

Book Reviews



THE ENTANGLED TRINITY: Quantum Physics and Theology by Ernest L. Simmons. Theology and the Sciences series. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014. ix + 205 pages. Paperback; \$39.00. ISBN: 9780800697860.

THE MYSTERY AND AGENCY OF GOD: Divine Being and Action in the World by Frank G. Kirkpatrick. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014. xvii + 163 pages. Paperback; \$39.00. ISBN: 9781451465730.

These two books from Fortress Press can be read as complementary: what is argued by Simmons from the “bottom up” level of quantum mechanics can be understood also in light of Kirkpatrick’s more “top down” philosophical-theological approach. Both are trained philosophers of religion who seek to clarify divine presence and especially activity vis-à-vis the world. The difference might be that the former’s panentheistic model of the God-world relationship is extended by the latter’s personalistic commitments.

Those who have followed developments at the theology and science interface will recognize Simmons’s contribution to the discussion in various journal articles and book chapters over the last two decades. This volume deepens ideas he has written about, but, more importantly, sets them within a broader framework that includes (in part I) clarification of underlying epistemological, methodological, and foundational issues on the one hand, as well as (in part II) substantive explication of the history of trinitarian theological reflection on the other hand. The result is a useful book that can be used in advanced undergraduate courses in theology and in seminary curricula.

The basic thesis builds off the application to theology of the phenomenon of quantum entanglement proposed in the last decade or so (by John Polkinghorne and Kirk Wegter-McNelly, among others) and seeks to extend such to understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. Simmons’s argument is that the entanglement and superposition of nonlocal quantum phenomena (at a distance) provides a physical metaphor and model for understanding how the immanent trinitarian perichoresis (indwelling) of divine persons is intertwined also with the economic Trinity as creating, redeeming (in the incarnation), and sanctifying the world. In this framework, the world participates in, panentheistically, the triune reality of God.

Consistent with the process and Whiteheadian philosophical assumptions prevalent among some at the vanguard of the theology and science conversation, the concomitant proposal is that given this immanent-and-economic trinitarian interrelationality, God can be understood to evolve as interwoven with the world. The important point, however, is arguably practical: that the entangled Trinity invites creatures like human beings to cooperate vocationally with God, which is the appropriate response of those who follow Simmons in seeing theology and science as mutually informative and creatively interactive.

If Simmons’s springboard is developments in quantum physics, Kirkpatrick’s motivation throughout his long career as a philosopher of religion and a philosophical ethicist (the volume under review is his eighth book publication) is the quest for a religiously satisfying God as personal agent in a scientific age. If scientific integrity seems to demand a noninterventionistic deity, an overly transcendent deism fails to meet human need and does not square with human experience. In conversation with philosophers of action (especially John Macmurray, Raymond Tallis, and Edward Pols) who have explored the metaphysics of at least human agency, the solution proposed is of God as primordial and personal agent whose direct actions create, supervene upon, and utilize cosmological laws, events, causes, and creatures to bring about divine intentions. Just as only human intentionality and agency can intervene amidst or comprehend a whole sequence of interactions, so also divine activity similarly operates transcendently (to the cosmos) but no less personally (vis-à-vis personal creatures) upon and pervasively within the infrastructure of the whole socio-temporal-material world.

What is being sought is an appropriately anthropomorphic conception of God, one that makes sense of what monotheistic scriptural traditions assert about a self-revealing deity, but yet also is plausible for late modern minds. By and large, the author seems to agree that discernment of divine acts in history, while inferentially possible (albeit not because the causal joint between the divine agent and any cosmic event is identifiable), occurs most dependably in the light of scriptural attestations to such activity. Attempting to chart a *via media* between deconstructionists and Barthians who decry metaphysics (albeit for different reasons) on the one side and pietists and dualists who affirm supernaturalistic divine agency (again, for different reasons) on the other side, Kirkpatrick suggests a metaphysically robust account of God as personal agent, but yet not exactly in the same sense as human agents.

Whence then the mystery of God noted in the title of Kirkpatrick's book? While not deploying eschatological notions, the argument tends precisely in that direction: that, in a Pannenbergian sense, any attempt to grasp divine being and action in the world proceeds not least from a posture of faith, one that is open to confirmation (or not) in the end. From this perspective, one might say that Kirkpatrick provides a primordial theory of divine action that is simultaneously also eschatologically and teleologically oriented according to patterns discerned by scriptural traditions of inquiry. The divine character illuminated in such cases is not uncontested, of course, but such contestation is surely what should be expected when attempting to define personality from agency. The point is that any primordial divine activity is nevertheless fully intelligible only against an eschatological horizon, or according to the overarching telos or design, to use philosophical terminology.

The Mystery and Agency of God is a sustained argument in philosophical theology while *The Entangled Trinity* is fundamentally a theological reflection approached from various angles (methodologically, historically, and scientifically). If the author of the former might urge the latter to consider more personalistic conceptions of divine agency, the latter might suggest to the former that quantum metaphors and analogies might fill out the mysterious character of such divine being and action. Fortress Press is to be commended for facilitating such potential conversations even if it might be pressured by market demands to publish otherwise.

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Letter

Concordism vs. Context

In a recent paper (Harry Lee Poe, "The English Bible and the Days of Creation: When Tradition Conflicts with Text," *PSCF* 66, no. 3 [2014]: 130-9), the thesis is advanced that since the days of creation in Genesis 1 do not have a definite article in the original Hebrew, they should be translated not as "the second day," "the third day," and so forth but "a second day," "a third day," et cetera. Poe says that the "absence of the definite article with the days of creation almost certainly means that the days are meant to be understood as not occurring in immediate succession to one another without any intervening time" (p. 137). In fact, Poe argues that, although the days were

probably 24-hour days, the text allows for "an indeterminate time span between days" (p. 130) which could cover the fourteen billion years which modern science assigns to the age of the universe.

Poe's interpretation is thus concordist: there is concord between the Bible and the findings of modern science. I question some of Poe's grammatical points. For instance, almost all of his examples to show that the word "day," when modified by an ordinal, usually takes the Hebrew article, do not seem comparable to Genesis 1, because unlike Genesis 1 they employ a prepositional phrase (usually "on the ordinal day") while, except for the seventh day, Genesis 1 does not employ a prepositional phrase. But my interest is not in refuting Poe per se but rather in using his work as an illustration of how concordism takes verses of Scripture out of context in order to interpret them as agreeing with modern science.

The first relevant contextual datum for the interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 is Genesis 2:3: "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." This verse, along with the sequence of six days in Genesis 1, ties Genesis 1 to Exodus 20:9, 10: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work ..." This is a commandment that the Israelites had to obey. How long a period of time did they think the six days of labor covered? Is there any real question that they thought those days covered six immediately consecutive 24-hour days? How long and when did the Israelites think God wanted them to do no work? Was it not for the twenty-four hours of the seventh day which immediately followed the six days of labor?

Having set forth this scenario of seven immediately consecutive 24-hour days, Exodus 20:11 continues with an explanation of why the Israelites were commanded to work six days and rest the seventh: "For (meaning because) in six days (which the context has just defined as immediately consecutive days) Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day ..." The ancient Israelites, to whom all this was addressed, had no problem accepting as fact the creation of the universe in six immediately consecutive 24-hour days, but a modern concordist cannot accept this because it is so clearly contrary to the scientific evidence. So, the modern concordist (apparently unconsciously) ignores the biblical context, sets the offensive biblical passage into the context of modern science, and then figures out a way to make the passage agree with (or at least not disagree with) modern science.