# BOOKS I HAVE READ: TRACES OF THE TRINITY

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**Category:** Reviews

A little under a year ago, I wrote a geeky little post called "The Trinity Doesn't Dance", which caused quite a bit of a stir on Facebook as a lot of people got very upset about something I didn't say.

Basically, my point was that the Greek wordÂ *perichoresis* which is often used of the Trinity has nothing to do with dancing, despite a superficial resemblance to the root of the word choreography. As I say, it's a rather geeky post and I was surprised that so many people got so upset about it.

I bring this up, because I've just finished readingÂ Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human ExperienceÂ by Peter Leithart which is an excellent book on the subject ofÂ *perichoresis.*

Don't stop reading!

Traces of the TrinityÂ is a relatively easy read; it's funny, it's heartwarming, it's informative and it's blooming brilliant. If you are going to read one theology book this year, make it this one.

The book is a normal sized paperback of just over 170 pages. It is not pitched at an academic level, though there is a good smattering of endnotes for those who want to know more. It will cost you just over a tenner at Amazon, less if you buy it for Kindle.

Getting back toÂ *perichoresis;Â* Leithart defines it in this way:

> *The word derives from a Greek verb (perichÅ  rein) that means â€œto containâ€  or â€œto penetrate.â€  First used to describe the unmixed union of divinity and humanity in Jesus, it has been more commonly used to describe the communion of the three persons of the Trinity as mutually â€œindwelling,â€  â€œpermeating,â€  or â€œinterpenetratingâ€  one another.*

His simple thesis is that mutual indwelling is a feature of the whole world, because that is the nature of its creator.

> *I attempt to discern how trinitarian theology illuminates the world we live in. My opening assumption is simple-minded: Christians believe that the Triune God created the world, and that should have some implications for the kind of world that it is.*

> *What I have been describing is the â€œperichoreticâ€  shape of reality.*

However, though this is the central thesis of the book, it is delivered slowly, carefully and clearly through a number of chapters each looking at a different aspect of creation.

Different chapters cover issues such as the nature of the human body, relationships, sex, language and music. Each one reinforces the central theme, but the book is always interesting and rarely

repetitive. Unusually for a theology book, God hardly gets mentioned until the last chapter. While this sounds strange, it strongly underlines the central thesis of the book. He shows us a world that we are intimately familiar with and having done that, he clearly demonstrates its relationship to the creator God.

Did I mention that it is funny?

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I found the chapter on language to be particularly good (well, I would, wouldn't I?) and there is plenty in there to give others interested in Bible translation something to think about.

> *Still, I have serious doubts that â€œcommunicating thoughtâ€ is the best way to describe the purpose of language. Language communicates thoughts, of course, but thatâ€™s not the only thing language does, and probably not the main one. Intellectuals and academics and philosophers think this is what language is for because itâ€™s what they use language for. But when the baseball slips sideways out of my hand and begins sailing toward an unsuspecting bystander, my cry of â€œDuck!â€ or â€œWatch out!â€ isnâ€™t an attempt to communicate thoughts from my brain to the bystanderâ€™s. Itâ€™s an effort to prevent an accident, and to save myself the trouble of a lawsuit. I donâ€™t think much before shouting, and I donâ€™t want the bystander to think either. I want her to â€œDuck!â€ and â€œWatch out!â€*

> *Words differ. Words have unique properties, both empirically (sound, visible features) and semantically. Yet these irreducibly different words do what they do only because they inhabit one another. Words contain other words, even as they are contained by words. Things contain other things even as they are contained by those things.*

Just a few other quotes to whet your appetite.

> *In my own field of theology, many operate with flat-edged systems that they use as blunt instruments for bludgeoning people who disagree. Theological systems become heavily defended fortresses to keep the undesirables at a distance.*

> *Scripture also assumes that God is capable of human speech. Because God has designed creation and humanity and ordinary human language to communicate about him, he can speak clearly in ordinary human language about himself. God has revealed himself in human language, that human language has been preserved in the Bible, and it is ordinary human*

> *language. Therefore, ordinary human language is adequate for communicating the reality of God to us. Of course, there is mystery at every point, but why should we expect anything else? We want to talk about, and to, an infinite, incomprehensible God.*

It's a very good book; buy it!

Oh, for those who sometimes worry about the authors I recommend, Peter Leithart teaches at New St Andrews in Moscow, Idaho and is of impeccable Reformed credentials!