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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
New Jersey

Allan Coppedge (Ph.D., University of Cambridge) was a name that I was unfamiliar with. I had never heard anything about him, nor read anything that he had written, but given my love for all things 'Trinity,' it was an easy choice to request this book. When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity it doesn't matter much whether I love or hate a book, whatever my feelings when finished, I simply *have* to read it. But I was pleasantly surprised with how much I enjoyed Coppedge's contribution to Trinitarian studies.

Rather than follow the recent trend of surveying various prominent theologians and examining their Trinitarianism (see e.g., La Due's *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*; Letham's *The Holy Trinity*; Grenz's *Rediscovering God*[1], et. al), Coppedge opted to take a more systematic approach in offering a thorough examination of what Scripture has to say about God. Of course he touches on the history of the doctrine, and the prominent theologians surveyed by the above mentioned authors are referenced in the footnotes and bibliography; but Coppedge's volume is thoroughly concerned with what the Bible has to say. Another thing that separates him from the rest is his examination of Open Theism and Process Theology in light of Trinitarianism.

In the first two chapters Coppedge builds the Trinitarian case from what the Old and New Testaments have to say about the Father, the Son/Word, and the Holy Spirit. In these chapters he suggests that only examining passages with 'triadic forms' is an "entirely inadequate" approach to

dealing with this subject. (25) He suggests three proposals to "adequately handle the significant data of the New Testament on the trinitarian nature of God" (26):

1. Broaden our understanding of the literary structure to include the theology of the persons of the Trinity in the selection of data.
2. Consider the literary structure of whole New Testament books in light of trinitarian references.
3. Jesus' challenge to his disciples in the Great Commission will serve as a lens for organizing other trinitarian passages that refer to all three persons of the Trinity.

This method allows passages in which only two of the three persons are mentioned to count as 'trinitarian.' It also allows us to examine entire books in light of the brief sections that have generally been considered trinitarian. Coppedge's reading of Scripture is certainly trinitarian (as well it should be), but there were times when I questioned whether or not the data supported his reading of it. For example, Coppedge says in reference to the virginal conception:

> Jesus' divine nature is confirmed by the angel's statement to Mary that Jesus will "be called holy" (Lk 1:35). Luke also adds that the Father's essential name/nature is also holy (Lk 1:49). The Lukan birth narrative demonstrates that Jesus shares in the essential nature of a holy God and that Jesus' holiness is shared with both the Father and the Spirit. (30)

The problem is that I'm not sure exactly how he draws this *from* the text, and he doesn't offer any exegesis in support of this reading.

In the third chapter Coppedge spends a bit of time tracing the historical development of the doctrine. It's an adequate enough treatment, and certainly enough to get the novice going, but obviously, anyone interested in the subject will want to pick up a book (or multi-book) length treatment of it.

Chapters four through nine focus primarily on the economic and immanent Trinity. Coppedge certainly takes more than enough space to outline the ways in which God relates to creation and within himself. He takes the time to define the key terms (e.g., essence/substance, person, consubstantial, coinherence, etc.), and notes the differences in language between Eastern and Western Christianity, as well as the confusion that it caused. Like those great theologians who have gone before him, Coppedge is careful to walk the fine line of the diversity and unity, distinction and indivisibility of the three persons, noting their shared functions in the

economy. He also appropriately points out that while they 'share the work,' so to speak, certain persons take the prominent position in specific acts (i.e., the Father's prominence in creation, the Son's in redemption, the Spirit's in sanctification, etc.).

Coppedge also takes the position of most theologians, that the economic Trinity reveals the Ontological (i.e., immanent) Trinity. He sees the incarnation of the Son as the interpretive key to understanding more fully the Father and the Spirit. He states: "In terms of knowing God (our epistemology) we begin with Jesus and the economic Trinity. However, with the being of God (our ontology) we focus on the role of the Father and the ontological Trinity" (128-129). This, of course, is an approach that has a distinguished pedigree throughout Church history. This section of the book is littered with various tables and charts that illustrate Coppedge's points and certainly help the reader to retain the information. I am a big fan of this kind presentation, as it only helps to encourage memorization and reinforce what has been learned.

But as much as I have enjoyed the book up until this point, everything has largely been review. This was all information that I had been privy to for quite some time. Where Coppedge impressed me the most was with his examination of God's providence. In my reading on the Trinity I have yet to come across anyone who mentions providence in more than a passing manner, and even then, it is usually from a Calvinist's perspective, but Coppedge devotes two chapters (12 & 13) to the subject, from a Wesleyan-Arminian perspective. In them he takes a look at concepts such as human free will, God's foreknowledge, prevenient grace, determinism, and more. He examines the various concepts through the lenses of classical theism, process theology, open theism, and finally trinitarian theism.

I found his arguments for the freedom of humans being grounded in the loving interpersonal relationship of God to be solid. The point of his position that I was most impressed by was that:

> The triune God is a social being, with interpersonal relationships at the heart of who he is. The freedom to relate in love is a crucial component of his personhood. God made people in his own image, that is, for freely chosen personal relationships. (306)

Finally, I was pleased to see Coppedge address open theism because it is a concept that I have not studied in depth, nor one that I have cared much about, that is, until it was presented in the light of the Trinity! He basically outlines briefly the ways in which open theism is opposed to classical theism, and then offers some correctives via trinitarian theism. He suggests that if we begin with the revelation of God in Christ, then we should first view God as 'loving Father' and not

'sovereign King.' (327) Trinitarian theism also balances God's transcendence and immanence, which is exemplified in God's entering the world of space and time through the incarnation. And lastly, God's interpersonal relationships are the foundation of all personal relationships. God has created man to relate to him and to one another in genuine, personal relationships, but this requires freedom. He says:

> People are free to respond to God, to love God, and to take moral responsibility for their actions. There is a certain "risk" in this, but it is a limited risk because God does have complete foreknowledge of the future. Thus he is able to providentially order the circumstances of life, the world and history to accomplish his purposes in light of human freedom. (327)

The book is rounded out by a two-page name index, listing all of the authors mentioned throughout the volume; a four-page subject index; and nine-page Scripture index. I think that this speaks to how thoroughly Bible-going Coppedge was throughout this text. And I must mention that I was ecstatic that he (and the editors/publishers) decided to go with footnotes in this volume!

When it's all said and done, *The God Who Is Triune* is a good, solid, treatment of the Trinity from an evangelical perspective. Although he does deal with some of the more technical aspects of Trinitarian theology, I'd still recommend this text to beginners, as he builds up to the more difficult concepts and is always quick to define his terms and the way things work. The intermediate student can learn quite a bit as well from Coppedge's book, while the advanced student would be mainly reviewing. I could definitely see this as a text for a class on Trinitarianism, either seminary level, or adult Bible study/Sunday school. Go out and pick this volume up at your earliest convenience; you won't be sorry.