

Taking The Trinity Seriously



by Lloyd Arnett



Anglican Agenda Series ♦ J.I. Packer, editor

“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” John 1:18 ESV

Let us pray: *O God, bless us this day, as we wrestle with the wondrous revelation of Your divine Majesty. We pray with St. Paul “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give [us] a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.” Amen.* Eph. 2:17

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Preface To The Series

The Anglican Agenda series of publications aims to open up current questions that call for thought, discussion, prayer and decision among members of the Anglican Church of Canada at this time. The series is sponsored by the Essentials movement, which seeks all-round renewal of life and strength in the Anglican Church, and its writers are Anglican Church personnel speaking out of their loyalty to the Church and their acute sense of its present needs. It is hoped that the series will spark deep personal reflection and group discussion within and between parishes, so that we all may be better prepared for the difficult and demanding era into which, as it seems, our Church is now entering.

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Cover: Andrei Rublev (1370-1430) — Icon of the Holy Trinity, said to originate from the Trinity Cathedral of the St. Sergius' Trinity Monastery in Sergiev Posad.

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Taking The Trinity Seriously

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On a Sunday, long ago, in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther entered his pulpit to preach on the doctrine of the Trinity. Among his words were these:

This article is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp, or the tongue to express, that God, as the Father of his children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right.

My task here is to share with you a biblical, Anglican, orthodox-Christian understanding of the Holy Trinity, showing what it means to believe that God is Three-in-One, while leaving as much as I can of the technical discussion behind for theologians. I'll warn you in advance that some of what I'm going to tell you may be new to you and may even seem fantastic. But only the shape of the material has been mine. The truths involved have been with the Church for 2000 years. If they seem fantastic to us it is because we so little hear them taught and because God is so dynamic and complex a being that his totality is all, truly, phenomenal: totally mind-blowing as we might say.

Introductory Definitions

The doctrine of the Trinity as stated in the first of the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church, is that,

There is but one living and true God.... And in the unity of this Godhead there be Three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Modern Anglican C.B. Moss stated the doctrine in a series of five propositions:

- a) There is one God.
- b) Within the indivisible Godhead there are three coequal and coeternal [*Hypostases* or] 'Persons.'

- c) The Father is the source of the Godhead; the Son is eternally begotten by the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeds from Him.
- d) Each Person exists eternally in the other Two; [this is called the *Perichoresis*, or *Circumsessio*].
- e) The relation of each Person of the Divine action is distinct, the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Redeemer, the Holy Ghost is Sanctifier, yet all Three work indivisibly in all things” (Moss, 40).

One Bible scholar summed it up this way:

When we have said these three things, then—that there is but one God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct person—we have enunciated the doctrine of the Trinity in its completeness.”
(Warfield, 3016).

The definitions, then, add up to this: there is a single divine life that all three Persons share; all are together in every expression of that life; yet the three, though eternally inseparable, remain eternally distinct in their relations with each other and with each element in the created order. All God’s work, therefore, is truly teamwork in some form.

The Trinity at the Centre

Theologian Charles Lowry has called the doctrine of the Trinity, “the most comprehensive and the most nearly all-inclusive formulation of the truth of Christianity” (Lowry, 419). Many scholars regard the bulk of Christian doctrine as an “extended commentary” on Christ’s reference to God as Trinity in the Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

(Matthew 28:19-20; Oden, 203)

“Name” here is singular; “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” thus appear as what Karl Barth strikingly calls the “Christian name” of God. So it is that, as historical theologian Thomas Oden has noted, “From the time of the apostolic fathers, triunity has been considered defini-

tive of the Christian teaching of God, accepted alike by Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern church communions.... It is not merely a speculative or theoretical or incidental or optional teaching, but is regarded by consensus as essential to the Christian understanding of God” (Oden, 187).

At the same time, no doctrine has been the focus of more puzzlement, discomfort and controversy. “If a popularity poll were taken among the doctrines of the Christian faith,” said evangelical scholar R.T. France, “there is little doubt which would come bottom. Nobody likes the doctrine of the Trinity” (France, 102). As Alister McGrath, has written, “The doctrine of the Trinity is unquestionably one of the most perplexing aspects of Christian theology, and requires careful discussion” (McGrath, 247).

Outsiders who try to grapple with Trinitarianism aided by reason alone usually return strongly negative verdicts. Eighteenth century American President Thomas Jefferson, a genius in the fields of architecture and politics, and framer of the American Declaration of Independence, but a non-Christian—rather a Deist— called the doctrine “incomprehensible jargon.” Incomprehensible, yes, said medieval Catholic divine, Thomas Aquinas, but not unintelligible (Bloesch, 37). It is not irrational, but supra-rational—beyond the power of reason to fully grasp. That we can’t understand it *comprehensively*, does that necessarily mean we can know nothing about it at all? No!

One of the initial difficulties we face with the Trinity is that the word is not used in the Bible. “The Old Testament was written before its revelation; the New Testament after it” (Warfield, 3015). “Yet,” writes Thomas Oden, “we must speak of the Trinity, as Augustine knew, not because we are able to fathom it with overweening confidence, but because we cannot keep silent on a matter so central to faith” (Oden, 180).

When we have considered all this, we need to turn to the apparent enigma of the origins of the doctrine. It came into existence in one of the least likely settings imaginable.

It has been a common understanding of Church history since the time of the fourth century church father, Gregory of Nazianzus, an expert on the doctrine of the Trinity, that one of the major themes of the Old Testament was the establishment of monotheism and the *oneness* of the Godhead in the minds of the Jewish people.

Every Jew knew and repeated the Shema: “Hear, O Israel, The

Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). They knew Is. 44:5: “I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God beside me...” Their repeated sin throughout the time leading up to the Babylonian captivity was falling back into polytheism, worshipping other so-called gods. From the time of the post-exilic restoration up to the first century, after repeated failures, the Jewish people had finally become, for some centuries, confirmed monotheists. And it is so to this day. In the 1970’s I picked up a pamphlet written by a rabbi for a synagogue in Indianapolis, Indiana. In explaining the beliefs of Christians for his people he wrote, “Jews believe in one God; Christians believe in three.”

But, now, here is the mystery. In a few short years, after the close of the Old Testament period, and just before the appearance of the New Testament, a group of devout Jews, the very first Christians, seemingly overnight became Trinitarians—without so much as an indication of conflict. One biblical scholar has declared:

There is nothing more wonderful in the history of human thought than the silent and imperceptible way in which this doctrine, to us so difficult, took its place without struggle—and without controversy—among accepted Christian truths (Warfield, quoting Sanday, 3015).

Yet was this really so surprising? After all, the truth of the Trinity was being announced from the start, not indeed in isolation, as a talking point, but by implication, as both the framework and the substance, both the form and the content, of a gospel that could not, and never can be, stated in any lesser terms. In the Gospel, God is identified as the Father who in love sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world through his cross. Now that the Son has returned to be with the Father in glory, the Father and the Son send the Spirit to evoke faith in Jesus, to link us to him, and to make us live in worship and service of the Father and of Jesus himself. To affirm these things is to display our salvation as the joint work—the combined operation, the team job, you might say—of one God who is as truly three persons as he is one Lord.

The assumption that there is only one God, but that he is truly tripersonal, pervades the entire New Testament, and finds expression, implicitly at least, every time the gospel is preached or explained. When Jesus told Nicodemus that to enter the kingdom of God one must be born of the Spirit and put faith in the crucified Son of Man

who is the Son of God (Jn. 3:1-16), he was talking Trinity, as does every faithful evangelist everywhere. A man in a play by Moliere was surprised but pleased to find that he had been talking prose all his life. It is to be hoped that all witnessing Christians will be as pleased as they will perhaps be surprised to find they have been talking Trinity whenever they have testified to Jesus. Yet, so in fact they have been—not, of course, in technical language, but using the biblical terms for the three key players in the story they are telling. In this sense, then, the truth of the Trinity is in solution throughout the New Testament as stirred-up sugar is in solution in a cup of coffee, and accepting God's trinity is necessarily involved in accepting the gospel itself.

The Biblical Evidence

When the first Christians, having accepted trinitarian belief from the Apostles, studied the Old Testament Scripture, paradoxes not understood before, became clear. In the very first sentence of the Bible, when they read that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” the Hebrew for God, *‘Elohim,’* was a plural noun, “oddly enough linked with a singular verb” (Oden, 193). Immediately following, in Genesis 1:26, there was another arresting sentence. God speaking about human creation says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image and likeness.” The one God is speaking in the first person plural: the oddity recurs. It appears again in Genesis 3:22, “And the Lord said, Behold, the man is become as one of *us*, to know good and evil.” And so, in Genesis 11:17, at the famous Tower of Babel encounter, God says, “...let *us* go down, and there confound their language.”

In other Old Testament verses such as Ecclesiastes 12:1, they could read “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,” literally in Hebrew, “Remember your Creators....”

Most startling of all, in the aforementioned Shema, they read the verse we translate “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God’ —literally, for them, “our Gods,” *‘Eloheinu’* — is ‘one Lord.’” (Deut. 6:4).

But this was all after the fact. How did they come to this momentous understanding in the first place?

Something quite unexpected happened. Seeking the long awaited Messiah, they were confronted with someone who was much more than anyone anticipated or imagined. Not only did He command the power of the prophets, he could control the weather, walk on water, be audibly spoken to by God the Father, heal the sick, see into

people's hearts and minds, receive visitations from biblical characters hundreds of years gone, and raise the dead. Most astoundingly, He raised himself from the dead. In John 20:28 when the disciple, Thomas, hailed Him as "My Lord and my God!" Christ accepted the identification and chided him for not realizing it sooner.

And, as if this weren't disconcerting enough already, Jesus introduced them to the Holy Spirit. In the following years the Apostles taught and wrote about the Three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as divine, for Christ had made God known. As John put it, "No one has ever seen God; the only God who is at the Father's side [literally, in his bosom, i.e. his embrace], he has made him known" (Jn. 1:18).

Anglican author Francis J. Hall has noted that:

Several New Testament passages mention the three Divine Persons as Divine (Mat. 3:16-17; 28:19; Jo. 14: 16, 17, 26; 15:26; II Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 2:18; II Thess. 3:5; I Jn. 5:7). A comparison of texts taken from all parts of Scripture shows that (a) Each of these Persons is Creator, although it is stated that there is but one Creator (Ps. 33:6; Is. 44:24); (b) Each is called Jehovah, the Lord, the God of Israel, the Law-giver, Omnipresent, and the Source of life; while it is denied that there is more than one Being who may thus be described (Deut. 6:4; Jer. 23:6; Ez. 8:1,3; Rom. 10:12; Lu. 2:11; II Cor. 3:18; Mat. 15:31; Lu. 1:16, 17; II Sam. 23:2,3. Rom. 7:25; Gal. 6:2; Rom. 8:2; Ja. 4:12; Jer. 22:24; Eph. 1:22; Ps. 139: 7-8; Deut 30: 20; Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:10; 7:8); (c) Each made mankind (Ps. 100:3; Jn. 1:3; Job 33:4); quickens the dead (Jn. 5:21; 6:33); raised Christ (I Cor. 6:14; Jn. 2:19; I Pet. 3:18); commissions the ministry (2 Cor. 3:5, 6; I Tim. 1:12; Acts 5:28); sanctifies the elect (Jude 1; Heb. 2:11; Rom. 15:16); and performs all spiritual operations (I Cor. 12:16; Col. 3:11; I Cor. 12:11), although obviously but one God is capable of these things." (Hall, 95-96).

The New Testament is so saturated by the Trinity that one scholar wrote:

The whole book [NT] is Trinitarian to the core; all its teaching is built on the assumption of the Trinity; and its allusions to the Trinity are frequent, cursory, easy and confident. It is with a view to the cursoriness of the allusions to it in the NT that it has been remarked that "the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much heard as overheard in the statements of Scripture." (Warfield, 3015).

The Apostolic community was faced with this ultimate doctrine,

not given them so much in word as revealed in action. God, the One God of the Old Testament, in the fullness of time, revealed His own nature to men. “In a word,” said Professor Benjamin Warfield, “Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are the fundamental proof of the doctrine of the Trinity” (Warfield, 3015).

The Divine Nature: The Father and the Son

Let us now gaze at the Divine Majesty as God has revealed himself in His word and granted understanding in the Church.

Before the world began, from all eternity, there was God. In Him was life, wisdom, beauty, goodness, power, all perfection. He was One, yet not alone. God the Father knew Himself objectively. He also knew, and rejoiced to know, an Other, a perfect, living, identical image, a separate mode of His being, distinct from Him, but one with Him in His own essence. In this Other the Father saw all his perfections reflected. The letter to the Hebrews says the Son is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). And Jesus himself affirmed that “the Father loves the Son” (Jn. 5:20).

Some Christians think that when Scripture speaks of the Son as the Father’s “only-begotten,” it refers to Christ’s birth from Mary, but this is not so. It is the eternal relationship between the two Persons that is in view. Recent scholarship has shown that the Greek word *monogenes*, found in John 1:14, 18, 3:16, was used to express the “onliness,” and therefore the preciousness and belovedness, of a single son, with no special focus or stress on his begottenness. That is why some translations don’t say “only begotten Son” but “one and only,” or simply “only Son.” When the Nicene Creed says that the Son of God is the “only-begotten... begotten before all worlds... very God, of very God... of one substance with the Father,” it is saying in a fourth-century way that the Son, who as he said of himself lives “because of the Father” (Jn. 6:57), is yet co-eternal with, and of the same nature as, the Father, and is to be worshipped, trusted and adored alongside the Father, in the same way that the Father is. Being born of Mary is the Son’s incarnation in time; being begotten of God the Father is the so-called “eternal generation” of the Son before all time.

Theologian Daniel P. Fuller has noted that there is a problem raised by using the word ‘begotten’ “in making clear Jesus’ unique relation to God: as far as human experience is concerned; the begetter always exists for a period of time before the one who is begotten. Yet the

Scriptures are clear that Jesus the Son has always existed as the only begotten of the Father” (Fuller, 119). Fuller notes that C.S. Lewis, who wrestled with the same reality, is helpful in suggesting how this can be so:

I asked you just now to imagine... two books.... You made an act of imagination and as a result you had a mental picture. Quite obviously your act of imagining was the cause and the mental picture the result. But that doesn't mean that you first did the imagining and *then* got the picture. The moment you did it, the picture was there.... That act of will and the picture began at exactly the same moment. If there were a Being who had always existed and had always been imagining one thing, his act would always have been producing a mental picture; but the picture would be just as eternal as the act (Fuller, 119).

Fuller has shown how John the Apostle understood this to be the case [using John 1:18]. “Writing in his Gospel, John stated, ‘God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made [God] known.’ There is no other way to construe this proposition than to understand that Jesus, from all eternity, was both God and also a person separate from God the Father. John 1:1 mentions the ‘Word’ (...Jesus) as having existed always, alongside God: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with [*pros* ‘over against’] God, and the Word was God,” (Fuller, 118).

Reformer John Calvin said: ‘When we speak simply of the Son, without reference to the Father, we well and properly declare him to be of himself, and for this reason we call him the sole beginning. But when we mark the relation that he has with the Father, we rightly make the Father the beginning of the Son,’” (Fuller, 119). Within the divine unity the Son always existed, and his life was always one of response to the Father.

The Divine Nature: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Where now does the Holy Spirit come into the picture?

“The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as proceeding both from the Father and the Son. According to Galatians 4:6, ‘God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts’; John 15:26 makes the same basic affirmation: ‘When the Counsellor comes, whom I [Jesus] will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.’ Hence the Westminster Confession

(1647) makes the following distinction between the three persons of the Trinity: “The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit [is] eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son’ (2.3), (Fuller, 120).

What do we mean by “proceeding” and from where did the Holy Spirit come?

I can do no better here than quote an extended passage from Fuller, including understandings from eighteenth century divine, Jonathan Edwards, and C.S. Lewis, again (pp. 118-120):

A comprehension of God’s necessary work in having the Spirit proceed from both the Father and the Son begins with understanding the love the Father and the Son have for each other. John 3:35 affirms that ‘the Father loves the Son,’ as do Matthew 3:17 and 17:5, where the Father says, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ And Jesus acknowledged this love when he said, in praying to the Father, ‘Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world’ (Jn. 17:24). The Scriptures also make it clear that the Son loves the Father: ‘The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me’ (14:31). This love is also evident when Jesus said, ‘The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him’ (8:29). From this love of the Father and the Son for each other, we understand in what sense God is, and always has been, love. ‘God’s love is primarily to Himself, in the Father and the Son loving and delighting in each other.... The happiness of the Deity, as all other true happiness, consists in love and society.’.... In fact the ‘spirit’ of this community is so strong that a separate center of consciousness called the Holy *Spirit* proceeds both from the Father and the Son in such a way that the third person exists, who himself is a center of consciousness and has all the divine attributes of the Father and the Son.... Thus Edwards argued:

The Godhead being thus begotten by God’s loving an Idea of himself and showing forth in a distinct subsistence or Person in that Idea, there proceeds a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sacred energy arises between the Father and the Son in mutually loving and delighting in each other.... This is the eternal and most Perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect

manner possible. The deity becomes all act, the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Lewis follows the same line of argument:

Perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions [is] that in Christianity God is not a static *thing*—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you won't think me irreverent, a kind of dance. The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know that's almost inconceivable, but look at it this way. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trades union, people talk about the 'spirit' of that family, or club, or trades union. They talk about its 'spirit' because the individual members, when they're together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they wouldn't have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course it isn't a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that's just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a *real* Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God" (Fuller, 120-124).

Some of this is undoubtedly speculative, but it makes the vital point that the personal life of the Holy Spirit is a supreme expression of the divine love.

The Son: The Face of God

At this point in my own understanding some time ago, I noticed that I began to feel that my own comfortable image of God was shaking and that I was being confronted with something quite alien. While it is true that God is God and something quite beyond us, the further truth is, that it is not God who is alien. In our fallen state, we are the ones who have become alien. When I realize that I was created in the image of God, I realize that the more corrupt I am the more alien He seems, and the more like Christ I become, the less alienated I am.

Also, I can't do the things God does; I can't generate another me [and the consensus in some quarters is that one of me is in any case

quite enough]. I'm a creature and God is God, but there are little echoes of Him in my being. We ourselves are more complex than we know. For instance, ask yourself this: When you talk to yourself, ... to whom are you speaking?

The understanding of the Church is that, in the fullness of time, God revealed His Trinitarian nature: the Father revealed the Son and the Son revealed the Spirit. God never intended that we feel alienated by His nature. He wants us to eventually behold His glory. In the meantime, we have an aid—a visual aid, in the most literal sense—in relating to Him. On one occasion Jesus' disciple Philip said to him,

“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (John 14:8-10)

Jesus' words to Philip bring home to us the force of John's conclusion of his prologue: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him *known*” (Jn. 1:18). When we need a grasp of the Trinity as the God we worship, with Whom we communicate, Whom we serve, rely on, and hope in for the future, we should remember that Jesus is both the face of God the Father, and the measure of the mind of the Holy Spirit. Seeing Jesus, we see the triune God.

The Trinity, the Creeds, and the Church Today

When the last Apostles were passing from the scene, there was concern about the sacred doctrines of the Church. There was an understanding that the truth was desperately important. St. Paul, approaching his death, told the Church,

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30)

At the end of the first century twin enemies closed in on the Church: persecution and error. A hostile Roman Empire, the Jewish establishment, and unhappy pagans attacked from without and persons twisting true doctrine and creating divisions undermined the Church from within. The Church found it necessary to formulate the

doctrine of the Trinity to protect God's self-revelation from error. The term Trinity was first coined in the second century, but even before then an attack had begun from the self-styled Gnostics who denied the deity of Christ. After them came many others, including the sixteenth-century Socinians, who also denied Christ's deity.

Dr. Walter Martin wonderfully tells the story from this point:

...perhaps the most crucial test of Christian doctrine in the early church was the 'Arian heresy.' It was this heresy which stimulated the crystallization of thought regarding both the Trinity and the deity of Christ. The climax was reached at the famous Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). There, backed by laborious study of both testaments, Athanasius and Paul (Bishop of Alexandria) decimated the Arian position and forced the excommunication of the schismatic Arius and his followers. At this time the church drafted the famed Nicene Creed and shortly afterward the Athanasian Creed. Thus the church recognized what the apostles and prophets had always taught—that the Messiah shares the nature of God, as does the Holy Spirit—'neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.'

The Arians, on the other hand, never considered the matter a closed issue. As years passed, they almost split the Christian church apart, but time and time again they were thwarted by the great Athanasius, who held to the Scriptures tenaciously. Once, when he was hopelessly outnumbered, Athanasius was urged to join the Arians, and it was here that his character and that of the faithful Christians of the early church shone most brightly. With the challenge 'The world is against you, Athanasius' ringing in his ears, the beleaguered theologian thundered, "No, it is not the world against me, it is Athanasius against the world.' History records that though he lost many battles, he outlived Arius and won the final victory. Never again [writes Martin] was the trinity of God successfully challenged within the church (Martin, 26, 27).

Why, you may ask, does it matter what happened in that dusty history so many centuries ago? It matters, said Martin, because,

Today there are still remnants of the Gnostic heresy (Christian Science), the Arian heresy (Jehovah's Witnesses), and the Socinian heresy (Unitarianism) circulating in Christendom. All of these errors have one thing in common—they give Christ every title except the one which entitles Him to all the rest—the title of God and Savior (Martin, 27).

Very recently J.I. Packer has written:

the past half-century has seen the emergence, and in North America especially, both sides of the forty-ninth parallel, the dominance, of a type of theology, calling itself *liberal*, that does not acknowledge biblical authority, or the Trinity, or the incarnation, or the atonement, or the resurrection, reign and coming return of Christ, or personal salvation in and through Christ, or the calling of the church to holiness and evangelism, in a way that squares with historic reformed Anglican belief. It minimizes the uniqueness of the gospel, and pursues assimilation to other world faiths of a pantheistic or panentheistic sort: Hinduism, Sikhism and some forms of Buddhism, for starters (Packer, 15).

The revelation of the Trinity is the fountain-head of every major doctrine of the Christian faith. If Jesus is not God there is no Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection. If the Holy Spirit is not God, there is no Baptism into Christ's body, no spiritual regeneration, no filling, no being changed into His likeness.

The Trinity is not just a theological concept or theory; it is a divine disclosure of the nature of the Godhead. We can only truly *know* the Godhead as the first Church did, as it becomes revelation to us, as we experience God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not a fancy, let alone a fantasy, but a fact about God. This intimate self-revelation from our Creator, in His creation, salvation, and sanctification of us is the most precious possession we have. In it we know God as He really is.



The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13-14) Amen.

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Questions for Study and Discussion

1. Study of the Trinity has been described as like looking into the sun. Do you agree? Why?
2. Is Trinitarian orthodoxy really fundamental to all other Christian doctrines? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of any mistaken view of Christianity that does not involve some mistake about the Trinity?
4. How should the Trinity be taught (a) to adults, (b) to children?
5. Why do Christian hymns and songs lay such stress on praising and adoring the Trinity? Should they do this?
6. What would you recommend as the best way of celebrating Trinity Sunday in your own congregation?



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