



The doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity have always been the centerpiece of Christian orthodoxy and therefore of ongoing historical controversy. This issue features them from the perspective of their continuity, first among the Greek patristic writers and then more broadly in the discipline of historical theology.

A Continuity of Pneumato-incarnational Spirituality

A brief exposition on the deification of man in Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Maximus the Confessor

The Greek patristic spiritual tradition from early on has converged on the doctrine of deification as being the central concept of redemption. Namely, the believers have been enabled to participate in the very life of the Triune God. But before this notion of deification or *theosis* clearly became the dominant model in the third century, Irenaeus had already sketched the outlines of this idea even while he was defending against the Gnostics. In supplying the orthodox explanation for the need of the baptism of Jesus, the Bishop of Lyons articulated the cooperation of the Spirit in the

economy of the incarnate Son for the sake of our salvation.

This pneumatological aspect of redemption integrated into the doctrine of the incarnation was later followed and adapted by Athanasius in his work *Contra Arianos* because he perceived that there is a parallelism between Irenaeus's polemic against the Gnostics and his own battle with the Arians.

In the early part of the sixth and perhaps leading up to the seventh century, we find a similar scenario when the Origenist controversies broke out during the reign of Justinian, and the influence of spiritual guides such as that of Evagrius of Pontus and his systematized teachings on Origenistic spirituality was revived and became widespread among the ascetics in various monasteries.

It is during this time that Maximus the Confessor, a great synthesizer of the fathers before him, attempts to remedy the many questionable doctrines of Origen and salvage some of his insights. But concerning the patristic doctrine of deification as well, one can see in his concise yet comprehensive account of the Christian vision how Maximus demonstrates a clear continuity with Irenaeus doctrine of recapitulation in Christ.

Contrary to the views of Justin and Origen who had not overcome the 'one-and-the-many' problem of Middle Platonism, whereby the mediatorial role of the Logos undermined the full deity of Christ, Irenaeus's account of the economy of salvation provided an alternative explanation. A new manner of life in keeping with the new dispensation had been rehearsed, but is finally ushered in by the incarnation. Therefore, the Spirit's 'anointing' at the baptism of Jesus was brought to bear for the sake of His followers, that is to say, making our human nature accustomed to the life and ministry of the Holy Spirit who will indwell and transform all believers.

Maximus also follows this line of reasoning so that Christ's 'mediatorship' does not entail a *reduced* concept of His divinity for us to commune with the divine. Instead, it expresses divinity in its *fullness*, and even our *empowerment* by which we would be healed and become instrumental for God's intended purpose for all of His creation, but particularly for us to participate in Him in ever-increasing measure.

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Reviews & Annotations

Classical Trinitarian Theology: A Textbook.

Tarmo Toom
New York: T&T Clark, 2007
192 pp.
ISBN: 0-567-02699-X

The Triune God in Godself may well be incomprehensible and ineffable, but the *doctrine* of the Triune God is meant to be understood. Toom did a very good job in providing a textbook for students at all levels in order to help them tackle the Trinitarian debates of the early church that culminated at the ecumenical Council of Constantinople (AD 381).

His own experience of the benefit of making all kinds of charts while reading the patristic texts (44) forms the basis of his didactically justified approach in the book. The textbook is divided into three parts, each one representing a more advanced level. Part 1 is a rough introduction into the most important discussions, definitions, and comparisons concerning the subject. Part 2 covers the largest portion of the book. Because students have to learn the language of the Trinitarian discourse, Toom pays a lot of attention to the use of technical terms. This is extremely helpful, certainly because these terms did not always have the same meaning in each century and sometimes even among different writers in the same period. The rest of Part 2 is based on 3 charts which provide a synoptic overview of the search for Trinitarian orthodoxy throughout the centuries: 1) The first three centuries deal with the initial question of God's unity and plurality; 2) The first half of the 4th century is concerned with the question of the essential sameness and/or distinctness of the three divine persons; and 3) The second half of the fourth century adds the 'new' element of the discussion of the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Part 3 is a helpful resource list for

advanced students to further locate the English and Greek/Latin primary texts of recommended ancient sources on the Trinity.

Everyone knows that any schematic summary of the Trinitarian debates will always have its shortcomings. Toom is well aware of this and often refers to the nuances which should be made in the light of recent scholarship. The references in the text (and bibliography) to scholarship including many primary sources while dealing with a certain theologian or movement makes this book an excellent tool for an instructor to deepen the details interactively with the students.

Toom's awareness of recent scholarship is also seen in his approach towards the categories of orthodoxy and heresy. Many of them make little sense and are misguided according to Toom (45). He remarks, "The pro-Nicene theological spectrum was at least as diverse as the non- or anti-Nicene spectrum" (108). Although this reviewer agrees that there were indeed all kinds of subtle differences and different modes of expression, this does not mean that there was no genuine theological consensus in the Church about the essentials of the Christian faith. If the important soteriological concerns behind the Trinitarian issues were put to the fore, rather than only mentioned casually, one can anticipate a different view from that of Toom. Thus, on the question whether Jesus should be fully God in order to save us, and consequently, in the same sense as the Father is, one does not find so much diversity in the early Church.

In having asserted "it is anachronistic to speak about

Trinitarian orthodoxy before the end of the fourth century" (46) Toom also seems to define, perhaps inadvertently, Trinitarian belief primarily by means of the expressions of the late fourth and beginning of the fifth century. This becomes rather obvious especially in the first part of the book where Toom's own beliefs are explicitly revealed. To say that the three persons cannot be distinguished by *temporal* priority but that the Father has a *causal* priority over the Son and the Spirit is typically of the Cappadocian Fathers (more specifically Gregory of Nazianzen), but this articulation does not necessarily have to be the only orthodox way of expression. In other aspects one can also discern an Augustinian and more Western approach particularly in his choice of expressing the Trinitarian belief. But again, certainly because Part 1 is only introductory, this lack of nuance is justified and probably even inevitable.

In closing, this book qualifies to be used as a textbook in some of the patristic and systematic theology courses. Regarding the interpretation of technical terms one sometimes wishes that it would be translated, for example in Dutch, for those students to grasp the nuances better. Even more, one is wishful that this book will continue in a series. Toom deals with what he calls 'the Trinitarian phase of Christological debates' (1). A textbook concerning the Christological phase of Christological debates will probably be an even greater challenge!

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