

example of this odd abridgment is the particularly truncated explanation of perhaps one of the most difficult passages in all of Paul—Romans 9–11—where all three chapters are summarized in less than a page and a half, whereas Romans 1–4 is given around seven pages of detailed attention. This seems disproportionate considering the importance of Romans 9–11 to the discussion of Israel, election, and the future.³

A second issue, outside of the first one mentioned, is the nature of the assumed reader. There is a lack of clarity concerning precisely *who* NTIW is intended for. Were I privileged to teach a seminary course introducing the New Testament, I would heartily recommend and require the use of NTIW. However, if I were teaching a similar course for undergraduates and beginning readers of the New Testament, I do not believe the size and scope would be conducive to said learning environment. This is not a criticism of the book *per se* although I do note that I do believe certain sections are needlessly long above, but a point for future professors and teachers about some mild misgivings.

All in all, this work holds up quite well against all of its faithful New Testament introduction competitors, and one can scarcely find a more widespread work that seeks to address all of the critical issues in New Testament studies—all while seeking to build up the Christian for a life of knowledge, learning, and faithful service to God-in-Christ. To that end, may this book do just that.

Nicholas Rudolph Quient
The First Baptist Church of Redlands, California

The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief. James R. White. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2019. ISBN 978-0-764233821. Pp. 231. Softcover. \$16.99 (USD).

Amidst the endless recent theological books on the Trinity, there is an angle for everyone. In the case of James R. White's *The Forgotten Trinity* (revised and expanded), the approach is different than typical university academics or local pastors, since it is the approach of conservative evangelical apologetics.

White summarizes and defends a cogent and scholastic Trinitarian dogma. While the tone seeks to be generous, the overarching, functional framework naturally remains one of entrenched warfare about false teaching and heretics vs. truth and the orthodox, where both the author and implied reader are already familiar with this orientation. White's contention is that "the doctrine . . . is so misunderstood that a majority of Christians, when asked, give *incorrect* and at times downright *heretical* definitions of the Trinity" (13). "*Wrong* information"

³ The debate over the meaning of "all Israel" (Rom 11:26) is summed up in a single unqualified sentence: ". . . all Israel . . . consists of all believers" (522).

(193) and incorrect definitions are no small issue in this doctrinal debate. “We hang a person’s very salvation upon the acceptance of the doctrine,” readers are told on the second page, “yet if we are honest with ourselves, *we really aren’t sure exactly why*. It’s the topic we won’t talk about: no one dares question the Trinity for fear of being branded a ‘heretic,’ yet we have all sorts of questions about it, and we aren’t sure who we can ask” (10).

This perspective is peculiar, indicating much about the author’s own experience and perception (and perhaps the book’s original 1990s date). For this reader, it was all questions: *do Christians really hang anyone’s eternal salvation upon the simple “acceptance of a doctrine”?* *And if we aren’t sure why, why are “we” doing this?*; *Given the endless conferences, books and symposia, confessions and liturgies, Bible studies all focused on the Trinity, who is it that “won’t talk about it”?* *And, how is it (and why are) Christians afraid for asking such theological questions to begin with?*⁴

Questions only multiply as readers encounter one puzzling assertion after another. “The Trinity is the highest revelation God has made of himself to His people” (10), leaving readers to ask, *According to whom?* and, *Isn’t the Christ event the highest revelation of God (assuming there legitimately exists such a superlative)?*⁵ White’s reasoning is “the Incarnation . . . [is] that one act revealed the Trinity to us in a way that no amount of verbal revelation could ever communicate” (10–11). The Christ event is subservient to the more ultimate and grand revelation of God as Trinity. White also laments that the Trinity is “rarely the object of adoration and worship—at least worship in *truth*” (13). In reading the book, it was hard to discern the difference between worshipping God as Trinity and worshipping *the doctrine of the Trinity*.⁶

The perspective is also noticeably modern and rationalist in its anthropology,

4 The answer to this last one is obviously a historical ethos of coercion and threats of violence—whether in the long story of the institutional church burning heretics at the stake specifically for questioning Trinitarian dogma, or the more common threats of eternal hell from the pulpit. *The Forgotten Trinity* implements the standard strategy of various sectarian, religious, and fundamentalist movements by *mixing subtle threats with love*. “I wish to invite you, my fellow believer, to a deeper, higher, more intense love of God’s truth” (14; cf. 9, 18)—but “we must be willing to love God *as He is*” (14). A mental mistake, a faulty “image of God in our mind” (14) on the level of God’s nature, has the worst of consequences. One is here reminded of Marcella Althaus-Reid’s “T-Theology,” as quoted in Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 85–86: “Theology is a grand imperial narrative of power. It seeks to classify all reality systematically . . . T-Theology [teaches people] . . . how to justify . . . acts of brutality as, in a sense, acts of Christian love.”

5 The use of the male pronoun for the Trinity as the whole, is also noticeable for a contemporary work in theology. Even the most conservative and reformed of systematic theologians writing in the most conservative and reformed publishers are at least critically aware of this issue and its importance. E.g. Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2008).

6 Cf., “The object of [Jonathan Edwards’] reflection is in changing, for it is nothing other than the eternal truth of God. The world, and his circumstances, cannot take away from him what is most precious: his God” (16).

allergic to anything subjective. “The deepest feelings and emotions evoked by the Spirit are not direct toward unclear nebulous, fuzzy concepts, but toward the clear revealed truths of God concerning His love, the work of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit” (12); “We do not just sit back and expect God to zap us with some emotional surge” (13); “this work . . . is written from a position of ‘passion.’ Passion not in the sense of unordered, chaotic feelings . . .” (13), etc. In reading the book, it seems unfathomable to the author that a person could worship something genuinely mysterious, or that human feeling and intuition might indicate truth,⁷ or that the clearest theological truths may not have anything to do with the Trinity, or that God might primarily be understood as a person to be experienced and not an object to be systematically comprehended.

Indeed, the perspective is extremely dogmatic. “If one denies any of the preceding truths upon which the Trinity is based, one will end up rejecting the entire doctrine *en toto*” (17). Despite cheap talk of theological thinkers having “clouded minds” (15), there is no middle ground, and the situation is knowably black and white. The thick theologizing of Nicaea to Chalcedon can all be found somewhere, somehow, in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament⁸ while the specific opinions of the author are given the weight of timeless orthodoxy. A paltry few pages are given to “mystery” and the limits of language before brushing all that aside to define the Trinity in contemporary, propositional English language: “Within the one Being that is God, there exists, eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (23). The author is so confident of this stated doctrine that “Christians who accept all of the Bible believe this doctrine” (25), and “*Every error and heresy* on this doctrine will find its origin in a denial of one or more of these truths” (25; emphasis mine). Furthermore, “An unwillingness to worship God *as God is and has revealed himself* lives behind every denial of the Trinity that appears down through history” (17). Thus, if readers raise any questions about the proposed definition, one already knows in advance that their eternal salvation may be in question.

7 The author is part of the reformed anti-empathy movement, which prides itself on the coarse preaching of judgment and predestination and discourages any substantive appeals to “emotion” in rational discourse, especially in the face of minorities (e.g., African Americans, non-heterosexual persons, etc.) who are suffering social oppression. The movement finds its most recent contemporary inspiration in the work of psychologists Jordan Peterson, and Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

8 Hence “forgotten” Trinity: “Most Christian people, while remembering the term ‘Trinity,’ have forgotten the central place the doctrine is to hold in the Christian life” (12). It escapes White that these unfortunate Christians include those of the first two centuries CE, and that the official acceptance of Trinitarian dogma in Christendom (to whatever extent it was in certain periods) is not proof of its concrete impacts on “the Christian life.” The rise of Nicene orthodoxy over Arianism is also said to be proof that “political power cannot overthrow scriptural truth” and evidence of “the irresistible force of truth” (189). But this (problematically) suggests that the doctrine’s *political success* is an indicator of its *theological truth*, not to mention that orthodoxy is rightfully coercive.

The approach of the book is typical of such cheap apologetics: the orthodox idea is defined, followed by proof-texts and additional evidence showing that it's correct, and refuting dissenters along the way (in this case, primarily Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons). Although readers are reminded to love God, experience proper emotion, and not just obtain "good ammunition to use the next time I debate the Trinity" (15), the book essentially functions in precisely this way.

For an explicitly popular level work (19, 29) of (American) evangelical fundamentalist apologetics, one therefore unfortunately witnesses what one might expect: a near total absence of relevant secondary sources,⁹ prevalent use of outdated biblical studies resources,¹⁰ and an astounding degree of isolation and ignorance on the primary subject matter.¹¹ Without any literature review, bibliography, justification of method, and familiarity with developments or debates on the

- 9 White implements Hodge, Warfield, and Berkof (all from the early 20th century). Remarkably, one of the only contemporary persons cited (and favorably) is Wayne Grudem—whose notorious views on the Trinity have been the object of repeated criticism by fellow conservative evangelicals, reformed theologians, and traditional Trinitarians. See Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017); *idem.*, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012); *idem.*, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002); Millard J. Erickson, *Whose Tampering With the Trinity?* (Louisville: Kregel Academic, 2009); Michael Bird and Scott Harrower, *Trinity Without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy in Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Kregel Academic, 2019); D. Glenn Butner, *The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case Against the Eternal Submission of the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018). White somehow manages to sidestep this debate of two decades that consumed conservative evangelical discussions on the Trinity—and sidestep the implication: that internal consistency within this "orthodox" group is an illusion.
- 10 E.g., the second edition of Bauer and Danker's *Lexicon* (1979), Kittel's *Theological Dictionary*, Thayer's *Lexicon*, the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, etc.
- 11 The book shows virtually no familiarity with the theology of and debates about the Trinity outside the narrow confines of Old Princeton and post-reformation scholasticism. Barth, Moltmann, Rahner, other giants on the subject of the Trinity are not mentioned. The problem of "Arianism" in scholarship is nowhere referenced (on this, see in particular David Rankin, "Arianism," in *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philp Esler, 2nd ed. [New York: Routledge, 2017]). And note that the last several years saw the release of several evangelical-Protestant books on the Trinity such as Bird and Harrower, *Trinity Without Hierarchy*; Butner, *The Son Who Learned Obedience*; Keith Whitfield, *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Application* (Nashville: B & H, 2019). This isn't to mention significant evangelical-Protestant works on the subject after the initial release of *The Forgotten Trinity*, such as Stephen Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), or significant works prior to its release, such as T. F. Torrance's seminal *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016, orig., 1996). Other recent works on the Trinity include Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); Dick Eugenio, *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014); Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, *The Oxford Handbook on the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Lincoln Harvey, *Jesus in the Trinity* (New York: Blackwell, 2020); Harriet Baber, *The Trinity* (New York: Blackwell, 2019). White appears to be in dialog with none of these conversations, much less aware that they exist and/or might be relevant to his studies.

Trinity over at least the last thousand years, it's as far away from academia as one can imagine.

How bizarre, then, that *The Forgotten Trinity* successfully served as (“Dr.”) White’s dissertation for the obscure and unaccredited Columbia Evangelical Seminary.

It is unfortunate that a critical review like this has to be written. But it is more unfortunate (and baffling) why a division of Baker House would publish (and re-publish!¹²) such phony scholarship to begin with (and by a publicly notorious figure no less).¹³ But my bigger concerns are more practical: the book will put Christian readers in an incredibly vulnerable place, leaving them with a superficial account of theological development in church history and misplaced priorities about the nature of worship, theologizing, and biblical study.¹⁴ They are also left without any clear direction for more substantive study of the Trinity.

It should go without saying that there are dozens of Christian doctrines and models of the Trinity,¹⁵ and that they are frequently complementary, not in competition.¹⁶ Furthermore, churches are free to identify themselves with Nicene orthodoxy, implement some other articulation,¹⁷ or do the work of the church without a creedal requirement at all. If discerning what can rightly be called “Christian” on this subject is White’s primary concern, then we will have to do more than close our eyes and ears, circle the wagons around shameless ignorance, and proclaim

12 Other than vague remarks on the back cover, there is no clear indicators as to what was changed or why in the 2019 edition. (It is ironic that something similar happened with Grudem, who changed his views on the Trinity and promised to emend them in a revision of his popular *Systematic Theology*, but never did.)

13 Note observations in Jamin Andreas Hübner, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* (Rapid City, SD: Hills Publishing Group, 2020), 25–28; 45–47. White serves as a pastor of the infamous Apologia Church in Mesa, AZ.

14 Early Christians frequently (and perhaps most commonly) worshipped and prayed to God through Christ. See Piotr Ashwin-Siekjowski, “Creeds, Councils, and Doctrinal Development,” in *The Early Christian World* in conjunction with Larry Hurtado, *The Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For White, this (and the general fact of doctrinal development) is automatically discounted as significant because of some theoretical final revelation of Trinitarian dogma unveiled in the Constantinian and/or post-Constantinian era.

15 These would include all those in the first five-hundred years of the church, to the more recent ones like Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987); Raimon Panikar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993) and *Trinitarian and Cosmotheandric Vision (Opera Omnia, Vol. VIII)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2019); Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “God in Communion With Us: The Trinity,” in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

16 This is true for many concepts, theologies, and doctrines—but all the more true for something as deep, mysterious, and complex as the nature of God’s existence. If there is one area of human knowledge where a person should *not be dogmatic*, wouldn’t it be on the nature of God? (“Trinitarian dogma” is, perhaps indeed, an oxymoron.)

17 The Brief Statement of Faith (1981) comes to mind as a modern-day equivalent to the Nicene Creed.

certain knowledge about perhaps the most notoriously complex topic of Christian theology.

Jamin Andreas Hübner
LCC International University

Amanda W. Benckhuysen. *The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. Pp. x + 262. ISBN 978-0-8308-5227-7. Paperback. \$25.00 (USD).

In *The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation*, Benckhuysen examines what more than sixty forgotten female interpreters from the fourth to the twenty-first century said about what it means to be male and female, based on their interpretations of Genesis 1–3 and Paul's writings. The book is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, each chapter functioning as an independent article with its own thematic concerns. The book's appendix fleshes out the biographies of individual women interpreters.

Chapter 1 introduces the history of the interpretation of Eve by well-known male interpreters and by forgotten or ignored women. As Benckhuysen points out, women writing on Eve usually interacted with the dominant interpretive tradition of their time, providing alternative views from a female perspective. While many early interpreters negatively portrayed Eve as “an inferior and secondary creation who bore primary responsibility for plunging the world into sin and strife” (8), several male interpreters, such as Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Basil of Caesarea, and Lombard, viewed Eve more positively, suggesting that Eve like Adam was created in the image of God and was equal to Adam in dignity and virtue (18–19). Benckhuysen's brief survey reveals that some of the female interpreters who accepted the traditional representation of Eve in Genesis 1–3, also pushed back in subtle and not-so-subtle ways (22).”

Chapter 2 focuses on the literary defenses of women in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, when women began to write and circulate their responses to the resurgence of misogynist texts (24–25). Benckhuysen highlights Christine de Pizan's first published defense of women. In her positive reconstruction of the image of women, Christine portrayed women as human beings beloved by the Creator and found no biblical basis for arguing that women were secondary or inferior to man (28). Following Christine's lead, many other women writing poems, prayers, treatises, dialogues and devotionals to promote “a more godly, redemptive and liberating view of women in home and society” (26). Weighing in on the common mediaeval debate about “who sinned more,” Nogarola reasons that if women are the weaker or less intellectually capable sex, Adam is more culpable for sin (31). On the basis of their close readings of Genesis 1–3, many women