

An Alternative View of the Godhead

Throughout church history there has been a significant minority for whom the “problem of the Trinity” has seemed not only baffling but unnecessary. G.H. Williams’ celebrated work, *The Radical Reformation*,¹ refers often to an anti-trinitarian camp among those who differed with mainstream orthodoxy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These believers he classifies as evangelical rationalists, distinguishing them because of their nontrinitarian Christology from the majority of Anabaptists and Spiritualists. History records that this persistent minority fared badly at the hands of its “orthodox” rivals. Persecution, however, did not prevent the establishment of a vigorous nontrinitarian tradition which survives into modern times. There continues to be a substantial body of writing which, while not all of it is explicitly nontrinitarian, reflects the same misgivings about the traditional understanding of the Godhead.

Remarks en passant from two significant commentators encourage us to continue the task of asking our trinitarian friends to consider our anti-trinitarian position with more than curiosity. Firstly, Leonard Hodgson informs us that in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates between unitarians and trinitarians, both parties “accepted the Bible as containing revelation given in the form of propositions.” Speaking as a trinitarian, he confessed that “on the basis of argument which both sides held in common, the unitarians had the better case.”²

We are glad to think that our case for a unitarian view of the Godhead is recognized as scripturally strong. We note also Maurice Wiles’ remark that “the church has not usually in practice (whatever it may have claimed to be doing in theory) based its Christology exclusively on the witness of the New Testament. . . . Christological doctrine has never in practice been derived simply by way of logical inference from the statements of Scripture.”³

This is precisely our point. Nontrinitarian believers in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God are not persuaded that the creed of Jesus and the Apostles can be reconciled with the Nicene and Chalcedonian statements of faith.

¹Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1962.

²*The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Nisbet, 1943, 220, 223.

³*The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, London, SCM Press, 1974, 54, 55.

We do not wish to be factious; we simply submit that Leonard Hodgson was right. The Bible taken as a source of divine revelation will much more readily support a unitarian understanding of God.

We ask our readers not to associate our viewpoint with *Universalist* Unitarians. We are strictly believers in the exclusive claims of Christ and the Bible. We do not think that salvation can be gained outside of God's appointed "man, Messiah Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). We are firm believers also in the coming Advent of Christ in His Kingdom to rule the nations. We deplore the current dismantling of Scriptural teaching in the interests of a vague ecumenism and the desire to be "relevant."

The purpose of this journal is to put Biblical unitarianism "on the table" for close examination. But we will not limit ourselves to a single theme. We are eager to explore not only matters of Christology but also soteriology, anthropology, and especially eschatology. We are believers in the authority and normative role of Scripture. And we have questions to put to our colleagues of other persuasions in regard to the fundamental issue of the content of the New Testament Gospel. We are puzzled by the extraordinary eclipse which Jesus' message about the Kingdom seems to have suffered.

In the pages of *A JOURNAL FROM THE RADICAL REFORMATION, A TESTIMONY TO BIBLICAL UNITARIANISM*, we hope to demonstrate our conviction that cherished theological positions are not necessarily fair guides to the truth as the New Testament teaches it, and that everything is to be gained by "examining all things carefully."

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