

Having addressed what for many might be a significant, if unspoken, obstacle to the affirmation of women in leadership, the misconception that a male God somehow prefers males, she turns her attention to positive images of women serving in ministry of various kinds. While the biblical examples offered by the stories of the incarnation, the annunciation, and surrounding events afford the opportunity to highlight women like Mary and her cousin Elizabeth in the ministries of parenting and proclamation, roles that will extend, for Mary, from the Magnificat to Pentecost and beyond, I was equally moved by the way Peeler connects her theological assertions to her own experience in ministry. While she acknowledges that not every tradition will see her claim—that this God who is not male values women and men equally—as a strong enough reason to give women a voice in ministry, she does not shrink from the reality that these truths, that she is created in the image of God and that God the Son was born of a

woman, give her the strength to stand at the table each week to bear Christ in the Eucharist. For all of us, both men and women, who seek to serve the church in all kinds of ministry, Peeler's invitation to see ourselves as God's beloved can provide the joy and the hope necessary to do the work of God's kingdom. For this, and for so many other reasons, I am thankful for this book.

TODD EDMONDSON holds an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary and a PhD from the University of Louisville in Kentucky. He teaches humanities at Milligan University and pastors a congregation in eastern Tennessee.



Book Review

Three in One: Analogies for the Trinity by William David Spencer (Kregel Academic, 2022)

Reviewed by CHRISTA L. MCKIRLAND

I was recently at the Evangelical Theological Society conference scouring the book booths for an ideal text to use in my course on the Trinity. Personally, I enjoy reading books on the nuances of the doctrine's historical development, or detailed accounts of the metaphysics of consubstantiality, simplicity, and inseparable operations. However, "joy" is not how most of my undergraduate students have felt in engaging these texts. Frankly, most of my students want to know why this doctrine even matters. On the other hand, I have found accessible texts that make a case for the doctrine's relevance to the Christian life but often fail to: seriously engage primary texts, show sensitivity to global perspectives, substantiate gendered language for God, or value partial pictures of the Trinity. Finally, across both the erudite and the conversational forms of books on the Trinity that I have read, most Western Trinitarian scholars do not consider their own positionality as they come to this doctrine. After all, "why should who I am matter if I am talking about a mind-independent reality such as the Trinity?"

In addition to benefitting my students, William Spencer's book is of value to readers of *Priscilla Papers* for at least three reasons: It gives insight into the use of gendered language for God. It adds another expert's voice to the discussion on the absence of hierarchy in the Trinity. It gives context to debates about these and other questions. That is, we are better able to understand focused discussions when we also study the broader doctrine within which those discussions happen.

Fortunately, I was recommended this book by a friend who recognized the needs I perceive as I encounter scholarship on the Trinity. Dr. Spencer's introduction lays out his own cultural heritage and why he wrote this book. While the Trinity is the focus, his students are his audience. And they are not a passive audience, for he weaves their multi-cultural voices throughout the volume. Many of these students know English as their second or third language, and thus Spencer garners forty years of teaching experience to make accessible this critical doctrine. Given that experience, Spencer also knows the ways the Trinity has been weaponized in some sectors of evangelical thought, and he is attuned to theologies of subordination and how they are wielded against women. Such attunement is also shown through the use of "Godself" instead of always using "he" and by concluding with insights about gendered language for God (including affirming the value of such language).

Given his multi-cultural context, Spencer's valuation of voices beyond the European theological genealogy is another strength of this book. He pulls from Kenyan, Native American, Cuban, Australian, Finnish, and South Korean scholars as his contemporary sources while also engaging with many primary source texts from the early church. Knowing his audience may be completely unfamiliar with Trinitarian terminology and concepts, Spencer defines load-bearing terms in simple and clear ways. Finally, as the title says, the pivot point for the entire book is the use of analogies for understanding this doctrine.

As a summary, his first chapter situates who he is, why he wrote this book, and a few preliminary terms. For readers who have an analogy allergy, his second chapter gives a defence of their use, especially by acknowledging the contextual nature of knowledge, including revealed knowledge. Consequently, analogies are valuable, but they are also limited. The goal of his book is to help the reader discern the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed analogies (which come from church history and his students). Analogies are images that seek some truth correspondence with reality. They are not exhaustive. To further strengthen his case for analogies, Spencer turns to Jesus's use of images and parables in ch. 3 as a precedent for the artistic and metaphorical speech of analogy.

Chapter 4 then shifts into analogies of light for the Triune God, looking at both Scripture and early church theologians and their use of this image. Here Spencer also connects problematic images with ancient beliefs that have contemporary expressions—for instance, Mormonism and Christian Science. By comparing the doctrine of the Trinity to religious frameworks they have heard about, students who wonder about the relevance of the Trinity can more easily connect the dots about the importance of this doctrine. These dots continue to be connected in the fifth chapter with a detailed look at the image of light in the book of Hebrews and especially how early thinkers leveraged the light analogy for their various doctrinal positions and through to the present day in the theology of Jehovah's Witnesses. Chapter 6 expounds on images that move and change while chs. 7 and 8 focus on more static images. Finally, the ninth chapter turns to the image of God as family—tackling gendered language for God in more detail. Again, the pros and cons of the different kinds of analogies within each of these categories are explored, remembering that “An analogy only purports to highlight one aspect, one point of correspondence in what it is imaging” (144).

My critiques are quibbles pertaining to some clarification. This is especially due to this book being intended as a “primer in theologizing” and thus needing some additional context for students exposed to this doctrine for the first time (201). The first quibble is in ch. 7, pgs. 125–26, within Spencer's discussion of *taxis* (that is, the question of divine hierarchy) in Athanasius's work. The move from his argument about the lack of hierarchy in Athanasius's work to one evangelical scholar's reading of *taxis* to argue for hierarchy in the Trinity and “in those elements of the created order” was not entirely clear. Readers who may not know that some theologians leverage a hierarchical understanding of the Trinity to argue for the subordination of women to men would need this spelled out.

My second quibble is also in ch. 7, in a statement Spencer makes on pg. 155: “Because both Tertullian and Erickson recognize an eternally living triune God, they can both understand, as Marcion and those like him did not, how one person of the Godhead could die and overpower evil, while the two other persons of the one, great God were still alive and holding the universe together.” This was the only statement in the entire book that gave me pause because the implication seems to be that

the Second Person of the Trinity not only died, but also ceased to exist. Since the Son is the one through whom the universe is held together (Col 1:14–16), I do not believe the Son ceased to exist but continued to hold the universe together with the Spirit and the Father, even through death. Perhaps the confusion is compounded by saying the other two persons “were still alive” since this seems to separate existence and essence, which are one and the same for God. God as three persons always exists. I do not think Spencer is arguing against this, but since the necessary unity of the Godhead is important to make clear, this statement would benefit from some unpacking.

My final quibble is the minimal engagement with scholarship from the last decade. Considering the absence of those voices, the debate about social trinitarianism in ch. 9 did not seem fully represented or its interlocutors fully addressed. However, this can be easily supplemented with other class readings and discussions and will hopefully be an area that Dr. Spencer can address at more length in future work.

Given the many positive aspects of Spencer's book, I look forward to introducing my students to his thinking. I am especially keen to do so given the sensitivities he brings to this critical doctrine and his clear love of the pedagogical task in service to the Triune God.



CHRISTA MCKIRLAND is a lecturer in systematic theology at Carey Bible College in Auckland, New Zealand. She earned MA and ThM degrees from Talbot School of Theology in southern California and a PhD from the University of St Andrews, Scotland. She founded Logia International, an organisation that encourages women to pursue postgraduate divinity education for the sake of the academy and church (see <https://LogiaTheology.org>). Christa has published various books and articles and served as associate editor for the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (IVP Academic, 2021).