



Emery, Gilles and Matthew Levering, eds.

The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity

New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xvi + 632.
Hardcover. \$150.00. ISBN 9780199557813.

Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

It's quite common to talk about the rise, fall, and resurgence of Trinitarian theology. One is hard pressed to open up any of the dozens of recent books on file and not find a reference to the role that Friedrich Schleiermacher played in its demise or the role that Karl Barth and Karl Rahner played in its renewal. But for as ubiquitous as this claim is, it is equally wrong, or at least in need of nuancing as editors Matthew Levering (Professor of Theology at the University of Dayton, Ohio) and Gilles Emery (Professor of Theology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland) point out in the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*. They rightly note that “in reality reflection on the Trinity has never ceased to be fruitful and give rise to new approaches” (1).

There was never a dark age of theology where the Trinity was forgotten and in need of rescuing and this volume helps to bring this to light. It does so by gathering essays from an interdisciplinary and ecumenical (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant) group of scholars, which include some of the best in the fields of biblical studies, historical, and systematic theology. While not slavishly tracing the development of Trinitarian theology throughout the ages, they helpfully show that it has always been a topic of conversation from the time of the Scriptures to the present day. A summary of each of the 43 essays in this massive tome would be cumbersome, and the editors have done a much better job of that than I could anyway, so I will offer a brief overview and some reflective comments on the overall usefulness of this resource.

The volume is divided into seven disproportionate parts. Part 1 contains six chapters on “The Trinity in Scripture” although only four of them are properly devoted to Scripture (Seitz on the OT; Rowe on Paul & Hebrews; Gathercole on the Synoptics & Acts; and Ben Witherington on the Johannine Literature). Khaled Anatolios’ chapter discusses “The Canonization of Scripture,” which isn’t so much about the process of canonization as it is about how the canon determined the contours by which the Church Fathers, namely Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Athanasius, and Augustine formed their theology/apologetic. Mark Edwards’ contribution is geared more toward patristic exegesis but serves to segue into the next section. Part 2 contains four chapters on the “Patristic Witness to the Trinitarian Faith” and spans the Ante-Nicene Fathers to the “Late Patristic Developments in the East,” notably concluding with the Trinity’s relation to the rise of Islam, a subject that deserved treatment in part 7 of the book but unfortunately received none.

Part 3 contains five chapters covering “Medieval Appropriations of the Trinitarian Faith” and offers a nice array of essays that span the particular to the general. For example, Lauge O. Nielsen treats the Trinitarian theology of four theologians in particular: Alcuin, Gottschalk, John Scotus Eriugena, and Anselm of Canterbury, while Russell Friedman more generally treats 13th to 15th century Trinitarian theology. Karl Christian Felmy comprises a nice middle ground between general and particular in discussing the controversies, theology, and major players in “The Development of the Trinity Doctrine in Byzantium.” Part 4 contains nine chapters spanning “The Reformation to the Twentieth Century.” There’s considerable diversity in this section as it covers both Catholic and Protestant Trinitarian theology in the 19th century as well as modern Orthodox thinking; the contributions of major figures like the magisterial Reformers and the top theologians of the last generation (Barth, Rahner, and von Balthasar); and there’s even a foray into the discussions taking place among contemporary analytic philosophers.

Part 5 contains eight chapters on “Trinitarian Dogmatics” that are smartly arranged according to most of the major loci of systematic theology. Kathryn Tanner’s article on “The Trinity as Christian Teaching” serves as something of a prolegomena, while the following four essays comprise the theology proper, dealing with the divine Persons and their names (Te Velde), Patrology (Durand), Christology (Weinandy), and Pneumatology (Marshall), respectively. The remaining essays can be categorized according to theological anthropology (Saarinen), ecclesiology/sacramentology (Morerod), and soteriology (Keating). Part 6 contains seven chapters on a variety of issues pertaining to “The Trinity and Christian Life.” One expects articles on liturgy & preaching (Wainwright), morality (Cessario; Hall), and prayer (Murphy), but chapters on art (Boespflug), feminism (Harrison), and politics (Bauerschmidt) were surprising

though they shouldn't have been—the conciliar debates have shown us how the Trinity and politics impact each other and art is an integral part of all life. Treating feminism seems dated but Harrison, in usual fashion, offers helpful correctives to extremes on both sides of the debate.

Part 7 contains four chapters of “Dialogues.” In two of those chapters (Fergusson and D’Costa respectively) the doctrine of the Trinity is set as the point of reference for ecumenical dialogue and advancement among the major branches of the Christian church, as well as the guiding principle, along with the mysteries of the Church and kingdom, for our engagement with and understanding of non-Christian religions. Charry discusses the respective Jewish and Christian doctrines of God through examples of Jewish-Christian dialogues throughout history, being careful not to frame the issue so as to give preference to the Trinity and thus eliminate true dialogue. I have to admit confusion over exactly what Rowland contributed; I simply couldn't understand it. This volume is rounded out with a concluding chapter from the editors on the prospects of Trinitarian theology followed by a general index that combines cited authors and subjects.

Not since the 1999 volume *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* have I seen such a diverse collection of essays from such an esteemed group of contributors. But in addition to having a stellar lineup, this volume is surprisingly accessible, and geared toward those eager to learn (as evidenced in the suggested reading lists and bibliographies at the end of each chapter). I expected quite a bit of technical discussion, and it's there to be sure, but I'd have no problem directing beginning students to parts 1 & 2 of this volume in order to get their bearings in the field. Now I will admit that as one advances through the chapters they'll notice that the reading gets tougher, but I think that's reflective of the shifts in Trinitarian theology from the Bible to the modern age, with the biblical faith and witness veering more toward lucidity and modern reflections being somewhat muddled (as seen, e.g., in my utter confusion over what exactly Rowland was saying).

There were a number of standout essays, notably Christopher Seitz on “The Trinity in the Old Testament” in which he persuasively argues that the “literal sense” of the Old Testament points to the Trinity more than simply mining for “threesomes” in the text ever could. He also helpfully (and rightfully) highlights the rigorous exegesis of the Church Fathers in their debates and doctrinal formulations. Had the Trinity not been in the Old Testament then one wonders how patristic exegesis yielded so robust a doctrine. It's unfortunate that Seitz's was the lone essay on this topic. George Hunsinger's “Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity, and Some Protestant Doctrines After Barth” is about as good of an introduction to Barth's Trinitarianism as one could

hope for in less than twenty pages. I only wish he had more space to expand his appropriately critical comments on Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Jüngel, all of whom he finds at odds with both Barth and Rahner in some form or other.

But for as satisfied as I am with this volume I will admit to being a bit greedy. I would have liked to have seen the “Dialogues” section beefed up with a chapter on the Trinity and Islam (as we find in the recently published *Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* with David B. Burrell’s chapter “Trinity in Judaism and Islam”). I also found myself wishing that there was a standalone chapter on the *filioque*, one that addressed its history and theology. As it stands, Bruce Marshall devoted a few pages (405-10) to it in his chapter on “Trinitarian Pneumatology,” and David Fergusson gives it just over a page (550-51) in his chapter on “Ecumenism and the Doctrine of the Trinity Today,” but there’s no real sustained engagement with the doctrine. And while I’m wishing for more (in a massive 600+ page volume mind you!), I would have appreciated a bit more with regard to the Trinity in analytic philosophy. There’s a lot going on in that field and one short essay doesn’t quite capture the gist of it.

While I’m nitpicking allow me to lodge an aesthetic complaint or two. I was irked by the inconsistent use of transliterated and untransliterated Greek throughout the volume. Surely this is something that should have been caught in the editorial process and given some kind of uniformity before it went to publication. And the recommended reading at the end of each chapter lacks uniformity as well. Under the heading of “Suggested Reading” in many chapters we read, “The following are recommended,” followed by the authors’ names and the year of publication in parentheses (see, e.g., 26, 67, 265). Then we find those recommended volumes in the subsequent bibliography. Some chapters omit the “The following are recommended” introduction to the list (see, e.g., 413, 470). Other chapters simply have a bibliography under the heading “Suggested Reading” (see, e.g., 279) while others annotate their “Suggested Reading” (see, e.g., 122, 136). As silly as it sounds, things like this actually hinder the reading process, at least for readers such as me.

These wishes and aesthetic gripes aside, I’d heartily recommend this volume to anyone who can get past the prohibitive price tag and procure a copy. In a perfect world it would be re-released as an affordable paperback and put into the hands of every student of Trinitarian theology.