

The Development of Trinitarianism in the Patristic Period

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In his book *God in Three Persons*,¹ evangelical apologist E. Calvin Beisner depicts the doctrine of the Trinity as a New Testament teaching which was preserved by the early Church and accurately explained in the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325). He writes:

It is wrong to say that the Trinity is far separated from apostolic teaching, even if we neglect the fact that it is taught in the New Testament, for the apostles' hold over the first several generations of Christians connects them strongly with what those later Christians taught.²

He specifically cites Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus among those who are "connected strongly" with the teaching of the apostles, a judgment with which I am sure these second and third century "defenders of the faith" would agree.³

A careful review of the evidence, however, suggests otherwise. In this article I intend to demonstrate the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity, far from being a Scriptural teaching which was carefully preserved and passed down to the "successors of the apostles," was in fact developed over a considerable amount of time in conjunction with gnosticism and Greek philosophy. I will argue also that this development represents not

¹E. Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1978.

²*Ibid.*, 51.

³Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.3: "The ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us."

a clarification of latent Scriptural teaching, but rather a radical reinterpretation of the essentially unitarian theology of the New Testament.

I. GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism was a product of hellenistic syncretism, drawing on a wide variety of traditions including astrology, Zoroastrianism, Platonism, Stoicism, hellenistic Judaism, and the mysteries. "In general, we may call it a redemptive religion based on dualism."⁴ This dualism was not only the dualism of spirit and matter common among the Greeks, but the dualism between good and evil (the former associated with spirit, the latter with matter).⁵ Emancipation from evil matter was believed to be available via *gnosis*, not "any ideal philosophical knowledge nor any knowledge of an intellectual kind, but a knowledge which had at the same time a liberating and redeeming effect."⁶

Noted historian J.N.D. Kelly has written that

there seems to have been a Jewish gnosticism antedating the Christian; and in most gnostic systems Jewish, more correctly heterodox Jewish, ingredients were prominent. Some of the later New Testament documents also combat what appear to be gnostic influences. It is therefore more satisfactory to regard gnosticism as a movement or, more precisely, a tendency which was wider and older than Christianity. The product of syncretism, it drew upon Jewish, pagan, and Oriental sources, and brought a distinctive attitude and certain characteristic ideas to the solution of the problem of evil and human destiny.⁷

It appears that the Apostle Paul was counteracting gnostic errors in his correspondence with the Corinthians and the Colossians, and an anti-gnostic polemic is particularly prominent in the pastoral epistles.⁸ John also appears to be concerned about gnostic teachings in the Church, branding his opponents "antichrists" (1 John 2:18).

Both Paul and John found gnostic interpretations of Christ objectionable. Paul described the gnostic Jesus as "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4) and

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, trans. by Reginald H. Fuller, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, 162.

⁵Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.

⁶*Ibid.*, 55.

⁷J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978, 23.

⁸Mark M. Mattison, *The Making of a Tradition: A Criticism of Orthodox Christian Theology*, Wyoming, MI: Ministry School Publications, 1991, 49-51.

emphasized the full and true humanity of Christ (1 Tim. 2:5; 3:16). Believing that matter is evil, gnostics found it difficult to believe that the Christ could be a man of flesh. This typically led them to postulate either a docetic view of Christ (in which he only *appeared* to be human) or a distinction between the heavenly Christ and the earthly Jesus into whom the Christ had descended. The latter view certainly seems to be that of John's opponents⁹ who refused to believe that Christ had "come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2), i.e., as a single human person.

Precisely this doctrine is attributed to Cerinthus, an early gnostic from Asia Minor, by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I.26.1). Irenaeus explicitly depicts Cerinthus as an adversary of John (III.3.4). It is also illuminating to compare John's polemic with the slightly later Christology of the Alexandrian gnostic Basilides, who believed that "it is not incumbent on us to confess him who was crucified, but him who came in the form of a man, and was thought to be crucified" (I.24.4).

"Christian" gnostics, dissatisfied with the human Jesus of history, were quick to reinterpret him along docetic lines, regarding Christ as an otherworldly aeon who either pretended to be human or who descended into a human body. This concept of Christ as a preexistent, metaphysically divine being was rapidly appropriated by the Church, though in a modified form, since an explicitly docetic view of Christ had been clearly condemned by the apostles.

The Valentinian form of gnosticism, which flourished in the second and third centuries, was particularly influential. The Valentinians anticipated Christian theology in the adoption of certain Greek philosophical concepts to describe relationships between the divine beings of their *pleroma*. Perhaps the most significant was the concept of the *homoousia*.¹⁰ Of this term, Muller writes:

The term had been used earlier by Origen and in Greek philosophy to indicate a generic equality or sameness of substance, and even by the gnostics to indicate the continuity of substance between the emanated aeons that have come forth from the abyss of spiritual being.¹¹

⁹"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist" (1 John 2:22).

¹⁰Cf. Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma*, New York: Harper & Row, 1957, 250.

¹¹Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985, 139. He goes on to write: "The Nicene usage of the term *homoousios* was probably limited to the refutation of Arianism and the affirmation of the substantial equality of the Father and the Son."

One Valentinian document, *The Gospel of Truth*, clearly describes the relationship between the Father and the Son in terms analogous to the later Christian understanding of the *homoousia* (NHC I,3,38.7-15).¹²

II. GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Of the Graeco-Roman philosophies in vogue among the intellectuals of Late Antiquity, Platonism and Stoicism were preeminent. The Stoics taught that a supreme rational principle, the *logos*, pervades the material universe. "Seminal *logoi*," parts of the universal *logos*, reside in men, "and the Stoics made an important distinction between the 'immanent *logos*' (*λόγος ἐνδιώθετος*), which is his [man's] reason considered merely as present in him, and the 'expressed *logos*' (*λόγος προφοπικός*), by which they meant his reason as extrapolated or made known by means of the faculty of speech or self-expression."¹³ These doctrines helped Christians to articulate their theology in philosophical terms.

The Middle Platonism of such philosophers as Albinus, Apuleius, and Atticus, which stressed the concept of a supreme transcendent God¹⁴ and advocated a high ethical standard, was found particularly attractive to early Christian theologians. In the Neoplatonism of the third century and beyond, the transcendence of God was stretched to the limit.¹⁵ The highest principle, or *hypostasis*, better known as "the One," is beyond being. From it comes the second *hypostasis*, Mind, and from it in turn the third, the Soul (cf., for example, Plotinus, *Fifth Ennead* I.10). This concept of hypostases, that is, realities which derive from higher essentialities, was indispensable for early Trinitarian development.¹⁶

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRINITARIAN DOGMA

Trinitarian dogma did not develop in a vacuum, and it certainly did not develop overnight. The Gentile world which inherited the Christian

¹²Harold Attridge, "The Gospel of Truth as an Exoteric Text," *Nag Hammadi. Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1986, 250-251.

¹³Kelly, 18, 19.

¹⁴Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986, 79.

¹⁵Kelly, 20.

¹⁶Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972, Vol. 8, 577.

tradition, because of its lack of sympathy with the Jewish Messianism of Jesus and the apostles, was quick to reinterpret Christ in the light of its own tradition. “The dogma of Christ’s deity, he [Martin Werner] has said, turned Jesus into another Hellenistic redeemer-god, and thus was a myth propagated behind which the historical Jesus completely disappeared.”¹⁷ The full and true humanity of Christ, which is unequivocally affirmed in the New Testament,¹⁸ was compromised in this new ideological setting. “Through his insertion into the fundamentally mythological apparatus of the gnostic doctrine of the world and of salvation, Christ was made into a strictly mythological being.”¹⁹

These gnosticizing tendencies which posited a metaphysical preexistence of Christ (thus undermining his essential humanity) can be detected as early as the so-called “apostolic Fathers.” Clement of Rome assumes that it was Christ himself who inspired Old Testament writers (*1 Clem.* 16.2; 22.1), and the author of *2 Clement* asserts that “we ought so to think of Jesus Christ, as of God” (1.1). The same author depicts Jesus’ divine nature as spirit which “then became flesh” (9.5). This unarticulated “spirit Christology” is also expressed by the *Epistle of Barnabas*, which describes Jesus’ human nature as the “vessel of his Spirit” (7.3; 11.9). *Hermas* appears to combine some form of binitarianism with an adoptionist view of Christ when he writes that “the holy pre-existent Spirit, which created the whole creation, God made to dwell in flesh” (*Sim.* 5.6).²⁰ He goes on to assert that “the Son of God is older than all his creation, so that he became the Father’s adviser in his creation. Therefore also he is ancient” (*Sim.* 9.12). Aloys Grillmeier writes:

The Shepherd of Hermas seems Christian here in so far as it assumes a distinction within God and thus with some degree of clarity allows the foundations of a Trinitarian or at least a binitarian (Father-Son) belief to be established. Its idea of God cannot be derived from a Jewish monotheism. The idea of the “Son of God” has already progressed too far.²¹

¹⁷G.H. Boobyer, “Jesus as ‘Theos’ in the New Testament,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 1967-68, Vol. 50, 251.

¹⁸Cf. J.A.T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973, 143-179.

¹⁹Rudolf, 151. He goes on to write that this “has already left its deposit in the New Testament,” a statement with which I disagree.

²⁰“Hermas’ theology was thus an amalgam of binitarianism and adoptionism, though it made an attempt to conform to the triadic formula accepted in the church,” Kelly, 94.

²¹Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd. 3d., Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975, 42.

This assessment amounts to the remarkable admission that what we should consider a “Christian” view of God is far removed from the originally Jewish concept of monotheism—belief in one God! Yet it was not Paul and John who were in the habit of making distinctions within the Godhead (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; John 5:44); it was the gnostics and the Platonists. As Jesus began to be regarded as a person of “two natures,” not only did his humanity suffer; the absolute unity of God faltered as well.

To be sure, the Fathers did not see it that way any more than do modern exponents of the metaphysical deity of Christ. Ignatius, for example, writes of both the one God (cf. *Mag.* 8.2) and the humanity of “Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; he was truly crucified, and died” (*Tral.* 9; cf. also *Sm.* 1-3). Yet this insistence on Christ’s humanity, which is calculated to counteract docetic interpretations of Christ (both these passages are written in a polemical context), is of dubious value when he blatantly asserts Christ’s personal preexistence (cf. *Eph.* 19.2,3; *Mag.* 6.1; *Pol.* 3.2) and unmitigated deity (cf. *Eph.* 1.1; 7.2; 18.2; 19.3; *Rom.* inscr.; 3.3; *Sm.* 1.1; *Pol.* 8.3). Here we are dealing with an incarnational theology in which redemption is only possible once divinity and humanity are drawn together in an ontological union. This soteriology is surely best understood against a hellenistic perception of the gulf between God and man, not against the New Testament which depicts sin as the primary problem. Indeed, Ignatius appears to rely more heavily on philosophy than on primitive Christian tradition when expressing his concept of Christ’s twofold nature, describing him as “both flesh and spirit; both begotten (*γεννητος*) and begotten (*αγεννητος*); God existing in flesh,” and so on (*Eph.* 7.2; cf. also *Pol.* 3.2).²²

The practice of articulating Christian doctrine in terms of Greek philosophy was more widespread in the writings of the second century Apologists.²³ Justin Martyr, who had studied philosophy extensively,²⁴

²²William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 61, 267, 268. Schoedel depicts this language as “more precise metaphysically” than “the earlier more or less poetic descriptions of the entrance of Christ into the world (Phil. 2:6-11; cf. 2 Cor. 8:9)” (267). I perceive this language rather as evidencing a fundamental misunderstanding of such Pauline texts.

²³Cf. G.W.H. Lampe, “Christian Theology in the Patristic Period,” *A History of Christian Doctrine*, ed., H. Cunliffe-Jones, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, 30ff.

²⁴On Justin’s education and place in the development of Platonism, see M.J. Edwards, “On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1, April 1991, 17-34.

described God as unbegotten (*1 Apol.* 14; *2 Apol.* 6), nameless (*1 Apol.* 10, 61, *2 Apol.* 6), ineffable (*1 Apol.* 61), and so on.²⁵

The Apologists sought to explain the relationship between God and Christ by appealing to the imagery of the Word or Rational Principle, particularly as understood by the Stoics. With the Stoics, they distinguished between the immanent Word (*λόγος ἐνδιάθετος*) and the expressed Word (*λόγος προφοπικός*).²⁶ With this distinction in mind, they could neatly differentiate between two stages in the existence of the Word: first as residing within God (immanent) and then as a distinct person who had been begotten (but not created) by God (expressed). Theophilus writes, for example, that “God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat him, emitting him along with His own wisdom before all things”²⁷ (*Autol.* II.10) and also of “the Word that always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought. But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begat His Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation, not Himself being emptied of the Word, but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with His Reason (*Autol.* II.22).²⁸

These concepts afforded the Apologists a more precise way of conceiving Christ’s divinity. At this point the unformulated “spirit Christology” of an earlier stage begins to give way to a more developed “Word-flesh” Christology. Justin Martyr seems to have believed that the Word took the place of the rational soul in the man Jesus (*2 Apol.* 10).²⁹

The Apologist Melito significantly contributed to later Christological thought by conceiving the divine and human natures of Christ as operating independently of each other. In writing of the two natures, he used the term *ousia* (*Frag.* 7).³⁰ Of this term, A.M. Fairburn writes: “From philosophy the term passed into gnostic theology, and thence into the terminology of all the Greek schools, heretical and orthodox.”³¹ In a

²⁵Cp. Athenagoras, *Supplic.* 10: “We acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason. . . .”

²⁶Cf. Kelly, 96.

²⁷He writes elsewhere “of the trinity (*τριαδός*), of God, and His Word, and His wisdom” (*Autol.* II.15).

²⁸Cf. also Athenagoras, *Supplic.* 10.

²⁹Kelly, 146.

³⁰Some, however, have doubted the authenticity of this fragment. Cf. Kelly, 41, and Grillmeier, 97.

³¹A.M. Fairburn, *Christ in Christian Theology* (Hodder and Stoughton), 1983, 86.

footnote he adds that “from this point onward the term grows ever more common and specific.”³²

Despite the extensive Christological reflection we have seen so far, a clearly Trinitarian concept of God has been conspicuously absent. Triadic formulas abound, to be sure;³³ but belief in the Father, the Son and the Spirit need not imply that the three are co-equal, coeternal persons in one God, nor that the Spirit is a person at all. Grant writes that “the doctrine of the trinity in unity is not a product of the earliest Christian period, and we do not find it carefully expressed before the end of the second century.”³⁴

The first Christian writer who began to reflect on a Trinity (not just on a triad) was the uninfluential Apologist Athenagoras.³⁵ Drawing on Platonic and Stoic concepts, Athenagoras writes that

the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason of the Father is the Son of God. . . . The Holy Spirit Himself also, which operates in the prophets, we assert to be an effluence of God, flowing from Him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun. Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists? (*Supplic.* 10).

Commenting on Athenagoras, Grant writes “that in beginning to develop the doctrine of the Trinity Christians made use of the methods already worked out among Platonists and Pythagoreans for explaining their own philosophical theology, in harmonious accord with pagan polytheism.”³⁶

The first Christian writer to use the term *trinitas* was Tertullian of Carthage. In reacting against modalistic Monarchianism, Tertullian argued that in God three *personae* share one *substantia* (he avoided the term *consubstantialis*, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *homoousia*, because

³²*Ibid.*, n. 10.

³³Cf. Matt. 28:19; *Didache* 7; *1 Clem.* 46.6; 58.2; Ignatius, Eph. 9.1 (*Mag.* 13.1, 2 are possibly interpolations; cf. Schoedel, 130, 131); Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 13,65; etc.

³⁴Grant, 156.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 157.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 158. We are reminded of Justin’s appeal to the second epistle of pseudo-Plato to vindicate the Christian triad (*1 Apol.* 60). Cf. also Clement, *Strom.* V.14.

of its association with gnosticism³⁷). The one person of Christ, he believed, was made up of both the divine “substance” and the human “substance” (cf. *Adv. Prax.* 27).

Tertullian’s Trinity, however, as was that of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, was conceived of in economic terms.³⁸ Grillmeier writes that “Tertullian is thinking not of a purely static threeness. I.e. for him the second and the third persons proceed from the *unitas substantiae* because they have a task to fulfill. Only the Father remains completely transcendent.”³⁹

The same cannot be said of Origen’s Trinity. Although Origen’s Trinity was hierarchical (like the Neoplatonic triad of the One, the Intellect, and the Soul),⁴⁰ the Son and the Spirit being subordinate to the Father, “Origen’s Trinity is, generally speaking, conceived of as the eternal mode of God’s being, and in no way as determined or evoked by the needs of the ‘economy.’”⁴¹ In sharp contrast to the Apologists and Tertullian, Origen refused to postulate two stages in the existence of the Word. Rather, he held that the Word is eternally generated by the Father (*De princ.* I.2.2.).⁴²

Significantly, both Clement and Origen utilized the Valentinian gnostic *homoousia* concept to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son. Martin Werner writes of the term:

Irenaeus had only used the gnostic *homoousia* in a hypothetical manner. He did not wish to encumber his own case with such an heretical idea. But Tertullian had adopted the ‘*una substantia*’ with all seriousness; yet he avoided the Latin ‘*consubstantialis*,’ which corresponded to the gnostic expression ‘*homoousia*.’ This restraint was abandoned by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. They applied the gnostic ‘*homoousia*’ to the relation of the Logos-Son to God the Father, and decidedly so in the gnostic sense.⁴³

This concept was of course canonized in A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicaea.

The importance of the Nicene Creed for the history of Trinitarianism can hardly be overestimated. Besides affirming the unmitigated deity of

³⁷Cf. Werner, 251.

³⁸Kelly, 104-115.

³⁹Grillmeier, 120.

⁴⁰Clement of Alexandria’s Trinity was also hierarchical. See Kelly, 127 and Lampe, 66.

⁴¹Lampe, 78.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 74.

⁴³Werner, 251.

the Son, it affirmed his equality with the Father. Prior to Nicaea, subordinationism had been the norm. Justin Martyr, for example, could describe the Son as a being “below” the Father (*Dial.* 56.4) and Origen could go so far as to refuse to pray to Christ (*De orat.* 15.1).⁴⁴ This subordinationism is easily understood against the Middle Platonic doctrine of God’s transcendence which requires the mediatorial activity of the Word. Thus, “the Nicene formula of A.D. 325 was really designed to exclude completely from the relationship between the Father and the Son every trace of subordinationism.”⁴⁵

Later, the Cappadocian Fathers further defined the Trinity by arguing that the one *ousia* is indivisibly present in the three *hypostases*.⁴⁶ Thus, the term *homoousia* could be applied to the Spirit also.

The extensive use of these Greek philosophical and Valentinian gnostic concepts is highly illuminating. That Trinitarianism was constructed with Greek building blocks (rather than with the untainted teachings of the New Testament) is virtually undeniable. Augustine of Hippo, whose influence in Christendom has been nearly unparalleled, “confesses” that he was driven to seek God’s truth after reading “those books of the [Neo]Platonists” (*Confess.* VII.20). It was these books (probably Plotinus’ *Enneads*) which convinced him of the literal deity of Jesus (*Confess.* VII.9; VIII.2)! Prior to this time, his view of Christ had been similar to that of Photinus of Sirmium (*Confess.* VII.19).⁴⁷ That is to say, he believed in Jesus’ complete and uncompromised humanity before being persuaded (by Neoplatonic philosophy) that Jesus had preexisted as God Himself.

That a Christ who exists eternally as the second person of a Trinity cannot be an authentic man is clear.⁴⁸ Subsequent Christological dogma bears out this fact. The “twofold nature” view of Christ which had been elaborated by Melito and developed by Tertullian led naturally to the doctrine of *anhypostasia* which was officially endorsed at the Second

⁴⁴A position with which we would strongly disagree!

⁴⁵Werner, 246, 247.

⁴⁶Muller, 308.

⁴⁷On Photinus, see Mark M. Mattison, “Biblical Unitarianism from the Early Church through the Middle Ages,” *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism*, Winter 1992, Vol. 1, No. 2, 10, 11.

⁴⁸Cf. John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, Cambridge University Press, 1967, 106: “We can have the humanity without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both.”

Council of Constantinople in A.D. 553. According to this doctrine, the divine Son assumed impersonal human nature without becoming a human person.⁴⁹ Surely this does not square with the New Testament witness that Jesus of Nazareth was a man (cf. Acts 2:22)!

IV. CONCLUSION

The appeal to antiquity has always been a favorite argument of Trinitarians. In reacting against dynamic Monarchianism,⁵⁰ Eusebius quotes from a document which refers to “Justin and Miltiades and Tatian and Clement and many others, in all of whose works Christ is spoken of as God. For who does not know the works of Irenaeus and of Melito and of others which teach that Christ is God and man? And how many psalms and hymns, written by the faithful brethren from the beginning, celebrate Christ the Word of God, speaking of him as Divine” (*Hist. Eccl.* V.28).

This argument in fact is very shallow. It is true that the respected Church Fathers⁵¹ of the second century and beyond all believed in the metaphysical deity of Christ, but it is not true that they simply preserved a clearly biblical doctrine, or that they all conceived of the relationship between the Father and the Son in precisely the same way. Trinitarian dogma developed slowly over several centuries, and in conjunction with Platonism and gnosticism. Furthermore, it is possible to demonstrate that an alternate interpretation of God and of Christ did indeed exist in the early Christian period.⁵²

Those who hold the doctrine of the Trinity to be a New Testament teaching must account for the apparent lack of understanding which we find in the first several centuries of this era. A more sophisticated suggestion is that the celebrated creeds “clarified” what was only hinted at in the New Testament. To this we would reply that what is not clearly stated in the New Testament ought not to be erected into sacred dogma.

⁴⁹The doctrine of *enhypostasia*, that the human nature is personalized in the Word, is hardly better.

⁵⁰Dynamic Monarchianism may be roughly construed as the patristic counterpart of our “biblical unitarianism.” See Mattison, “Biblical Unitarianism.”

⁵¹Respected because of their place in the development of “orthodoxy.”

⁵²Cf. Mattison, “Biblical Unitarianism.”