

BOOK REVIEWS

Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 352 pp. Hardcover. \$38.64.

Theologians have wrestled long with the question of how to hold together the inseparable operations of the persons in the Trinity, while retaining their appropriate works and missions. Inseparable operations refers to the idea that all three divine persons work simultaneously in every operation of God, retaining the unity of the Godhead even when stressing the appropriate works of the persons reflecting their eternal order of subsistence. A tension can exist in our minds between focusing one divine person and keeping in view his inseparable relations to the other two along the way. In modern theology, the question is often whether unity or Triunity should take pride of place in Trinitarian theology. However, the inseparable operations, used properly, can help us better understand how and why God works the way that he does without prioritizing either unity or Triunity at the expense of the other. Adonis Vidu argues persuasively that the doctrine of inseparable operations is essential to Trinitarian theology, since eternal generation and eternal spiration reflect the unity of the divine essence as subsisting in the divine persons, resulting in Trinitarian agency in every act of God. This book is profound, useful, and timely, especially in relation to shifting conceptions of personhood found in many modern versions of social Trinitarian theology. Though not an easy read and not for beginners in the subject, Vidu profoundly advances modern discussions of the Trinity by retrieving its classic expressions, especially via Thomas Aquinas, engaging extensively with modern exegesis and many doctrinal loci.

Vidu explores the inseparable operations of the divine persons by setting the context for the question and leading readers through case studies in relation to particular biblical teachings. The first three chapters establish the doctrine from Scripture, showing that all three divine persons work in every divine act without erasing the personal subsistences or relations of origin in God. The author moves from this starting point into the development and rejection of the doctrine, with a positive case for it against various strands of social Trinitarianism. After laying this foundation, chapters 4–9 apply inseparable operations to creation, incarnation, Christology more broadly, atonement, ascension and Pentecost, and the Spirit indwelling both Christ and believers as love. The issues treated are well-chosen since Vidu tackles some of the most challenging Trinitarian questions head on. For instance, the fact that the Son became man and not the Father or the Spirit, and yet all three persons act simultaneously in incarnation. He applies this

equally to his defense of divine impassibility in relation to Christ's suffering and death on the cross. A common thread running through the volume is a recurring and relatively complicated set of illustrations for inseparable operations from magnetism. Some readers will find this helpful, while others will view it as hard to follow, resulting in more complications than the illustrations are worth. In the end, the author successfully defends and clarifies a vital component of classic Trinitarian theology, displaying thorough interaction with Scripture and wise use of Aquinas' profound insights on the Trinity.

Several helpful features of this work stand out. First, Vidu's biblical theology of the inseparable actions of the divine persons begins with the Old Testament. Many treatments of the Trinity omit this vital building block for its mature New Testament formulations. However, even though this is the case, his OT material is somewhat truncated, excluding traditional appeals in Christian history to Proverbs 8:21-31 and the Angel of the Lord as the preincarnate Christ (8-9). It is important to remember that while we should read the OT on its own terms in its proper contexts, we must also read the OT in light of the NT (e.g., Lk. 24; 2 Cor. 3). Without reading too much into OT texts regarding the Trinity, the divine authorship of Scripture carries the idea that God always knew where the story was going. Hints at a plurality of persons early in Scripture give rise to stressing the Lord, the Servant, and the Spirit in the Servant Songs of Isaiah, and the Angel of the Lord being the Lord and being sent by the Lord in Zechariah 1-2. It is not merely that the NT is compatible with the OT teaching about God, which Vidu shows clearly, but that God anticipated the NT revelation about himself gradually, clearly, and purposefully in the OT. Vidu makes a good beginning in this direction, while short changing the exegetical developments in this area present in Christian history. The OT building blocks of the Trinity remain an underdeveloped theme in modern Trinitarian theology, though they were a major theme in early church, medieval, and early modern theology. It is best to assume that Christian theologians throughout the ages were on to something, and it is unwise to restrict one's reading of the doctrine of God in the OT to modern exegetical methods and historical investigation alone. While we must not follow historical Christian exegesis slavishly, neither should we dismiss its core principles so readily in modern Trinitarian theology.

Other high points in the book include the relation of nature and will, and the way in which the missions of the Son and the Spirit reflect the eternal processions in God. Vidu repeatedly notes that while early Trinitarian theologians attached will to nature (e.g., 81), many modern social Trinitarians tend to connect will and person. This meant that theologians taught that Christ had two wills because he

had two natures, one divine and one human. There is one divine will exercised from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit (142). Yet under modern thought, attaching will to person often leads to three willing subjects in God and various social Trinitarian constructs (such as Moltmann's), some of which include subordination among the persons. The alternative to subordination in this connection is Tritheism, in which three distinct willing subjects all occupy the category of God. Vidu's critical insights here shed great light on the differences between theologians of the present and the past on this point. Likewise, he illustrates that while the economic Trinity is not the immanent Trinity, the missions reveal the processions. That is, what God does in time reveals who he is in eternity, without conflating who God is with what God does. Picking up Aquinas' idea that missions are an external effect showing an eternal procession, he uses this concept to explain the relationship of Christ's two natures in one person. Christ's humanity, as the instrument of his divine nature, reveals the eternal procession of the Son (215). While the entire Godhead works in every work of Christ, some things are peculiar to his human nature, and they reflect his distinct procession within the Godhead. These are deep waters to tread in Trinitarian theology, but the author's reflections fruitfully push readers in the right direction by retrieving classical Trinitarian ideas, giving an alternative to modern discussions.

At least one other point is worth mentioning. Vidu's assertion that the atonement is not merely legal but ontologically transformative through union with Christ by the Spirit in his deified humanity will prove controversial (246). The question is whether "deification" is the right way to describe the elevation of Christ's humanity and ours above our natural state through grace. He notes later that Roman Catholic theology teaches "elevation of the soul into communion with the whole Trinity," Protestant theology teaches union with Christ, and Eastern theology teaches deification. Yet all three maintain "a presence of the divine persons that transcends the effects of God's actions" (281). In other words, there is more to our salvation than giving a tidy list of benefits from Christ. Our communion with the Triune God is ineffable, incomprehensible, and mystical on some level, regardless of how people from differing traditions describe it. As a Western Protestant theologian, language like "deification" or "theosis" still seems somewhat improper, due to its risk of gross misunderstanding and blurring the Creator/creature distinction (which Vidu does not do). Yet even WLC 39 notes that Christ became man to "advance our human nature." It is important to note that "mystical union" with Christ, as the ground of communion with Christ in his benefits, entails true communion with the Triune God in a way that is experiential and not merely dogmatic. Theology is about knowing God, and believers

know more of God than they can express through doctrine alone.

This book is one of the best recent contributions to Trinitarian theology that this author has read. Reestablishing personhood in the Trinity as relation of origin rather than independent personal action and willing seems increasingly to be the need of the hour. Vidu provides readers with the historical, conceptual, and exegetical tools to cut through the heart of much confusion in the so-called Trinitarian renaissance today, especially related to thorny questions like eternal subordination and social Trinitarian theology. This book will serve serious-minded students interested in Trinitarian theology, especially among professors and ministers who want a deeper grasp of the doctrine than what they might find in entry level texts.

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Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 464 pp. Cloth. \$55.

The past several years have witnessed a renaissance in what is often called classical theism. Works in this vein have explicated the attributes of God or been devoted to one attribute in particular.¹ To date, however, the retrieval of the traditional doctrine of God has largely been focused on God understood generally, or God in his triune being,² rather than the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit in particular.

In *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism*, Steven J. Duby brings the traditional doctrine of God to bear on Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible. The impetus for this project is that in the past two centuries or more, scholars have “cast doubt on whether a ‘more traditional’ doctrine of God can fit with an exegetically driven Christology” (xiv). Against such doubts, Duby contends that the God of the Bible

¹Some notable examples include Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (London New Delhi New York Sydney: T&T Clark, 2016, repr. 2018); James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017); Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019); and Michael J. Dodds, *The One Creator God in Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020).

²See, e.g., Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016); Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021); and Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022).