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**Book Reviews: Advancing Trinitarian Theology;
Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity**

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Oliver D. Crisp, Fred Sanders (eds.), *Advancing Trinitarian Theology. Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 978-0-310-51709-2. £14.99. Pbk

Jason Sexton (ed.), *Two Views on The Doctrine of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 978-0310498124. £12.99. Pbk.

The modern project to recover the doctrine that the one God whom Christians worship is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is now many decades old, old enough for project itself to become a matter of theological debate. Both these volumes attest to how well established that debate has become and to the levels of interest and energy it continues to attract.

The papers from the 2014 Los Angeles Theological Conference collected in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology* are perhaps more significant since they include several pieces which seek to advance the debate in new ways. For example, Stephen Holmes proposes lines of innovation upon foundations in the Cappadocian Fathers and Thomas Aquinas: to join up the notion of the inseparability of action of the divine persons with that of the relations of origin which distinguish them (the Father is distinguished from the Son and Spirit by generating the former and spirating the latter, and so on) and with the particularity of the missions of Son and Spirit (only the Son is incarnate, for example). In effect he claims that the divine persons' inseparable actions toward creatures are grounded in the inseparable action of the generation of the Son and process of the Spirit from the Father that is their common life. All the divine persons *are* involved in the missions of Son and Spirit, but according to the mode of their relation of origin, so the Son's incarnation needs to be seen as his particular enactment a broader divine activity also performed by Father and Son. With Lewis Ayres, I suspect both moves were already limned in the fourth century, but both do bear this sort of fruitful development.

Kendall Soulen's essay is the most innovative of the volume. He proposes that by attending to the New Testament pattern that applies ciphers and circumlocutions for the Tetragrammaton to Jesus Christ and to the Spirit we may resolve the problem Karl Barth's doctrine of election seeks to address – the ambiguity of the identity of the God who elects – without paying the price of making the Trinity contingent on that election and so impairing our affirmation of divine freedom and grace. The key to this resolution lies, we may infer, in the peculiarity of the Tetragrammaton as the proper name of God (so specifying the One who elects) which discloses the divine identity apart from the decision to be God for Israel (so preserving divine freedom and grace).

Also noteworthy is Karen Kilby's account of the political significance of the doctrine of the Trinity. She abjures the attempt to model the divine life and apply it to human relations in the manner of those who liken the Trinity to a community or perfect society ('social trinitarians'). We are too close to that life, caught up by the Spirit in the movement of the Son to the Father, she argues, to be able to stand back and model it. Such an emphasis on the limits of our theological knowledge might inform a resistance to absolute confidence in any social system or vision, but Kilby's account offers more, specifically for the privileged nonpoor of the wealthier parts of the world whose greatest impediment to pursuing justice and the relief of suffering is their unwillingness to engage. The pattern of the Son's incarnate life means that relating to God with him must involve engaging with matters of injustice; faith in the work of the Spirit to align us with this life enables us to acknowledge our sin and work at 'a new fidelity to the real'; orientation to the Father as the horizon toward which we move allows us to sustain that engagement despite the limits of our power and activity – giving meaning to each finite project and its limited efficacy and evoking fresh efforts beyond provisional results.

Two Views on The Doctrine of the Trinity turns out to offer three views: two defences of the 'classical' doctrine of the Trinity, from Stephen Holmes and Paul Molnar which agree on the essentials of that position, and two rather divergent 'relational' accounts from Thomas McCall and Paul Fiddes. Both Holmes and Molnar are keen to hammer home how unfaithful relational (by which they chiefly mean 'social trinitarian') theologians are to the trinitarian theology of the Church Fathers and medievals. McCall also rejects social trinitarianism, however. He argues that the divine persons are distinct from one another in the manner of an I to a Thou, as evidenced in discourse between them in the New Testament (and Psalms), but are numerically the same. Paul Fiddes, however, sees his position as farther still from social trinitarianism. For him the divine 'persons' are relational movements (there is no-one doing the relating), akin to human relationships, a pattern into which we are drawn as into a dance, and which affect the world by influencing us.

The volume is presented as an introduction for evangelicals to contemporary debates about the Trinity. For those with little theological training, its chapters are too polemical, technical and dense to serve that function. For those with more, they do bring to light some of the larger underlying contested issues in Trinitarian thinking: the interpretation of key terms in pre-modern sources (like 'relation'); how the analogical character of theological language impacts accounts of divine personhood; the propriety and force of arguments and analogies from human experience; what inferences about intradivine relations may be drawn from scriptural depictions of the incarnate Son relating to his Father; and whether God-world relations may be

genuinely mutual without impairing the independence of God's existence apart from the world.

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