

David H. Kelsey, *Human Anguish and God's Power* (Current Issues in Theology, Book 16). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. pp. 294. Hardcover. \$39.99.

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David H. Kelsey is the author of *Human Anguish and God's Power*, the latest volume in the Cambridge University Press' series, "Current Issues in Theology." This book continues Kelsey's legacy as an author presenting theological doctrine in conversation with practical pastoral challenges. He serves as the Weigel Professor Emeritus of Theology at Yale Divinity School and is responsible for publishing *Proving Doctrine*, *Imagining Redemption*, and most significantly, his two-volume theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence*.

One of the enduring challenges of Christian theology is identifying how the infinite and eternal God relates to and interacts with his finite creation. Pastoral theology's drive to explore the dimensions of God's providential and pastoral care for his world regularly presses the boundaries of the Creator/creature distinction. Kelsey's contribution in *Human Anguish and God's Power* (hereafter referred to as *HAGP*) is aimed at addressing the anguish people endure related to the suffering of others. He explores how God's providential care can console the anguish of persons touched by the suffering of those close to them. *HAGP* is organized in three Parts. After outlining the main concern of human anguish in the Introduction, Part I addresses the Glory of God, Part II unpacks Divine Providence and Sovereignty, Part III is a doctrinal section on Power, and Part IV considers Stammering Praise.

Kelsey tackles head on the mis-guided comfort regularly offered to persons in anguish. His proposal claims people are regularly told "everything happens for a reason" as though human suffering is purposely brought upon individuals in order to fulfill a divine plan. In tackling this subject, Kelsey addresses important theological issues surrounding the Creator/creature distinction. His argument, as in many of his other books, is characteristically dense and layered. God's intrinsic glory involves his relating to creation in the three "strands" of creative blessing, reconciliation of the estranged, and eschatological blessing. According to Kelsey each of these strands are natural expressions of providence and sovereignty which are, themselves, aspects of God's glory. Kelsey concludes that the divine economy operates with a single end (*telos*); namely, eternal life accomplished through salvation. Kelsey's objection to the traditional cliché, that "everything happens for a reason," rests on his conviction that it requires God to relate in each of the three "strands" with a different sort of "good" for his creatures (167). He affirms, instead, a single *telos* in the divine economy but different "patterns of relationship" (*taxis*) in each of the three strands.

Glory is the primary character of God that Kelsey draws on for his presentation. In *HAGP* glory is represented as the dynamic relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit *ad*

intra. It is the foundation of divine power, love, and set as the cornerstone of God's sovereignty and "self-expressiveness" *ad extra* (65, 71). As Kelsey states, "it is (God's) glory that gives him the ability to relate the eschatological blessing (salvation unto eternal life)" (25). The problems arise with "misguided consoling of the anguished" when glory is attributed to the providential care of creation in the "strand" of creative blessing only. Under this truncated view the two strands of "reconciliation" and "eschatological blessing" in the divine economy are weakened and obscured. According to Kelsey, when these two of the three strands in the economy attenuate, the result is devaluation of grace and overvaluation of human effort in the arenas of self-care and healing (185).

Kelsey addresses pastoral concerns largely overlooked by serious theological reflection. By so doing he makes productive and needed contributions to areas of doctrine that have been largely neglected. There are, however, some significant omissions that leave the effort incomplete. One question left unresolved is "how does God interact directly with the anguished?" Kelsey offers doctrinal insight as to why the problem exists, but he offers little actual theological help to the anguished. The book stops one step away from describing the actual source of divine comfort. While Kelsey accurately deconstructs an inadequate solution, he does not provide an alternative description for God's interaction with men and women.

Kelsey focuses on God's life *ad intra* but fails to bridge that conceptually to God's work *ad extra*. He displays a commendable foundational commitment to the glory of the Trinity but does not explain how God interacts personally with creation. This oversight could be helped by borrowing on the recent retrieval of concepts such as the divine missions, the asymmetrical relationship of the Creator to his creation, the role of the Spirit in human life, and the distinction of "real" versus "logical" relations in the Creator/creature continuum. The exposition of *HAGP* would benefit by making an explicit connection to the theological insight of the *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the external operation of the Trinity are undivided).

Where Kelsey's book is helpful is in his presentation of several classical and scholastic doctrines. The areas of God's providence, sovereignty, and intrinsic glory are articulated insightfully and profoundly. Additionally, his offering on conciliar trinitarianism and the scholastic doctrine of God's Power are a helpful contribution. As an academic aid this volume is valuable as a research and conversation partner to the advanced theology student of doctrinal study. Seasoned church leadership in the arenas of congregational care and those dedicated to intentional care of God's people are additional milieus this book holds value. While Kelsey's presentation is high level interaction with high level doctrine, his target audience is church and community members and providing them with the tools they need to support hurting people. *HAGP* conceptually answers the call to fill a unique contribution to equipping leadership in the church for a greater understanding of the way God relates and cares for his people.
