

Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham

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Intellectual traditions at the medieval university: the use of philosophical psychology in Trinitarian theology among the Franciscans and Dominicans, 1250-1350

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Russell Friedman is a professor of medieval philosophy and theology at the University of Leuven. These books go back to 1992 when he began to write the doctoral dissertation he presented to the University of Iowa in 1997. In 2008 it morphed into four lectures at the *Ecole pratique des hautes études* in the Sorbonne. Cambridge published these lectures in 2010; and in 2013 Brill published the magisterial version of what he began to write in 1992.

The short book isn't a summary of the long one. They both tell the same story; but they tell it differently. The four chapters of the short book have the informality that comes from having been lectures. And it contains material that isn't in the long book: diagrams that illuminate various parts of Friedman's argument; a list of the major elements of disagreement between Franciscan and Dominican Trinitarian theologies; and an annotated bibliography of selected secondary literature. What this means is that reading the short book is a good preparation for reading the long one; but it isn't a substitute for the much more detailed study.

Two questions dominated the debate that interests Friedman. Is the Son literally or only metaphorically a Word or a Concept formed by the Father? And why are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit distinct, as well as essentially identical? His books document how and why Franciscans and Dominicans answered these questions differently.

Franciscans favoured a literal interpretation of the sense in which the Son is a Word or a Concept formed by the Father. And so, to explain the Son's generation and the Spirit's spiration, they appealed to the way in which we form concepts and make decisions. On the other hand, Dominicans argued for a metaphorical interpretation of these ideas.

Franciscans believed that, while they are absolutely identical, the Son and the Spirit are distinct from the Father and from each other, because each of them emanates from the Father in a unique way: the Son from the Father's Mind by generation and the Spirit from the Father's Will by spiration. Again, Dominicans disagreed. Father, Son, and Spirit are absolutely identical; but they are distinct, because they are uniquely related to each other. The Father is related by paternity to the Son; the Son is related to the Father by filiation; and the Spirit is related to the Father and the Son by spiration.

Both sides stripped ideas like being generated and spirated - as well as being constituted, produced, or formed - of all their temporal and causal connotations. In all cases of this kind, they were making only logical or conceptual points. At the same time, the debate was complicated by the fact that Franciscans accepted the unique relations and Dominicans accepted the unique emanations. So, often the debate was about which explained what. Franciscans believed that the relations exist, because the emanations occur. Dominicans believed it was the other way round: the emanations occur, because the relations exist.

Friedman has divided his detailed and comprehensive survey of these agreements and disagreements into three parts.

Part I covers roughly the same ground as chapter one of the short book: the debate between 1255 and 1280. It traces the making of this controversy to the different ways in which Aquinas and Bonaventure understood relations, emanations and personal distinctions. And it describes and evaluates what a number of Franciscans and Dominicans brought to the debate during this period. John Pecham's contribution is the most memorable, because he gave the Franciscan version of the story an adventurous spin. Because he emphasised the three unique emanations - the Father doesn't emanate, the Son emanates from the Father by generation, and the Spirit emanates from the Father and the Son by spiration - he argued that, counterfactually, the Spirit would be distinct from the Son even if he didn't emanate from both the Father and the Son. In other words, Pecham argued that the Filioque is contingently but not necessarily true. And so, because the Spirit is constituted by spiration, he actually - but not necessarily - emanates from both the Father and the Son rather than from the Father alone.

Part II covers roughly the same ground as chapters two and three of the short book: the debate between 1280 and 1320. On the one hand, theologians like Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, and Peter Auriol argued for strong or literal interpretations of how a word or concept illuminates the Son's relation to the Father. On the other hand, Hervaeus Natalis and Durand of St Pourcain raised radical criticisms of the Franciscan position. Scotus created a sophisticated philosophical psychology in which the Son is created as a Concept or Word by the Father's Mind in very much the same way as a concept or word is created by a human mind. At about the same time, while remaining within the Franciscan tradition, Peter Auriol began to question the extent to which speculation driven by reason had complicated Trinitarian theology. It's a fascinating 66 page story that Friedman tells clearly and convincingly, with Auriol questioning what he saw as unnecessary distinctions, and calling for a search for simplicity and an emphasis on God's unity.

Part III covers roughly the same ground as chapter four of the short book: the debate between 1320 and 1350. It saw the emergence of a new emphasis on divine unity and simplicity; and this led to a waning of the Trinitarian debate. In these chapters, Friedman considers three theologians in detail. He puts William Ockham's nominalism and fideism into a fresh perspective. And he explains why Walter Chatton and Gregory of Rimini endorsed praepositinianism, which is a conviction that goes back to Praepositinus (1150-1210). Although he flourished before Bonaventure and Aquinas, his ideas were rejected by Henry of Ghent, but embraced by Walter Chatton and Gregory of Rimini. Friedman's study is the first that deals in any depth with Chatton's praepositinianism; a position which argues that it's simply a given that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are and are not distinct. Therefore, they are distinct in and of themselves, and not because of something else, like a relation or an emanation.

In addition to the theologians who've been named, Friedman discusses about 50 others both to illuminate the contexts in which the main figures functioned and to identify the links that bound them to each other. And he ends his book with three good things. A conclusion that tracks the immense creativity and diversity of Trinitarian theology between 1250 and 1350, an extensive bibliography, and a critical edition of Eustace of Arras' question on what distinguishes the Spirit from the Son.

Friedman's writing style is reader friendly; and his arguments are clear, concise, and convincing. At the same time, this is a book for studying rather than only for reading. And if it is read slowly and thoughtfully, it yields questions and insights that connect the present and the past. Here are three examples from a longer list.

First, the two traditions are still alive, with Wolhart Pannenberg being an example of someone representing the Franciscan option, and Gilles Emery of someone who prefers the Dominican alternative. This means that Friedman's material can be used both to challenge and enrich our study of contemporary Trinitarian theologies.

Second, Friedman rejects Étienne Gilson's belief that, because of its separation of reason and revelation, the fideism which originated with Ockham resulted in "the total wreck" of scholastic philosophy and theology. As he sees it, the fideistic views of Ockham and Chatton aren't signs of the bankruptcy of fourteenth-century scholasticism. Instead, they are further evidence of "the immense vitality and creativity" of later-medieval Trinitarian theologians.

Third, although Friedman doesn't make the point, it's possible to see fideism, not as a loss of confidence in reason, but as a deeper understanding of its place in theology. From this perspective, praepositinianism could lead to replacing insights from traditional Aristotelian logic with insights from modern axiomatic logic. And if this happens, it's possible to argue that it's just as silly for a theologian to ask why the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are and are not distinct, as it is for a mathematician to ask why points have neither length nor breadth. Neither question bites. This is how things are. This is what has to be accepted if one wants to do Trinitarian theology or Euclidean mathematics. And in neither case is fideism the name of the game; it's axiomatics.

For all these reasons and many others, reading and studying Friedman is a stimulating way to enrich one's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, or to get to grips with it for the first time.

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