

## A Christ-Driven Purpose

*The Purpose-Driven Life*, by Rick Warren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

The Purpose-Driven phenomenon hardly needs introduction. Active Christians in America who have not heard of either *The Purpose-Driven Church* or *The Purpose-Driven Life* (hereafter *Driven*), both written by pastor Rick Warren, based in Orange County, California, are few and far between. The latter has topped bestseller lists, sold more than three million copies in twenty languages, adorned secular bookstore windows across the land, inspired interviews, spawned a booming cottage industry, and sparked a remarkable “movement” within the evangelical church. The excitement seems justified. Millions of lives have been touched by the book and its attendant studies, groups, seminars, and special events. Beyond impacting individuals’ lives, it is credited for boosting worship attendance by twenty percent and group attendance by an astounding one hundred and two percent in eight thousand churches.

Picking up on themes that most Christians are already familiar with, Warren organizes them into a book of forty chapters, which he intends the reader to take in at a devotional rate of one per day. Each of the chapters is introduced with one or two verses and wraps up with a “point to ponder,” a “verse to remember,” and a “question to consider.” Within the text itself, Warren employs some 1,200 scriptural quotes and references drawn from over fifteen versions and paraphrases of the Bible as he undergirds and fleshes out his points. The text itself, the major themes of which I will consider momentarily, is written with the ordinary reader in mind. The prose is simple and straightforward. The language is informal.

Section one of *Driven* asks the question, “What on earth am I here for?” and then leads from section to section in a constantly unfolding answer, the unifying theme of which is that believers should live lives that fulfill God’s purpose, which is to glorify Himself. The way to bring glory to God is mainly through five activities: worshipping God, loving other believers, becoming like Christ, serving others with our gifts, and telling others about God (55-57). These five ways of bringing God glory are the five main purposes that God has for our lives, purposes according to which the

remainder of the book is structured. In “Planned for God’s Pleasure” we read that “bringing enjoyment to God, living for his pleasure,” is the first purpose of our life (63). The practical way to bring pleasure to God is worship (64). By worship Warren means something more than atmospheric music or an occasional nod God-ward: “Every activity can be transformed into an act of worship when you do it for the praise, glory, and pleasure of God” (67).

In “Formed for God’s Family,” Warren tells us that God’s second purpose within His overall purpose is to build “a family who will love him, honor him, and reign with him forever” (117). Of foremost importance in God’s family is love. On this basis, Warren states that “after learning to love God (worship), learning to love others is the second purpose of your life” (125). Warren includes in this section a detailed and encouraging discussion of the importance of experiencing the Body of Christ in a practical way.

Third, we “were created to become like Christ” (171). Writes Warren by way of introduction, “From the very beginning, God’s plan has been to make you like his Son, Jesus. This is your destiny and the third purpose of your life” (171). This kind of life is what God describes in the beatitudes, the fruit of the Spirit, Paul’s famous chapter on love, and Peter’s list of “characteristics of an effective and productive life” (173). *Driven* lists three major things that transform our character directly: the truth of God’s Word, trouble in our daily existence, and temptation.

God’s fourth purpose for our life is service to Him and to others. “You were put on earth to make a contribution,” writes Warren (227). Our service is desperately needed by believers today, and that service is a preparation for our service to God in heaven for eternity. In this section, *Driven* encourages us to consider how we were uniquely shaped for service and advises us as to “how real servants act” and think (257, 265).

The concluding section, entitled “You Were Made for a Mission,” presents the fifth purpose for which we were created: to continue to do as Christ’s spiritual Body what He did in His physical body—introduce people to God (282). The way we can fulfill this mission is mainly by sharing our life message, which includes our testimony, our life lessons, our godly passions, and the gospel (289-290). Until we realize that this mission is not optional

---

and begin to actively take part in it, Christ cannot come again. The final two chapters of this section (and the book) exhort us to balance our lives through the foregoing five purposes for which God has created us, for only a life that is characterized by worship, fellowship, Christlikeness, service, and evangelism is a life that is truly driven by God's purpose.

### Affirmations

*Driven* asks the question that believers ought to ask themselves but rarely do: "What on earth am I here for?" Even when we ask the question, we often add extraneous phrases that signal our desire not so much to know God's purpose but to identify *our*—or rather "*my*"—role in it: "What is the purpose of *my* life?" "What is God's will *for me*?" *Driven* prefaces its answer by stating unequivocally that "it's not about you....If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and *for* his purpose" (17). It notes that each of our lives "fits into a much larger, cosmic purpose that God has designed for eternity" (21). This purpose is ultimately to "show the glory of God" (53). God's glory is defined as being nothing less than "who God is" (53). We also read that glory is "the essence of [God's] nature, the weight of his importance, the radiance of his splendor, the demonstration of his power, and the atmosphere of his presence. God's glory is the expression of his goodness and all his other intrinsic, eternal qualities" (53). Such a view is highly to be lauded in a day and age in which, to read many Christian books, God seems to have a plan and purpose for everyone but Himself. Not only does *Driven* ascribe a grand purpose to God; it ascribes to Him the eternal purpose that God Himself attests to in Ephesians 3:10-11 and 21—receiving glory through His Son and His people.

Another worthy aspect of the book is the fourth section, entitled "You Were Created to Become Like Christ" (this section also contains serious errors that will be addressed shortly). God's purpose is far deeper than living comfortable, well-adjusted lives. Instead, Jesus "wants to make us like himself before he takes us to heaven. This is our greatest privilege, our immediate responsibility, and our ultimate destiny" (178). Drawing on some of the more powerful verses regarding our conformation to Christ's image—Romans 8:29 chief among them—the importance of spiritual growth, progress, and maturity in the lives of believers is emphasized. The book is quick to refer the reader to Colossians 1:27 and state that "Christlikeness is not produced by imitation, but by inhabitation. We allow Christ to live *through* us" (174).

A third point of affirmation lies in the book's treatment of the experience of the church in a small-group oriented life. This aspect of the Christian life forms the core of the

section "You Were Formed for Christ's Family." However, Warren goes on to point out that being part of God's universal family is not enough: we must become a "member of a local expression of God's family" (136), which, practically speaking, means being a committed member of a local congregation. Warren makes his case for the vital importance of small groups in which we are "Experiencing Life Together" and "Cultivating Community" (chapters eighteen and nineteen respectively). Warren maintains that it is particularly in such a setting that people can experience healthy Christian fellowship that is according to a biblical standard (151).<sup>1</sup>

### Critiques

Although *Driven* makes a number of good points, not all of which are mentioned above, the book's overall message and therefore a number of its supporting elements must be critiqued at a fundamental level. As we have noted above, it speaks in general terms of God's larger, cosmic purpose. What is not enunciated is the defining characteristics of this purpose and the unique means by which God accomplishes it. Because the way by which God accomplishes His eternal purpose is absent from this book, every major point that *Driven* makes is robbed of its proper context and is thus incomplete at best, inaccurate to the point of error at worst. So basic is *Driven's* flaw that rather than helping its readers, it will cause them to deeply misunderstand God's purpose and, as a result, hinder them from experiencing the Christian life and church life according the eternal purpose that it seeks to unveil.

### The Economy of God

*Driven* makes several striking points with regard to God's purpose, Christ, and the connection between them. As we have seen, it posits that God's ultimate purpose is to bring glory to Himself. It defines glory as "what God is" and points us to the fact that Christ is the definitive Bearer of God's glory. The book then states that God's glory is made known in the church and eventually through the New Jerusalem (which it incorrectly refers to as heaven). Regrettably, although *Driven* contains each of these elements, and in that highly significant order, it does not synthesize them. If it had, the fragmented rendition of God's purpose that *Driven* provides might have coalesced into a comprehensive sketch of God's purpose with its major features and details and therewith provided a door into the believers' practical experience of God's purpose.

God's ultimate purpose is that God's glory would be fully expressed. Although God's purpose was fulfilled in type in the Old Testament, it was only in the New Testament that the very "effulgence of His glory" is revealed in Christ

---

(Heb. 1:3). Outside of Christ there is no glory, and outside of Christ God enjoys no expression. Consequently, we could say that Christ is God's glory. Indeed, because God finds no expression outside of Christ, God delights exclusively in His Son.<sup>2</sup> Thus, when in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, the Father uttered such unqualified statements as, "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight" (Matt. 3:17). Again, on the Mount of Transfiguration, God overshadowed the disciples and made it emphatically plain that it was Christ, not the law and the prophets, that pleased Him (17:5). Following Christ's death and resurrection, in both of which Christ satisfied the Father (Heb. 10:5-9; Acts 13:33), God exalted Christ "far above all," gave Him "the name which is above every name," and sat Him "on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). The witness of the Scriptures testifies that Christ, the One in whom all things cohere and the focal point from which all God's glory beams, was, is, and forever shall be the unique and unrivaled delight of the Triune God.

Today this God-satisfying Christ is not only seated in the heavenlies; He as Head over all things is being transmitted to us, the members of His Body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). In this transmission the church shares in all that Christ is to such an extent that we as His Body become His very fullness (v. 23). Hence, the church as the vessel that receives the unsearchable riches of the God-glorifying Christ (3:8) becomes the expanded locus of God's glory. In short, the church with Christ as its received content and expression is the very manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).<sup>3</sup> Thus, it comes as no surprise that Paul would say that the glory is not only in Christ Jesus but also in the church unto all the generations forever and ever (Eph. 3:21). Eventually, the New Jerusalem as the consummate product of the transmission of Christ into His believers and the ultimate manifestation of God in the flesh bears God's appearance (Rev. 21:11; 4:3) and shines in full intensity the glory of the God of glory (21:11), bringing untold delight to the Triune God (cf. Ps. 132:13). Hence, God's eternal purpose and unique delight is to be expressed in the Son and in Christ's fullness, increase, and expansion, the church.

What should be of utmost concern to us as believers, then, is how this purpose is fulfilled and how God's Christ can fill the church corporately and us individually. God's means of accomplishing this is His economy. God's economy is God's plan of dispensing Himself in Christ into His elect so that the church can be produced, the New Jerusalem can be consummated, and He can ultimately be expressed. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul writes of God's economy in experiential terms. First, Paul writes concerning the critical juncture in his life when he turned from the law to Christ. This turn, he informs us,

was not a mere change in heart, a repentance, or an acknowledgement of Christ. Rather, he writes, "It pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me" (1:15-16).

Several verses later he writes of his experience of Christ that followed Christ's being revealed in him: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (2:20). Then in chapter four Paul gives us another clue as to the matter at hand when he agonizes over the Galatians: "My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you" (v. 19). These verses, a small sampling of many others that address this matter, both explicate and illustrate the economy of God: God dispenses His Son into us so that Christ is revealed in us, lives in us, and is formed (shaped) in us for God's glory and God's pleasure. By daily experiencing the dispensing of God in Christ into us, we will be transformed into His image, Christ will be magnified in our mortal body, and we corporately as the church will be to the praise of the glory of God's grace (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:20-21; Eph. 1:6).

*Driven* seems only vaguely cognizant of the fact that God's eternal purpose is to be expressed through Christ's shining out through His regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect as the church and eventually as the New Jerusalem. Moreover, the book is utterly unaware that God fulfills His purpose by an economy of dispensing Himself into man. Thus, *Driven* maintains that the ways in which we "bring glory to God" are worshipping Him, loving other believers, becoming like Christ, serving others with our gifts, and telling others about Him (55-57). These general answers are accurate; however, because *Driven's* unfolding of God's purpose is incomplete and its elucidation of God's dispensing nonexistent, it diverges from the revelation of the Scriptures and eventually misleads the believer who is seeking to live a life that is driven by God's eternal purpose. As a final result, the reader is guided into self-effort and religious behavior rather than to the dispensing of the Christ of glory into his being for God's pleasure.

### *Living Like Christ*

Because *Driven* does not contemplate the matter of the divine dispensing, its explication of becoming like Christ and serving others with our spiritual gifts fall far short. Christlikeness, according to *Driven*, is the kind of life that God describes in the beatitudes and as the fruit of the Spirit. *Driven* also maintains that becoming Christlike is a matter of Spirit-assisted character improvement (174). *Driven* has many interesting things to say concerning our becoming like Christ: it says that genuine Christlikeness is a matter of indwelling not of imitation, and it indicates that "it is the Holy Spirit's job to produce

---

Christlike character in you” (174). Yet throughout this section, *Driven* never once arrives at the heart of the matter, namely that we are truly conformed to the image of Christ only by God revealing Christ in us, by Christ living in us, and by Christ being formed in us. This is especially noticeable when it proffers strategies that will conform our lives to the beatitudes and the fruit of the Spirit, teaches us how to respond “to problems as Jesus would” (197), and helps us to overcome temptation. Although *Driven* insists that Christlikeness is more than a matter of human behavior, these examples underscore its teaching that conformity to Christ’s image is our acting like Christ with the Spirit’s help. While stressing our need to be like Christ, it focuses on our doing rather than on Christ’s living in us. Therefore, instead of helping us live Christ as Paul did in Philippians 1:21, *Driven* unknowingly (and clearly contrary to its intentions) leads us to being perfected by the works of the flesh, albeit in the name of Christ (Gal. 3:3). Because of its unclear message, *Driven* will leave many believers scrambling as they try (and fail) to act like Christ while seeking to experience the reality of Christ living in them per Galatians 2:20.

### *Exercising the Gifts*

The section entitled “You Were Shaped for Serving God” (225) also suffers from not knowing God’s economy. As a result, it paints a false picture of what it means to exercise spiritual gifts. The essence of *Driven*’s thought is summed up in the following passages:

God deserves your best.

He shaped you for a purpose, and he expects you to make the most of what you have been given. He doesn’t want you to worry about or covet abilities you don’t have. Instead he wants you to focus on talents he has given you to use....

The best use of your life is to serve God out of your shape. To do this you must discover your shape, learn to accept and enjoy it, and then develop it to its fullest potential. (249)

Jesus’ parable of the talents illustrates that God expects us to make the most of what he gives us. We are to cultivate our gifts and abilities, keep our hearts aflame, grow our character and personality, and broaden our experiences so we will be increasingly more effective in our service. Paul told the Philippians to “*keep on growing in your knowledge and understanding,*” and he reminded Timothy, “*Kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you.*” (254)

Here, *Driven* commits at least two errors. First, contrary

to what the book conveys, the exercise of the gifts is ultimately for only one purpose—the building up of the Body of Christ. Although the use of the gifts that God has distributed to the members of His Body in resurrection surely benefits others on an individual level, such individual profit is only a by-product of genuine Christian service. Paul told the gift-obsessed church in Corinth to let all things be done for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 4:26, 4). Any exercise of spiritual gifts that is not for the building up of the Body of Christ is not the use that God intended for the gifts.

Second, *Driven* fails to see that in God’s building up of the Body of Christ, as in everything else, it is only Christ who pleases God. *Driven* would have us believe that God is pleased when we discover, develop, and use the gifts and abilities we were born with or have acquired through training and experience. Realizing that the use of the gifts is for the building up of Christ’s Body, the church, we must also come to terms with the fact, that strictly speaking, only Christ is qualified to do the building and only He is qualified to be the material. Christ told us in Matthew 16:18 that *He* would build His church. God desires our building insofar as it is Christ Himself doing the building in us and through us. The Body of Christ, which Paul calls “the Christ” in 1 Corinthians 12:12, builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16). Christ Himself in the members of the Body builds up Christ’s Body.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9-12 Paul issues a sober charge that requires us to build up the Body of Christ with acceptable materials only. The acceptable materials are gold, silver, and precious stones. These materials signify the various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God. It is with these that the apostles and all spiritual believers build the church. What is not allowed is wood, grass, and stubble, which signify the knowledge, realization, and attainments that come from the believers’ natural background and the natural way of living, all of which are the created and fallen natural life, which is condemned to be judged. In encouraging believers to unwrap their spiritual gifts by listening to their heart, applying their abilities, using their personality, and employing their family, educational, vocational, ministry, and painful experiences (236-248), *Driven* is essentially encouraging the members of the Body of Christ to build the Body with what they are—wood, grass, and stubble—rather than with what Christ is—gold, silver, and precious stones.

The result of using so-called spiritual gifts in this way has three terrible consequences: the Body of Christ is marred, the marring work of the offending saint is destroyed by fire, and that believer will suffer God’s punishment (although he will not perish) (1 Cor. 3:13, 16-17). Rather than perpetuating a false view and practice of the

---

spiritual gifts and even encouraging the development of the very factors that destroy the Body of Christ, *Driven* would have done well to convey the truth of fulfilling one's function in the Body of Christ with Christ as the Builder and the content of the building.

## Conclusion

Simply directing seeking believers to the eternal purpose of God is laudable; however, one would hope that the development of that charge would be full, accurate, and biblically sound. Regrettably, *Driven*, while clarifying several general ideas about God's purpose, fails to communicate either the essence of God's purpose or the dispensing of Himself in Christ into His believers for the fulfillment of this purpose. As a consequence, the book focuses millions of believers' attention on what they can do in and of themselves with the aid of the Spirit and keeps them in ignorance regarding their experience of Christ Himself being transmitted into and living within them. The teaching contained in *Driven* and in many other books like it can result only in a so-called Christlikeness that actually expresses the well-intentioned, yet natural man and a kind of "gift"-oriented activity that diminishes Christ, exalts the self, mars Christ's Body, and ultimately invites God's judgment. Those who share *Driven's* message—authors and readers alike—must realize that man's efforts, even with Christ's "assistance," can never bring glory to God, much less fulfill His purpose. Quite the contrary, only Christ delights the Father. If, therefore, we are to please the Father, we must fulfill His purpose by enjoying the dispensing of Himself in Christ into us so that His Son can be revealed in us, live in us, be formed in us, and be manifested in us for God's eternal expression.

by Nathan Betz

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The book rightly stresses the importance of close fellowship among local believers. However, it advises the readers to join themselves to local congregations, which may be—and in practice almost always are—divided from one another. The biblical revelation posits that there can be only one church in any city, even if that one church, overseen by one group of elders, must meet in smaller groups for practicality's sake (Acts 8:1; 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 16:1; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Rev. 1:10-11; Acts 2:46). We thus affirm *Driven's* advice that believers meet in small groups, while heartily taking exception to its implicit encouragement of factionalism within each city's unique expression of God's church.

<sup>2</sup>Strictly speaking, those persons and things in the Old Testament that pleased God did so only indirectly, for the Old Testament with the totality of its positive content, was written

in anticipation of the coming of God's Son and took His Son as its sole subject (Luke 24:27). For example, the animal offerings of the Old Testament satisfied God only because the reality of those offerings was His Son (Heb. 10:5-9).

<sup>3</sup>This is displayed in the New Testament in a number of instances. In one case, Paul, as a recipient of the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ through the church's petition on his behalf, magnified Christ in his mortal body even as he was bound by chains in a Roman prison (Phil. 1:19-21).

## Emulating the Life and Unity of the Trinity

*The Trinity*, by Philip W. Butin. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001.

In *The Trinity* Philip W. Butin, a former pastor of Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico and president of San Francisco Theological Seminary, discusses the importance and relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian faith, worship, and mission. As one of the twelve volumes in the *Foundations of Christian Faith* series, the book examines the biblical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity and traces its development in church history from the early centuries in which the doctrine was established and clarified to the modern period in which it has been challenged and recovered. In discussing the significance of this doctrine for the Christian life, *Trinity* principally argues that since the Triune God "exists in the intimate intercommunion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (91), His intention is that the believers participate in communion with the Triune God and reflect the life, mutuality, and unity of the Trinity in the church. Although the book attempts to present God's intention from the perspective of the inner trinitarian communion, it nevertheless falls short of revealing God's economy to dispense Himself in Christ as the life-giving Spirit into our tripartite being in order to reproduce Himself within us. Thus, the book fails to present the means by which the believers fellowship with the Triune God and with one another—the divine Spirit in our regenerated human spirit. Ultimately, it misses God's lofty purpose—that the Triune God and redeemed humanity would mutually indwell each other to produce the Body of Christ, an expression and enlargement of the oneness of the Divine Trinity.

## Trinity's Presentation of the Trinity in the Christian Life

At the outset Butin posits that "Christian faith is rooted in the historic conviction that the one, unique God is triune, existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (xiii). He also

---

contends that trinitarian theology is of crucial importance not only to academic scholars for their objective study but also to ordinary Christians for their everyday life. The book then highlights Jesus' baptism and our baptism as two instances that unveil the trinitarian character of God. At Jesus' baptism, God, who in the Old Testament is recognized as Yahweh in His self-identification, is revealed as the Father of Jesus, the anticipated Messiah, with the Holy Spirit as the bond of the latter to the former. After His death and resurrection, Jesus charged His disciples to baptize the believers into a mysteriously threefold revelation of the singular divine name: "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

**B**utin argues that trinitarian language and awareness emerged spontaneously as early believers sought to articulate the divine glory they beheld in Jesus and to describe the life-transforming presence they experienced through the Holy Spirit. According to *Trinity*, the New Testament reveals that early Christians confessed God as Father, Jesus as the unique Son of God, and the Holy Spirit as God at work in the world, the Christian community, and Christian individuals. Butin then traces the articulation of trinitarian belief that Christian teachers and theologians have suggested across the church's history from the second century through the present.

Following this, Butin attempts to explore the implications of the Trinity for Christian faith, worship, and life. The Triune God awakens and sustains faith in us by showing us His own self. The Triune God is love and is gracious. The Triune God saves us from sin and mortality to restore us to the intimate divine-human relationship by taking up residence in our midst through the Holy Spirit's work in human hearts. The Triune God frees us to be changed according to the pattern of Christ's human life through our prayer and our accountability to other believers that we may reflect the mutuality and unity that characterizes the Triune God. The Triune God suffers compassionately with us, entering into, absorbing, and defeating our suffering; hence, our sacrificial suffering on behalf of others can be a reflection of God's own being and work.

Butin contends that since God is essentially relational, the divine image in which we were created consists in our interpersonal relatedness. This points to God's intention that the divine *koinonia*—the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—should be reflected in human *koinonia*. In the church, the Body of Christ, we reflect God's own essential relationality through our worship, prayer, and daily life rooted in our communion with the Triune God. The diversity in unity that characterizes the Trinity is reflected in the unity of the believers because "distinct and diverse human persons comprise Christ's one body" (95). To reflect the unity of the Triune God, the believers as the Body of Christ should eschew

individualism, personal privacy, and self-sufficiency; rather, they should experience interpersonal receptivity, interdependence, and shared accountability. Further, stating a "Christian sensitivity to the need for reversing the destructive legacy of patriarchy" (100), *Trinity* quotes biblical texts that contain female images of God and cautiously encourages the believers to vary our address to God, "using the wealth of feminine or gender-neutral terms available in scripture and Christian tradition" (103). In its conclusion, the book issues a missionary call to the believers to participate in the Triune God's own mission to the world. In the Spirit, the church participates in His priestly ministry to extend God's gracious forgiveness to sinners, in His royal ministry to repudiate the false authority of any kind of coercion, and in His prophetic ministry to proclaim the good news to the world.

*Trinity* admirably underscores the fundamental import of the Trinity. Butin suggests that although the doctrine of the Trinity may offend sensibilities, cause misunderstandings, and provoke controversies, we must believe in the Triune God because Christian faith depends upon the truth of the Trinity. Butin asserts that "Christian teaching about the Trinity is the heart and center of Christian faith" (xiii). *Trinity* declares that only in the Trinity do we know with confidence that God desires to be known by us and is gracious toward us: God poured out the divine love for us in Christ and lives within and among us as the Holy Spirit to reconnect us to God. Since it confirms the truth of the Trinity as the basis of our assurance of salvation and of God's desire to reveal Himself to us, the book should be credited for recognizing the Trinity as the hinge of Christian faith.

*Trinity* rightly suggests that substituting any object of our own preference for the worship of the Triune God causes us to succumb to the age-old temptation of worshipping a projection of human desires. Butin warns that "our worship degenerates into a mere diversion unless it is directed to the true and living God: the One Who Is" (12). *Trinity* also asserts that Christian worship is not an entertainment event catered to our own personal taste; it is the cultivation of our "open, unhindered interpersonal communion with the interpersonal, triune God" (97), in which God motivates through His Word and Spirit, and we respond to His initiative. According to Butin, "Trinitarian worship is not primarily something we offer to God. Rather, it is gracious participation in the triune God's own life and *koinonia*" (98).

The book correctly exposes a human tendency to project a god who reflects our own preferences and mirrors the values of our culture. Butin posits that in idolatry we construct a god on the basis of human needs, ideas, or desires, whereas in the Trinity "God the Father reveals

---

God's own self to us in the Son, by the Holy Spirit" (9). For instance, Butin points out that the logic of social trinitarianism (which often speaks of God as a divine society or community) at times seems to argue from human insights gained in social theory and then to the way God exists as Trinity. The book emphatically contends that "it would be little more than idolatry to project an understanding onto God primarily because it coheres with a contemporary intellectual trend like socialism" (64).

### The Triune God in the Human Living of Christ

*Trinity* suffers from several fundamental shortcomings that limit the reader's understanding and experience of the Triune God. First, it presents a shallow understanding of the human living of Christ. According to the book, the human living of Christ figures prominently in God's purpose for us: God intends to change us through the Trinity—that is, through the Father by the Holy Spirit, extending the divine life to us "according to the pattern of human wholeness exemplified for us in the Son" (84). The book contends that God's purpose for humanity is "embodied in Christ's own example" (84): "The good purpose of the triune God for human life is gradual growth—in the Spirit—toward the wholeness we see in Jesus Christ, our pattern" (86). The book then characterizes His human living as "Jesus' humble example, who in his humanity depended completely on the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit to be the person God intended him to be, and to do the work that God intended him to do" (112).

Regrettably, this characterization of the human living of Christ neglects the intimate embodiment in the man Jesus of the entire Triune God. To its credit, *Trinity* recognizes the interdependence of the Father and the Son in the human living of Christ; it also mentions Augustine's normative trinitarian teaching that "every divine action in creation and human life is the concerted work of all three divine persons" (108). Despite the cursory mentioning of this Augustinian tenet, the book nonetheless comes short of exploring the deeper significance of Christ's incarnation and human living in relation to the operation of the Trinity: Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God, was the Son coinhering with the Father and acting by the Spirit (John 14:10; Matt. 12:28). Throughout His life on earth, from His incarnation to His crucifixion, Christ was the Triune God-man—the complete Triune God united with the perfect man—whose every action was the operation of the entire Trinity.

Just as Christ's every action in His human living was the simultaneous operation of the entire Triune God abiding in Him, so also our every action in our living as His members must be the operation of the Triune God dwelling in us (1 Cor. 6:15; Phil. 2:13). As the first God-man—a man

indwelt by the Triune God, Christ was the Son living and working with the Father and by the Spirit to live out the Triune God as God manifested in the flesh for the expression of God. Following His pattern we, the brothers of Christ as the many God-men, should live and work as the sons of God indwelt by Him as the Spirit, living out God as the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh for His enlarged expression (John 12:24; Eph. 4:6; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Tim. 3:16). Because the book fails to explore the inner dynamics of Christ's human living in relation to the operation of the Triune God, it comes short of revealing the core significance of His human living as a paradigm for the believers.

### The Resurrected Christ as the Life-giving Spirit

*Trinity* also comes short of unveiling how we can be transformed into the image of Christ in order to reflect the Triune God. According to the book, we should "seek to live in the glorious light of Jesus' humble example" (112). *Trinity* asserts that we as the Body of Christ should be enabled by God "to follow after the pattern of Jesus Christ the crucified God" to share and bear the suffering of the fellow members of the Body (109). Further, it claims that "our willing and sacrificial suffering on behalf of others" can be a faithful reflection of God's own being and work, even a "vital bridge of connection and empathy with the triune God of love, who suffers compassionately with us" (87). In the main, the book seems to suggest that in order to reflect the Triune God, the believers should muse upon the human living of Christ and imitate His virtues, such as love, compassion, and forbearance. Yet according to the divine revelation in the Scriptures, to reflect the Triune God is not to emulate Him as our outward model through the help of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives; rather, it is to allow the resurrected Christ as the indwelling Spirit to reproduce Himself within us by receiving the dispensing of the Triune God into our being.

We reflect the Triune God, not by what we *do* for Him, but by what we *are* in Him (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:9). That is, we can express the Triune God only as He in Christ as the life-giving Spirit works Himself into our being to saturate us with Himself, ultimately making us the same as He is in life, nature, disposition, image, and glory but not in the Godhead (Col. 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:19, 29; 1 John 3:2; Heb. 2:10). Because the book fails to reveal the intrinsic meaning of reflecting the Lord, it aims the believers toward imitating the incarnated Christ as an external exemplar of humanity by the power of the Spirit, not toward a living contact with the resurrected Christ as the Lord Spirit dwelling within them.

### The Processed Triune God

*Trinity* repeatedly quotes Matthew 28:19 and highlights

“our shared baptism in the strong name of the Trinity” (117). However, it fails to show that it was only after He had completed His process in Christ to become the life-giving Spirit that the Triune God announced to His disciples for the first time a distinct and unequivocal revelation of His triune being: “Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19). He disclosed His triune name at the consummation of His process because as the life-giving Spirit, He can now consummate His economy by dispensing Himself as life into us.

The Spirit is much more than “God’s presence with the disciples once Christ has gone to the Father” (17); the Spirit is the totality of the processed and consummated Triune God—and the reality of the resurrected Christ with all His human experiences and accomplishments—transmitting Himself into our being to be our life and life supply. All the steps of the process the Triune God has undergone in Christ are not mere historical events; they have been compounded with His divinity into the all-inclusive Spirit to be applied to, and dispensed into, the believers (Phil. 1:19). Apart from knowing this all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, the reality of the processed and consummated Triune God, we cannot experience the processed Triune God in all His person, process, and possessions.

### The Triune God Coinhering with His Tripartite Elect

*Trinity* also falls short of revealing the essence of the relationship God intends to have with His believers. The book should be commended for recognizing that what characterizes God’s own essentially relational existence is the coinherence, the mutual indwelling, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—“three distinct divine persons indwelling and inhabiting and existing in one another” (91). Although the book argues that we were created to reflect God’s own triune relationality, it neglects the Triune God’s intention to extend the relationship of coinherence to His believers. The Triune God’s work within the believers is the reflex of His intrinsic being; every economic activity of the Triune God is but the reflection of the immanent reality within the Trinity.

From eternity to eternity, the three of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—exist as an incorporation; that is, they mutually coinhere and indwell one another (John 14:10-11). Hence, when the Triune God entered time to carry out His salvific economy, He intended to bring redeemed humanity into this divine incorporation, that is, to coinhere with humanity (v. 20; 15:1-5; 17:21-23). The chief confirmation of God’s intention to coinhere with man is the incarnation of Christ, an incorporation of the Triune God with the tripartite man. *Trinity* underlines that the New Testament “joyfully announces how we can

be restored to the intimate, face-to-face, divine-human relationship for which we were created” (81). Yet it does not show the highest intimacy of the relationship God intended for redeemed humanity: the mutual abiding of God in man and man in God based upon the truth that He in Christ has put Himself into us through regeneration (Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:10; John 1:12-13) and that we were put into Christ through baptism (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; Matt. 28:19). Since the three of the Trinity are an incorporation, enjoying the relationship of coinherence, for the Triune God to have a relationship with the believers that is any less intimate than that of coinherence will not satisfy His intense desire to be fully one with redeemed humanity. *Trinity* claims that “we are all created for *koinonia*: open, unhindered interpersonal communion with the interpersonal, triune God” (97). But it misses the fact that we were created to participate in the coinherence of the processed and consummated Triune God—without becoming a part of the Godhead—for the purpose of manifesting who He is in His eternal, intrinsic being: the coinhering Triune God, a divine incorporation.

### The Body of Christ—The Reproduction of the Oneness of the Triune God

At the heart of the book is its claim that we are created to reflect “God’s own trinitarian, relational reality” in the community of the Christian faith, the church (93). *Trinity* asserts that Christians are the Body of Christ on earth, sharing “God’s life together in communion with one another” and living in interdependence with one another (95). Within this one Body, the book argues, the believers should reflect God’s own triune relationality by mutually serving one another, being held accountable by others, accepting one another’s responsibility, depending on one another, caring for one another, and sharing one another’s joy and suffering. The book posits that “it is God’s own interpersonal communion within the Trinity that is the basis, pattern, and dynamic of the communion we share with other believers” (104). Certainly, the oneness, harmony, and interdependence of the Divine Trinity serve as the pattern for our coordination as the members of the Body of Christ. However, the book does not present the significance of the Body of Christ as the issue of our living in the coinherence with the processed Triune God: that is, the Body of Christ as the reproduction of the oneness of the Triune God.

The Body of Christ is presented merely as a “community” of believers caring for and depending on one another based on their faith and baptism to reflect the communion and relationality within the Triune God; it is not presented as a divine and human incorporation in which the Triune God in Christ as the Spirit mutually indwells His tripartite elect who become a duplication and enlargement of the coinhering oneness of the Divine Trinity (Eph. 4:4-6).



---

The only genuine and eternal oneness in this universe is the coinhering oneness of the Divine Trinity. Hence, the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ is the processed Triune God Himself in Christ as the Spirit incorporated with His regenerated believers, the members of the Body. Paul characterizes the oneness among the believers as “the oneness of the Spirit” (v. 3). *Trinity* overlooks this intrinsic view of the Body of Christ; it discusses only an external unity among the believers achieved through a shared communion with the Triune God. This may assuage the human desire for community and emulate the communion within the Trinity, but it misses the internal oneness of the Body of Christ accomplished through the mutual indwelling of God and man, which satisfies the Triune God’s heart’s desire to duplicate and enlarge His oneness of coinherence in and through redeemed humanity.

### The Regenerated Human Spirit

Another critical shortcoming of *Trinity* is its neglect of the human spirit as the key to experience the Triune God. Based on 1 John 1:3 the book points out the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the *koinonia*, or communion: our communion with the Triune God and with the believers. The former is primary because the latter grows out of the former; hence, we cannot create the fellowship by focusing horizontally on one another to strengthen human relationships apart from the vertical fellowship with the Triune God. *Trinity* rightly highlights that genuine communion with God and others in prayer and in worship is the work of the Holy Spirit. The book fails to unveil, however, the means through which we fellowship with the Triune God and the believers—our regenerated human spirit. The Triune God is processed in Christ and consummated as the life-giving Spirit; man—a tripartite vessel composed of spirit, soul, and body—is created with a human spirit, a receptacle to receive and contain God (1 Thes. 5:23; Job 32:8).

Through our regeneration, our human spirit is born of, united with, and indwelt by the Spirit to become one spirit (John 3:6; 1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:22). The Triune God who is embodied in Christ and realized as the Spirit now lives in our regenerated spirit (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:11); thus, it is only in our regenerated spirit that we can contact, realize, and experience the Triune God. Since the divine fellowship between the Triune God and the believers is the divine Spirit being joined to the human spirit to become one spirit, Paul speaks not only of “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (the life-giving Spirit) (2 Cor. 13:14) but also of the “fellowship of spirit” (the regenerated human spirit) (Phil. 2:1). According to the New Testament revelation, our divine fellowship with the Triune God and with one another takes place exclusively in our spirit. The book ardently argues that “the primary concern of worship” is our relationship with God (97);

worship involves our “humble confession, jubilant praise, heartfelt thanksgiving, receptivity to God’s leadership and guidance,...deeper faith and trust” (98). Yet it neglects the Lord’s primary mandate for true worshippers that they exercise their spirit to contact God the Spirit in order to drink of Him as the fountain of the living water (John 4:14; 7:37-39). Despite its admirable emphasis on the vertical fellowship with the Triune God, the book does not provide an entrance into the fellowship because it overlooks the human spirit, the locus of the divine fellowship with the Triune God and fellow believers.

### Conclusion

Overall, *Trinity* gives a credible summary of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity and seeks to present the doctrine of the Trinity not as an abstruse and esoteric concept reserved for theologians but as a Christian teaching relevant and even central to the personal and corporate life and worship of believers. The book admirably attempts to shift the focus from an abstract understanding of inner trinitarian relationships to a practical understanding of the Triune God’s relationship with human beings. In particular, against the backdrop of the rise of Western individualism and the erosion of traditional Western social structures, the book advances a notion that the believers as the Body of Christ should reflect the essential relationality and the divine unity of the Triune God. Although this notion may appear to approach the goal of God’s eternal purpose, the book actually comes short of revealing how the Body of Christ expresses the oneness of the Divine Trinity.

The book posits that “we are created for interpersonal relationship with the interpersonal God: the Trinity” (92); more significantly, however, the New Testament reveals that we are created for a coinhering relationship with the coinhering Triune God. *Trinity* only incites the believers to emulate the life of the Trinity by musing on the exemplary living of the historical Jesus by the power of the Spirit; it does not exhort them to become the corporate reproduction of Christ by enjoying the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit dispensing Himself as life into our being. The book can only encourage the believers to emulate the unity of the Trinity by caring for and sharing accountability with one another through the communion with the Spirit; it cannot encourage them to mutually abide with the Triune God to become the reproduction of His coinhering oneness by enjoying the Spirit dwelling in their spirit. Ultimately, reflecting the life and unity of the Triune God, as espoused by *Trinity*, is more about the earnest emulation of God through human effort than the organic reproduction of God in man through the divine dispensing.

by David Yoon