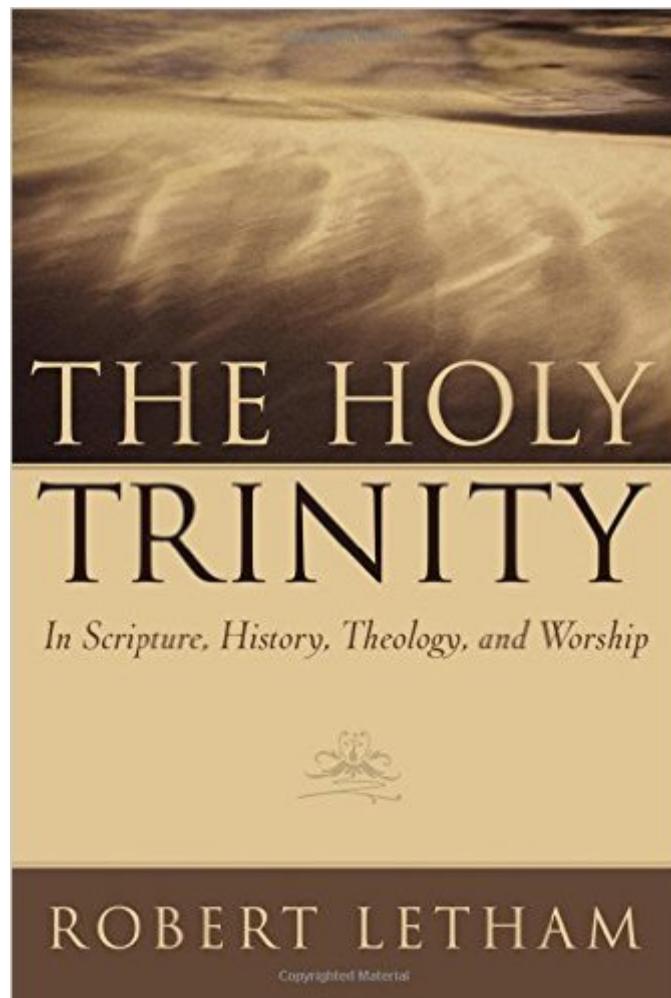


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The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, And Worship



Synopsis

When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, evangelicals have underachieved. In *The Holy Trinity* Robert Letham helps to redress this shortcoming. He offers a well-researched volume about "the One who is utterly transcendent and incomprehensible." After examining the doctrine's biblical foundations, the author traces its historical development through the twentieth century, and engages four critical issues: the Trinity and (1) the incarnation, (2) worship and prayer, (3) creation and missions, and (4) persons.

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Customer Reviews

Letham's "The Holy Trinity" is an in-depth discussion of this distinguishing, cardinal, yet too-neglected doctrine of Christianity. Letham's main concern, and crowning section, has to do with the importance of the Trinity. What are its implications for our worship and for our lives in general? As Christians we are saved from sin and death by all means, but we are not only saved "from": we are also saved TO union with God. Letham argues that this attribute of God in particular we should understand better: what is the union within God himself that we are adopted into? How do we relate to the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit? Letham charges that too often the church (in particular the Western church) is ignorant of, or negligent of, the Trinity. We refer to God as "LORD" without thinking about who God is or who Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are. We have our analogies handy -- but unfortunately these usually introduce heresy themselves. Even in the best use these are limited to "illustrating" how God is simultaneously One and Three; and we remain ignorant about the relationship among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and about how God in each of his persons relates

to us (what is the same of the One God, what is unique among each of the three Holy Persons). As a sneak preview, let me share a few salient points of this doctrine:^{*} God is knowable to us because he revealed himself to us. And he revealed himself as he truly is, not as a false *faÃ§ade*; so while we finite mortals can not know everything about Him, we can trust that what He revealed is true of his nature.^{*} God is One: one essence, one being.^{*} God is three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each fully God.

Dr. Letham has provided the reader with one of the most comprehensive and in depth treatments of the Trinity that I have found. There are books that survey the history of the Trinity theologically (The Trinity by Olson and Hall, e.g.), but this one goes into a lot of depth. He begins with the Bible and then goes through each phase of Church history to investigate what the theologians in that era had to say. He interacts extensively with the primary sources. He tells you what Irenaeus said and what Athanasius said and what the Cappadocians said, and so on. He also offers an incisive critique of their positions. He is also conversant and interacts with the voluminous literature on the various epochs of the church's development of the Trinity. His bibliography is worth the price of the book. Further, he places the footnotes and citations at the bottom of each page which is very helpful. It didn't use to matter, but I wanted to see who he was quoting and any additional comments he might be making. The book, though technical is articulate, readable and accessible. I gained a lot of understanding of the Trinity and the issues involved in the historical development. One thing in particular is the fact that I also became aware of the mysteries that we can't penetrate. That is excellent scholarship. The scholar and the layman will profit from this book. They will be introduced to the major players in two thousand years of history and what they had to say. I especially liked his interaction with Eastern scholarship (Lossky, Bulgakov, Staniloae, and Bobrinskoy). He may have left some people out, but I would be hard-pressed to know who they might be. He also has some excellent chapters on application of the Trinity to life, worship and mission.

In my goal of reading through all of Larry Crabb's recommended reading list he provided at the School of Spiritual Direction, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (2004) by Robert Letham was the third book on the Trinity and far and away the most detailed and scholarly (The first two being *Delighting in the Trinity* by Reeves and *Experiencing the Trinity* by Johnson). Letham's book provides some 550 pages exploring the Trinity for evangelicals who he argues have "underachieved" in this arena. The book is divided into four general sections: biblical foundations, historical development, modern discussion, and critical issues. Each of these sections

goes into some depth. I am glad that he opened with the biblical foundations exploring both Old and New Testament justification for the Trinity. How these biblical foundations then gave way to developments in the early church toward the development of a trinitarian theology was quite interesting. In the second section, Letham examined how the doctrine developed and the heresies that also arose. After reaching Calvin, he jumps forward to more modern explorations, in large part because there were apparently many silent years in terms of doctrinal development. The four chapters that made up the final section, critical issues, were the most important to me. Though the historical development was interesting and quite beneficial in terms of understanding why certain decisions were reached, this final section dealt much more with practical matters. In other words, how does trinitarian thinking influence worship, prayer, missions, and relationships.

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