

2009

Book review: "The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition" by Neil Ormerod

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Repository Citation

Dallavalle, Nancy, "Book review: "The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition" by Neil Ormerod" (2009). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. 78.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/religiousstudies-facultypubs/78>

Published Citation

Dallavalle, Nancy. (2009). Book review: "The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition. By Neil Ormerod. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press" *Horizons* 36 (2), pp. 357-358.

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Molnar's argues that the given of Christian theology is God's ultimate independence, freedom, and unchangability. It is the Scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ, this independent God incarnate, that attest to these divine attributes. Molnar's 2007 Christology book *Incarnation and Resurrection* further supports his devotion to a Christology from above. His primary argument, in both texts, is more methodological than substantive. His criticism is not primarily of what theologians say but their means of argument.

Much of modern systematic theology has taken its starting point as the human experience of God in the world. This can be communicated in a myriad of ways, but transcendental theologians, feminist theologians, liberationists, and pluralists begin their examination into God's triune nature from the human experience of the economic Trinity. Molnar argues that the starting point must be faith in Jesus Christ as God incarnate—not as a human revealer. Beginning one's theology with the economic Trinity makes God dependent upon humanity—Creator needing creation. Molnar argues that the doctrine of the immanent Trinity must be protected if Christian theology is to respect the significance of Christ.

This book is well researched and demonstrates a precision in writing and analysis. Molnar takes seriously his interlocutors of Rahner, Moltmann, McFague, LaCugna, Kaufman, Johnson and others. This seriousness does not, however, equate with agreement with them. Molnar rejects all of these approaches as Ebionite, Docetic, pantheistic, or agnostic. It is rare to have such well respected theologians deemed heretical. The strength of his argument may be lost in the vociferous manner in which he criticizes others.

This text deserves attention from those interested in contemporary trinitarian theology. Its argument represents an important contribution to this theology although Molnar addresses specialists more than generalists. The voice of Karl Barth, who argued so strongly for the disclosive nature of Jesus Christ and the independence of God, is still being heard in contemporary theology.

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BRIAN M. DOYLE

The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition. By Neil Ormerod. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005. 175 pages. \$20.00 (paper).

This volume is the fruit of a sustained engagement with some recent questions in trinitarian theology, an engagement that responds particularly to Roman Catholic theologians formed by the work of Karl Rahner. Drawing on four already-published articles, Neil Ormerod brings forward what he finds to be a problematic framework for trinitarian theology, one that mistakenly jettisons the "permanent achievement" of the Western tradition, particularly as that tradition is grounded in the work of Augustine and, to a lesser extent, Aquinas.

Challenging the work of Rahnerians, particularly Catherine Mowrey LaCugna and Roger Haight, Ormerod (in company with fellow Lonergan scholar Robert Doran) charges that these theologians tend to use the legacy of Aquinas as an interesting collection of resonant fragments rather than as a systematic and compelling whole. Similarly, von Balthasar's use of allegory rather than

analogy reduces trinitarian theology to “just another religious mythology” (29), while Moltmann’s social approach places “person over substance” and seems to be driven by ecclesiological concerns that misread the notion of person. (Indeed, Ormerod’s alarm about the contemporary tendency to move directly from trinitarian theology to ecclesiological application is welcome.)

Ormerod’s charting of the “realms of meaning” (Lonergan) in Augustine’s work serves his primary thesis, which is that current work in trinitarian theology does not allow for the kind of differentiation necessary to allow for a real understanding of the doctrine, and particularly of the *filioque* added to the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. Augustine’s psychological analogy, on the other hand, makes an interior appropriation possible without collapsing it into other kinds of knowing.

Further, Ormerod rightly notes the difference between a model and an analogy, arguing that the realism of the latter sets it apart from the epistemological distance implied in the word “model.” Yet, in dealing with trinitarian theology in particular—as opposed to Christology, for example—one might ask if the model/analogy distinction can be made as readily as in the latter case, even for those who might use realism in other cases. While Ormerod might meet such a reservation with a charge of fideism, one could ask whether his insistence on differentiation could also extend to the different kind of claim that the doctrine of the Trinity represents.

Ormerod’s survey of many currently writing in the area of trinitarian theology (including Wolfhart Pannenberg, Colin Gunton, and Walter Kasper) is helpful, allowing the informed reader to argue along with him (this is less true with his approach to von Balthasar). Yet it is his incisive criticism of what he finds to be the neuralgic points in the Rahnerian legacy (including Rahner’s disregard for the *filioque*) that serves as the organizing principle here, with Augustine, retrieved through Lonergan’s systematic lens, proposed as the antidote.

For graduate students and scholars, Ormerod’s critical response to some widely accepted currents in trinitarian theology will re-cast what might seem to be an overly-familiar conversation. Ormerod suggests that his own work needs extension, and promises as much at the end of this study, which is itself now a necessary dialogue partner for current trinitarian theology. I look forward to the work to come.

Fairfield University

NANCY DALLAVALLE

A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church. By Franz Dünzel. Translated by John Bowden. New York: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2007. ix + 148 pages. \$21.95 (paper).

Usually treatments of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity begin from the standpoint of contemporary orthodoxy and attempt to show, often in a disguised manner, a trajectory from the Bible to the present, discounting all heresies. Dünzel takes a different approach. He considers seriously the attempts of all participants in the trinitarian conversations from the New Testament to