

bears a resemblance to both the biological idea of impregnating and the horticultural idea of sowing.

The fear seems to be that if our concepts become broader, they will lose meaning, but that is only because of the dominance of the model given us by the sciences of modernity. On that model, narrow and precise concepts are the ideal, and thus to move in the opposite direction is thought to undermine meaning. On another model, however, quite the opposite is the case. In our

intimate communions, meaning increases as our concepts broaden to accommodate the intentional meaning of the other person. On this model, an insistence on narrow and precise concepts prevent others from communicating the richness and fullness of their concepts. On this model, the richness and fullness of meaning is communicated only as we allow our concepts to be broadened. My claim is that in the reading of Scripture this second model should often be preferred over the first.

## A Little Trinitarian Reflection

MYK HABETS

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Recently much discussion has been taking place regarding the distinctive doctrine of the Trinity. With so much discussion, writing and publishing, it is easy for profound and ground breaking works to be overlooked and forgotten. One such work is that of Dr Thomas Weinandy O.F.M., Cap., a lecturer at Oxford University, entitled, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity*. This little trinitarian reflection simply draws to mind some of his insights which I have found helpful and thought provoking for my own research into Spirit christology.

In light of the perceived inadequacies of the received trinitarian tradition (East and West), Weinandy presents a reconceived doctrine of the Trinity in his Work *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*.<sup>1</sup> He considers the weaknesses of the trinitarian constructions of both East and West to lie in an inadequate, even flawed, conception of the role and function of the Holy Spirit within the trinitarian life.<sup>2</sup> In the West the Father and Son play active roles while the Spirit assumes a passive function as merely the Love or Gift shared by the Father and the Son. Under this presentation how is the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit identified? In the East the *monarchia* of the Father is so pervasive that the notion of *perichoresis* is undermined.

Without denying a biblical sense of the Father's *monarchia* Weinandy argues that a proper understanding of the Trinity can be attained only if 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.<sup>3</sup> This drives Weinandy to present his thesis that, as he writes, 'may seem subtle, yet one that I believe radically transforms and revolutionizes the Christian understanding of the Trinity.'<sup>4</sup> His thesis is simply that:

the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit. The Son is begotten by the Father in the Spirit and thus the Spirit simultaneously proceeds from the Father as the one in whom the Son is begotten. The Son, being begotten in the Spirit, simultaneously loves the Father in the same Spirit by which he himself is begotten (is Loved).<sup>5</sup>

In this sense then the Spirit proceeds from the Father and is identified as the one in whom the Father begets the Son. In this double movement the Father is defined (personed) as the Father of the Son and the Son too is defined (personed) as the Son of the Father. In short, all three persons of the Trinity, within their relationships, help constitute one another.

Weinandy offers the following authors who propose a somewhat similar, if undeveloped trinitarian paradigm. F.X. Durwell,<sup>6</sup> L. Boff,<sup>7</sup> and J. Moltmann.<sup>8</sup> Moltmann deals with this under his discussion of the reciprocal trinitarian efficacies which are multiple in kind. From these and other sources my own research has been developing this trinitarian model in terms of a trinitarian Spirit christology which I shall comment on shortly. However, as Weinandy himself notes, the proposals he builds upon (and now we note his proposal as well), do not seem to have had any impact on the larger theological community. The significance of what they are proposing appears to have been neglected.<sup>10</sup> This is an oversight which must surely be corrected if we are to move beyond a mere repetition of a dead orthodoxy.

The presuppositions of the trinitarian argument of Spirit christology are founded on several related presuppositions. Firstly, the three persons of the Trinity as they reveal themselves in the economy of salvation manifest their inner trinitarian life and relationships.

This is in accord with the axiom that the economic is the immanent Trinity (Rahner). Secondly, the economic Trinity is primarily expressed in functional terms in the Bible, yet there is an inherent trinitarian ontology; 'The *pro nobis* manifestation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit innately contains and naturally unveils in se ontological reality.'<sup>11</sup>

This trinitarian construct does not wish to denigrate the *monarchy* of the Father but to highlight this *monarchy* without any subordinationist tendencies. To do this a mutual co-inherence or *perichoresis* of action within the Trinity must take place whereby the persons are who they are because of the action of *all three*. While the Son and the Holy Spirit come forth from the Father, this is not some prior ontological action but rather in the coming forth all three persons become who they are, and they do so precisely in reciprocally interacting upon one another, simultaneously fashioning one another into themselves.<sup>12</sup>

What makes this *perichoresis* intelligible is the active role of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. The Father begets the Son in the spiration of the Spirit so the Spirit makes the Father to be the Father of the Son and the Son to be the Son of the Father. The Spirit thus proceeds from both Father to Son and Son to Father and so becomes distinct in his mutual relation to them as the love by which they come to be who they are for one another. This conception moves beyond both western and eastern models. In the West the Holy Spirit is Love shared between the Father and the Son. As such he is passive and impersonal. In the East the Son and Spirit proceed from the Father in a linear fashion. When Spirit christology is raised to the trinitarian level the Holy Spirit is given an active role within the Triunity that guarantees him a personal distinction.

The *monarchy* of the Father must be maintained within the one being of the Triunity and not prior to or outside it. In the East the tendency has been to see the Godhead as residing in the Father alone and he mediates divinity to the Son and Spirit. In the West there is the distinct impression that the Godhead is distinct from the three persons and is an independent but apophatic *ousia* of oneness. Both are incompatible with the biblical revelation. The Godhead is neither the Father *alone* nor a solitary *substance* separate from the three persons. The Godhead is the Triunity. The one Godhead is the action of the Father begetting the Son and spirating the Spirit, thus sharing with them the whole of his deity, constituting them as equally divine. In this way the *monarchy* of the Father is maintained but within the Triunity of persons.<sup>13</sup>

Because the Son is begotten from the Father he is the Son and proceeds by way of generation. For this reason filiation is ascribed to the Son. Each of the terms 'Father' and 'Son' presupposes the other and the relationship between them. But this action, traditionally understood, is a passive one whereby the Son is Son due to his begetting from the Father. Is there a sense in which he also has an active role of a reciprocal nature

which equally constitutes his being the Son in relationship to the Father? This question can be answered only in light of the role of the Holy Spirit.

In order to differentiate the Spirit from the Son the early church spoke of the Son's generation and the Spirit's spiration. But exactly what the difference was the early church was at odds to adequately explain. Working with existing trinitarian paradigms we have no adequate explanation as to why the Spirit is not another Son or at the very least a grandson to the Father. The reason provided by our new paradigm of Spirit christology is that 'the Father is the Father in that he begets the Son in the Spirit. The Father spirates the Spirit in the same act by which he begets the Son, for the Spirit proceeds from the Father as the fatherly Love in whom or by whom the Son is begotten.'<sup>14</sup>

This understanding of the Trinity maintains the monarchy of the Father as the *fons divinitatis* from whom came both the Son and the Spirit, without also positing any subordination within the Trinity (an eastern tendency) or dividing *de Deo uno* from the treatise *de Deo trino* (a western tendency).<sup>15</sup> In this way a comprehensive paradigm for Spirit christology holds together a theology of Word and Spirit within a trinitarian construct. As the Word of God the Father breathes forth the Son which implies impulse and motion. This impulse or motion is the breath of God, the *pneuma*, hence Word and Spirit go together out from the Father in a mutual, co-inhering relationship with each other. In the economy as in the immanent Trinity God is revealed as the Father who begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit. The Son responds to the Father in reciprocal fashion as the obedient Son in or by the Holy Spirit.

While Weinandy did not develop a Spirit christology as I have more than hinted at here, he did provide a profound vision of the basis of Triunity that is able to complement both eastern and western approaches, thus ensuring ecumenical catholicity, while at the same time adhering strictly to biblical revelation, thus ensuring fidelity to the Word of God. Amidst the current resurgence of trinitarian studies let us not be too quick to overlook or dismiss such rich work as Weinandy has offered to us in this work, and let us be open to biblically faithful advances on the received tradition in both its eastern and western expressions.

*Myk Habets lectures in Systematic Theology and the Bible College of New Zealand.*

### Footnotes

1 T.G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 6ff.

2 *Ibid.*, 8.

3 *Ibid.*, 15.

4 *Ibid.*, 17.

5 Ibid., 17.

6 F.X. Durrwell, *Holy Spirit of God: An Essay in Biblical Theology*, trans. B. Davies (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 133-159.

7 L. Boff, *The Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis, 1988), 6, 84, 146f., 204f., 236.

8 J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. M. Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 169f., 182-185; *ibid.*, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 306-309. I also identify this theme in *ibid.*, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM, 1990), 84.

9 J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 70-71.

10 Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*, 19.

11 *Ibid.*, 22.

12 *Ibid.*, 78f.

13 See the trinitarian reflection on 'person' in C.E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2nd edition 1997), 54 and J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1985), 40.

14 Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*, 69.

15 K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 17-18. W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. G.W. Bromley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1.281ff. For the same practice see the Greek Orthodox dogmatics of D. Staniloe, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* (Guterson, 1985). Also see the discussion in K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations. Volume 4: More Recent Writings*, trans. K. Smyth (London: Darton, Longamn & Todd, 1974), 77-102.

# The Lord of the Rings and the Christian Faith

EDMUND LITTLE

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When Peter Jackson began filming *The Lord of the Rings* in New Zealand excitement became intense. Rarely does the publicity mention that Tolkien was a devout Catholic Christian, and that his work reflects his faith. He wrote to a priest friend, '*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously so in the revision.'

Paradoxically, in his revision Tolkien removed overt references to religion or cult. He probably wished to avoid the mistake of C.S. Lewis in the Narnia stories where Christian allegory becomes so blatant that the narrator turns into preacher and the story is marred. Tolkien draws his material from pagan Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and German mythology, and presents his tale as fictitious history set in a remote age. The story therefore demands no Christian allusions.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere does Tolkien mention the word 'God', and yet the whole work is saturated in Christian theology.

Russians in the Soviet Union were quick to perceive this. Some western critics were slow to do so, and when realization dawned, they condemned Tolkien's work as a fairy-story which must therefore be 'unrealistic' and 'escapist', unworthy of attention from mature com-

mentators such as themselves. They proved, as one scholar observed, that people are never so childish as when they assert their grown-up status.<sup>2</sup> There are in fact no fairies in Tolkien's work. It has elves, dwarves and hobbits, but they are not pretty, tinselly or quaint. Each group is portrayed with its own well-defined language and culture. They are more realistic than many people drawn from 'real life' in modern fiction and films.

Tolkien portrays Middle-earth in accordance with Christian theological principles.<sup>3</sup> It has one creator God, Illuvator, known, significantly, as the 'One'. Tolkien gives a hint of this when Sam and Frodo are with Faramir in Henneth Anûn. They pray a silent grace before their meal, looking towards the West. 'We look', says Faramir, 'to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be', a clear reference to the one eternal God.

This creator god of Middle-earth is one and unique, but he does not act in isolation. Like the God of Scripture, he works through his own sentient creation, through beings of spirit and flesh. He entrusts the ordering of the world to an angelic creation, the Valar, who inhabit Valinor. They, like other creatures, have