

has also provided a valuable resource for the experienced teacher who is able to supplement the helpful outline provided in this work.

Ryan Meyer
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Allen Park, MI

The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship. Revised and Expanded edition, by Robert Letham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019. xl + 650 pp. \$22.50.

In this expanded second edition of his magisterial work, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, Robert Letham highlights once again the foundational importance of the historic, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity by way of masterful biblical exegesis, thorough historical analysis, and ample application for the church's ministry and worship. However, this time, Letham includes new sections that incorporate the latest research in Augustine and Barth studies. He moreover addresses current evangelical discussions regarding the Trinity, especially as they relate to subordinationism. The underlying thesis of this work is the necessity of listening intently to those who have contributed substantially to the development of the church's understanding of the Triune God. Divided into four main sections, the book covers the biblical basis for the doctrine, its historical developments, modern-day discussions, and critical issues ranging from the relationship between the Trinity and the Incarnation to the place of the Trinity in worship and missions.

In the first section, Letham traces the biblical background for the Trinity throughout the Old and New Testaments. In a rather extensive footnote, Letham justifies the older Christian practice of starting with the Old Testament in discerning a biblical doctrine of the Trinity rather than starting with the New Testament and reading it back into the Old as Fred Sanders and other scholars suggest. Also with respect to the Old Testament, Letham, again over and against the objection of Sanders, tentatively allows for the identification of various appearances of God as either theophanies or Christophanies, arguing that doing so would not necessarily undermine the Incarnation. With respect to the New Testament, the author engages in detailed exegesis of various Johannine and Pauline passages to argue for the Son's equality with the Father as well as his pre-existence as the Son. This matter of the Son's pre-existence is of particular significance in that Letham on exegetical grounds challenges the scholarly consensus that it was a later development in New Testament Christology. In this regard, the author argues that earlier New Testament writings, like those of Paul affirm the Son's pre-existence. Elsewhere in this first section, Letham makes a very convincing case that passages regarded as largely "binitarian" strongly imply Trinitarian relations.

The second section on the historical development of Trinitarian doctrine is unsurprisingly the longest one. One of the major strengths of this section is its clarity in explaining complex, abstract concepts. This section alone makes the volume an invaluable resource as it constitutes a helpful compendium on the development of Trinitarian theology from the post-apostolic period to the post-Reformation era. While space prohibits an exhaustive review of this section's contents, several features warrant attention. In addition to trenchant discussions of Athanasius and the Cappadocians (chaps. 6 and 7 respectively), is a detailed analysis of both the text and theology of Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed which came out of the Council of Constantinople in 381 (chap. 8).

Probably one of the most noteworthy features of this chapter is the subdivision on the "Constitutive Elements of the Trinitarian Settlement" in which Letham outlines the parameters of Trinitarian doctrine defined by the Creed that are absolutely essential: one being, three persons; consubstantiality, which is the fact that all three persons "are of one substance, of the identical being" (190), meaning that there is one being of God which all three Persons equally share; indivisible will and inseparable operations of all three Persons within the Godhead; perichoresis (the mutual indwelling of all three Persons in the being of God); eternal generation of the Son and eternal procession of the Spirit; and *taxis*, the necessary order of relations within the Trinity: "from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit" (201). Most interesting in this regard is the author's inclusion of the last two, the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit as well as the order of relations as essential elements of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine. In this regard, Letham makes a very detailed exegetical case for eternal generation and procession. Two other invaluable chapters in this historical section discuss in detail Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity (chap. 9) as well as John Calvin's (chap. 12). In chapter 9, the author largely defends the bishop of Hippo's doctrine against the late Colin Gunton's charge that it encouraged alleged modalistic tendencies in the general Trinitarian doctrine of the West. In chapter 12, he calls attention to Calvin's emphasis on the three distinct Persons within the Trinity, as opposed to Thomas Aquinas' emphasis on the unity of God, which he, in the author's opinion, unduly disjoined from the three Persons. This stress on the absolute equality of the three Persons in which the reformer understood their distinctions to be relational, served as the basis for his view of the Son being *autotheos* ("God of himself").

The third section of the work deals with the contributions made to Trinitarian theology in twentieth century by Karl Barth (the subject of chapter 13), Karl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg (chap. 14), various Eastern Orthodox thinkers (chap. 15), and T. F. Torrance (chap. 16). Significantly, Letham addresses the question as to whether Barth's Trinitarian theology is modalistic. In this regard, while Letham acknowledges that Barth strongly rejected modalism, he nevertheless argues that the Swiss theologian's rejection of the traditional word, *person*, in favor of "revealer, revelation, and revealedness" to refer

to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively implies a unipersonality in God that would lend itself to modalism.

The fourth and last section concerns critical issues such as the relationship between the Trinity and the Incarnation as well as worship, prayer, and missions. One of the most compelling chapters in this section has to do with “the Trinity and Persons” (chap. 20). Drawing from Scriptural exegesis as well as historical resources from the Patristic through post-Reformation periods, Letham powerfully demonstrates how the Trinity serves as the necessary basis for the ultimate goal of Christian salvation which is the believer’s union with God, or in other words, the sharing in the love that is constantly shared among the Persons within the Trinity. This, in turn, Letham alleges, fundamentally determines how we treat people who bear the image of this Triune God.

The Holy Trinity is a more valuable work now than when it was first published. It is clearly written and masterfully demonstrates the necessarily complementary relationship between biblical exegesis, historical, systematic, and practical theology. Letham throughout shows how the Trinity is absolutely foundational not only to Christian doctrine, but to Christian life as well. It is an invaluable resource for seminary level classes in theology proper as well as theologically serious pastors and laypeople who are interested in restoring the Trinity to its necessarily central role in preaching, teaching, worship, and ministry. *The Holy Trinity* is indeed an outstanding gift to both the Christian academy and the Church.

Andre A. Gazal

Montana Bible College, Bozeman, MT

The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God, by Vern S. Poythress. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020. xxx + 688 pp. \$49.99.

For the better part of the past two decades, evangelicals have debated the nature of the absoluteness of God, particularly what it means to say that God is impassible. At times, the controversy has been rancorous; accusations of heresy have split at least one denomination. Both sides reject process theology and open theism, in which God is entirely absorbed into the flux of the finite world. But the classical theists (James Dolezal most prominent among them) have argued that many otherwise conservative theologians have nonetheless compromised the absolute nature of God.

Vern Poythress makes it clear that *The Mystery of the Trinity* addresses the present controversy, particularly in the appendices (three of which are entitled “Issues in the Controversy,” “Suggestions for Classical Christian Theists,” and “Suggestions for Christian Personalists”). Yet his ambitions for this book are broader; it is not intended solely as a