Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Feenstra & Plantinga, Jr., TRINITY, INCARNATION, AND ATONEMENT: PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS

Stephen T. Davis

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I am not sure, then, that Hick's interpretation of religion is ultimately persuasive. Nevertheless, this is a rich and rewarding book. It is also an important one. Hick has shown us why we should be concerned with the issue of religious pluralism and proposed a thoughtful solution; future work on the problem will have to take this book into account. I strongly recommend it.

Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays, ed. by **Ronald J. Feenstra** and **Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.** Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989. Pp. xii + 236, $29.95.

STEPHEN T. DAVIS, Claremont McKenna College

This book contains the final versions of the papers from a conference that was held at Marquette University on April 14 - 16, 1988. It was an extraordinary and well-attended gathering of both philosophers and theologians. The aim was to have them communicate with each other on three crucial topics in Christian theology, *viz.*, Trinity, incarnation, and atonement. Those who attended the conference will remember being impressed at the uniformly high quality of the papers, at the energetic discussions they generated, and at the sense that something important was beginning.

I am delighted to report that the book is excellent; it is a must reading for anybody who is interested in the theological topics that are considered—or, indeed, for anybody who is interested in the curious and unexpected recent movement of Christian philosophers writing about theology (about which I will say more later). The editors, both of whom are younger theologians of a Reformed persuasion, are to be commended both for their own fine essays and for the book as a whole.

The philosophers and theologians who contribute to the book are all somewhat traditional or conservative in their approach to the Christian faith. By this I mean: (1) all of them take Christian tradition seriously; in their essays they deal with figures and issues many contemporary theologians ignore; (2) all appear to agree with Neal Plantinga's comment, "Theological theories ought to be drawn and elaborated from Scripture" (p. 23); and (3) all end up affirming (rather than rejecting as outmoded, mythological, or prescientific) at least some traditional theological formulations.

There are three essays on the Trinity: "Social Trinity and Tritheism," by Neal Plantinga of Calvin Theological Seminary; "Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality" by David Brown of Oxford University; and "Trinity and Transcendentals" by Norman Kretzmann of Cornell University. There are noticeable commonalities among the three authors. First, each takes the classical doctrine of the Trinity seriously and tries to make sense of it in a robust and

orthodox sense. Second, each has a firm grasp on the history of trinitarian thinking that is relevant to his argument. An implicit thesis common to the three is that contemporary trinitarian thinking must begin with the history of doctrine; theologians today ought not try to "start over" on their own. Third, each argues with care, precision, and clarity.

Christian orthodoxy says that there are three divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—but only one God or divine substance. The so-called "social analogy" of the Trinity says that there are three personal essences, each of which is wholly God, and each of which is a distinct center of consciousness (that is, of knowledge, love, will, and action). The Godhead, then, is essentially like an extraordinarily tightly-knit community or family. The obvious and persistent criticism of such a view is that it is tritheistic. Plantinga and Brown are both committed to the social theory of the Trinity, and in quite different ways defend it against this charge.

Plantinga tries to answer the objection by making three points. First, there is only one kind essence of divinity, *viz.*, the Godhead itself (which is possessed in its entirety by each of the three persons). Second, there is essential unity of purpose, will, and action among the three divine persons; inter-trinitarian conflict is not only never actual but not possible. Third, the three persons have an ineffable closeness, loyalty, and love for each other that is described in the Eastern theological term *perichoresis*; the members lovingly interpermeate each other; each is "in" both of the others; there is no isolation, secretiveness, or fear of being transparent to each other. The three persons, then, are not three individuals, not three independent or autonomous persons. Plantinga concludes that "social trinitarianism emerges as safely monotheistic. For it shares the general Christian conviction that there is only one Father, only one (general as opposed to personal) divine essence, and only one triune God" (pp. 31 - 32).

Has Plantinga successfully rebutted the charge of tritheism? Perhaps the most pointed way to find out is to ask: Which of his affirmations about the oneness of the Trinity must a tritheist reject? Although I am in sympathy with the social analogy and believe Plantinga has gone a long way toward rehabilitating the theory, it seems to me that work remains to be done. Of course trinitarian orthodoxy is sometimes accused of being tritheist, e.g., by Jews, Sabellians, Socinians, etc. But I do not wish to raise that issue; the question here is whether Plantinga's version of the social analogy is more open to the charge of tritheism than are other, more standard, trinitarian models. And on Plantinga's second and third points it seems that a tritheist could argue: (1) that three quite distinct Gods could achieve complete and even essential unity of purpose; and (2) that three quite distinct Gods could achieve the loving unity described by Plantinga. Accordingly, I believe Plantinga could strengthen his case if he could refute these claims. If he were to do so, he

would have shown, and not just said, that a socially understood triune God is one God.

In his article, Brown is extending and defending a social view of the Trinity that he articulated in his work, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985). He does so through a fascinating examination of the concept of "person." He first argues that in classical times the notion of "person" did not involve self-consciousness, and so naturally led the Cappadocians and others to the social theory of the Trinity. But in modern times, he points out, personhood entails individualism, and so the social theory (which affirms three centers of consciousness in God) seems heretical. Brown's strategy is to call into question this modern, self-reflective notion of "person" and to suggest alternatives.

The most controversial aspect of Brown's argument is his affirmation of consciousness in each of the divine persons (they are aware of themselves as separate agents, as logically distinct individuals) but self-consciousness only in the Trinity itself. He closes his essay by replying to two related objections to this point, one raised by Feenstra and Plantinga, and the other by his commentator at Marquette George Mavrodes. Feenstra and Plantinga ask whether we can properly speak of "persons" at all in the absence of self-consciousness. Brown admits that nowhere in his paper does he rigorously define the term "self-consciousness" (he does suggest it is a form of self-reflectiveness). But he argues that we normally regard consciousness (which is "awareness of oneself as a distinct entity"—p. 70) as sufficient to identify a person. He resists the suggestion that accordingly the three persons of the Trinity are "unreflective," at least in some uncomplimentary senses of that term.

Mavrodes then asks whether the placing of self-consciousness exclusively in the Godhead does not imply (instead of a Trinity) a Quaternity whose members are Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and the Godhead. For surely self-consciousness entails consciousness (even if the reverse does not hold). Brown replies to this suggestion by arguing that "self-consciousness" has several meanings, and that the one he has in mind for the Godhead—something like Hegel's idea of "the perfectly rational society in which the individual amounts simply to one of several modifications of the social whole" (p. 72)—does not entail personhood. The Godhead has no existence in itself but only exists as the three persons. I will leave it to readers of the book to decide for themselves whether Brown has successfully answered these objections.

Kretzmann's essay is an adept and careful analysis of a neglected aspect of Aquinas' theology, *viz.*, his use of transcendental terms—e.g., "being," "one," "true," "good"—in relation to the Trinity. Unlike the constructive essays of Plantinga and Brown, Kretzmann's essay is suggestive and exploratory. Kretzmann hopes that theologians can use Aquinas' discussion to help illuminate the doctrine of the Trinity. I myself believe this is quite possible,

although one slight problem is that Thomas' claim that the four transcendental terms mentioned above neatly divide to cover, respectively, the divine essence, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit seems somewhat strained, even baroque. Nevertheless, my own hope is that Kretzmann will continue the argument on another occasion. We need to hear more from him on this topic.

There are two essays on incarnation: "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate," by Tom Morris of the University of Notre Dame; and "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," by Ron Feenstra of Marquette University. Like Brown's, Morris' contribution to this book continues the train of thought of a previous book, in this case his well-regarded *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1986). Morris tries to show that the notion of incarnation, understood in a full-blooded Chalcedonian way, is both coherent and attractive. He makes skillful use of several distinctions from his book, e.g., individual essence and kind essence; common property and essential property; and merely human and fully human. He criticizes the kenotic approach to christology, and concludes by explaining and defending his own "two-minds view" of the incarnation.

I confess to being an admirer of Morris' work in christology who is still only partially convinced; I wish him well and hope his argument succeeds. I have always been puzzled, however, by Morris' rejection of kenosis as a model for christology. Two of the criticisms of the kenotic notion from *The Logic of God Incarnate* are patiently answered by Feenstra in his essay in the present book, and the one Morris mentions in "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate" amounts to two quotations from ancient Christian sources that tell against kenosis (one from *The Tome of Leo* and the other from Athanasius), as if these texts were unquestionably normative for theologians today. Now orthodox christologists naturally want to do their work much in the spirit of ancient figures and texts such as these, but you surely can't refute kenosis in this simple way. Furthermore, Morris himself seems to me to be an unwitting kenoticist—what his own theory entails that the second person of the Trinity "gave up" or "emptied himself of" in the incarnation was continuous moment-by-moment access to the contents of the divine mind.

Finally, let me point out that both in his book and in the present essay Morris explains the two-minds theory mainly in cognitive terms (i.e., in terms of what, say, the man Jesus knew). I believe the theory will be convincing only if it is able to cover the volitional and emotional aspects of the person as well (as John Hick argues in *Religious Studies,* Dec., 1989). I hope Morris extends his theory along these lines.

Feenstra does a superb job of explaining and defending an approach to the incarnation that is both orthodox and kenotic. He correctly sees that the deepest issue for kenosis concerns God's essential properties. Feenstra chooses to focus mainly on omniscience (opening his view, perhaps, to the

same point about the incompleteness of the theory just mentioned against Morris); what is essential to God, he says, is not omniscience *simpliciter* but rather the more complex property of being omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate.

The most interesting aspect of Feenstra's essay, in my opinion, is his concluding defense of kenosis against the charge that it must deny the continuing humanity of the exalted Christ. He acutely distinguishes between the incarnation (which never ends) and the kenosis (which does come to an end) of the Son of God. In other words, the Second Person of the Trinity will always be God incarnate but was kenotically incarnate only for thirty years or so. Of course this move does open Feenstra to the demand that he explain precisely how incarnation without kenosis is possible. And the problem here is that kenosis is precisely Feenstra's explanation of the incarnation; some other theory is evidently now required. Will he then be pressed in Morris' direction in order to explain the nature of the Second Person's continuing non-kenotic incarnation?

Although naturally I have no objection to the claim that Christ's full humanity continues in his exaltation, my one criticism of Feenstra is that I do not see how affirmation of this claim can be made a requirement of orthodoxy. The question is not: can we think of theological reasons why we might want to affirm the continuing humanity of Christ (which is what Feenstra does in his point (2) on page 147). It is: Why must it be the case that anybody who denies it is heretical or at least unorthodox?

It is true that some theologians recognized by the church as authoritative teachers mention the point; it is also true (as Feenstra points out) that the Chalcedonic definition is mainly written in the present tense (Christ *is*, not *was*, fully human). But there is little biblical support for the claim that the exalted Christ is still fully human, and other than the tense of the verb (surely a frail reed on which to hang a criterion of orthodoxy), the Creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon do not speak to the point at all. Does the ascended Christ in his glory remain embodied (and thus incarnate)? Feenstra points out that Lutheran and Reformed confessions affirm as much. But of course that does not make it so, let alone a requirement of orthodoxy. There may well be sufficient evidence in favor of the continuing humanity of Christ to make it a point that theologians can teach, but I believe there is nowhere near enough unanimity on it either in Scripture or in the Christian tradition to make it a point that must be insisted upon.

There are three essays on atonement: "Aquinas on Atonement," by Phil Quinn of the University of Notre Dame; "Atonement and Justification," by Eleonore Stump of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; and "The Sacrifice and the Sacrifices: From Metaphor to Transcendental?," by Colin Gunton of King's College, London. The essays by Quinn and Stump,

both of which focus on Aquinas' views, are in my judgment two of the finest essays in a volume of outstanding essays.

Quinn carefully explains Aquinas' theory of the atonement, crucially based as it is on the notions of satisfaction and vicarious suffering. He then discusses three objections that might be raised against Aquinas' account: (1) the notion of God ransoming sinners from sufferings justly inflicted on them by the devil seems morally unsavory; (2) Aquinas' claim that satisfaction is completed only by means of faith in Christ or the sacraments of the church seems overly stringent because it excludes from salvation certain folk—infants who die unbaptized, Old Testament heroes (unless one argues implausibly, as Aquinas does, that they had faith in Christ)—who do not seem culpable in their unbelief. (3) The whole notion of vicarious suffering—one person suffering for the sins of another—seems morally unpalatable to us.

Quinn discusses possible ways of replying to these objections or of amending Aquinas' account in order to deflect them. His comments are sensible and thought-provoking. I agree with him that the first point—God, so to speak, deputizing the devil so that the devil justly causes sinners to suffer—is not essential to Aquinas' overall theory of the atonement, and can be excised from it. On the second point too I agree with Quinn's conclusion, viz. that there must be "some way in which Christ's sufficient satisfaction can be applied to those who non-culpably lack faith in him so as to remove their debts of punishment" (p. 171). On the third point, however, I must demur. Quinn finds the whole idea of vicarious suffering alien, morally improbable, and hard to swallow. "Debts of punishment for serious sins," he says, "simply cannot be transferred from one person to another" (pp. 172-173). And in the moral realm, Quinn is surely correct. It does not make sense that Quinn should suffer for my sins, or me for his. But it does not follow from this, I think, that the Son of God cannot suffer for both my sins and Quinn's. Perhaps vicarious suffering works in this one case. Or at least, so I believe it could be argued.

Eleonore Stump is interested in a perplexing theological problem—the relationship between two apparently quite separate means of attaining the salvation of human beings, justification by faith and the atonement won by Christ's passion and death. Which saves us? If both, how are they connected? Stump explains Aquinas' views on both points, and draws on an amended version of Harry Frankfurt's theory of the freedom of the will. After discussing various possible objections, and through a series of helpful illustrations and analogies, Stump arrives at a theory. I am oversimplifying a complex and carefully constructed argument here, but the idea is this: Christ's passion and death "cracks and melts our hearts" and moves us toward abandoning our resistance to God, and toward repentance and faith.

One of the many strengths of Stump's argument, in my opinion, is that it

is able to reconcile God's gracious initiative with human free choice. There is a difference, she says, between the breaking down of dissent and the positive producing of consent. God infuses grace into the heart—grace that was previously refused—when we freely abandon our dissent, and that grace then produces in us the second-order volition that is requisite for justification. Nowhere in the process does God coerce the will or undermine its freedom. A psychological objection might be raised: apparently many people come to faith in Christ without having had their hearts first melted by considering Christ's passion and death. But this is a mere quibble; I confess that at all important points Stump has convinced me.

Colin Gunton is a British theologian whose essay in the present book covers some of the same ground that he covers in his recent book, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). He admits that the notion of "the sacrifice of Christ for us" is metaphor, and in fact is metaphor that is far from acceptable given Enlightenment sensibilities. But metaphors are intrinsic features of human language, he says, and the notion of sacrifice is a deep and pervasive theme in human experience. We cannot make sense of our world without this metaphor; it is a transcendental theme that is given definitive theological shape by the sacrifice of Christ. Following the lead of the nineteenth-century Calvinist Edward Irving, Gunton distances himself from certain vulgar and inappropriate ways of understanding atonement. He concludes that sacrifice—and here the root notion is that of gift—is a legitimate way for Christians to express the reality of God savingly present in Jesus Christ. One of the strengths of Gunton's theory, in my opinion, is the place he makes for the work of the Holy Spirit in atonement.

Let me conclude with a few remarks about the movement this book exemplifies. Some ten to fifteen years ago a group of Christian philosophers in this country, both Catholic and Protestant, seemed almost simultaneously to tire of writing about theism and began to think and write about topics in Christian theology. A few were ordained clergy with some theological training; most were not. The trend has continued, and has even picked up momentum; it now promises to become something of a flourishing industry. Theological articles by professional philosophers appear with some regularity in, above all, *Faith and Philosophy*, as well as in philosophical journals such as *Religious Studies* and *The New Scholasticism* and in theological journals such as *The Reformed Journal* and *Modern Theology*. The book I am reviewing is an important effort in placing the results of this movement before the public.

The very idea of philosophers doing theology is so surprising (some of us can remember the days when as graduate students we were scarcely allowed even to mention the word) that one might wonder how to account for the movement. No doubt one related cluster of reasons is: the current wide ac-

ceptance of the philosophy of religion as a legitimate and thriving subdivision of philosophy, the existence of the Society of Christian Philosophers, and the influence of certain of its most respected members who led the way into theology (many but not all of whom are contributors to the current book).

But another reason must in honesty be mentioned (despite the discomfort it will cause)—dissatisfaction with the current state of theology. In connection with their professional work, especially in the philosophy of religion, Christian philosophers occasionally find themselves reading theological texts from people like Anselm or Aquinas or Calvin or Barth. And it appears that many Christian philosophers find the work of such thinkers to be more careful, stimulating, and faithful to the Christian tradition than the work of many contemporary theologians, especially the more radical ones.

One of the dangers of philosophers doing theology, of course, is that their work will seem naive or uninformed. If Christian philosophers want to continue to address themselves in a convincing way to the Christian community on theological topics, then I am convinced that they will need to educate themselves in both the history of doctrine and biblical exegesis. Sound Christian theology simply cannot be done without a firm foundation in both disciplines. Fortunately, the contributors to the current work point the way for us. Plantinga, Brown, Stump, and others show us how important the first is; Plantinga (in his brief but excellent discussion of the New Testament basis for the doctrine of the Trinity) shows us how important the second is.

Where will the movement go from here? I do not know. Will it have any influence on professional theologians? Will it affect the training of clergy? Will it reach "the intelligent layperson in the pew"? Again, I do not know. I do believe, however, that *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* is a book of such high quality on topics so important that it will be hard to ignore.

The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition, by **Colin E. Gunton**. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989. Pp. xiv + 222. $24.95.

PHILIP L. QUINN, University of Notre Dame.

In recent years there has been a dearth of books in English about the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. Neither theologians nor philosophers of religion have been much interested in submitting this doctrine to sustained examination. It is therefore striking that not just one but two books on this topic appeared in print in 1989. One is a philosophical study by the Nolloth Professor of Philosophy of the Christian Religion at the University of Oxford.[1] The other, which is the book under review here, is a theological study by the