

*Forsaken. The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters*

Thomas H. McCall

Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2102, 11 + 171 pp.,  
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SUMMARY

McCall's book aims at a strong view of indivisibility in the doctrine of the Trinity, the divine attributes, the nature of the atonement, and justification and sanctification. The Father and Son are not ruptured because of the cross, nor does the cross remove a supposed tension between God's love and wrath. The nature of the atonement is rich like a complex network rather than a set of individual models, and justification and sanctification, while distinct, cannot be separated from each other or the work of the triune God.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce livre, l'auteur affirme avec force le caractère indivisible de la Trinité, des attributs divins, de la nature de l'expiation, et le caractère inséparable de la justification et la sanctification. La croix n'entraîne pas de rupture entre le Père et le Fils. Elle n'a pas non plus pour but de résoudre une supposée tension entre l'amour et la colère de Dieu. Plutôt que de concevoir la nature de l'expiation selon un ensemble de modèles distincts, il faut apprécier sa richesse comme celle d'un réseau complexe. La justification et la sanctification, bien que distinctes, ne peuvent pas être séparées l'une de l'autre, mais constituent l'œuvre rédemptrice du Dieu trinitaire.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

McCalls Buch vertritt einen starken Standpunkt der Unteilbarkeit im Hinblick auf die Lehre der Dreieinigkeit, die göttlichen Attribute, die Natur der Erlösung, Rechtfertigung und Heiligung. Vater und Sohn werden durch das Kreuz nicht auseinandergerissen, auch hebt das Kreuz nicht die angenommene Spannung zwischen Gottes Liebe und Gottes Zorn auf. Das Wesen der Erlösung gleicht eher einem reichlich komplexen Netzwerk als einem Bausatz mit einzelnen Modellen. Darüberhinaus können Rechtfertigung und Heiligung, während sie unterschiedlich sind, doch nicht voneinander oder vom sonstigen Werk des dreieinigen Gottes geschieden werden.

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Was the Trinity broken at the cross? Did the death of Jesus make it possible for God to love people? Was the death of Jesus a meaningless tragedy? Does it even make a difference? These four questions form the structure of the present book. McCall, associate professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, argues for a strong view of indivisibility: of Father and Son, divine attributes, the nature of the atonement, and justification and sanctification. This indivisibility is not one that avoids or negates distinctions, but it does deny separation, confusion and

division. Each of the four chapters asks a key question, attends to it and concludes with some views to avoid, affirm and then explain why it matters.

McCall is critical of the 'broken-Trinity' view and the stance that Jesus' cry of dereliction does not refer to Psalm 22 or only refers to Psalm 22:1 and not to the entire passage. 'Saying "the Trinity was broken" amounts to saying "God does not exist"', he argues (44). Although the Father and Son relation was not ruptured, Scripture and tradition help us see that we must affirm that the Father did indeed abandon his Son, but only to death. McCall also argues that Jesus' union with humanity and the Son's relationship with the Father must be seen as unbroken.

Did the cross make it possible for God to love us? This question assumes that God's love might not have existed (or was different) prior to the cross. Contrary to some scholarly and popular trends, Scripture demonstrates that God's love is holy and wrathful and that his wrath is also loving. But, wrath is a *contingent* attribute stemming from the holy love of the Trinity. At this point, both divine impassibility (meaning the appropriateness of divine emotion, not the lack of emotion) and divine simplicity play important roles. God's love is the holy *impassible* love of the Trinity that never oscillates in relation to sin. Divine simplicity reminds us that wrath and love do not oppose or compete with one another. Neither is it merely the Father alone who is wrathful and the Son who loves, as though they could be divided. The simple nature of the triune God means that all three persons are equally loving and wrathful, undivided in their works, and trustworthy in their love and wrath. In sum, 'God is for us. It is not *part* of God that is for us – as if some divine persons or some divine attributes were opposed to me while others are for me – it is just *God* who is, in the impassible simplicity of the trinitarian life, radically *for us*' (91).

The third chapter asks whether God's divine foreknowledge means that God killed Jesus, since he knew the crucifixion was going to happen. McCall navigates between what he sees as two extremes: a senseless tragedy view and a soft (compatibilism) or hard view of determinism. Furthermore, McCall outlines the nature of the atonement as including a wealth of views, unable to be divided or emphasized against one or the other. The final chapter outlines the distinct but undivided nature of justification and sanctification as understood in a trinitarian context. The work of the triune God results in our immediate justification as well as our ongoing sanctification. The book concludes on a personal note in which McCall powerfully testifies to the significance of the trinitarian gospel in the face of his father's death in 2009. Whether the reader agrees or disagrees with his arguments, this is a great witness to one of the main truths that McCall has been after: the Trinity really does make a difference in our lives.

Reformed readers are likely to disagree with chapter three in particular and may have problems with the



presentation of determinism. The author's critique is too brief and at times dismissive, speaking of those who want to protect divine sovereignty 'as if it *needs* protection' (99-100). My hope is that this chapter will not distract from McCall's main contribution, even though the arguments against determinism seem to wander from the book's central aim.

It is difficult to know the level of education necessary to benefit from this work. It is deeply pastoral and filled with wisdom and insight in a mere 170 pages. However, it assumes a good working knowledge of historical theology, doctrine, some philosophy, and at times technical distinctions. Some of these are fit for students and pastors, while in other places McCall engages academic scholarship that the intended audience is not likely to know well or at all. Even so, he should be commended for the book's many strengths. In this very readable volume; McCall brings the skills and tools of analytic theology to bear on some very difficult teachings. He brings clarity, precision and insight along with a pastoral tone that shows great care not only for the truth but also for the mind and character of the readers. Other scholars would do well to imitate McCall's work for the sake of students and the Church.

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***God is a Communicative Being: Divine  
Communicativeness and Harmony in the  
Theology of Jonathan Edwards***

T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology

**William M. Schweitzer**

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\$110.00, hb; ISBN 978-0-5671-9522-7

**RÉSUMÉ**

Dans cette monographie, William Schweitzer étudie l'élément central de la doctrine de Dieu chez Jonathan Edwards. Selon lui, Jonathan Edwards voyait la propension divine à communiquer comme la clé pour comprendre la création. La communication intra-trinitaire, communication de connaissance, d'amour et de joie, se reflète dans la communication *ad extra* qui s'effectue de manière harmonieuse par la médiation de la nature, de l'Écriture et de l'histoire. Écrit avec intelligence, cet ouvrage remarquable constitue une ressource excellente, non seulement pour les spécialistes qui s'intéressent à Jonathan Edwards, mais aussi pour tous ceux qui se penchent sur les grandes questions théologiques suivantes : Qui est Dieu ? Pourquoi a-t-il créé le monde ? Comment puis-je le connaître ?

**SUMMARY**

In this monograph William Schweitzer examines the core of Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of God. Edwards, as Schweitzer explains, sees divine communicativeness as the key

to our understanding of the Trinity *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*. God essentially communicates his knowledge, love and joy through the media of nature, Scripture and history, and he does so in a harmonious way. Lucidly written, this outstanding work is an excellent resource not only for Edwards scholars but also for everyone who is interested in the big theological questions: Who is God? Why did he create the world? How can I know God?

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

In dieser Monographie untersucht William Schweitzer das Herzstück von Jonathan Edwards' Lehre von Gott. Wie Schweitzer erläutert, versteht Edwards die Kommunikationsfähigkeit Gottes als Schlüssel zu unserem Verständnis von der Trinität sowohl *ad intra* als auch *ad extra*, also nach innen wie nach außen hin. Gott teilt im Wesentlichen sein Wissen, seine Liebe und Freude durch die Medien von Natur, seinem Wort und der Geschichte mit, und dies auf eine harmonische Weise. Dieses hervorragende Werk ist verständlich geschrieben und ein ausgezeichnetes Hilfsmittel nicht nur für Wissenschaftler, die sich mit Edwards befassen, sondern auch für jeden, der an den großen theologischen Fragen interessiert ist: Wer ist Gott? Weshalb hat er die Welt geschaffen? Wie kann ich Gott kennenlernen?

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Scholarly interest in the North American pastor, theologian and philosopher Jonathan Edwards remains high. Today, the virtually unlimited availability of Edwards resources, both physically (printed Yale University Press editions, 1957-2008) and digitally (Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/>), facilitates research and leads to an ever-increasing number of publications. This is surely a desirable development as Edwards' voice deserves to be heard today if we want to make real progress in our theological discussions. However, faced with the immense proliferation of Edwards studies, one is in danger of losing sight of the core of Edwards' theology and hopes for a presentation of the big picture. To speak with authority, such a scholar would not only have to exhibit a profound insight into the Edwards corpus but would also need to be familiar with the secondary material, which is, as already mentioned, enormous. William M. Schweitzer is such a scholar and he handles the daunting challenge exceptionally well.

Jonathan Edwards' *Leitmotif*, Schweitzer argues, was to find an answer to the fascinating question of why a self-sufficient God would create. This is the answer Edwards offers: God 'created the world to communicate himself to intelligent beings' (12-13). As suggested by the title of Schweitzer's volume, God is an inherently communicative being; it is his very intention to communicate himself to creation in a harmonious way. In Edwards' view, Schweitzer explains, God's communicativeness *ad intra*, the intra-Trinitarian sharing of knowledge, love and joy is mirrored by his communication *ad extra*, whereby all of reality is infused with his beauty, harmony and excellence. As self-communication can be