

Editorial: Analytic Theology and the Tri-Personal God, The Trinitarian Renewal in Analytic Tradition

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“[T]he emergence of systematic theology as analytic theology was [. . .] an accident waiting to happen” (2009, 54), said the late William Abraham. This stimulating event constitutes the beginning of the renewal of *analytic* Trinitarian theology, a renewal waiting to happen, and that finally (and happily) happened.

European theologians and philosophers from Continental tradition may be more prudent about whether analytic tradition had said something new or has something to say at all. This special issue aims to show what we can say about this relationship between Trinitarian theology and analytic tradition and what are the results: is it a positive or an unfortunate accident?

An excellent project summary for two volumes wherein Emmanuel Durand and Vincent Holzer explore the resources and results of the Trinitarian renewal (2008, 2010), of what we define as *the continental renewal*. Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Gisbert Greshake, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and John Zizioulas are some of the most prominent theologians of this movement. Aiming to discern how we can verify a trinitarian renewal, Emmanuel Durand enumerates five tasks that theologians or philosophers may follow in order to confirm it:

- 1) the development of a fruitful relationship between contemporary Trinitarian theology and the more ancient sources of the testimony of faith;
- 2) the identification and discernment of the decisive philosophical developments for the development of Trinitarian conceptuality;
- 3) the permanent requirement to ensure a scriptural foundation for Trinitarian theology, in order to benefit from the suggestive and resistive value of the biblical texts for Trinitarian conceptuality;
- 4) the elaboration of a mutually enriching relationship between the spiritual life and Trinitarian theology, backed by the practice of the latter as a spiritual exercise;
- 5) the enterprise of allowing the Trinitarian doctrine to play its full role in other related fields of theology and to draw renewed benefit from it. (2008, 301-302)

Let us adopt and respond to this list.

1) Is there a fruitful relationship between contemporary Trinitarian theology and the more ancient sources of the testimony of faith? Yes, there is. An excellent example of this worry is represented in the recent special issue of Beau Branson, Joseph Jedwab, and Scott Williams, focused on what they called the “Conciliar Trinitarianism”, where authors explore “the conjunction of claims about the Trinity in the first seven Ecumenical Councils” (2020, 1). A non-exhaustive list of authors developing this fruitful relationship includes: Beau Branson, Sarah Coakley, Richard Cross, Brian Leftow, Anna Marmodoro, Dale Tuggy, and Scott Williams.

Some essays presented in the present special issue are attached to develop this relationship between ancient sources and contemporary theology: Branson’s paper on “One God, the Father,” King’s paper on “To Whom Can God Speak?”, Bray’s essays on “Richard of St. Victor’s Argument from Love and Contemporary Analytic Theology of the Trinity”, Pouivet’s study of “McCabe on the Persons of the Trinity”, and Hollingsworth’s paper on “Thomistic Simplicity and Distinguishing the Immanent and Economic Trinities.”

2) Can we identify and discern the decisive philosophical developments of this renewal? Yes, we can. The most recent work in analytic Trinitarian theology has been focused on the Threeness-Oneness problem of the doctrine and the problem of constitution. Scholars like Beau Branson, Jeffrey E. Brower, William L. Craig, William Hasker, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Peter van Inwagen, Brian Leftow, Michael C. Rea, Richard Swinburne, and Dale Tuggy have largely contributed to the debate. These discussions appeal to the relativity of identity or the metaphysical theory of constitution to defend a Social Trinitarianism or a Latin Trinitarianism.

In this issue, Peter van Inwagen comes back to this question, in his “Richard Cartwright on Logic and the Trinity”, while Tim Lethen’s paper on “Computation Theology” explores the logic problem in relation to computer science. In his “What Exactly Are the Intra-Trinitarian Relations?” Pavel Butakov explores the metaphysical nature of the relations of the Trinity. Mysterianism remains a respectable position in this philosophical framework, and Guillon’s paper on “Trinity: Mysterianism and the Problem of Meaninglessness” points out this approach.

3) Is there a permanent requirement to ensure a scriptural foundation for Trinitarian theology? In the last decades, analytic theologians and philosophers have paid more attention to this requirement, especially thanks to the creation of the Logos Institute for Analytic and Exegetical Theology at St Andrews. When the question is focused on the relationship between the Scriptures and Trinitarian theology, a real challenge appears.

On the one side the question regards a meta-theological issue: the relationship that the Scriptures and theology (even philosophy) must entertain, because of the

complexity of *ensuring* a scriptural foundation.¹ On the other side, Emmanuel Durand is aware of the difficulty, both for continental and analytic scholars to assure this task, which remains urgent. So, “this work is far from being completed” (Durand 2008, 304), and merits to be worked upon.

4) Have analytic theology and philosophy enriched the relationship between spiritual life and Trinitarian theology? Surprisingly, this is the case, for different reasons. It is so if we adopt William Wood’s thesis according to which analytic theology may be understood as spiritual practice (Wood 2021, 176), or if we follow the enlightening ways to do it, exposed in the posthumous work on “Analytic Spirituality” of David Eford (2022). That being said, it is not yet enough.

Some attempts to enrich this relationship are illustrated also in M. C. Murphy’s book on *Divine Holiness & Divine Action* (2021); in *Love, Divine and Human* edited by O. Crisp, J. Arcadi and J. Wessling (2020) and J. Wessling’s book on *Love Divine* (2020). Studies on the problem of divine hiddenness pay particularly attention to a topic where personal and rational approaches converge. Miłosz Hołda’s paper on “Threefold Hidden God” is an example of this enterprise.

5) Does the Trinitarian doctrine play its full role in other related fields of theology and draw from it renewing benefits? Yes, definitively. Much of the research cited below shows how Trinitarian theology is playing its full role in other related fields. Sarah Coakley’s study on *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity”* (2013) is a “groundbreaking” example of that (McCall 2021, 192 n. 18). Undoubtedly, here is one of the most important and positive qualities of analytic approach: interdisciplinary research creating new ways to talk about God and human beings (e.g. Panchuk and Rea 2020).

Michael Bauwens’ paper on “An Institutional Metaphysics for the Trinity: Family, Unity and Mary” works in creating advantages of this relationship.

We may conclude by saying that it is not pretentious to talk about a real Trinitarian renewal in the analytic tradition. From a more global perspective, how can we situate this renewal in the history of theology? We may distinguish two moments in the trinitarian renewal: the continental one in the 20th century and the analytic one in the 21st century. After the first moment of the Trinitarian renewal realized in the *continental* tradition, the analytic renewal is not only comparable to the first moment but is taking more place and more interest than the first moment. Hopefully analytic Trinitarian theology will continue to enrich the spiritual and intellectual life of believers and a discussion between the two traditions will be possible.

So, yes, it was a positive accident waiting to happen, and we did our best to contribute in its happening. Good reading.

¹ None of the two volumes edited by Emmanuel Durand and Vincent Holzer contains an essay on this topic.

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