

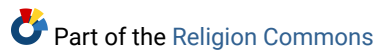
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Book Review: The God Who is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God (Allan Coppedge)

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Book Review

Glenn Morrison, *The Heythrop Journal* 52:5 (Sept, 2011): 830-831.

The God Who is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God. By Allan Coppedge. Pp. 345, IVP Academic 2007.

There are a multitude of approaches to Trinitarian Theology. In the Catholic theological tradition, the Bible is the soul of theology, and philosophy, spirituality and ecclesiology form essential foundations. In contrast, the evangelical tradition holds the Bible as both the soul and foundation of the theological imagination. Following in this latter tradition, Coppedge's book on the Trinity provides a new and systematic approach to developing a biblical theology of the Trinity. The approach is new because of its systematic and comprehensive method of drawing out, integrating and developing Old Testament and New Testament data: images, indicators, analogies, attributes, aspects, differences, approaches, issues, questions, roles, metaphors, portraits, triadic forms and identities. The aim here is to utilise the data to emphasise the threeness of the Trinity, and hence exemplify specifically how both testaments relate the divine persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At times, the reader may find that the pastoral, spiritual and missional zeal of the evangelical approach produces a strong scent of supersessionism or eisegetical hegemony. Coppedge's frequent analyses of importing the Old Testament data upon the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and emphatic statements like, 'Christians have more information about how God works', together aid to fuel the position that Christians 'more fully' understand Judaism's monotheism, namely that God (Adonai) has a

threefold character. Given that one of the aims of the author's book on the Trinity is to renew ecumenical dialogue by way of theology, any attempts at 'wider ecumenism' (inter-faith dialogue) could well be catastrophic. In terms of ecumenism between Christian denominations, there are several unsubstantiated and perhaps, intemperate, statements throughout the book that do not foster sensitivity, for example, concluding or rather judging, that the role of Trinity in the teaching structure of the Catholic Church is diminished because there is less emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit. As a result, people relate to God personally in a more general way. Another example, in the context of discussing God's fatherhood, Coppedge dismisses the elevation of Mary as the Mother of God 'in some parts of the church' because 'the Bible will have none of it'. Again such comments should have been left out, the better to focus on perhaps, the feminine in God, such as by way of developing theologically the sense of 'rachamim' (Heb. mercy) and its derivation from the word, rechem' (Heb. womb). In this way, we could conceive that the Son's maternity within God gestates compassionate love in the world.

I want to suggest that my concerns here illustrate the danger of onto-theology, whether or not the approach is for the most part a biblical one. It is nearly impossible to do theology without falling into ontological thematisations, judgments and proofs. Any explanation about the being of God, including metaphors, analogies, roles and attributes, must draw from ontological language. Coppedge's search in the scriptures for examples of God's triadic essence, existence and reality, results in ontological statements about God. However each statement, although indicating a truth of divine being, may easily be confused for personal experience or the interest of human being. For example, when Coppedge interprets the statement, 'God is good' as a

‘metaphorical analogy’ and as ‘literally true’, he is using the language of onto-theology to explain the mystery of God. However, in the language of alterity, the statement, ‘God is Good’ is not a metaphorical analogy and nor is it something to be contained in consciousness. The statement is a truth otherwise than being, and perhaps more acutely discovered through the diachrony of otherness, that is to say, by way coming to responsibility through time. In Christian theological terms, articulating that ‘God is good’ demands a Trinitarian praxis, that is to say, a paschal life where the Spirit veils and unveils the good truth of the Father’s will.

In spite of the chasm that I have opened up between the author’s approach and my concerns, Coppedge’s biblical exploration on the Trinity is a profound compendium uniting biblical data with the triadic nature of God. Overall, the book, written in good faith, produces a number of insightful pastoral and spiritual explorations of the Trinity that may help Christians on the quest for discovering Jesus as the starting point for the tri-personal God. Of particular value to this aim is Coppedge’s treatment on how God works through human choice in and through creation.