Most anthologies, as is well known, are uneven. While this one is no exception, it boasts some rare strengths. Included are contributions from perhaps the two most distinguished systematic theologians of their generation in the English-speaking world today, namely, John Webster and Kathryn Tanner. That alone would be enough to command attention. Beyond that, this collection of ten essays maintains a high level of discussion throughout. One essay in particular, however, stands out above the rest. Ivor J. Davidson’s “Salvation’s Destiny: Heirs of God” deserves the widest possible readership. Davidson's elegant and deeply considered piece advances our understanding of divine adoption to a new level, surpassing anything on this topic that I have ever encountered.

However, since the Davidson essay appears last in the book, let me begin at the beginning. In the opening chapter, John Webster continues his exciting forays into the doctrine of God, this time with regard to the theme of salvation. He argues that when soteriology is not grounded in the doctrine of God, it tends to assume unfortunate nominalistic and moralistic deformations. Only when the perfect life of the Holy Trinity is seen as the beginning and end of all things can salvation be properly conceived. Salvation means that “God will confirm his own glory by glorifying the creature” (19). God’s triune self-repetition in history, as constituted in his covenant with Israel and fulfilled in the history of Jesus Christ, is the only sound basis for thinking about salvation. Webster notes that “we still await a soteriology in which the first article plays more than a negligible role” (20). However, it is precisely such a soteriology that Davidson so helpfully adumbrates.

Kathryn Tanner, known for making bold innovations within the bounds of Greek patristic theology, continues her project in this volume by reflecting on humanity’s being created in the image of an incomprehensible God. Drawing upon the idea of ‘plasticity,’ which has gained currency today through the rise of neurobiology, Tanner suggests that the image of God is more like a pure potency than a given actuality. The *imago dei* seems to become more nearly teleological than foundational for the reality of human existence as given by God. The divine image is something human beings become rather than something they have, not so much a status as a goal. A potential problem here is the unwanted implication that persons would seem to be rather less than human until the *imago dei* is actualized in them with the assistance of grace. This could have unfortunate drawbacks for attempts to ground human rights in a God-given dignity that nothing can efface. Tanner could perhaps avoid this
pitfall by allowing for an “Irenaean” distinction between “image” and “likeness.” The former might be seen as ineffaceable while the latter could still be as fully teleological and plastic as she wishes to posit.

Several essays in the volume take issue with Karl Barth’s doctrine of election (Burgess, Mostert, Thompson). Many weighty objections are raised and anxiety is evidenced that according to Barth all human beings might somehow end up being saved. The only trouble with these critiques is that the preferred options are more or less kept under wraps. In the end, it is hard to know just what exactly Barth’s position is being contrasted with. The assumption seems to be that Barth is more problematic than a favored if undisclosed alternative. Until better instructed, therefore, one is entitled to suspect that Barth’s tilt toward universal hope is indeed the worst possible stance, except for all the others.

For those who wonder whether the merits of Christ’s death may properly be conceived in ‘proportional’ or quantitative terms, Oliver Crisp offers what should surely become the definitive refutation of “acceptilation” and “acceptation,” laying these bugbears to rest once and for all. Stephen Holmes defends the ideas of divine aseity and simplicity as essential to soteriology, thus expanding on some themes established by Webster. Nicola Hoggard Creegan intrepidly argues that the cosmic scope of salvation might extend not only to humans but also to animals and all other beings. “Fallenness affects all creation yet is no obstacle to God’s loving purposes” (85). Murray A. Rae, who plumps for a fully christocentric account of salvation, suggests that soteriology requires a fully theological understanding of history.

The chapter by Ivor J. Davidson, however, emerges as the gem of the collection. Rescuing the idea of divine adoption from being merely a subordinate theme in the doctrine of justification, Davidson makes it absolutely central to a proper understanding of salvation. He does this not only in a fully trinitarian way, but also so as to do full justice to the soteriological role of the Father in league with the Spirit and the Son. Here is a pithy summary of his argument:

If the end for creatures is the inheritance of God the Father with the Son by the Spirit, this outcome is in truth subordinate to the end for the Father himself—his pleasure in the possession of a people, in humanity brought to its intended place in fellowship with him, alongside his Son by the Spirit: “the spoils of the divine mercy,” for the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:4). Redeemed and glorified subjects, brought to resemble the Son in his relation to the Father through the Spirit, are thus God’s own glorious inheritance (Eph. 1:18), a creaturely counterpart to God’s fellowship with himself. (170)