

Overflow: How the Joy of the Trinity Inspires Our Mission

By Michael Reeves

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Review By Mike Towns

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Has your motivation to serve the Lord dried up? Are you feeling tired or frustrated in evangelism? Do you need encouragement to persevere? Michael Reeves has a solution for you, one which you may find surprising: the doctrine of the Trinity.

Through the four short chapters of *Overflow*, Michael Reeves, president of Union School of Theology in the United Kingdom, takes readers on a tour of the glory and wonder of the Trinity and what that means for mission. He wants Christians “to know a God who is not mean and pinched but overflowing with life, goodness, and beauty. For when you are full of Him, you too will overflow and be a spring of life-giving water to all around you” (10). God the Father, Son, and Spirit is in his very nature an overabundance of love, which he pours out onto his people. And as his people receive that love, they are empowered to pass it on to others as well.

Chapter one sets the foundation for God as “the fountain of all goodness.” Reeves explains, using John 14–17 and other passages, how the Father has loved the Son since the foundation of the world, and thus God is in his very nature love. “When you start with Jesus, and in Him you discover a triune God, you have found a God of infinite beauty, love and loveliness beyond compare” (25). The incomparable beauty and greatness of God is seen in the perfect love shared among the persons of the Trinity.

Chapter two builds on this theology to show how God’s overflowing love also flows out from his people to the world. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, notes Reeves, to pour out the love of God into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). And as the Spirit does so, we are filled with such a perfect, glorious love that we cannot help but pour it out to others through gospel proclamation. “Mission is the overflow of love from the enjoyment of divine fellowship. As we partake in the Father’s pleasure in His Son, and the Son’s pleasure in His Father, and the Spirit’s enlivening of their mutual love, it causes us to share their love for the world” (56).

Reeves then turns to consider what it would be like if God were not Trinity: how would that affect his character of love? Chapter three discusses two alternatives: a god who is one person (as in Islam) or a godless world. Reeves is frank in his dire assessment of both options. If Islamic theology is correct, then God cannot be love at his core, since from eternity past there would have been no one to whom he could express this love. He could not have created humans out of the overflow of his love but could only have done so to make servants for himself. “Without the Trinity, religious people in the world are condemned to a bleak system of sterile power instead of abounding love” (66). Secular atheism is no better, as this can only lead to “a despairing nihilism and meaninglessness” (13). If God is not Trinity, the world is a terrifying place indeed.

But God is Trinity, and so his people can rejoice in and rest in his overflowing, eternal, undeserved love. They can then, as chapter four

tells us, shine like lights in the universe. God's people have been adopted into his family and have been showered with his eternal, unending love. And so they shine out to the world around them. "As the Lord fills the universe with countless stars, so He will fill His creation with the sons of God. They will gather around Him and, like the true Light of the World, they will shine with sparkling radiance as well" (92).

Reeves writes as an academic and a theologian who specializes in the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than as a cross-cultural worker. Yet he writes with an eager desire to inspire workers like us not to be ashamed or nor confused by the Trinity. Reeves calls us to love our triune God and, despite the objections we know we will face, to boldly proclaim that a triune God is our only hope in this world. So, this book is eminently practical.

In my own gospel conversations with North Africans, I have tended to avoid discussing the Trinity. It is certainly a point of massive contention and confusion for Muslims, and in many cases should not be the doctrine we address immediately. Yet the more we delight in the Trinity, the less we will be shy or reticent to talk about this glorious doctrine. For example, in a recent conversation with a friend, discussion about the meaning of life ("to glorify God and enjoy him forever")¹ quickly moved to the fact that God is love and can only be love because he is triune. *Overflow* inspired and equipped me to explain and exult in the Trinity in my evangelism.

In addition, recognizing the love that exists between the persons of the Trinity and how that flows out to God's people produces in us a heartfelt, uncontrived, unforced evangelism. I have found this vision of God's trinitarian love to be inspiring, a truth I want to meditate on regularly in order to strengthen my resolve, boldness, and joy.

1 Cf. The Westminster Short Catechism.

As a short appeal to love the doctrine of the Trinity, *Overflow* is limited in its scope. It does not teach believers how to explain the doctrine, nor does it lay out a full trinitarian theology. Readers will need to go elsewhere for those things. Yet for anyone taking the gospel to others, especially those on the front lines of missions, this book will be a sweet encouragement to open their eyes to the glory and importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Whether you are working with Muslims, secular agnostics, Hindus, or anyone else, you will be helped and motivated.

Overflow is a gentle yet inspiring invitation to serve God out of the overflow of his trinitarian love. The gospel, which is meaningless without the Trinity, calls forth not a begrudging service to a master, but a satisfied, eager service to a loving Father. Reeves's sweet, devotional tone is especially appropriate for workers who may be running on empty. And his brevity only makes the book more accessible. I personally was inspired by his awe-filled vision of our triune God and encouraged to press on in mission out of the overflow of His love. I imagine any other worker, especially the weary among us, would find similar inspiration from this short meditation.

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