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THE TRIUNE GOD

We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the universe; that He only is God, creative and administrative, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose; that He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

—*Manual*, Article 1



Every Christian act and impulse—praying, witnessing, believing, singing, worshiping—arises and is nurtured by the Christian confession of who God is and how He moves the world through love. The Christian God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the thrice-blessed name of the holy Trinity. The Church's great hymn writers have instinctually known that this is the God who must be praised.

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! . . .
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!*

—Reginald Heber

*Come, Thou Almighty King . . .
Come, Thou Incarnate Word . . .
Come, Holy Comforter . . .
To Thee, great One in Three.*

—Anonymous

The Church prays to the Father, through the mediating ministry of the Son, in the empowering enablement of God the Spirit. Early artistic renderings of the Trinity often represented this truth. The crucified Christ is seen reclining in the

Father's bosom, for only through the blood of the Son are we reconciled to God. In the midst of Father and Son, the Holy Spirit hovers as a dove, for He is the richly and freely endowed "bond of love" between Father and Son.

The doctrine of the Trinity may be the one Christian teaching that moves from 0 to 60 in six seconds, from relative clarity to befuddlement in no time flat. Although the word "Trinity" does not appear in the New Testament and was not known until the *Latin Trinitas*, coined by the Church father Tertullian (c. 160-220), all Christians know the word and most can give a rudimentary explanation of the Three-in-One and the One-in-Three. After that, however, most people—even many pastors—are lost. Practically speaking, Christians overwhelmingly are mere monotheists rather than fully realized Trinitarians.

Not everyone can have the Sistine Chapel in the backyard for private meditation. But imagine a place within your reach where beauty is beyond description and truth beyond question. Would you not spend as much of your life there as possible?

The simple beauty of God as triune is that this is who God reveals himself to be. God has brought the Sistine Chapel to your backyard. Why not experience God as He wills himself to be known, loved, and worshiped by those He created for this express purpose? The doctrine of the Trinity is the strongest possible theological, spiritual, and even ethical statement God can make to us. It is not human ingenuity and curiosity that have erected some unknown and unknowable doctrine, although too frequently this has happened. The Trinity is the gospel of God, the only divine offer to take human life into divine life and transform it. As great Trinitarian theologian Karl Barth put it, the Trinity means that God perfectly corresponds to himself. Of none other can this be said.

Historically, the headwaters of the doctrine of the Trinity are found in Jesus' bold assertion of His oneness with the Father (John 10:30), a claim that led directly to His death. When

at Christmas we sing “Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!” (John F. Wade, “O Come, All Ye Faithful”), we acknowledge that the Father’s eternal Word, coming into flesh in Jesus Christ, is in reality “very God of very God . . . being of one substance with the Father” (Nicene Creed).

The Holy Spirit is by no means an afterthought. This Spirit is, with the Son, coequal and coeternal with the Father. He may be the Third Person of the Trinity, but He is God’s first response and first overture of peace and healing to this cruel world. The Holy Spirit appears in the Bible’s first paragraph as the Presence of God brooding over the waters (Gen. 1:2).

Is there a distinctive Nazarene approach to the Trinity? Not if it will remove Nazarenes from the great ecumenical consensus that from the beginning of Christian history has confessed God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Yet the Nazarene emphasis on the love and grace of God and on seeking full conformity to the heart of Jesus Christ is a perfect fit with God’s triune nature.

The heart of Jesus Christ is to do His Father’s will in the constant embrace of the Spirit’s anointing. The Triune God is, as someone has so well expressed it, “no solitary God.” He is rather a Community-in-Love, where each of the three Persons pours His life out for the other two and receives His life back from Them. Our best human analogy, any family that constantly practices other-regarding love, is only a flickering wick next to the Trinity’s brilliance.

C. S. Lewis said it best: “We [as Christians] trust, not because ‘a God’ exists, but because this God exists” (“On Obstinacy in Belief,” from *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*). John Wesley closed his sermon “The New Creation” with a beautiful testimony centering God’s power to make all things new exactly in His very being as triune: “And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”

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Quote Rack

You, O eternal Trinity, are a deep sea, into which the more I enter the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek. The soul cannot be satiated in your abyss, for she continually hungers after you, the eternal Trinity, desiring to see you with the light of your light. —Catherine of Siena

The doctrine of the blessed Trinity is a reminder of the supernaturalness of biblical Christianity. The doctrine defies rationalization, yet it provides for the believer the answer to the unity and diversity of the world. —Robert P. Lightner

Footprints

The Early Church was troubled by heresy even before the writing of the New Testament was concluded. One heresy concerning the Trinity was promoted by Origen, an influential teacher of the third century. Origen taught subordination of the Divine Persons: God as preeminent over the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Three Persons as coeternal but not coequal. He instructed believers to pray only to God the Father, believing that prayers directed to the Son and the Holy Spirit were sinful.

We recognize that because God is triune, prayer must be voiced to the Triune God with no hint of subordination. The Father is the “goal” of prayer, Jesus Christ the “road or bridge,” and the Holy Spirit the “motive power” driving the believer along the way of the Son toward the Father (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*). To pray to God is to engage the Trinity.

Ponder and Pursue

The names of God have specific meanings and therefore are like a picture of Him or a promise from Him. Examine these scriptures to study a few of the names of God.

EL SHADDAI: “God Almighty” is used 48 times in the Old Testament, 31 times in Job alone (Gen. 17:1).

JEHOVAH-JIREH: “The Lord Will Provide” comes from the Hebrew for “to see” or “to foresee.” He recognizes our needs and provides (Gen. 22:14).

JEHOVAH-M'KADDESH: "The Lord Who Sanctifies" makes whole or sets apart for holiness (Exod. 31:13; Lev. 20:8).

JEHOVAH-SHALOM: "The Lord Our Peace" brings peace derived from being a "whole" person in right relationship to God and to one's fellow human being (Judg. 6:24).

JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU: "The Lord Our Righteousness" comes from *tsidek*, straight, balanced as on scales, thereby the full weight, right, righteous (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:16).

JEHOVAH-ROHI: "The Lord Our Shepherd" derives from *ro'eh*, to pasture (Ps. 23:1).

JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH: "The Lord Is There," ever-present (Ezek. 48:35).

Some of the most prominent names of God are plural, suggesting the three-in-one nature of the Trinity.

EL, God, "mighty, strong, prominent," is used approximately 250 times in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:1). *ELOHIM*, the plural form of *EL*, is used with singular verbs.

JEHOVAH, "LORD" (translated in all capitals). *YAHWEH* is the covenant name of God, occurring more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament (Exod. 6:3). From the verb "to be," *YAHWEH* is "The Self-Existent One," "I AM WHO I AM," or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE," as revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3). Deut. 6:4-5 uses both *JEHOVAH* and *ELOHIM* to indicate one God with a plurality of persons.

ADONAI: "Lord" (only the "L" capitalized) is used 300 times in the Old Testament, always plural when referring to God. Whenever singular, the reference is to a human lord or master. (Note both Jehovah "LORD" and Adonai "Lord" in Ps. 110:1.)

Additional Scripture References

Gen. 1; Lev. 19:2; Deut. 6:4-5; Isa. 5:16; 6:1-7; 40:18-31; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19-20; John 14:6-27; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 2:13-18.