

BOOK REVIEWS

Knowing about God

Knowing God, by J. I. Packer. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993.

“A masterpiece by a master theologian”; “must reading for any Christian who is serious about faith”; “a rich, profound, delightful and transforming discussion of the Christian understanding of God”; “next to Scripture this could be the most significant book you will read this year”—such is the praise that religious leaders have heaped upon J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, a volume which has sold more than a million copies and which, in Packer’s own words, “has become a nurture book for the Christian world” (Preface, 1993). In a sense, these accolades are well deserved, for the book has many commendable features. Claiming that “the task of trying to tell people who God is remains a major part of what I take to be my ministry” (Preface, 1975), Packer is strong to stand against the trend of the age, against theological error, and against the use of images in the worship of God. He clearly desires to honor the Word of God and the greatness of God, to defend the gospel of God, to advance from knowledge about God to knowledge of God, and to apply the truth of God to life. He writes excellently, even eloquently, of certain attributes of God—immutability, majesty, wisdom, love, grace, wrath, goodness, severity, jealousy—and has beneficial things to say concerning the judgment, guidance, and adequacy of God. All of this is praiseworthy, being grounded in Scripture (although surveyed through the lens of Reformed theology and colored by adherence to the clergy-laity system).

Viewed solely from the perspective of objective theological knowledge, *Knowing God* is a helpful book. However, its objective help is actually a hindrance to the subjective experience of God through which we come to know God. Although Packer’s book may help one to learn about God in a limited, objective way, the doctrinal assistance it provides can hinder one from knowing God in a full, balanced, experiential way—the way which is according to the emphasis of the divine revelation in the New Testament. This is a most serious matter. Using Paul’s metaphor of the veil in 2 Corinthians 3, we may say that the fundamental teachings contained in *Knowing God* become a veil that hinders believers from actually knowing God Himself. Knowledge about God becomes a barrier to knowing God. An entire book would be required to substantiate this assertion fully and adequately. This critique of *Knowing God*—occasioned by the appearance of

the twentieth-anniversary edition—must be limited and will focus on matters of particular importance.

Packer’s Method of Advancing from Knowledge about God to Knowledge of God is Fundamentally Defective

Admitting that “doctrinal study really can become a danger to spiritual life” (p. 22), Packer advocates the following practice as the means of turning “our knowledge about God into knowledge of God”: “The rule for doing this is...that we turn each truth that we learn about God into a matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God” (p. 23). This method is inadequate and defective for a number of reasons.

First, it reduces the process of knowing God to a mere mental activity, altogether ignoring the need to exercise the regenerated human spirit to contact God the Spirit (John 4:24). God is Spirit, and we must use our spirit, as well as our mind, if we are to know Him. Second, Packer’s method ignores the fact that knowing God is a function of the divine life (John 17:3). Through regeneration we have received the life of God, the divine, eternal life, for we have become genuine children of God possessing the life and nature of God (John 1:12-13). The more we experience this life and grow in this life, enjoying its spontaneous function, the more we know God. Third, Packer’s method fails to acknowledge the crucial function of the anointing in knowing the Triune God (1 John 2:20, 27). The anointing, the moving of the Spirit in our regenerated spirit, teaches us concerning the Triune God by applying Him to us. By anointing Himself into us God teaches us concerning Himself. The more we are anointed by Him, the more we know Him. Fourth, Packer’s method, which stresses outward, objective knowledge about God, makes little or no allowance for the crucial matter of the inner, subjective, experiential knowledge of God. This inner knowledge, which is dependent upon the law of life (Rom. 8:2; Heb. 8:10) and the anointing, originates in our regenerated spirit, which is indwelt by the divine Spirit. Through the law of life and the anointing, the true and living God, the Triune God revealed in the Word of God, is known by us not only objectively but also subjectively. The combination of objective and subjective knowledge issues in the true knowledge of God.

In contrast to Packer’s method, knowing God requires that we eat and drink God in order to be filled with God (John 6:48, 53-57). If we followed Packer’s advice, to learn about a particular food it would be sufficient simply to learn certain

facts about the food, meditate on these facts in the presence of the food, and then offer words of appreciation for the food. But all this ignores the one indispensable requirement—actually eating the food. To eat a certain food is to know it by tasting, masticating, digesting, and assimilating it, that is, by experiencing it, enjoying it, and being constituted with it. In like manner, if we would know God, who is our true food and true drink, we cannot stop with learning about God, meditating before God, and offering praise to God. If we would know God, we must eat God—that is, we must exercise our regenerated spirit to receive God in Christ as our life supply. Then having eaten God, we should digest Him and assimilate Him and thus be constituted with Him. If we eat, digest, and assimilate God and if we are organically constituted with God, we will know God not merely in doctrine but in reality.

***Knowing God* is Incomplete and Unbalanced concerning Biblical Truth**

Packer says, “In *Knowing God*...I find nothing I wish to withdraw. In fact I get help from rereading it....Nor do I find any omissions in terms of the overall plan” (Preface, 1975). These words indicate that the author is quite satisfied with his book, evidently feeling that nothing significant has been left out. In fact, matters of tremendous significance have been ignored, resulting in an unbalanced presentation of biblical truth.

Packer emphasizes objective truths but ignores, or at least minimizes, subjective truths. For example, his treatment of Romans 8 concentrates on the objective truths in verses 31 through 39 but bypasses the subjective truths in verses 2 through 11: truths related to the law of the Spirit of life (v. 2), walking according to the spirit (v. 4), the spirit being life (v. 10), the mind set on the spirit being life (v. 6), the indwelling Spirit (v. 9), and the Spirit giving life to our mortal bodies (v. 11). Paul, unlike the author of *Knowing God*, is balanced between objective and subjective truth, knowing, for instance, that Christ is both in us (v. 10) and at the right hand of God interceding for us (v. 34). Furthermore, in Packer’s book other vital truths are not properly addressed: Christ revealed in us (Gal. 1:15-16), Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20), Christ being formed in us (Gal. 4:19), Christ being magnified in us (Phil. 1:20), and Christ making His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17).

Knowing God is unbalanced and incomplete also in the attributes of God selected for discussion. Many attributes are not treated adequately: light, riches, fullness, sincerity, mercy, joy, kindness, forbearance, glory. Packer makes a particularly egregious blunder in not concentrating on the first and the basic attribute of God—life. Packer expatiates on Genesis 1 without noting the great truth that the central revelation in this chapter is that God is a God of life, that

the spiritual significance of the sequence of creation is the unveiling of God as life and of His desire to be life to man. Not even in the section devoted to the implications of God’s fatherhood (p. 205) does Packer speak of the divine life. He claims that fatherhood implies authority, affection, fellowship, and honor but ignores the most important point—that fatherhood is a matter of life. Such an omission is inexcusable in a book that purports to tell people who God is. Packer is “deeply concerned...to help people realize God’s greatness” (Preface, 1975). It is unfortunate that, unlike the apostle John (1 John 5:11-12; John 3:15), he is not deeply concerned to help Christians realize God’s life. God is great, but His eternal purpose is accomplished not mainly through His greatness but through His life.

Regarding God’s eternal purpose, *Knowing God* has virtually nothing to say. The book utterly fails to expound the divine revelation concerning God’s economy (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 1:10; 3:11), God’s purpose (Eph. 1:11; 3:11), God’s will (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; 5:17; Col. 1:9; Rom. 12:2; Rev. 4:11), and God’s good pleasure, the desire of His heart (Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13). Such omissions are amazing, utterly astounding! How can one know God, much less help others know God, without exploring in full the divine revelation regarding the economy, purpose, will, and desire of God?

***Knowing God* Presents an Unbalanced View of the Trinity**

“Christianity rests on the doctrine of the *trinitas*, the threeness, the tripersonality of God....The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential part of the Christian gospel” (pp. 65-66). This emphasis on doctrine points to an imbalance between concepts of the Trinity and the reality of the Triune God in Christian experience. Contrary to the balance in the Scriptures, Packer stresses doctrine but does not pay proper attention to subjective spiritual experience.

“Having sent the eternal Son into the world, the Father now recalls him to glory and sends the Spirit to take his place” (p. 67). Although Packer surely is not a tritheist, the language here has serious tritheistic implications, for it appears to divide the Godhead and fails to display the balance of the essential and economical aspects of the Trinity. Instead of following the New Testament to say that the Father who sent the Son came in the Son (John 8:29; 14:9-11), Packer seems to posit a separation of Father and Son, with the sending Father remaining in heaven and the sent Son living on earth. Then, in Packer’s view, the Father recalls the sent Son and sends the Spirit to take the Son’s place. It appears that, for Packer, the Spirit is here, but the Son and the Father are not. This is contrary to the revelation concerning the Triune God in the New Testament.

Knowing God also fails to address the biblical balance of the eternal immutability of the Triune God and the temporal process through which the Triune God has passed in Christ

in order to dispense Himself into us as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. On the one hand, the Godhead is eternal and immutable. On the other hand, in the incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the Triune God has passed through a process enabling Him to enter into us to be our life, our life supply, and our everything for the Christian life and for the building up the Body of Christ.

In *Knowing God* there is a further imbalance with respect to the Trinity—the imbalance concerning the truth of the objective existence of the Triune God and the subjective indwelling of the Triune God. According to the New Testament the three of the Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are all in the believers (Eph. 4:6; John 14:20; Col. 1:27; 2 Cor. 13:5; John 14:17). If we would know God, we must know that the Triune God is in us. Packer stresses God's objectivity; the Bible, balanced in the twofoldness of its revelation, stresses both God's objective existence and the believers' subjective experience and enjoyment of the indwelling Triune God.

Knowing God Denies the Believers' Life-relationship with God

The author of *Knowing God* is enamored with the doctrine of adoption; the longest chapter in the book is devoted to this subject. Packer's notion of adoption rests upon a grievous error—the denial of the believer's life-relationship with God. The expression *life-relationship with God* conveys the biblical truth that the children of God have received the eternal life of God, that God is their Father by spiritual birth, and that they now have an unbreakable relationship with their Father in the divine life. In other words, when the Bible says that those who receive Christ become children of God born of God, it means what it says. We are not God's *adopted* children—we are God's *regenerated* children. It is a wonderful, marvelous, mysterious fact that we who believe in Christ and who are justified in Him have been born of God to become children of God with the life and nature of God. Packer's repeated stress on adoption denies one of the most basic and elementary truths of the Christian life—that the believers in Christ have actually been begotten of God (1 John 2:29; 3:1, 9; 4:7; 5:1 18), that they actually are children of God, that they actually have the life of God, and that God actually is their Father not by adoption but by birth.

Toward the end of the chapter on adoption, Packer charges his readers to say the following words "over and over" to themselves: "*I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer*" (p. 228). This is followed by questions designed for introspective self-examination: "Do I understand my adoption?" "Do I treat God as my Father in heaven...trying to do everything to please him, as a human parent would want his child to do?" "Does the family likeness appear in me? If not, why not?" Packer then concludes

this chapter with a prayer that exposes an acute lack of spiritual understanding: "God make us his own true children" (p. 229). It would be absurd for a genuine Christian, a child of God, to utter this prayer. If one has not been regenerated, one should repent and then pray to receive Christ in order to be born of God and thus become a child of God. But no child of God should ask God to make him what he already is. Such a prayer betrays ignorance both of what God is as the begetting Father and of what a believer is as a child begotten of Him. If we do not know that we have been born of God, we surely cannot help others know God as the begetting Father.

This prayer also exposes the fundamental flaw in Packer's incomplete message and misdirected method. With an incomplete message that focuses on objective matters and that ignores subjective truths in the Bible—in particular, the truth of the believers' divine birth and the consequent life-relationship with the Father—can any true knowledge of God be gained by meditating, even prayerfully, on such a doctrinal message? No amount of meditation on the concept of adoption will yield any spiritual value to a genuine Christian, to one who has been begotten of God. Instead of meditating on the doctrine of adoption and asking God to make him what he already is, a child of God should know the reality of his divine birth, enjoy the divine life in his spirit (Rom. 8:10), and seek to grow in the life of God for the glory of God, for the expression of the Father who has begotten him. Instead of meditating on the doctrine of adoption, we would do better to exclaim with the apostle John: "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and **we are**" (1 John 3:1, *emphasis added*).

Knowing God Overemphasizes the Role of the Mind in Knowing God and Misconstrues the Nature of the Human Spirit

In knowing God we need a trained, disciplined mind and an enlivened, exercised spirit. Paul knew this (1 Cor. 14:15; 2 Tim. 1:7), but the author of *Knowing God* does not. He makes the most serious mistake of saying that "our spirit" is "our conscious self" (p. 226). This is an error of immense proportions. The Bible reveals that although man is a whole entity, an organic unit, there is a distinction not only between body and soul but also between soul and spirit (1 Thes. 5:23). Whereas the soul is the organ of self-consciousness and of contact with the psychological realm, the human spirit is the organ of God-consciousness and of contact with the spiritual realm. Paul said that he served God in his spirit (Rom. 1:9), that the Lord and His grace are with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; Gal. 6:18), that we should walk according to spirit (Rom. 8:4), that we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17), and that he "who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). He did not say that he served and walked in the "conscious self," nor that the

Lord and His grace are with the “conscious self,” nor that we need a “conscious self” of wisdom and revelation, nor that he who is joined to the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18), is one “conscious self.” The human spirit is not the “conscious self”—it is an organ created by God for us to contact God, receive God, and contain God. Knowing God is primarily a spiritual matter, and for this we need to exercise our regenerated human spirit to be one with God, who is Spirit.

Of course, we also need to exercise our mind to think clearly concerning God and to understand the divine revelation in the Word of God. But what sort of mind should we exercise—the natural mind or the renewed mind (Rom. 12:2)? In the natural mind there are high things “rising up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:4-5), a deplorable situation (affecting believers and unbelievers alike) not taken into account by Packer in his call to and reliance upon meditation as the way to know God. A renewed mind is a mind that is being renewed as the spirit becomes the spirit of the mind (Eph. 4:23), a process in which the regenerated spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, spreads into our mind, enabling it to know God not only in His objective revelation but also in His subjective indwelling.

Knowing God Says that God’s Goal is Heaven, but the Bible Reveals that God’s Goal is the New Jerusalem

The author of *Knowing God* repeatedly talks about heaven. Speaking of God’s decision to “set his love upon particular sinners,” Packer says that God will “not know perfect and unmixed happiness again till he has brought every one of them to heaven” (p. 125). He talks of “the heirs of heaven,” asking, “Are you among their number?” (p. 199). He is convinced that “the experience of heaven will be of a family gathering” (p. 218). He assures us that “faith hopes for heaven” (p. 224) and that “heaven is my home” (p. 228). He urges us to ask ourselves if we “look forward to that great family occasion when the children of God will finally gather in heaven” (p. 229). Heaven may be the goal of those who follow religious tradition, but it is not the goal of those who embrace the divine revelation. Heaven may be Packer’s goal, but it is not God’s goal. God’s goal is the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2, 9-11)—a spiritual entity which is the corporate expression of the Triune God through His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people. The New Jerusalem, the consummation of the Body of Christ, will be the ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose, the wife who will satisfy the desire of His heart and with whom He will enjoy a blissful marriage for eternity. This is God’s goal, and only this—not heaven—will make God happy.

If we do not know the New Jerusalem, we do not know God. If we do not know what will make God happy, what will bring about His “perfect and unmixed happiness,” we do not know God. One may know about God and assume that

heaven is His goal and happiness. Those who truly know God in life and according to His revelation, and thereby know the desire of His heart, know that His eternal goal, His eternal delight and satisfaction, is the holy city, the Lamb’s wife, the New Jerusalem. The more we know Him, the more we will be one with Him for the fulfillment of His economy, His purpose, His will, and His desire—the building up of the Body of Christ in this age for the consummation of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

Reviewed by Ron Kangas

Reconceiving the Importance of the Economical Trinity

The Father’s Spirit of Sonship, by Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M.Cap. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.

Relying upon both personal, spiritual experience and impressive theological research and analysis, Thomas Weinandy, a Catholic theologian who serves as a Lecturer in History and Doctrine at the University of Oxford, offers an insightful reconception of the immanent Trinity that both respects the concerns of the Eastern and Western traditions concerning trinitarian theology, and affirms the central role of the economic Trinity in the life and experience of every Christian in his recent T & T Clark publication, *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity*.

In the preface and introduction, Weinandy discusses not only his claim—that there is a need to reconceive the role of the Holy Spirit in the inner trinitarian relationships of the immanent Trinity—but also discloses his personal, spiritual experiences which prompted his theological investigation. (As used by Weinandy, the term *immanent Trinity* corresponds to the term the *essential Trinity*, which has been used extensively in the main articles of this inaugural issue.)

Weinandy acknowledges that the starting point of his argument was not a philosophical response to a theological question, but rather a theological response to a spiritual experience. He states:

I was prayerfully considering and studying Romans 8:14-16...At one point the thought came to me that if we, who are Christians, are conformed into sons of the Father by the Spirit through whom we are empowered to cry out in the same words as Jesus, then the eternal Son himself must have been begotten and conformed to the Son in the same Spirit in whom he too eternally cries out ‘Abba!’ (pp. ix-x).

Thus, Weinandy’s thesis is quite simple: “I want to argue that within the Trinity the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father as the one in whom the Son is begotten” (ix). While he respects the common belief in East and West that the Son and the Spirit

depend on the Father, he points out that the traditional understanding of the Trinity both among Eastern and Western teachers of the church, insofar as it relates to the role of the Holy Spirit, is fundamentally flawed due to the fact that “philosophical notions are still active in their respective conceptions of the Trinity which are foreign to and not in accord with scriptural revelation” (9). Rather, he believes that in the inner trinitarian relationships of the immanent Trinity “all three persons, logically and ontologically, spring forth in one simultaneous, nonsequential, eternal act in which each person of the Trinity subsistently defines, and equally is subsistently defined by, the other persons” (15).

In chapter 1, Weinandy places his argument within the context of theological scholarship, both ancient and modern, and discusses the presuppositions of his argument. After briefly restating his thesis, he acknowledges that there is not an abundance of support for it from such church authorities as Augustine and Aquinas. His presuppositions, however, reveal a deep understanding of the connection between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity. His thesis is based on three interconnected presuppositions:

Firstly, the three persons of the Trinity as they reveal themselves in the economy of salvation manifest their inner trinitarian life and relationships. The immanent Trinity is identical to the economic Trinity. Secondly,...functional economic trinitarianism discloses an ontological immanent trinitarianism....Thirdly, the development of authentic trinitarian doctrine and theology is the coming to perceive and express this inherent trinitarian ontology from within its scriptural, and so functional, economic expression (22).

In chapters 2 and 3 Weinandy reviews the New Testament evidence for his thesis, impressively covering the role of the economic Trinity in the birth, baptism, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as in our relationship to the Triune God as revealed in the Epistles of Paul and the Johannine literature. In so reviewing these portions of the New Testament, Weinandy attempts to show from an economic perspective that it is the Spirit who confirms and even defines the sonship of Jesus and by extension the Fatherhood of the Father. Allowing his premise that the actions of the economic Trinity manifest the being of the immanent Trinity, he states that likewise eternally it is the Spirit who defines and confirms the eternal sonship of the second of the Trinity and equally the Fatherhood of the Father.

In chapter 4 Weinandy fully develops his new trinitarian ontology, which he feels improves some of the weaknesses inherent in the traditional trinitarian conceptions of both East and West. Following the prescription of Aquinas, he redefines the persons (or, better hypostases) according to differences in origin and action for the three. He rejects the Eastern notion that Godhead is firstly proper to the Father

and then derivatively to the Son and to the Spirit, as well as the Western notion that Godhead is proper to the essence of God and distinct from the three persons. Rather, he argues that “the one Godhead, the one being of God, is the action of the Father begetting the Son and spirating the Spirit, and so sharing with them the whole of his deity, constituting them as equal divine persons” (60). For Weinandy, at issue here is the fully equal and fully personal identity of each of the three. Particularly, he is interested in affirming the personhood of the Spirit by positing an active role for Him in the eternal Trinity, a role that makes Him equally involved in distinguishing the three. While accepting the traditional view that the Father is He who begets the Son and that the Son is He who is begotten of the Father, he expands the role of the Spirit in the immanent Trinity as the One by whom the Father begets and loves the Son and through whom the Son loves, and thus glorifies, the Father. “Now the cornerstone which holds together this fatherly act of lovingly begetting the Son and this filial act of the Son loving the Father is provided by the action of the Spirit” (73). The language is deliberate and precise, for Weinandy conceives of the Trinity as “a mutual co-inherence or *perichoresis* of action...which makes the persons be who they distinctively are” (78). Weinandy’s *perichoresis*, unlike the *perichoresis* of the East and the circumincession of the West, is one of the actions themselves: “The acts of begetting and spiration co-inhere in one another and thus account for why the persons themselves co-inhere. Actually, the persons themselves are the co-inhering acts” (80). In Weinandy’s formulation, each of the three has a definite and equal personal role and action in asserting the identity of the three persons of the Trinity.

In chapter 5 Weinandy speaks of the ecumenical applications of his thesis. He maintains that his new trinitarian formulation properly respects the Eastern demand that we understand the Spirit as proceeding directly and principally from the Father “because it is only in the procession of the Spirit that the Father begets the Son” (95). The new formulation also properly respects the Western position that the Spirit also proceeds from the Son, if only derivatively, because the Spirit proceeds also from the Son as the identical Love for the Father in whom the Son is begotten (96).

Chapter 6, entitled “Living the Life of the Trinity,” seeks to apply his thesis by showing that the living of a Christian can be and should be intimately involved with the Triune God so that “our entrance into the immanent trinitarian life as the trinity of persons themselves live it” is possible (102):

The Father revealed himself as Father in the sending of the Son into the world and by incarnating him through the power of the Holy Spirit, and similarly he manifested his fatherhood through the raising of Jesus from the dead, making him Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. But in so doing he not only revealed that he is the Father in himself, but

also and concurrently performed his fatherly task by which those who believe might possess him as Father through the same Holy Spirit. Again, the Son, in becoming a man and by dying on the cross, not only revealed that he truly is the Son, but he also fulfilled his filial responsibility by which those who believe in him receive his Spirit of sonship, and so become his brothers and sisters in union with the Father. Or again, the Holy Spirit, by coming to dwell in those who believe, not only revealed himself, but in so doing transformed believers into the likeness of the Son so as to have God as their Father...the actions of the persons of the Trinity in economy of salvation...are the very same actions by which they make possible our incorporation into the life of the immanent Trinity (102).

Finally, in two excurses Weinandy examines two allied issues, the appropriateness of the term *person* in relation to the Trinity and the appropriateness of the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. On the former issue, he argues for the use of the term as providing a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the actions of the three in the eternal Trinity. This would, of course, strengthen the thesis of his book. On the latter issue, he insists on the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity because it alone provides the basis for understanding how the God who transcends all creation can come within creation and be all to it.

In evaluating Weinandy's most original book, we should distinguish between his thesis and his approach. His thesis—that in the eternal, immanent Trinity the Father begets the Son by the Spirit—is certainly novel and deserves attention. Ultimately, Weinandy hopes to assign to the Spirit an eternal action in defining the Father and the Son which would give Him a genuine “personality” on par with the evident “personality” of the Father and the Son. However, his description of that defining action lacks the characteristics of person that the Father and Son enjoy, for in the end his assessment of the Spirit is essential and not personal. “The Spirit principally proceeds from the Father as the love in which the Father begets the Son and so conforms the Father as the Father, and equally, but derivatively, proceeds from the Son as the Spirit who, in conforming the Son as the Son, is the Spirit by which the Son loves the Father” (74). As much as he may try to make personality out of this, the prevailing understanding of the church across the ages constrains him to the language of essence in referring to the Spirit. Certainly the church has long affirmed the personhood of the Spirit; it has not, however, adequately defined how the Spirit is a person. Weinandy's own attempt does little to advance the cause. It almost appears that Weinandy is trying to somehow “wedge” the Spirit in, which, while naturally appealing, is somewhat forced. But while his attempt to define the personhood of the Spirit fails (leaving us really where we were before his study began, that is, with the Spirit as the love in the Trinity), his understanding of

the Spirit's role in distinguishing the Father and the Son is profound. The existence of God the Son has long been seen as the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of God the Father, and vice versa. But few have attempted to define how the Father can beget the Son and how the Son can be filially related to the Father. Weinandy would have us see the Spirit as the “how” of the Father's begetting and the Son's being begotten. In the statement of his simple thesis—the Father begets the Son by the Spirit—the significance of the preposition *by* is never explicitly given. We take it that he would have us understand some personal function in the preposition, but it is difficult to catch his exact sense and, further, to accept his claim. Rather, it appears that ultimately his description reduces to this, that the Spirit is the essence of the Trinity by which the Father begets the Son and in which the Son expresses, declares, and glorifies the Father. This in itself is quite rich and important. That the Spirit functions as essence and not as personality is no new dilemma. Perhaps the resolution is in the notion that in the eternal Trinity even essence is hypostatic, as Augustine and Aquinas would have us understand Love to be.

Weinandy's approach is perhaps the greater asset in this study. Because he believes that careful attention to the actions of the Trinity in the economy of salvation allows us to understand the eternal relations in the immanent being of God, he gives careful attention to how the Triune God is integrally involved in the Christian and church life of the believers. He presents Christian experience as a life in and with the Trinity, and this is certainly attractive. It is refreshing to find so rich an application of so deep a theological truth. Weinandy certainly sees and well expresses that the Trinity is not for objective theological speculation (though speculate he certainly does) but for the active experiential fellowship between God the Triune and the objects of His divine love. His presentation of the believers' status as sons of God is profound, allowing to them no mere metaphorical sonship, which is so pervasive in Christian thought today, but a genuine sonship that derives from the Spirit of sonship, indeed as he would say, that derives from the Father in the same way that the Sonship of the eternal Son derives from the eternal Father. By such a full enjoyment of the Trinity, the believers know God truly as the Father because they are His actual sons; they manifest Christ as the Son by their own sonship; and they enjoy the Spirit as He distinctly bestows gifts on them for their participation in the Father and the Son. He speaks firsthand of believers who, formerly being “practical monotheists,” were brought “to a lively awareness of the Trinity,” manifesting as it were “an experiential awareness of the distinctive and individual relationships which they possess with each person of the Trinity” (105). This is ultimately where all theology should properly lead, to a deeper appreciation and fuller experience of God the Triune.

Reviewed by Kerry S. Robichaux and John Pester