



Hunt, Anne.

The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics

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Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Anne Hunt is Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy at Australian Catholic University. Avid students of Trinitarian theology are undoubtedly aware of Hunt's various contributions to the field in her books *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*, *What Are They Saying About the Trinity?* and *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery*. She has also authored a number of articles in journals such as *Irish Theological Quarterly*, *Pacifica*, and *Theological Studies*. Those less familiar with Hunt might not be aware that she is one of the more unique voices writing in the field.

Hunt is well versed in patristic and medieval trinitarian theology (especially from the Western tradition) and she's keenly aware of the goings on in contemporary theology as evidenced by her previous publications. She's written on well known names like Augustine, Aquinas, and Rahner. She's written on contemporary issues like liberation, feminist, and ecological theology as it relates to the Trinity. In other words, she's done what many of her peers have done, but what has set her apart, at least in my mind, is the manner in which she always interacted with the theology of individuals that don't get as much attention in the secondary literature on the Trinity.

The present volume is an extended example of this practice. Hunt is all too aware that "theology, by and large, has not probed Christian mysticism as a rich stream of data for the understanding

of the Christian faith” (viii) and with this in mind she has decided to examine the contributions of eight Christian mystics to the contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity. She has chosen four men (William of St. Thierry, Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross) and four women (Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, and Elizabeth of the Trinity) as her subjects.

This is a diverse bunch to be sure. They span a period of time from the 11th to the 20th century and thus have different historical contexts; their writings fit into varying genres; and Hunt breaks them into three different “styles of theology, which can be broadly classified as monastic, scholastic, and vernacular.” (xi) But for all their diversity the chosen authors share the Western theological tradition in common and are English or European. Hunt hopes that this study can lead into further study of mystics from the first few Christian centuries along with mystics from the Eastern tradition.

The chapters (one per mystic) proceed in chronological order. They all follow the same format in which Hunt introduces the theologian before offering background on his or her life and times. From here Hunt proceeds to outline some of the more significant writings of each theologian and then she moves on to discuss their particular insights into the mystery of the Trinity. This is followed by a brief summary conclusion and a list of reference (the primary sources) and further reading (secondary literature) material. While this book can be read from beginning to end it is set up as a reference work. Jumping from chapter to chapter will benefit the reader just as much as if they had read straight through.

It would be impossible for me to critique Hunt’s handling of the primary literature since I’m almost completely ignorant of it. I’m not well in the writings or theology of any of the mystics covered in this volume. Aside from having read a little Bonaventure (*Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*) and having seen some of these theologians referenced in other writings, I’m largely unaware of their contributions and must rely on Hunt for my present knowledge. But on those terms Hunt has done a wonderful job in introducing these mystics to me in an easy to understand manner.

I now know that William of St. Thierry emphasized the Holy Spirit to the point that I’d be comfortable calling him a “third article” theologian. I can now say that according to what I’ve read, Julian of Norwich had some good insights on the perichoretic relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but perhaps she focused on God’s love to the exclusion of his other attributes, such as his justice. Her mantra that “all will be well” is true enough in and of itself, but

how she fleshed this out in coming close to something like universalism is highly debatable. Teresa of Avila's thoughts on union with God reminded me of Wesley's understanding of entire sanctification, especially as it pertained to service to God. For example, Hunt says that:

[T]his awareness of the presence of the trinitarian indwelling leads the blessed souls not away from the world but outwards and to service. It brings with it not only an intellectual clarity regarding this divine company but also a clarity in regard to "everything pertaining to the service of God." The soul is now more focused on and more occupied with God's will, and God's will, Teresa is very clear, is always the life of practical charity in community. (135)

If Hunt's task was to give some attention to a neglected corpus of material then she has certainly succeeded. If her task was to introduce readers to theologians they might have otherwise overlooked then she has accomplished this as well. If her goal was to whet the appetite in hopes of further studies covering more ground then there can be little doubt that her goal was met. I've always enjoyed reading Hunt's work and this time has been no different. I look forward to her continued contributions and it is my sincere prayer that one day in the not-too-distant future she is able to expand to cover some earlier theologians (especially those from the Christian East).