

THE TRIUNE GOD: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

I. Introduction

- A. One of the claims we make as Christian apologists is that only the Christian worldview fully explains what is. In other words, it contains within itself the ability to answer all the major philosophical questions. In this briefing outline it is my purpose to demonstrate the vital importance of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity as the necessary foundation to that worldview. It should, and must be, our primary dogma (starting assumption).
- B. The late Francis Schaeffer used to say: *Every once and a while in my discussions someone asks how I can believe in the Trinity, My answer is always the same. I would still be an agnostic if there were no Trinity, because there would be no answers. Without the high order of personal unity and diversity as given in the Trinity, there are no answers. (He is There and He is not Silent, p.14)*
- C. Today in the light of adversarial worldviews like postmodernism (all is diversity), and Islam (unity), it is vital that Christians embrace, and once again proclaim loudly, the Triune God of Christianity.

II. The Essentials of the Doctrine

- A. There is only *one* infinite and personal eternal God, i.e., Supreme Being. (Ex. 20:3; Dt. 6:4; I Sam. 2:2; 2Kgs. 19:15; Isa. 37:16; 44:6,8; 45:18; Mk. 12:28-34; I Cor. 8:4-6; I Tim. 2:5; James. 2:19)
- B. This one God exists in three distinct, conscious persons: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit; three in personhood, but one God, i.e., one in essence. It is not a contradiction to say that God is one yet three, since He is not one in precisely the same way He is three. It would, however, be a contradiction to assert that God is one and three in precisely the same sense.
 1. The Father is God: There is very little dispute that the Father is deity. (Rom. 1:17; I Cor. 1:3; 8:6; 15:24; Eph. 4:6)
 2. The Son is God: The deity of the Second Person of the Trinity is shown by His Works, His claims, His attributes,, and the fact that He receives worship. The main purpose of the Gospel of John is to show that Jesus was God. In the very first verse the writer says: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God*, and, when Jesus repeatedly says, *I am*, it is the equivalent of saying *Yahweh* as in the OT. (Col. 1: 16-17; Jn 20:29; 8:59)
 3. The Spirit is God: In the baptismal formula in Matthew's Gospel (28:19 the Holy Spirit is equal with the other two persons in the Trinity. Same in II Cor. 13:13. In Acts 5 the sin was lying to the Holy Spirit. In the baptismal scene in Matt. 3 you see a conspicuous presence of all three members of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit as the Dove.
- C. This God is eternal; that is, He had no beginning. Sophisticated atheists still ask such juvenile questions as: "Who made God?" By definition, a creator God must be eternal.

III. Establishing the Doctrine of the Trinity

While the word *trinity* is not mentioned in Scripture it does not mean that it is not found there. It is developed in the NT, and the plurality of the godhead is very much implied in the OT. Dr. Scott Horell,

professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, lists 117 verses in the NT that teach that God is a triune being (unpublished paper).

A. The Old Testament

A careful student of the OT will see glimpses of a multiple-person deity.

1. In the very first verse of Genesis (*In the beginning God*) the Hebrew word for *god* is *Elohim*. When a noun in Hebrew ends in *im* it is plural. (As in *seraphim*, or *cherubim*). Later on In Genesis chapter one, verse 26, note the use of the plural pronouns: *Let us make man in our image...*
2. In Isa. 9: the prophet tells us that the child that will be born will be called *Mighty God*.
3. In Ex. 3:6 A careful reading of this text seems to indicate two persons who are deity, Yahweh and His Angel. In Judges 6:11-24 we see the same phenomena. A careful study of the scene again reveals Yahweh and His Angel. To see more of these passages see: *The Unseen Realm*, by Michael S. Heiser (especially chap 18).
4. Another verse that has puzzled Jewish rabbis is: Ps. 110:1. *The Lord said unto my Lord...* The clearest interpretation would seem to be that Yahweh (the Father) is addressing His Son. It is one of the major messianic passages in the OT.
5. The *Spirit of God* is mentioned over 400 times in the OT and mentioned first in the creation passage of Gen. 1.
6. The *Angel of the Lord* is mentioned often as well. Theologians refer these appearances as theophanies or pre-incarnate appearances of Christ. Note that in several of these appearances He is worshiped (Jos. 5:13-15).

B. The New Testament

While the doctrine of the Trinity is more clearly defined (see the verses noted above in II, B, 3) in the NT the actual refining of the doctrine took place later. In the early third century we find the first use of the word *trinity* by Tertullian . It was codified at the counsel of Nicea in 325 in the Nicene Creed and further refined by Athanasius later in the same century.

- C In Nature: There is an amazing occurrence of triads in nature. For example: space has three dimensions: height, width, and depth; in time, we have past, present, and future; in matter we have gas, liquid and solids. These are, of course not proof of the Trinity, but they are an interesting autobiographical feature of the Divine Artist, our Creator. Psalm 19:1 and Rom. 1 teach that nature bears witness to the Creator. It therefore, is not unlikely that we would see evidence in the natural world, in music, and in mathematics. For more information see Letham, Chapter 19, and *The Trinity in the Universe*, by Nathan Wood.

IV. The Importance of the Doctrine for the Christian Worldview

- A. In our postmodern, multicultural world, how important is the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian worldview? It is not only essential, but foundational. Without the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian faith crumbles and has no answers for the major questions of philosophy. And what are these major questions: Who am I? How did I get here? What is the meaning of life? How should I act? (Of course there are others and they can be expressed differently.)
- B. To the doctrine of Salvation

How could a unitarian god who is holy save fallen man? If there no trinity how can there be an incarnation? Without the salvation from sin there can be no communication with God.

- C. The existence of the Triune God solves one of the knottiest problems in philosophy: the problem of unity and diversity. With the Trinity we have unity and diversity. It's both and, not either or.
- D. The Trinity solves the problem of the personality of man. God is personal and man is made in His image. This is so important in the age of insurgent Islam. Allah, the god of Islam was alone before creation. He had no one to be in a relationship with, i.e., to communicate, or to love. Technically speaking, therefore, Allah is not a loving or personal god. Such a God seems ultimately dependent upon his creation in order to express the attributes of his own nature & personality. For all eternity prior to creation this God would have been alone with himself. With whom does He communicate? Whom does He love? However, before time began, the Persons of the Trinity were in a loving relationship. (See Jn. 17).

No one has ever demonstrated how time plus chance, beginning with an impersonal, can produce the needed complexity of the universe, let alone the personality of man. Francis Schaeffer in He is There and He is Not Silent, p.9.

- E. Without the Triune God of Scripture there is no way to settle arguments because there would be no laws of logic. For two people to communicate an idea or thought logic must exist. (*A is not non A*). Being able to communicate with language assumes the laws of logic. Atheism cannot explain the existence of the laws of logic! It is not an accident that John begins his Gospel *In the beginning was the word...* The Greek word for *word* is *logos* from which we get our word *logic*.
- F. With the biblical doctrine of the Trinity we can experience the true meaning of our existence. An existentialist philosopher used to say: *You can never experience the infinite starting from an finite reference point.* That's true; but because the Triune God has revealed Himself we can!
- F. The existence of the human family is patterned after the Trinity. Ever wonder where God came up with the idea of the family? How important is this today?
- G. Without a holy God who has revealed himself there would be no ethical absolutes. We would be left with moral relativism.

V. Errors to Avoid:

Augustine writing in the 6th century wrote: *In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable. De Trinitate* 1.3.5 (PL 42:820-22).

- A. Modalism. This error teaches that there is one God but that he appears in different modes as is necessary. For example: I am a son to my parents, to my wife, I am a husband, and to my children I am a father, but I am only Bill Crouse. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not modes; they are persons!
- B. Tritheism. With this error, the independence of each person is stressed. It essentially teaches that there are three gods. This is a contradiction as it violates the laws of logic.
- C. Emphazing one member over the others. Some contemporary churches over emphasize the Holy Spirit in their worship; to others the Holy Spirit is often ignored.
- E. Monarchism, or adoptionism. This error teaches that Jesus was a mere human until he received the Holy Spirit at baptism. Thereafter he had the power and attributes of deity. It is an absurdity to assume a derived or created deity.

VI. Conclusion

Only when we begin with the Christian religion – an infinite and personal triune concept of origins – do we logically have an explanation for things – human personality, the desire for meaning in life, personal immortality, a real creation having both unity and diversity, a transcendent basis for absolute morality, etc.

Because God is personal, human personality has genuine and eternal significance. The only kind of eternity that has any meaning or gives this life any meaning, is an eternity of personal immortality, and because Christianity involves a philosophy of religious dualism, God is the creator of a real creation. As result, there is no necessity with facing the very destructive consequences of nihilism.

The infinite personal Triune Creator, the God of the Bible is the only possible answer. Only when you begin with the Christian view of origins can you adequately explain the universe as we know it in terms of metaphysics, epistemology & morality. Metaphysics deals with the nature of existence, truth & knowledge; epistemology with how we know; & morality with how we should live. (Author unknown. It is also not a direct quote. I believe it is from Francis Schaeffer)

Have you ever wondered why the universe is so large? No man has enough brain cells to comprehend its infinity nor take in its immense beauty. God is the artist and He alone completely understands His work and only the Triune God understands the Triune God! Thankfully He was not silent, and He has revealed Himself.

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