

Gulley, Norman R. *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2011. xxv + 676 pages, hardcover.

Norman R. Gulley was a Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Adventist University and a scholar. Gulley's *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity* is the second volume of a planned multi-volume series on Christian doctrines. He also published other volumes, including, *Prolegomena* (2003), *Creation, Christ, and Salvation* (2016), and *The Church and Last Things* (2017). In the book *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, Gulley's main argument is on the doctrine of God, exploring historical contributions and the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle. The book is divided into sixteen chapters, each containing an introduction and concluding statement.

Norman R. Gulley states in Chapter 1 that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all one God. The Trinity's love is visible throughout the Bible. God's covenant history exemplifies His Trinitarian love. God's connection with people is marked by love throughout the Old and New Testaments. Christ and the Holy Spirit transformed the Christian understanding of the Trinity. According to the New Testament, God is a Triune of Persons, which distinguishes him. The Old Testament contrasts one God with many gods.

Gulley contended in Chapter 2 that Platonic, Aristotelian, Patristic, Medieval, and postmodern influences should not limit our understanding of God. According to Gulley, biblical evidence indicates God's love. God's characteristics and titles define who He is. The Bible's images of God are flawed and intended to aid human comprehension. Gulley demonstrates that God is incomparable and that no limited language can adequately express Him. God's presence is shown through unique characteristics.

Gulley agrees in Chapter 3 that the Church Fathers' Old Testament Bible was composed in Greek (LXX). Some people did not understand Hebrew and detested Jews because they persecuted Christians. Gulley claims that Greek philosophy aided the Church

Fathers in proving Jesus' divinity. According to early Patristic ideas, Christ was either a simple man or a Father-Spirit divinity. Another point of view is Christ's eternal sonship. According to Gulley, the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) battled against the Arian idea that Christ was created. Gulley claims in Chapter 4 that the Trinity preserved humanity on purpose. The Trinity agreed to temporary functional subordination to safeguard mankind, which only demonstrated their eternal love. Trinity would have been capable of saving mankind. The temporary functional subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father was the greatest act of love in human history.

Gulley claims in Chapter 5 that a timeless and temporal understanding of God impacts all six theological loci. The concepts concerning the God of Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, and Neoplatonism are timeless. Classical theology, according to certain theologians, has conceptual baggage. Tillich, Pannenberg, Cullmann, Feinberg, and Jenson reject the concept of an everlasting God. Gulley advocated replacing the phrase "timeless" with God's infinite duration in Chapter 6 since the Trinity enjoys perpetual fellowship. Because God is neither timeless nor locked in simultaneity, He cannot be unchanging and impenetrable. This pagan-inherited static notion of God rejects God's link with impermanent reciprocal love. The Bible should be used to replace traditional beliefs in God.

In Chapter 7, Gulley contends that new perspectives on God endanger traditional religion. They reject the notion that God is distant, unmoved by human suffering, and unchangeable concerning humankind. Modern believers in God criticize Greek philosophy for influencing classical conceptions while getting inspiration from other sources.

Gulley postulates in Chapter 8 that God desires to rescue humans and restore the planet to its pre-fall state. Jesus was to be humanity's Savior. Christ was to live and die for the redemption of all humankind; humankind may accept or reject this choice. Gulley claims in Chapter 9 that the Trinity is not a covenant since their love is not founded on a contract. Their love mirrors God's love.

This commitment is the foundation of God's everlasting covenant with humankind. All historical and contemporary agreements, including the Creation covenant, Noah's covenant, Abraham's covenant, Israel's covenant, Sinai covenant, and all others, reflect an eternal covenant.

In Chapter 10, Gulley discusses how God rewarded Solomon and made his reign the most productive in reaching other nations. It demonstrated that God rewards faithful people. Several heathen ladies enticed Solomon to worship pagan deities. Because he betrayed a promise to God, Israel and Judah were split. Both tribes worshipped different deities and were at odds with one another. Before escaping to Egypt, Assyria and Babylon enslaved Israel and Judah.

According to Gulley in Chapter 11, the ancient and new covenants may be analyzed historically and experientially. The previous link between the law and salvation was incorrect, but the new one is correct. Israel did not follow through on the previous arrangement. It was the individuals who were at fault, not the covenant. It renews the eternal covenant throughout redemptive history. In Chapter 12, Gulley mentioned that covenant theology restricts and redefines Paul's terminology. New Perspectives on Paul (NPP) academics focus too much on Second Temple Judaism and not enough on Paul's message.

In Chapter 13, Gulley explores textual evidence for a violation between the Sinai and new covenants. Paul does not condemn the Sinai law tablets but highlights their language skills if adherence to the law is not divinely inspired. Gulley claims that problematic passages glorify the new covenant while condemning the Sinaitic Law. Gulley suggests in Chapter 14 that God's beauty was shown through the sanctuary's sacrifices and rites, His oldest teaching method in the Bible, and visual insights into His creation. The sanctuary symbolizes the gospel's pervasiveness (Israel). The sanctuary's ceremonies and offerings reveal God. The stone Ten Commandments within and under the throne reflected God's omnipotence.

Gulley discusses God's Plan: Proponents of Predestination in Chapter 15, which says that God governs everything in His cosmos, including everyone's eternal destiny. Gulley noted those who declared an irrevocable decree based on His sovereign will, outside human influence. This gives the impression of a distant God rather than a God who desires a loving covenant relationship with humans.

In the last chapter of the book, Chapter 16, Gulley discusses God's plan: Opponents of Predestination. According to Gulley, the incorrect view of predestination diminishes God's love by suggesting that only the elect are saved and even questions His love by implying that some are reprobated. The Reformation biblical principle of *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* guides us to go to all relevant Scriptures before determining a doctrine or truth. Predestinarians, however, seem to overlook the potter verses in Isaiah 45 and Jeremiah 18, which are the root passages for the potter illustration in Romans 9.

As a point of departure on critical evaluation, Gulley used systematic approach in his writing and deliberation on the topic, *God as Trinity*, in which in the first two chapters, he critically lays the foundation and uses Scripture as the bases of his discussion in all chapters. This alludes to one of the greatest advantages of his discussion. For Gulley, God is eternal, the relationship on Trinity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is eternal, divine, marked by reciprocal love which is the core foundation (3). Gulley upholds Scripture as the source of knowledge which reflects divine love and echoes the true character of God and His attributes. Gulley, abreast of so much diverse scholarship, is to be thanked for his monumental work, his clarity of expression, and the cogency of his logic.

His irenic tone reflects his compassionate spirit, yet he never wavers from his message. Gulley posits God's relinquishing of Omnipresence and practically a use of other divine attributes which convey God's character (60). By this Gulley is very clear in the use of both communicable and incommunicable attributes of God in which no created being can possess them. On the other hand, it

is worthwhile to note that God's attributes are not separated from His nature or essence. Gulley's use of various terms to explain the functionality of the Trinity clearly helps a lot to clarify the eternal, ontological or immanent Trinity. Then, Trinity in Salvation history which Gulley calls the economic or revealed Trinity is the same as Trinity throughout but different in function (130). This clarification assists humanity to understand the diversity function of the Trinity in the redemptive work and reciprocal love toward humankind.

The acknowledgement of temporary subordination of Christ to fulfil his redemption mandate on earth, clearly highlights that Gulley is well vested with correct biblical sources which clearly show the incarnational duty of Christ in scriptural passages such as Hebrews 10:7, Psalms 40:6-8, John 8:28 (147). The mentioned Biblical passages clearly show the duty of Christ on earth, which is clear evidence of correct teaching. Gulley is thorough in his treatment and consistent in upholding the *Sola Scriptura* principle. The Bible must be allowed to interpret itself; the incarnation of Christ clearly confirmed the love God has for sinners.

Variations in understanding in the doctrine of timeless and spaceless have brought different implications to the six major loci of theology. As a result, Gulley did give a historical background from different Greek philosophers to the contemporary theologians toward their understanding of the timeless and spaceless God (113-213). This clarity by Gulley helps us to understand that it is impossible to prove that God is timeless from Scripture and that those who subscribe to such teachings do indebted it to the ancient philosophical teachings. As a result any who subscribe to teachings and beliefs in a timeless and spaceless God, means God does not act on time and does not show His love toward His creatures which is against correct biblical teachings.

Furthermore, Gulley gives an overview on God's plan of redemption and restoration toward humanity. He is clear on how the cosmic conflict began from heaven, how Satan influenced our first parents along with his manifestations toward humanity, and how God restored the lost planet to Himself (275-276). The chronological way of analysis by Gulley is very clear, easy to follow

and can be grasped by noting that cosmic controversy demonstrates the radical difference between selfishness and self-sacrificial love. This clearly shows how the mystery on the story of redemption can be easily be understood from the biblical perspective. This deeply spiritual, solidly scripturally-based *Systematic Theology* is intended to be a general evangelical theology with the Great Controversy theme as its organizing and theologically orientating centre.

Gulley must have wrestled with all of this in his book *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* which is a piece of its own kind. In it he is significantly silent about anything distinctively Adventist and gives no hint regarding the manner in which he intends this study to serve his own Church. One such case of silence in *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* stands out because of tracing the Covenant Plan, God's Plan from Creation through Israel, to Opponents of Predestination. In the six chapters dealing with Scripture and hermeneutics, no reference is made to Ellen G. White and the Adventist understanding of Scripture and the gift of prophecy.

Gulley's book has no bibliography. This does not mean, however, that he is unfamiliar with his sources. On the contrary, for the sixteen chapters read, Gulley used the 1400 footnotes averaging 95 footnotes per chapter. There are indices of Names, Scriptures, and Subjects. It is always pertinent that a volume based on much research handles its sources properly. So I checked a few quotes. This volume had few quoting errors.

In summary, Norman R. Gulley's *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* is an admirable and thought-provoking volume highly recommended to theologians and serious students of the Word. Gulley's in-depth exploration of the doctrine of God is both academically fulfilling and spiritually inspirational, addressing not only historical contributions but also distinctive beliefs and doctrines. Despite potential challenges, the book is a mine of competently integrated and focused theology that can be highly rewarding. I encourage anyone interested in deepening their understanding of Systematic Theology to read and explore this volume.

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