

endangered, much as were later slaves by their illegal, secret services of worship. 1 Corinthians 14:24 indicates that outsiders are likely to observe early Christian gatherings—and perhaps even to hear Paul’s letters.

Revelation’s powerful symbolism has played an important role in African-American churches. Opposition to the culture of imperial domination by first-century Christians supports similar resistance to political and socioeconomic repression in the present. Blount carefully avoids taking martyrdom as the ideal presented by Revelation. Rather, suffering and martyrdom are consequences of faithful witness in a hostile world. He draws a similar conclusion about Mark’s Gospel. The common opinion that Mark’s view of discipleship is part of a theology of the cross mistakes the result of the boundary-breaking emergence of God’s rule for the purpose of Christ’s death. In Mark, Christ does not die as a sacrifice for sin.

Although Blount presents his conclusions as readings from a particular perspective, not from universal principles, his discussion of sin and suffering in Mark requires rethinking exegesis of that Gospel by scholars generally, whatever their perspective. This clear, thoughtful treatment should not be confined to “African-American studies.” The analogies between African-American experiences and those of first-century Christians make the hermeneutics of liberating transformation fundamental to any Christian’s attempt to hear God’s word anew in the twenty-first century.

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Deus Trinitas:
The Doctrine of the Triune God

By David Coffey

Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999. 196 pp. \$35.00.

The Triune Creator:
A Historical and Systematic Study

By Colin Gunton

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998. 246 pp. \$25.00.

If anyone has written prolifically enough on the Trinity to declare with some credibility that the subject is temporarily overexploited and in need of a moratorium, it would be one of these two prolific authors. Both are mature theologians who already have made major contributions to this

field. Far from considering the topic depleted, each demonstrates in his own way that trinitarian theology is an apparently inexhaustible source of further insights.

David Coffey is a Roman Catholic thinker who combines profound respect for traditional formulations with an independence of judgment that sometimes verges on idiosyncratic. In *Deus Trinitas*, he undertakes a career-capping synthesis of his previous investigations and maps the direction in which he believes trinitarian theology must move if it is to continue thriving. Every chapter is teeming with provocative ideas, but two proposals from the early chapters are characteristic.

First, Coffey proposes a methodological refinement. He agrees with the regnant scholarly consensus that scripture knows nothing of an ontological Trinity, even arguing the more extreme position that at no stage of New Testament theology does one find the actual preexistence of Christ. Coffey objects, however, to the normal conclusion drawn from this: The New Testament is concerned, therefore, with the economic Trinity. He insists that we should call the New Testament's presentation of the Trinity simply that—the biblical Trinity. The tradition soon develops the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, and only then can we properly say that theology returns to the New Testament to construct a doctrine of the economic Trinity, because the economic Trinity presupposes both the biblical and immanent Trinity. Devotees of Bernard Lonergan's theory of knowledge will recognize the pattern at work here: The mind apprehends data (the biblical Trinity), achieves understanding (the immanent Trinity), and then returns to the data to seek confirmation (the economic Trinity).

On this basis, Coffey makes his second proposal: Very different models of the immanent Trinity can be developed from the distinct New Testament witnesses. Johannine theology yields a "procession" model that reads backward into the eternal Trinity from the Father's sending of the Son and Spirit. The Synoptic Gospels, however, underwrite a "return" model of the Trinity, narrating the journey of the Spirit-anointed Jesus back to the Father. These two models are complementary, not contradictory. The history of doctrine, however, has been dominated by the procession schema rather than the return model, which is more comprehensive and more capable of integrating all relevant data. Coffey's main plea, then, is that the procession model should be put into its proper place, folded into a longer trajectory. Whatever one thinks of Coffey's particular readings of New Testament theologies (and, though well documented, they are certainly open to challenge), he has pushed hard to make trinitarian theology accountable to a broader range of biblical evidence; the very fact that his systematic theology stands or falls largely on the basis of whether he reads scripture rightly is surely a gain. This is a book that repays scrutiny, especially as Coffey goes on in the later chapters to bring his work into dialogue with a number of recent developments in theology.

While Coffey's work digs deeper into the doctrine of the Trinity proper, Colin Gunton's *The Triune Creator* instead shows how trinitarian theology can enrich other doctrinal *loci*. In fact, argues Gunton, theologians have all

but evacuated the doctrine of creation of its special Christian content by ignoring the implications of the confession that the God who creates is the God who is triune. As in all of his work, Gunton here develops his constructive arguments in dialogue with historical theology, and as usual he is especially concerned to diagnose those points where the tradition has failed to do justice to revelation. He sees the mixed Platonism of the church fathers, especially Augustine, as the culprit behind creation theology's besetting, opposite errors: conceiving the world as a nearly divine emanation from God on the one hand, and denigrating matter and seeking redemption through escape from the created order on the other.

Though Gunton admits that this analysis gives his argument a Harnackian ring, he (unlike Harnack) is equally critical of the distortions introduced by Enlightenment conceptions, in particular the trinitarian timidity that led modern theology to solve all its distinctive problems without recourse to christology and pneumatology. Not content to assign blame, Gunton is also concerned to highlight successes in the history of doctrine and to bring those resources to bear on current needs. From Irenaeus to Barth, Gunton finds thinkers to recommend as allies in constructing an adequate Christian account of creation.

The Triune Creator is a somewhat rambling work, organized oddly and ranging from ontology to ethics. What it lacks in focus, however, it compensates for in scope and suggestiveness. Two of Gunton's arguments will suffice to give a sense of the kinds of ideas put forth in the work. First, Gunton insists that the distinctively Christian idea of creation is just that—distinctive. As a piece of theology based on divine revelation rather than on general cosmological speculations, it "says things that have not been said elsewhere." Much of the historical section of the book is provided to support Gunton's claim that "the Christian doctrine of creation has suffered much from being considered simply one instance of a general belief in creation." Gunton's other major argument is that the conceptual equipment most needed for an adequately Christian account of creation is the notion of trinitarian mediation, or a way of conceiving God's immediacy to creation through mediators who are themselves fully divine. Harking back to Irenaeus, Gunton argues that "because the Son and the Spirit are God, to create by means of his two hands means that God is himself creating. This is accordingly a theology of mediation which breaks through Hellenic doctrines of degrees of being." Trinitarianism, explicated in a robust christology and pneumatology, secures the distinction between creator and creature without infringing on either side.

These two works by major trinitarian theologians are very different in many ways, but together they represent the state of the art in this field. Fluent in the history of this oldest official Christian doctrine, both books seek to be judged by how well they function as interpretations of scripture. Both works are concerned to make trinitarianism a central idea that controls the entire field of systematic theology. Finally, it is worth noting that both books contain arguments for the necessity of acknowledging the immanent Trinity, rejecting as shortsighted and naïve the recent tendency

in much theology toward reducing this field of doctrine to a merely economic Trinity. In so doing, they move beyond that recent discussion to pursue fruitful research along more traditional lines.

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Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide

By J. P. Fokkelman

Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2001. 243 pp. \$24.95.

J. P. Fokkelman has written a compelling, important introduction to the contours and textures of biblical poetry. Contemporary readers face a dual challenge when it comes to understanding Old Testament or biblical poetry (though, for Fokkelman, biblical poetry *is* Old Testament poetry). First, most people today have almost no experience in reading poetry; we have forgotten—if we ever knew—how to engage with the unique ways in which a poem means. Second, according to Fokkelman, what students of the Bible have learned from traditional scholarship about biblical poetry is largely counterproductive to understanding the poem itself. If Fokkelman's book is an arrow aimed at this dual target, it is very successful in hitting the second, somewhat less successful in reaching the first.

Fokkelman winds his book around two core ideas about biblical poetry: *prosody* (the study of meter, rhythm, and counting in poetry) and *parallelism* (the basic feature of biblical poetry that one poetic line is echoed or extended by a second poetic line). Like the scribe trained for the kingdom who brings out of his treasure what is old and what is new (Matt 13:52), in terms of prosody and parallelism, Fokkelman is both critical of and dependent on previous scholarship. First, with respect to prosody, he believes that the syllable count of poetic lines, strophes, stanzas, and poems was essential to the writing of biblical poetry. Based on theories of syllable count, he argues that biblical poems were constructed in accordance with a rather strict poetic structure consisting of a colon (a poetic line), verses (two or three cola), strophes (two or three verses), and stanzas (usually two or three strophes). In this respect, Fokkelman is countering scholars who argue that meter (counting stressed and unstressed syllables) was more important than syllable count, as well as those who think that Old Testament poets paid little attention to prosody. The singular feature of Fokkelman's analysis is his belief that Old Testament poets very firmly adhered to certain norms of syllable count. While noting that most readers of this "introductory guide" will not be interested in or equipped to engage with the syllable counts of "the original, pre-Masoretic Hebrew from the