



The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything

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The doctrine of the Trinity is widely taught and believed by evangelicals, but rarely is it fully understood or celebrated. Systematic theologian Fred Sanders, in *The Deep Things of God*, shows why we ought to embrace the doctrine of the Trinity wholeheartedly and without reserve, as a central concern of evangelical theology.

Sanders demonstrates, with passion and conviction, that the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in the gospel itself. Written accessibly, *The Deep Things of God* examines the centrality of the Trinity in our salvation and the Trinity's presence in the reading of the Bible and prayer. Readers will understand that a robust doctrine of the Trinity has massive implications for their lives. Indeed, recognizing the work of the Trinity in the gospel changes everything, restoring depth to prayer, worship, Bible study, missions, tradition, and our understanding of Christianity's fundamental doctrines.

The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything Details

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thesis very interesting! Claim #1 is unpacked in a soteriological sense with a heavy emphasis on the doctrine of adoption. Claim #2 is unpacked at different turns throughout the book and keeps the reader engaged.

It is certainly more a work of systematic and historical theology than it would practical and this is worth noting beforehand. If you expect a practical read you will be disappointed. The extent he goes on this premise is how praying and reading scripture is a Trinitarian experience. I couldn't help but be disappointed the Sanders make no reference to communion or baptism, two seemingly rich Trinitarian experiences.

My biggest takeaway was in reading the accounts of other evangelicals with a rich Trinitarian theology. Reading the influence of Billy Graham, CS Lewis, DL Moody, Nicky Cruz, William Tyndale, John Owen and gave me a sense of relief and hope that Evangelical protestants can uncover this seemingly forgotten doctrine.

I did find the book enjoyable and worth the (speed) read though Sanders, as many theologians, has a tendency to be a bit redundant and long winded. The line between longwinded and thorough though is a fine one! Start with the study guide and summary in the back of the book and you will save lots of time.

Also, I am not sure who Sanders is writing to. From my reading, it is certainly geared towards a seminarian or professor level. This is a bit of a disappointment because I feel the audience that would most benefit from this topic is the lay believer. Perhaps a follow up book could be written that is more concise and easy to read.

Barnabas Piper says

Wonderful look at the trinity and how it is the foundation and life of the gospel. it's a bit dense in parts, but that should be expected from a book on the trinity. what was truly remarkable was how practical the implications were for a Christian.

Toby Neal says

Sanders writes a book on the doctrine of the Trinity seeking to show that the experience of every Christian is Trinitarian whether we know it or not. He encourages us to explore the deep things of God rather than succumbing to what C.S. Lewis calls the "recurrent temptation to... only dabble and splash, careful not to get out of my depth" (p.239).

Sanders spends the majority of his time looking at more popular evangelical writers from church history (Susanna Wesley, Oswald Chambers, Billy Graham, C.S. Lewis etc) to show how thoroughly trinitarian their thinking and writing was. He seems to be defending evangelicalism from the charge that we've ignored the trinity. He proves that this is not the case.

I found the book a bit tedious and I got bogged down in places and lacked the desire to finish the book. I felt the sections in the book when Sanders was interacting with evangelical authors ironically shallow. It felt as though the author was just trying to prove how trinitarian they were, but sometimes nothing new or deeper was developed from these authors. At many times I wrote in the margin, "What does this mean? What is the significance of this?" I felt that a lot was asserted but there wasn't much explanation of ideas nor of the significance of the ideas presented. One clear exception was in the final chapter on prayer and Sanders' commentary on C.S. Lewis' "mere trinitarianism". This was excellent and was a fitting summary of Sanders overall message in the book, as Lewis shows the the trinity is not a problem to be solved but the way we

experience God.

Other highlights were Sanders' definition of modalism as moodalism. The heresy that God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is God with three "moods".

While the book was helpful at points, it wouldn't be the first book I would recommend on the trinity.

As an introduction to the trinity I would recommend Michael Reeves' excellent book, "Delighting in the Trinity". Reeves manages to go deep and remain accessible. He writes beautifully and affectively about God. Bruce Ware's book on the trinity is also a helpful introduction. He defines the persons of the trinity in their relation to each other. So, God the Father is the Father of our Lord Jesus who loves and delights in all his Son is and does. Likewise, the Son is the Son of the Father who delights in bringing his Father glory by obeying his will in all things. Ware unlocked for me a lot of the teaching on the trinity in the gospel of John.

For those looking to explore the doctrine in greater depth I would recommend Robert Letham, "The Holy Trinity".

I guess if you would like a historical survey on how evangelicals have spoken of the trinity, Sander's book would be a good book to go to.

Luke Thompson says

Fred Sanders is a voice I listen to on the doctrine of God when too many other prominent voices are diverging from the classical articulation of who God is. This book is written for a popular audience in largely untechnical language that attempts to do a few things. It is written by an evangelical for evangelicals. Sanders self-consciously does not define the category "evangelical", and he uses a very wide brush when painting that category. He calls on the best aspects of the rich heritage evangelicals have going back five hundred years, from voices like the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, B. B. Warfield, John Wesley, John Bunyan, Isaac Watts, G. K. Chesterton, Jonathan Edwards, and many, many more.

The first thing Sanders tries to do in this book is his defense of his first and primary claim: "evangelical Christians have been in reality the most thoroughly Trinitarian Christians in the history of the church". That is an astonishingly bold claim and one that many may disagree with. I recommend lending Sanders voice an ear.

Sanders elsewhere distinguishes between primary and secondary Trinitarianism. Secondary Trinitarianism is the ability to articulate who God is through doctrinal formulations and theological awareness. This, Sanders acknowledges, is what is absent from the broad evangelical tradition, but no one gets primary Trinitarianism better than evangelicals. Primary Trinitarianism involves practices, a way of living the gospel, which are deeply rooted in the triune structure of salvation history. Sanders's main argument in defending his claim is that "the doctrine of the Trinity inherently belongs to the gospel itself", and evangelicals are gospel people more than anything else. "The gospel is Trinitarian, and the Trinity is the gospel." "The life of God in itself is the source of all the riches that fund the economy of salvation." The presentation of this argument is the reason why you read this book.

The second thing Sanders is trying to do in this book is to call contemporary evangelical Christianity into the deep waters of Trinitarianism, into a place where primary and secondary Trinitarianism is not misaligned. If evangelicals forget the foundations and origin of their practices, they are in danger of forgetting why they practice and believe what they do.

Becky Pliego says

A book that will make you love even more the Trinity, and will help you understand better how we, Christians, should embrace this cardinal doctrine of our faith which is the fullness of God and the gospel we believe and proclaim.

Thomas Achord says

Given the recent evangelical trinitarian discussion, I wanted to roll my sleeves up and do some work. But, I feel that this book is the culmination of reading lots of books about the Trinity. It reads technical at a few places but mostly like an intro exploration of the Trinity's implications for Christian thinking, living, and the gospel itself. Very enlightening, almost devotional at times.

I found a particular point of his interesting. Sanders claims that in order fully to enjoy the rich Trinitarian faith we have, we must have a sort of background knowledge of the Trinity, humming underneath our praxeology. How does this come about? Listen to Sanders' reasoning:

“A child by the age of five has learned, we are told, an astonishing amount about the physical world to which he or she has become spontaneously and intuitively adapted—far more than the child could ever understand if he or she turned out to be the most brilliant of physicists. Likewise, I believe, we learn far more about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into whose Name we have been baptized, within the family and fellowship and living tradition of the Church than we can ever say: It becomes built into the structure of our souls and minds, and we know much more than we can ever tell. This is what happens evangelically and personally to us within the membership of the Church, the Body of Christ in the world, when through the transforming power of his Word and Spirit our minds become inwardly and intuitively adapted to know the living God. We become spiritually and intellectually implicated in patterns of divine order that are beyond our powers fully to articulate in explicit terms, but we are aware of being apprehended by divine Truth as it is in Jesus which steadily presses for increasing realisation in our understanding, articulation and confession of faith. That is how Christian history gains its initial impetus, and is then reinforced through constant reading and study of the Bible within the community of the faithful.”

— Thomas F. Torrance, quoted in Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God, how the Trinity Changes Everything*, page 50

Sanders then asks, “Where do we locate the tacit awareness of Trinitarianism that can fund explicit understanding of the doctrine?” In other words, where is this pre-awareness of the Trinity developed and nurtured?

“The tacit dimension of Trinitarian thought, the non thematic awareness of Trinitarian reality that makes productive understanding possible, is located in the richness of the Christian liturgy, in the profound experience of continuity with tradition, and in the real presence of Christ himself in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The sources, then, are liturgy, tradition, and sacrament.” page 50-51

Later, Sanders says that this strong liturgical formation will not do for most evangelicals, and that what's needed for them is an emphasis on the Word of God - only one part of Sanders' liturgical structure - for the Trinity to become regularly experienced by evangelicals. This is not the point of the book; just an aside. For example, I found this portion particularly thematic:

"Such divine freedom is one of the things meant by grace. Notice how deeply imprinted this aspect of grace is, even into our language: When something is gratuitous (from gratia, grace) and given to us gratis (for free), the appropriate response is gratitude (responding to gratia) or gratefulness. Sometimes when a person gets a surprise gift, he blurts out, "You didn't have to do that!" Well, of course. That sentiment, too obvious to need saying, is a tiny meditation on the nature of the freedom that lies behind a true gift. So is the redundancy of describing something as a "free gift," as if there were any other kind of gift. Grace calls forth gratitude, and we answer with "thank you." This is also, by the way, why we say the word please when we ask for something. It is a shortened form of the expression, "If it pleases you," which is a way of recognizing that the person you are asking a favor from is not your servant but a free person who isn't required to do your bidding.

"Good manners are good theology."

— Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, p. 65.

This section shows Sanders' desire to link the Trinity with every aspect of Christian life. If this was his main goal in writing the book, he did very well.

Aaron Choi says

[not a review. simply a personal synopsis since i thought i'd benefit by taking notes]

The Trinity is absolutely fundamental to the Christian experience. Trinitarian understanding is presupposed in and fundamental to the Gospel. However, most believers look upon the Trinity as a set of doctrinal formulations that are divorced from the practicality of daily life. Because the everyday pertinence of the Trinity is not explicitly understood, the Trinity recedes into the background of evangelical priorities. In fact, it has been commonly regarded as a belief to be accepted by faith, but impossible to understand and appropriate into the Christian life. Evangelical attitudes toward the doctrine of the Trinity is like a drunk uncle--you accept him out of obligation but honestly, you're a little embarrassed to acknowledge him in the open.

What would result in a greater appreciation of the Trinity to the Christian life for broad evangelicals? It is primarily a matter of connecting Trinitarian truth to daily experience. Sanders argues that a "tacit knowledge" of some kind must be present to provide a framework for understanding. This tacit knowledge is comprised of instinctive, unarticulated but accepted truths. Traditionally, it has been standard fare to maintain that liturgy, tradition, and sacramental practice provide the tacit context for a robust Trinitarianism. However, most broad evangelicals (i.e., generally speaking, low church believers) do not have these resources at their current disposal. Will they be forced to change their ecclesiology and adopt new practices? No. Sanders argues that the characteristic personal experience and pietistic strands of typical evangelicalism provide a more-than-sufficient soil from which Trinitarian awareness can grow.

The Trinity ought to be and is immensely practical. But at its most basic level, the doctrine of Trinity isn't accepted for its utility to discipleship but simply because it's true: God is three in one. Before the creation of the space-time continuum, the Trinity was there. And though there was nothing there beyond God Himself, there was activity aplenty! God had interpersonal relationships of love within His own essence, as the three persons of the Godhead interacted in relational love. Sanders describes this as the "inner life" of the Godhead, where God lives "within the happy land of the Trinity." The Father delights in the Son through the Spirit, the Son submits and obeys His Father by the Spirit, etc.

His creation then of the universe did not arise from any inherent need, as if God needed to fill the formless and void with other sentient beings with whom He could interact. Rather, it was the case that God was

completely free in His divine act of creation, not attempting to fulfill any lack in Himself. This itself speaks volumes about the grace of the act of creation (and redemption for that matter; "double gratuity" as Sanders calls it)!

The absolute aseity of God is supported by Trinitarian belief. He is totally self-sufficient. Sanders states, "God is not lonely, or bored, or selfish" (96). Epistemologically, our theology is derived by God's revelation to us; that is, His saving actions towards us. By subjective experience, we deductively go back to observe the Trinitarian nature of God Himself--the final destination of "faith seeking understanding". Herein lies the principle of esteeming the Giver above His gifts. His self-disclosure to us and the benefits of salvation are not an end-all, but a means to delighting in who God is, in Himself. Just as in eternity past, the Father delights in His Son for who He is before what He does in redemptive history, so too believers are to delight in who God is before what He does for us. This reveals the basic priority of the ontological Trinity to the economic Trinity.

The evangelical tendency has been to downsize the Gospel and domesticate it. This is in contrast to the "avalanche" of Gospel truth articulated by Paul in his run-on, monster of a sentence found in Ephesians 1:3-14. As bloated as it may seem, Paul's statement is not hyperbolic in the least bit for the Gospel he describes is an attempt to articulate the deep nature of an infinite God giving Himself for man. John Piper has famously put it, "God is the gospel." Evangelical conventions of the Gospel are far too small. The reductionistic instinct typically results in a Gospel that is emphatically cognitive, emotional, or volitional (i.e., head-hand-heart; mind-will-heart). However, the Gospel is more accurately perceived when seen as the life of God animating the soul of man (consisting of mind, heart, and will). The thing that is so staggering and amazing about grace is the simple truth that an infinite God has given Himself for mankind! Again, we are guarding against the inclination to value the gifts above the Giver and reorienting our perspective so that the Giver is the most prominent reward of salvation. That is why the Gospel itself is inextricably tied to who God is. Soteriology is not to be separated from theology proper.

The Gospel evangelicals proclaim takes a distinctly Trinitarian shape. God's *oikonomos* (i.e., administration or dispensation) is not sloppy. The word *oikonomos*, found in Ephesians 1:10, brings up domestic imagery. Sanders articulates it as "the orderly arrangement of a share life" (128). And this orderly arrangement is necessarily tied to the very nature of God Himself. In other words, the economic Trinity is rooted in the ontological Trinity. His self-disclosure takes place through His actions in history. What God does expresses who He is. And its most basic level, the economy of salvation is seen as the Father sending both Son and Spirit to deliver mankind. Therefore, anything that one of the Persons of the Godhead does is set within the broader context of what the other Persons are doing. For example, when one thinks of Jesus, they must also think of His being sent by the Father. Likewise, one need also to think of Jesus being empowered by the Spirit. Every action where Christ stands in the foreground is accomplished with a Trinitarian backdrop. The clearest and most well-known example is His baptism, when the Father blesses the Son and the Spirit descends upon Him as a dove. It is practical to consider Jesus at the center in our pursuit of Trinitarian-based thinking since His acts in the space-time continuum offer us a concrete and observable basis to analyze.

When we shift the central focus to the Father, a complementary basis for Trinitarian-based analysis emerges. After all, the Father is the source that sends both Son and Spirit. As Sanders puts it, the Spirit and Son are the "Father's two hands" (138). Both Son and Spirit have distinct roles but they are united in that they are both sent to do the Father's will. With respect to soteriology, the Father purposes it, the Son accomplishes it, the Spirit applies it. Again, who God is is revealed by what He does: "God in himself is Father, Son, and Spirit; so in the economy of salvation the Father sends the Son and the Spirit; so in our experience the Father accomplishes salvation for us in the Son and applies it to us in the Spirit" (147). This is best summarized as God having a single, 2-fold economy of salvation, based on the Son and the Spirit's distinctive workings. It is less desirable to articulate it as 2 different economies because it fails to acknowledge the unity of their respective workings under the banner of the Father's sending.

The startling truth of redemptive history is that Son and Spirit don't merely provide the Trinitarian shape of the Gospel but they actually break into human history itself! The Word dwelt among us and the Spirit indwells us! And the way they relate to humanity remains unchanged from their roles in the immanent Trinity. The Son acts as Son, even in His incarnate state. The Spirit acts as Spirit, even as He indwells believers. So then their behavior and acting in the economic Trinity is the consistent to their action within the ontological Trinity.

The theological language typically employed to describe the Father as source sending The Son and the Spirit is "processions". There are 2 kinds of processions. There is "generation" from Father to Son. There is "spiration" from Father to Spirit. Just as the generation and spiration of Son and Spirit from the Father have always been present from eternity past within the Godhead, so too these roles are undertaken and reflected in the actions of Son and Spirit in history. This is the very premise of Sanders: that who God in Himself (particularly in His Trinitarian nature) is what God is for us. Or as Sanders himself says, "The eternal Trinity is truly present in the gospel Trinity" (156). In short, the Trinity is the Gospel. Any analysis of God acting in salvation history is a window into the Godhead itself! So then the Trinity is not an ingredient for obscurantism but a clarifying agent in our understanding of God!

Sanders applies this with Trinitarian understanding to adoption. In adoption, God has made us His own children. This adoption is reflected by our status as children and also in our being partakers of the Divine nature by virtue of the Spirit regenerating our hearts and making us into a new creation. It may seem hyperbolic to say that we enjoy the very Sonship that Jesus has with respect to the Father, but it is warranted given the biblical witness. Sanders calls the thought of this "something intoxicating" (161). Adoption then opens up new depths of understanding the intimacy we possess with God! That is why some have said, including J.I. Packer, that adoption is "the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification" (quoted on 165).

"[The] good news of salvation is that God, who in himself is eternally the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, has become for us the adoptive Father, the incarnate Son, and the outpoured Holy Spirit. God the Father sent the Son to do something for us and the Spirit to be something in us, to bring us into the family life of God" (165).

The resurgence of pleas to Christ-centeredness are warranted but to be truly Christ-centered will avoid being Father-forgetful or Spirit-ignoring. Just as Christ continually referenced His work in context of the Father who sent Him and the Spirit who empowered Him, so too, we will not look at Christ long before we see the Father and the Spirit in the same picture.

Salvation is most appropriately seen as people being united to Christ or as Paul states, "in Christ". But consider the Trinitarian context: the Father bestows His many blessings upon us by virtue of the fact that we are in Christ; and the only when we are united to Christ in this way is that the Spirit unites us to Him. Therefore, soteriology has decidedly Trinitarian "contours" (173). The Father wants to bless us with the rewards of salvation. Christ has accomplished salvation and secured its rewards. The Spirit applies the rewards into believers' lives. So then adjusting our perspective so that we see the Trinitarianism of our salvation more clearly doesn't alter the nature of salvation itself, but clarifies and sharpens our own subjective experience of it! Our experience is presupposed by the economic Trinity's working from the basis of the ontological Trinity (the Engine, the Car, and the Caboose of Salvation diagram, 187).

Sanders applies this to the topic of assurance. Our grounds of assurance cannot ultimately be found in the church, or our subjective self-conscious awareness of assurance, or even Scripture. All of these are either far too objective or subjective in their extremities. With the Trinity on the other hand, there is true objectivity in the ontological Trinity and there is also true and real subjective experience in the economic Trinity's work toward us. By grounding our own experience of assurance in who God is as He works toward us is to say that our assurance is as secure as God is consistent in Himself! As long as God remains consistent to who He

is, within the happy land of the Trinity, then He will remain consistent in the way He acts towards the elect, thereby securing our own subjective awareness of being held eternally secure in the Triune God.

In chapter 6, Sanders applies his Trinitarian perspective to Scripture. The words of Scripture are delivered to us in "Trinitarian cadence" (194). Sanders quotes Benjamin Morgan Palmer, who states, "the words of the Father are delivered by the Son, throughout the power of the Spirit; if this be not enough to clothe the written Word with all the dogmatic authority we ascribe to it, it is hard to see how the claim to any prerogative can ever be established" (194). Scripture is laced with the Father's word, spoken throughout the Son, by the power of the Spirit.

Sanders then spends the rest of the chapter showing the great evangelical heritage in understanding that Scripture involves the entire Trinity. Personally, I found it the weakest chapter in the book. Sanders fulfills his goal well in proving this evangelical Trinitarian awareness as it relates to the Bible. But that awareness, demonstrated by ample quotes from evangelical literature, does not necessarily prove the case itself: namely, that Scripture has a Trinitarian cadence. This would be better proven by looking at Scripture itself and its own disclosure of how the Father speaks in the person and work of His Son, by the power of the Spirit.

In the last chapter, Sanders applies his Trinitarian understanding to prayer. This is a fascinating discussion. He begins by saying that there is an inherent grain to prayer. Just as a piece of wood has a grain that indicates the structural movement of a thing, so too prayer reveals a distinctly Trinitarian grain. Believers would do well to be aware of the grain of prayer so that they can pray consistently with Trinitarian understanding (although Sanders makes clear that even if one is not consciously aware of the Trinity while praying, they still pray according to the grain nonetheless). The grain of prayer is seen as such: pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. This is the consistent movement of prayer indicated in Scripture itself. There are only a few examples of where prayers are directed to Jesus rather than the Father but Sanders assumes that even such prayers have to be done "in the name of Jesus". The sheer absence of recorded prayers in Scripture to the Spirit show all the more that this grain of prayer is a well-demonstrated principle of Scripture.

Not only does this Trinitarian perspective enhance our own awareness of what is happening in the activity of prayer but it answers the question of how prayer itself. How can an infinite God listen to the requests of mere creatures? It makes Him seem to be overly-dependent to listen and respond to the prayers of mortal men. However, He listens not by virtue of humans themselves but by virtue of who He is in Himself! Namely, He already listens, gives, and responds within Himself: the Father gives as the Son asks by the Spirit's working. As such, prayer is an invitation to join a divine dance that has already taken place long in eternity past, long before we even offered up our first request to God. As sons of God who have been united to the true Son of God by the Father's decree through the power of the Spirit, we can participate in what has been the eternal, divine activity of communication, giving, and receiving.

As such, the Trinity does not obfuscate but illuminates our understanding of what is happening in prayer! Sanders goes through a fascinating survey of C.S. Lewis's comments regarding the Trinity and prayer in "Mere Christianity". God is the final destination to prayer (Father); He is the energy that empowers prayer (Spirit); He is the bridge in prayer (Son). And not only does the Trinity prove to be more than a mere theoretical and abstract hurdle in this discussion of prayer, but it proves to be immensely practical in all aspects of the Christian life.

Sanders closes by exhorting his readers to be plunged deep into the very depths of the Trinity that we might discern the Gospel's profundity and experience it by being brought to the Triune God as He draws us to Himself in this uniquely Trinitarian way.

Lee Irons says

Fred Sanders is a professor of theology at the Torrey Honors Institute, a Christian great books program at Biola University.

In this book, Sanders seeks to help evangelicals re-learn the doctrine of the Trinity. His argument is that there is an intimate relationship between the Trinity and the evangelical heritage with its gospel-centered piety. He writes:

“Nothing we do as evangelicals makes sense if it is divorced from a strong experiential and doctrinal grasp of the coordinated work of Jesus and the Spirit, worked out against the horizon of the Father’s love. Personal evangelism, conversational prayer, devotional Bible study, authoritative preaching, world missions, and assurance of salvation all presuppose that life in the gospel is life in communion with the Trinity ... The central argument of this book is that the doctrine of the Trinity inherently belongs to the gospel itself ... Because the gospel is Trinitarian, evangelicals as gospel people are by definition Trinity people” (pp. 9-10).

However, Sanders is concerned that evangelicals have forgotten the deep Trinitarian background of the gospel that was of central importance to an earlier generation of evangelicals. Therefore, one of his goals in this book is to introduce us to the writings of earlier evangelicals to show their Trinitarian understanding of the gospel. He quotes authors from both the Puritan/Reformed branch and the Wesleyan/Holiness branch of the evangelical movement, low church and high church, great theologians and revivalist preachers. He quotes John Calvin on one page and Oswald Chambers on the next, Jonathan Edwards and Billy Graham, John Owen and G. Campbell Morgan, Thomas Goodwin and Dwight L. Moody – not to mention others like Andrew Murray, Francis Schaeffer, Henry Scougal, Spurgeon, John and Charles Wesley, and the Heidelberg Catechism! Quite a mish-mash, but one calculated to make his point that a robust Trinitarian theology has always played a central role in evangelical piety.

Here are brief summaries and quotes from each chapter:

Chapter 1: “Compassed About By Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Or, How Evangelicals Are Profoundly Trinitarian Whether They Know It or Not).” Sanders’s point in this chapter is that even if evangelicals today may not be fully aware of it, there is a “tacit Trinitarianism” already implicit in everything we do. “It is the deep grammar of all the central Christian affirmations” (p. 46).

Chapter 2: “Within the Happy Land of the Trinity (Or, God in Himself).” This chapter deals with what theologians call “the immanent Trinity,” that is, the Trinity without reference to creation or redemption, that is, without reference to us. “Simply knowing that the life of God in itself is the liveliest of all lives is a medicinal correction to our sick, self-centered thinking” (p. 81). “The cry in our day always seems to be for a practical doctrine of the Trinity, for relevance, application, and experiential payoff ... But the wisest Christian teachers have always known that shortcuts to relevance are self-defeating ... What we need to begin with is a profoundly impractical doctrine of the Trinity. With that in place, we can really get something done” (p. 95).

Chapter 3: “So Great Salvation (Or, The Depth of the Gospel).” In this chapter, Sanders does not move immediately from the immanent to the economic Trinity (that will come in Chapter 4). Rather, his concern here is to continue to hammer the point that even in salvation, it is more about God than about us. Riffing on the popular book *Your God Is Too Small* (1952) by J. B. Phillips, Sanders argues that our gospel is too small because our God is too small. To give us a sense of the greatness of the gospel, Sanders expounds Ephesians 1:3-14, pointing out the Trinitarian shape of the gospel, “from the electing and adopting Father, through the redeeming and revealing Son, to the promised and sealing Spirit” (p. 100). What we discover, in the end, is that ultimately in saving us God gives us himself. He quotes Thomas Goodwin: “Not only God doth bless

with all other good things, but above all by communicating himself and his own blessedness unto them” (p. 103). “He does not dispense blessings, but himself” (p. 124). Sanders calls this “the depth of the gospel.”

Chapter 4: “The Shape of the Gospel (Or, The Tacit Trinitarianism of Evangelical Salvation).” In this important chapter, Sanders finally moves to the economic Trinity, showing that each person of the Trinity has a role to play in the economy of salvation. The role of the Son is to accomplish our redemption, and the role of the Spirit is to apply that accomplished redemption to us by regenerating us and living in us. Sanders also shows how these two missions (the economic Trinity) are rooted in the two processions, that of the Son who is begotten of the Father and that of the Spirit who proceeds from the Father (the immanent Trinity). Sanders calls this “the shape of the gospel.”

Chapter 5: “Into the Saving Life of Christ (Or, What’s Trinitarian about a Personal Relationship with Jesus).” Sanders brilliantly shows that what evangelicals like to call “having a personal relationship with Jesus” must be broadened so that our relationship with Jesus is not “Father-forgetful” or “Spirit-ignoring” (p. 171). He makes the excellent point that Jesus is not our Father; rather, the New Testament teaches that the Father of Jesus is our Father (p. 169). Essentially, rather than speaking of having a personal relationship with Jesus, we should focus on the biblical doctrine of adoption, which is itself a Trinitarian concept (Gal 4:4-7).

The last two chapters are self-explanatory from their titles:

Chapter 6: “Hearing the Voice of God in Scripture (Or, The Tacit Trinitarianism of Evangelical Bible Reading).”

Chapter 7: “Praying with the Grain (Or, The Tacit Trinitarianism of All Christian Prayer).”

I really enjoyed this book and strongly recommend it. I think that Sanders has a real gift for explaining doctrine in a way that is clear, understandable, and biblical. At the same time, his use of a wide range of authors anchors his teaching in the best of the evangelical tradition and shows how far we have drifted from our roots. This book would make a great devotional book to work through.

Ken says

The author readily communicates his enthusiasm for this ancient, necessary doctrine. Without the Trinity nothing in the New Testament would make sense. Doctor Sanders must obviously tread a narrow line to win and keep his Evangelical readers' trust. He cannot get too philosophical or refer too often to the liturgical traditions of Christianity. He limits himself to the Bible, with some use of the Old Testament, and to pre-modern Evangelical theologians. He would have made his case stronger had he recalled the Arian heresy and its denigration of Jesus to second-class deity. What question does that troublesome word, Trinity, answer? From my own Roman Catholic perspective the only real shortcoming of this book is the failure to call for Church unity. Can the triune God of Love abide a divided Church? Can Jesus' prayer that all be one be ignored? Can One God of Three Persons inspire a society of individualists to surrender their isolations and seek the common good? Or is this Beauty only meant to inspire lonely biblicists to reread their particular, disparate versions of the Truth?

Surely the Father who has uttered the perfect word of love and the Son who has poured himself out in love inspire us to make every effort to set aside our divisive opinions and live in Communion with each other. Married men and women will create safe home for their children and never breathe a word of divorce. I hope readers of this warm, inviting book will be inspired to read and study the history of our Godly religion and its deep, beautiful and challenging mysteries. The world will be a better, safer place when they do.

Michael Brooks says

One of the great works regarding the true value of the conservative evangelical theological framework. Truly wonderful.

Rusty says

Get help thinking about the Trinity from this little book and you will never think in the same terms again. Very true to it's title. Awesome read.

David says

This is a good introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. The practical impact of the Biblical teaching on the Triune nature of God is made clear here.
