

still walked away with the distinct impression that Trinitarian theology generally achieved less depth and reached less widely in conservative post-Enlightenment theology than it had before. While Sanders rightly illustrates the way in which the Lord always preserved the core of the gospel in Trinitarian terms, modern conservative Christians still feel the weight of what is missing when they begin digesting classic Christian sources. Nevertheless, Sanders rightly cautions, “There is something built into the modern epoch that tends in the direction of a readiness to subject the past to limitless critique” (190). In the end, we should not overstate the revival of the doctrine in recent years, but neither must we undermine it.

One weakness of the book is that the author does not make much explicit appeal to Scripture. Exceptions exist, such as the numerous allusions to various texts on page 90 (e.g., 105, 111–5). Keeping in mind that the first chapter argues that we must look for “big picture” patterns in Scripture rather than piecemeal citations of texts to arrive at a biblical Trinitarian theology, it would nevertheless be useful to give readers clearer handles in biblical texts to help guide them through this process. Broad principles are more effective with persistent concrete illustrations.

Generally, this work is more difficult to process and digest than Sanders’s other excellent works on the Trinity. Due partly to his heavy interaction with modern trends in Trinitarian theology, this volume assumes more background knowledge than the author’s other volumes on the subject. Without detracting from its usefulness, this means that *Fountain of Salvation* serves better as an intermediate rather than a beginning text on the Trinity. Nevertheless, Sanders never disappoints. He provides readers with key ideas showing the interplay of Trinity and soteriology in ways that should help readers grow in understanding both the gospel and the God of the gospel.

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Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 423 pp. Paperback. \$34.99.

What does one get when one combines a natural scientist, trained in biochemistry and biophysics from Oxford, with a Cambridge trained philosopher-theologian and an Anglican priest? One gets Andrew Davison, an author as interesting as he

sounds. Predicting the next research topic from this Cambridge lecturer is not easy. Will he write on AI technology or the sacraments? Biological mutualism or the possibility of living on another planet? Theological tradition or ecological niche construction? Perhaps aliens? Maybe pastoral insights on carrying for dying parishioners? With Davison, any of those topics, or a combination thereof, would be a good guess. For this reason, a book that endeavors to lay out the relationship between God and *everything else*—a single book that attempts to thoroughly define and describe a Christian metaphysic—might seem like too broad of a project for most, but not for Andrew Davison, who sets out to do just this in his 2019 book, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*. Situated toward the Catholic-side of Anglicanism and the UK-side of conservatism, Davison writes with a wit and clarity that makes *Participation in God* both informative and delightful.¹

Davison does not leave the reader in doubt as to the central claim of the book. His introductory sentence is clear enough: “Approaching the world in terms of sharing and receiving should be the bedrock of a Christian understanding of reality, and of Christian doctrine” (1). This claim is as broad as it is strong. Does Davison truly mean sharing and receiving (or “participating”) should be the bedrock of how the Christian understands *all* of reality and doctrine? Yes, he does. To argue his case, Davison neatly divides his book up into four sections: participation and causation, the language of participation and language as participation, participation and the theological story, and participation and the shape of human life.

Davison does most of the metaphysical heavy lifting in this book in the first five chapters. Unabashedly dependent on Thomas Aquinas, Davison primarily interacts with Aristotle’s four causes as they were appropriated theologically by Aquinas. In the first chapter, he extrapolates on God as creation’s efficient cause—that which *brings about* all things. By doing so, Davison sets up the relationship between God and creation nicely for further development. According to Davison, “the core idea of participation is that things are what they are by participation in God: they are what they are because they receive it from God” (22). Importantly, this reception of being is one of “radical asymmetry” (29). We should not imagine a kind of pantheism or mutualism by identifying God as the efficient cause of creation, for “the creature is constituted by its relation to God, but God is not constituted by relation to creatures” (29). This is made clearer in subsequent chapters, where God is *explicitly* ruled out as specifically one of creation’s four causes; namely, its material cause. Insisting on this much,

¹Thanks to Timothy Gatewood for this helpful illustration.

with Aquinas, preserves God's aseity, even while it punctuates creation's radical dependence. How then can one affirm *creatio ex nihilo*? If God is not creation's material cause in the sense that creation is not made out of God, how can we say that creation is from God? Davison answers this question with Aquinas's exemplarism. God, says Davison (and Aquinas), is creation's formal cause. To insist on this much is, of course, to acknowledge Christianity's endlessly interesting relationship to Platonism. "The story of Christian participatory theology is, to a significant degree," says Davison, "the story of its encounter with Plato and the Platonic heritage. . . . From a Christian perspective, it has been not only a reception, but also a purification and perfection of this Platonic outlook within the matrix of Biblically informed doctrine" (92). From here, it is only natural for Davison to conclude this first section of *Participation* with a chapter on God as creation's final cause. Not only is all creation from and through the Trinity, it is also *to* the Trinity (cf., Rom. 11:36). Davison explores the topic of teleology here, demonstrating how all creaturely being is constituted by a God-ward dimension as a metaphysical necessity. This is true for all creation, but it is particularly true of humanity and man's desire. "All reaching out towards any good that we desire or strive for," according to Davison, "is a reaching out for God, and the expression of a desire for a greater participation in his, ultimate, good" (118).

The second section of this work is the shortest, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in profundity. Here, Davison dives headlong into the concept of *analogia entis* (the analogy of being). Some modern expressions of theology stress creation's likeness to God to the neglect of acknowledging his transcendence (leading, at best, to projecting mutualistic conceptions onto God as if he were a "being among beings," or worse, to a kind of process theology wherein God is constituted by creation), while other modern expressions of theology stress God's transcendence from creation to the neglect of acknowledging its likeness unto him (resulting often in a Kantian-like skepticism toward any true knowledge of God). Davison, however, identifies a thorough understanding of analogy as the best way of avoiding both of these unfortunate ditches. The reason "*analogy* features so prominently in participatory theology," is that "analogy is likeness in the face of yet-greater unlikeness, or against the backdrop of yet greater unlikeness" (147).

Having thoroughly treated participation as a broad metaphysical category, Davison begins to narrow his lens and sharpen his focus on participation in theological perspective. Naturally enough, Davison begins with Christology, the archetypal case of man's participation with God in the history of redemption. Here, Davison advocates for a classical conception of Christology, arguing con-

vincingly that to rightly accept the Christology of Chalcedon is to depend on a participatory metaphysic (206). Although the incongruity between such a view and any form of kenotic Christology is clear enough without explicit mention, Davison (in a jubilant moment for me) makes it explicit anyway: “In contrast [to a kenotic approach to Christology], a participatory account of the revelation of God in Christ would say that neither the incarnation nor the passion of Christ humiliates God; rather, they demonstrate God’s eternal humility” (214).

Davison continues to show how a participatory metaphysic informs and impacts all kinds of theological debates (further reinforcing his strong claim mentioned in his introduction about participation grounding *all* Christian doctrine) in chapter nine, when he addresses God’s real relations to his creatures and the ever-divisive topic of creaturely freedom. Is God exhaustively sovereign or do his creatures exercise a real freedom? Yes, answers Davison, like so many others. Except Davison marshals his participatory metaphysic in the service of offering this “yes” answer in a way that is particularly fresh: “The central point here is that God’s action does not stand alongside my free involvement, as if the two were in competition, or as if they were part of the same way” (228). According to Davison, creatures exercise real freedom, but that freedom is *creaturely*, which means it is what it is, irreducibly, *from* God. “God acts in all action because God gives creatures their being,” says Davison (228). Having addressed this controversial topic of creaturely action from within a participatory framework, Davison repeats this approach with another controversial topic: the problem of evil. Unsurprisingly, Davison follows the Augustinian account, considering evil a privation (or “failure of participation”). This approach invariably harkens the reader back to God as creation’s final cause: since “God calls each creature to an active fulfilment of its destiny by being the thing he has made it to be,” and since all things are made to be from and through and to God, “evil is the failure of a person – or thing, culture, or whatever – to live up to the likeness it is called to bear” (239).

At this point, Davison goes on to discuss what is one of the more interesting topics of an already very interesting book: soteriology’s participatory dimensions. It is apparent that Davison wishes to approach the topic in a spirit of true catholicity, insisting that “fidelity to the tradition here [on the topic of redemption] is seen to consist more in insisting on a plurality of approaches than on adherence to one position, or even a few” (263). While it is refreshing to see Davison acknowledge the diversity of perspectives throughout the tradition, he nevertheless stresses that a participatory metaphysic (and an accompanying participatory soteriology) does exclude at least one major category among theories of redemption. This is the “forensic” approach, which is, according to Davison,

“at root anti-participatory” and is “a latecomer in Christian history” (264). He goes on to suggest that this model *can* harmonize with a participatory approach, so long as the forensic emphasis does not so “dominate that the aspect of ‘being treated as’ rests only on the choice of God, and not on a grounding in the incarnate human life, death, and Resurrection of Christ” (264). Thus, after frightening all his Reformed readers by calling the “forensic” model a historical “latecomer,” he puts their minds somewhat at ease when he clarifies that “soteriology is only non-participatory in one extreme form: as a shrill deviation not simply from patristic and mediaeval traditions, but even from magisterial Reformation ones, cut loose from the broader tapestry of theological history and tradition” (265). For Davison, a participatory view of reality and doctrine requires that we view the telos of redemption as humanity’s restoration to, and participation with, God in Christ, which is something that Reformed Christians can most certainly affirm.

Reverend Davison shows his true pastoral colors in his concluding section of *Participation with God*, wherein he lays out how a participatory view of reality takes shape practically in the human life. Fittingly, Davison develops this section along the shape of the transcendentals of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. In his chapter on Truth, Davison works out how a participatory framework impacts one’s view of human knowledge and reason. What this view implies is that true growth in knowledge is growth in participation with God and *his* knowledge. Since God gratuitously grants being to his creatures, there is a sense in which all knowledge gained by the creature is given by God. In a quote from Aquinas that is sure to confuse not a few Van Tilians—in which Aquinas insists that “all cognitive beings also know God implicitly in any object of knowledge”—Davison summarizes, “From a participatory point of view, then, reason is not without an element of revelation” (318). Davison takes very much the same approach he has taken in this chapter with Truth’s transcendental partners, Beauty and Goodness.

In his chapter on Beauty, Davison shows how a participatory metaphysic necessitates a realist view of beauty, such that it “occupies a privileged place of participation: that shining forth from God that gives and constitutes the created world” (326). Created beauty, in this perspective, participates in divine Beauty, displaying God as creation’s efficient and formal cause, and awakening desire and love within the creature, harkening creation *back* to him as its final cause. Similarly, when it comes to Goodness, Davison can say that “Christian ethics is not about coercion, calculus, or cold duty; it is about love: loving good things in the right way, to the right degree, and in the right order” (348). This repetition of “right” and the insistence on “rightness” is one realization of Davison’s

participatory outlook: there is a *right* way to love the good in things because all things were made by a good God for a good purpose. They are what they are by participation, which means loving them in a rightly ordered way is both possible and ethically necessary. “Since all things come forth from God,” says Davison, “– and indeed, they come forth from God intrinsically related to each other – there is a non-arbitrary sense of what makes for more, or less, conducive relations and interactions” (352). Importantly, this means that the commonly understood contrast between virtue ethics and divine command theory is an unhelpful false choice dependent on a misunderstanding. If a participatory account of reality is true, then the divine commands God gives in Scripture work along the grain of the cosmos. Both “the nature of the creature and the disclosure of God offered by revelation are participations in God, and therefore consonant” (356).

I have virtually nothing overtly negative to say about this book. So, rather than criticizing it, I shall state and elaborate on two praises of Davison’s work, and then offer a few lingering questions that he has left me with. First, it should not go unnoticed that *Participation in God* is extraordinarily clear and comprehensive. Davison is able to navigate the waters between oversimplification on the one hand, and myopic tedium on the other. This means that interested readers who approach the work with very specific questions – like, say, Aquinas’s account of the *analogia entis*, with his use of *modus* principle – will not be disappointed. On the other hand, the reader who could not have imagined to even ask such a specific question, and instead simply wishes to know what Davison means by saying that creation *participates* in God, will also not be disappointed.

One particularly enjoyable feature of Davison’s work in this respect is the inclusion of “Further Notes” at the end of every chapter. These are extended explorations of thoughts arisen from the chapter’s main body, but were nevertheless not crucial enough to the argument of the chapter to include there. In typical British poise and politeness, Davison truly loves his neighbor-readers by offering them further contemplations without presuming to push it upon them. The net result of Davison’s ability to paint a big picture that is nevertheless finely detailed and textured is that the reader walks away with a clear understanding of Davison’s broad metaphysical proposal, having also learned quite a bit of surprising and specific information.

Another strength of this book is that it is appropriately modest. Notwithstanding how ambitious of a project this book is by nature, Davison is not concerned with getting overly bogged down with specific theological and philosophical disputes. This is not to say that Davison is unafraid of staking a position. Indeed, this book as a whole is nothing if not a massive renunciation of any

metaphysic that espouses univocity of being or a thoroughgoing nominalism. But Davison makes his case not by describing how nominalism wrecks theology and philosophy (as helpful as such works can be), but rather by drawing out the explanatory power that comes with a participatory outlook. In doing so, Davison nobly attempts to be as theologically inclusive as possible. This book is not a case for “Andrew Davison’s theology at every point,” but rather a case for participation’s centrality in Christian metaphysics and doctrine. Such an approach explains why, for example, Davison does not necessarily pick a single view of redemption and justification to the exclusion of others, but instead describes how different views are each conducive to a participatory outlook.

On this note, however, I do have some lingering questions. Without at all detracting from the modesty I just praised Davison for, I do find myself wondering what exactly Davison means when he says that a “forensic” account of redemption is a historical “latecomer.” Does he mean that the “forensic” account of a particular variety, namely the shrill and one-dimensional kind he described that essentially detaches the restorative elements from redemption and turns it into a kind of arbitrary legal fiction, is a historical latecomer? If so, I would affirm and agree with Davison’s comment. But if Davison means to say that all “forensic” accounts are historical “latecomers,” but some (namely, those that avoid the detachment just mentioned) are nevertheless conducive to a participatory outlook (which *seems* to be what Davison is saying, 264–5), I would want to press him.

Relatedly, Davison does commendable work when he clears up some common Protestant misunderstandings regarding the Council of Trent and a Roman Catholic view of justification. Davison shows how Trent “stressed that the righteousness that God gives to those he redeems is both something real in them and also distinct from God’s own righteousness: it is not God’s righteousness substituting for their own. On the other hand, they also stress that this righteousness is entirely from God, as its source and exemplar” (290). Thus, Davison shows, Trent’s conception of justification is, like the Protestant conception, one that views salvation as a gift by God, not simply a wage to earn by sheer grit, as is sometimes crudely depicted by some Protestants. And, fair enough. What this shows is that a Roman Catholic as well as a Protestant conception of justification is conducive in some way to a participatory metaphysic and theology. What this does *not* show, however, is whether a Roman Catholic or Protestant conception of justification is *right*. Yes, Protestants and Roman Catholics both agree that we have a real righteousness that comes from God and truly does belong to us—even within the Protestant tradition, there is an affirmation of the divine infusion of

righteous habits. The question is, does the real righteousness that results from this infusion of righteous habits *justify* the believer before God, or are believers justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ *alone* (with the personal righteousness of the believer being a working out in this life the fruit of sanctification that grows from the believer's union with Christ the Righteous)? Notwithstanding the helpful clarity Davison offers regarding the often-misunderstood teaching of Trent, I find myself wondering if he believes there is a lot less daylight between Rome and Protestant Christianity than there actually is.

In sum, I highly recommend this book. The strength in *Participation in God* for students is that Davison offers an impressively broad curation of resources in the figures he interacts with. This book is a kind of field-consolidator for all those interested in Christian metaphysics. On this note, while Davison avoids marrying himself to any particular terminology, anyone remotely interested in conversations surrounding Classical Christian Theism, Christian Platonism, or the Great Tradition will be greatly helped by this book. Further, I would also recommend this work as a surprisingly fresh source of worshipful contemplation. While Davison does not pretend to write *Participation in God* as a “devotional” resource, properly speaking, it is nevertheless incredibly fruitful for Christian piety. This is the case for one simple reason: the participatory outlook Davison proposes here cannot but fill the conscientious reader with a profound sense of *gratitude*. We creatures are what we are *by divine gift*. We live and move and have our being in the triune God. Not only is this outlook true, it is also good and beautiful, and it rightly concludes with praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is one God, world without end. Amen.

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Richard of St. Victor, *Richard of Saint-Victor, On the Trinity: Prologue and Six Books*, ed. Jean Ribaillier, trans. Aage Rydstrøm-Poulsen. Brepolis Library of Christian Sources, vol 4. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2021. 301 pp. English and Latin Edition. \$70.00.

Richard of St. Victor has been a vital voice in classical Trinitarian theology. Influencing later authors including Aquinas, and likely John Calvin, this book marks the first attempt to render his work in English. This review has two focal points: Richard's teaching on the Trinity and the quality of the translated