & the fellowship of God's people* (London: Scripture Union, 1987) 7

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *Trinitarian Theology for the Church* (Leicester: IVP, 2009) 25

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Olyott, *The Three are One* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 1998)

<sup>6</sup> Robin Parry, *Worshipping the Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005)

<sup>7</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology & Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004) 1

<sup>8</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son* (London: Hodder, 1996) 84

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005) 89

<sup>10</sup> Letham, 1

<sup>11</sup> *Collected Shorter Writings of J I Packer, Vol. 1: Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) 1-7

<sup>12</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit And Spiritual Gifts: Then And Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996) 169-180

<sup>13</sup> Brian Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity* (Leicester: IVP, 2004)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-32

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>17</sup> Timothy George (ed), (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 37-55

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 39

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- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 46
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 17-35
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 26-27
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 91-108
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 109-127
- <sup>24</sup> (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004)
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 253
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 407
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 422-423
- <sup>28</sup> Edited by Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Nottingham: IVP Apollos, 2009)
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 76
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 141
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 121
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 181
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 188-197
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 237
- <sup>36</sup> (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2011)
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., vii
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 5
- <sup>39</sup> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)
- <sup>40</sup> *The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 14
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 56
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 237
- <sup>43</sup> Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume One): Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2008) 353
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 529