



Volf, Miroslav and Michael Welker, eds.

God's Life in Trinity

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God's Life in Trinity and its German counter-part *Der lebendige Gott als Trinität* (Gütersloher, 2006) are two volumes of a *Festschrift* in honor of Jürgen Moltmann. In this, the English volume, scholars from all over the world submitted essays in honor of this theological giant. With 18 essays in all, each ranging from 10-20 pages, there is something for everyone.

As a volume in honor of Moltmann I think *God's Life in Trinity* succeeds, but as a volume on Moltmann's Trinitarian theology I believe that it falls short in some areas. For example, William Schweiker's essay "The Spirit of Life and the Reverence for Life" (22-32) doesn't engage Moltmann's Trinitarianism at all, instead he engages Moltmann's (and Albert Schweitzer's) ethics for the reverence of life, which is fascinating in its own right, but seems out of place in such a volume. Likewise, John Polkinghorne's essay "Jürgen Moltmann's Engagement with the Natural Sciences" (61-70) does well to honor Moltmann, and admittedly, addresses Moltmann's Trinitarianism more than Schweiker's essay, but it still is not focused upon Moltmann's Trinitarian theology.

But there were some exceptional essays in this volume that I think both honored Moltmann and fit with the idea that the title of this book puts into one's mind. Miroslav Volf's introductory essay "Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity" was a wonderful, but much too brief, look at the "Social" model of the Trinity. He does well to note what he calls a "rather obvious fact," that being: "[e]ach model [i.e., social & psychological] is inadequate to the extent to which it fails to accommodate the truth of the other." (5) For Volf it is important to begin with the operations ad extra (i.e., the economic Trinity) and allow that to shape our theology of the immanent Trinity, but he does acknowledge that through his revelation, God has revealed certain things about the immanent Trinity. Volf views the Trinity in this way:

The one God is a communion of three persons in that each dwells in the others and is indwelled by them. Because the Godhead is a perfect

communion of love, divine persons exchange gifts--the gifts of themselves and the gift of the others' glorification. The inverse is also true: Because they exchange such gifts, they are called a divine communion of love. So it is in God's eternal life, apart from God's relation to the world. (11)

Volf sees this relationship of exchanging gifts as a model by which people are to interact with one another.

Another highlight of this volume was Sarah A. Coakley's essay "The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered." In this essay she truly honored Moltmann and his wife Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, by being critical of Moltmann's thought concerning gender and God. In short, Coakley notes the difficulty in nailing down terms like "gender," "sex," "sexuality," "masculine," and "feminine" across various cultural lines. She states her lack of conviction that Moltmann has given "*precise analytic account of the relation of [these] terms...*" (135). She's highly critical of Moltmann's claim that there is "transsexuality" or "bisexuality" in God because it is still under-girded by a secular understanding of the "gender binary." Coakley's solution to this problem is sketched out in her saying:

If we think of the Trinity, then, not as a set of perfect mutual relations into which the (known) gender binary somehow has been interposed in a cleansed form, but rather as an irreducible threeness, that always refuses a mere mutuality of two, then we reemphasize the importance of the Spirit precisely as Moltmann has always urged, yet with a significantly different theological outcome for gender. Here we do not allocate the binary of "masculinity" and "femininity" to different "persons," or even to their relation, but instead step into a circle of divine desire . . . which is necessarily beyond our comprehension and categorization, but is drawing us by degrees into the "likeness" of the "Son." (140)

The last essay I wish to comment on is Gerald O'Collins' "John Donne on the Trinity," as this was perhaps the most Trinitarian essay in the entire book in my opinion. O'Collins examines three poems from the 16th-17th century English writer John Donne, drawing his Trinitarian theology from them. For Donne the Trinity was a necessity, not just as a tenet of faith, but a means of sustenance. He recognized how integral the Trinity was to his life in a way that very few ever realize. O'Collins says:

...Donne certainly does not rationally reduce trinitarian faith to little more than a theological puzzle for experts--a development that encouraged Immanuel Kant to state in *Conflict of the Faculties*, "The doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has *no practical relevance at all*, even if we think we understand it; and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts. Whether we are to worship three or ten persons in the Deity makes no difference." In his struggle with weakness and sin, Donne found the "three-personed God" highly relevant; in fact, the Trinity "for us" (*pro nobis*, in traditional theology, the economic Trinity) is our only possible hope of salvation. (204)

O'Collins concludes his essay by noting that while Donne didn't anticipate a Trinitarianism at all akin to Moltmann's (i.e., a social model), both men write about the Trinity with "*an intense conviction that nothing matters more than the Trinity in the distinctively Christian adventure to which they both witness.*" (210)

Over all, I highly enjoyed this volume. As I originally said, I think that as a *Festschrift* it certainly succeeded, and while there were a couple of essays that weren't really about the Trinity, the overall tone of the book was. The end notes however were bothersome, as usual, especially since in such short essays they wouldn't have been too cumbersome as footnotes. There is a five-page index to make for easy referencing, but no bibliography outside of the end notes. I recommend this work to anyone who is interested in seeing Moltmann's Trinitarian theology being engaged by competent scholars, as well as anyone who is interested in social Trinitarianism.