BOOK REVIEWS

Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West.* (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005) Pp. xii + 251. Paperback, $22.00.

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[1] Trinitarian theology has been on the rise, with all manner of studies and theologies being offered befitting the complexity and subtlety of One God in Three Persons, the unique Christian concept in world religion. This contribution by Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, while a very important one for anyone interested in the Third Person, would not fall normally within the scope of topics to be reviewed by this journal. Rogers, however, is eager to draw the perspectives of Eastern—and Syriac—Christianity into his field of vision.

[2] Waiting on final proofs from the publisher of his previous book, Rogers found he had plenty of time to delve into works on the Spirit in translations from the Eastern traditions. In particular, Rogers really loves Ephrem, citing numerous hymns, and one section of the seventh hymn on the Virginity is cited three times in the volume. Many other Syriac authors make an appearance in Roger's investigations: Balai, Bar Hebraeus, Jacob of Serug, Isaac of Nineveh, Philoxenus of Mabbug, Abdisho bar Berikha. Greek writers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, and Romanos the Melodist, along with significant forays into the thought of Russian Orthodox theologians Pavel Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov, and Paul Evdokimov are not the usual fare for a Western systematic/constructive theologian.

[3] Is this not the purpose for which all labors at translation have been intended: to provide other theologians and historians reliable source materials for their work? Rogers utilizes well the materials and assessments of other scholars. His favorite source is Sebastian Brock's The *Holy Spirit in Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Poona, India: Anita Printers, 1998) from which the lion's share of his Syriac citations are drawn.

[4] One of Rogers' other Eastern favorites is the life of Simeon Stylites, but it is the life as interpreted in several articles by Susan Ashbrook Harvey upon which he focuses. Admitting that he is making an atypical scholarly move, Rogers relies not upon the actual *vitas* of Simeon, but upon Harvey's secondary study [primarily "The Stylite's Liturgy: Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998) 523-539], which shall be examined below.

[5] Nevertheless, Rogers' monograph is still firmly planted in the West. Despite the numerous Eastern ("outside the Modern West") references, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas provide critical mass for the theology of the Spirit, while Robert Jenson, Donald Mackinnon, and Rowan Williams help guide Rogers in the thinking of the modern West. Behind all the scenes remains the presence of Karl Barth. Although Rogers firmly corrects Barth on several key points in the latter's understanding of the Holy Spirit, it is apparent that Barth still provides the orientation for much of Rogers' direction.

[6] In the midst of his sabbatical reading, Rogers came to recognize that the Person of the Spirit has usually been neglected, sublimated, disembodied, and consequently depersonalized in modern trinitarian theological systems. He begins with Barth who, while appearing to be the champion of the Spirit, is one of the culprits for its subtle demise. Paraphrasing the famous line from the musical *Annie Oakley*, Rogers captures the sense of Barth's approach, "Anything the Spirit can do, the Son can do better!" Barth talks about the importance of the Spirit, but over the pages of *Church Dogmatics* his Christocentric tendency nudges him to assign the real work of the Spirit to that of the Son. His language sometimes speaks of the Spirit being "the power of Christ," reducing the Person to a function. Rogers concludes, "In the background, Barth is both the model and disappointment here."

[7] Rogers sets out fourteen "Preliminary Theses," providing the outline of his argument. Several can be helpful for us here. The second and third theses direct us to the New Testament witnesses that permit us to glimpse the intratrinitarian relations and interactions of the Persons. We are allowed such glimpses through the agency of the Spirit which then manifests these relations "in human beings as the conditions for the possibility of human participation in the trinitarian life." The life of the Trinity is not just

an idea about which we think and contemplate, but a reality in which human beings can and do take part.

[8] Rogers' essential summary of this interrelationship is in his fifth thesis: "The Spirit proceeds from the Father to rest on the Son." He prefers the more active verb "to alight" rather than the passive "to rest." The idea is filled out in the following sixth thesis: "Because the Spirit hovers over the waters at creation and rests on the body of the Son in the incarnation, the Spirit rests on bodies in excess of nature, or 'paraphysically,' to coin a word out of Romans 11:24; not just in a way that re-befriends the physical, but also in a way that redeems, transfigures, elevates, and exceeds it." For Rogers, it is the non-necessity, the excessiveness, superfluity, the grace and rest that characterizes and distinguishes the Spirit as a Person of the Trinity.

[9] From here Rogers takes the reader on a rich, but complex tour amplifying the nature, character and adventures of the Spirit. Each section warrants time to savor and digest, so it is not a simple task to summarize all the insights and arguments elucidated. Yet it is possible to summarize the narrative of Rogers' understanding of the Spirit, and narrative is the word.

[10] "I propose that the Spirit is a Person with an affinity for material things. The Spirit characteristically befriends the body," declares Rogers. The Spirit is therefore not just a function or power of the other Persons. A Person requires a narrative, a vita, and despite the perspective of some readers, there are plenty of narratives of and about the Spirit in the Old and New Testament. Rogers acknowledges that many of these instances involve the Spirit acting in concert with the Son, so he uses these primary narratives to frame his development of the Third Person: Resurrection, Annunciation, Baptism, Transfiguration, and Ascension/Pentecost.

[11] The Spirit is often perceived as being inaccessible in a personal human sense, but Rogers objects that this is "not because she *lacks* the qualities of a person; the Spirit is inaccessible because she *has* the qualities of a person. She is not inaccessible because *im*personal, but *as* personal." Who, after all, can really say that one knows completely another person with all our inner mysteries? It is the superfluity, the excessiveness of the gifts of the Spirit, that most marks the character of the Spirit; an excessiveness—what else is grace but excessive?—by which human beings are saved. So in the

end the Spirit can do something better than the Son-rest. "The logic of the Spirit is not of productivity, but of superfluity, not the logic of work, but of Sabbath. The Spirit like the Sabbath sanctifies.

[12] A few notes on Rogers' journey through the narratives of the Spirit.

Resurrection: "The most remarkable trinitarian passage in the New Testament," Robert Jenson observes, is Romans 8:11—"If the Spirit of the One Who raised Christ Jesus from the dead dwells in your mortal bodies, you too shall rise from the dead." Rogers peers inside the verse through several other exegetes and early writers, but his most important insight comes via Aquinas. "Nevertheless something is to be gained by Christ's reception of the resurrection from the Father: The *exercise* of raw power is not joinable, because unlike Christ human beings do not have that power as their *proprium*; but the *reception* of power is joinable, 'because what God the Father did in Christ, he does also in us.'" Human beings become perfect, deified, not in their accomplishment, but in their reception of the Spirit's gift.

[13] Annunciation: The concept of the Spirit's superfluity and excessiveness is perceived especially in Mary's giving birth to Christ. One of Romanos the Melodist's hymns on the Nativity utilizes the key phrase "*para phusin*" that Rogers interprets as "excess of nature," as opposed to many translators who render the phrase, "contrary to nature." He rightly notes that it is this excessiveness of the virgin birth that some Protestants don't like and feel uncomfortable about, for it is just too exorbitant, out of control, physically excessive (Rogers is Presbyterian). The last word on this excessive Annunciation Rogers gives to Jacob of Serug, "Mary gave a body for the Word to become incarnate, while Baptism gives the Spirit for human beings to be renewed."(P. Bedjan, *Homiliae selectae*, Vol. 1, *mēmrā* 9, p. 204)

[14] Baptism: What happens at the River Jordan is to be primarily understood as an intratrinitarian event, in which other human beings may participate by their own baptism. The general problem of why did Jesus need to be baptized is answered by observing that while the Son does enjoy a divine attribute by right, there is no barrier to his receiving it also from another (the Spirit) in humility. This ability to receive from the Spirit also enables Christ to receive even from human beings. The Spirit relates to the Son by

taking "something Christ does not need and presents it to him as gift," while "Christ does not hold on to what is his but receives it from another as gift."

[15] Rogers is enamored with Ephrem's seventh hymn on Virginity [strophes 5, 6, and 14 are selected], placing it as his epigraph to the volume, examining it at the conclusion of Part I, and again here. The hymn identifies the oil used to anoint the baptized as "the dear friend of the Holy Spirit," the oil painting the image of Christ onto the one baptized. "Christ has many facets, and the oil acts as a mirror to them all: from whatever angle I look at the oil, Christ looks out at me from it." Human participation in baptism leads one back towards participation in the divine. Rogers cites Vladimir Lossky's succinct observation, "The work of the Son deifies human nature, and the work of the Spirit deifies the human person."

[16] Transfiguration: Rogers pulls together Romans 8 and Luke's depiction of the Transfiguration to imply that only God can pray to God. When human beings pray they are caught up in the triune activity of the Persons praying to one another. Prayer is what the Trinity does. Prayer does not "change God's mind," but is a transfiguration of human beings who do not know how to pray as they ought.

[17] It is in liturgy that human beings are nourished and developed by the Spirit over time. Rogers turns to the life of Simeon Stylites as an example of how asceticism can be liturgically channeled to a positive end for both ascetic and community. Simeon's *vitas* witness how Simeon's out of control severe asceticism caused continual dissension in his community, resulting inevitably in his expulsion. The local priest Mar Bas takes on Simeon and encourages both his athletic asceticism, pillar and all, as well as structuring his practices around the eucharist, the daily and annual liturgical calendar, preaching and teaching, healing and reconciling disputes. Rogers relays Harvey's assessment that "Simeon began his pillar-standing as an attempt to escape people, but was transformed into the very center of liturgical life.... His body becomes spiritual, anticipating the spiritual bodies of heaven, taking on characteristics associated with the Holy Spirit—light, fire, incense, presence on the altar, formation of the seeker, production of the witness, gathering of the community." Rogers concludes that Simeon, under his own authority was pathological, out of control, and therefore

amorphous, while under the liturgical formation of the Spirit, he is unique and original not as an individual but to and for his fellows.

[18] Ascension and Pentecost: Rogers recognizes the problem in his re-construction of the narrative of the Spirit is that Pentecost does not take place in the life of Jesus, nor does the Ascension mention the Spirit. Yet, Rogers sees the two events forming an excellent example of how the Son defers to the Spirit in order to receive a gift.

[19] It would be quibbling for *Hugoye* readers with their special interests to require more of Rogers in utilizing the resources of the Eastern and Syriac churches, though it is true that many of his Syriac references are branches to his argument, not the roots. His constructive pneumatology is just that: a systematic endeavor to understand the Person of the Spirit in her intertrinitarian activities. I believe, nevertheless, that Rogers is part of a beneficent trend slowly developing in Western theological ranks that recognizes and utilizes the contributions and insights of Eastern Christian and Syriac theology and literature. Predictably, Ephrem is the writer most often selected. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hughes Oliphant Old, Robert Wilken, Carol Zaleski, and certainly others, have referenced Ephrem and other Syriac writers in recent writings with no pretensions to Syriac scholarship *per se*, just pretensions to good theology. The more non-specialists in Syriac literature read these works in translation, the more we will learn in return. As Rogers would probably assent, there is ample roominess in the Spirit to accommodate all manner of readers of resources outside the modern West.