

## The Complexity of Trinitarianism

“The doctrine of the Trinity is crucial for Christianity.”<sup>1</sup> So writes Dr. Millard Erickson in his popular evangelical *Christian Theology*. His introductory comments, however, in the chapter about the Trinity should cast doubt on the truth of that statement. He writes:

In formulating our position on the Trinity, our theological method will be put to the test. Since the Trinity is not explicitly taught in Scripture, we will have to put together complementary themes, draw inferences from biblical teachings, and decide on a particular type of conceptual vehicle to express our understanding.<sup>2</sup>

Is the biblical doctrine of God really so complicated? To formulate a position on the Trinity, evangelicals feel compelled to rely on subtle inferences and information not explicitly presented by Scripture. Erickson’s comments, however, become even more revealing:

In addition, because the *formulation of the doctrine has had a long and complex history*, we will *have* to evaluate past constructions against the background of their period and culture, and to enunciate the doctrine in a way that will be similarly appropriate for our age.<sup>3</sup>

Not only must we rely on subtle argumentation; in addition, we *have* to study the long and complex history of Trinitarian development. Never mind Jesus’ rejoicing that God has revealed His truth “to little children” (Luke 10:21); to determine who God is we must read the Scriptures with theological sophistication and study nineteen centuries of theology to formulate a proper position.

In the face of these assertions, we feel compelled to ask: Why must we affirm as “crucial” or “essential” for Christian faith anything not explicitly taught in Scripture? Surely matters “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3) are indeed contained in the New Testament. The words of the well-known unitarian, English philosopher John Locke are appropriate here:

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<sup>1</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983, 322.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

...being a covenant of free grace, God alone can appoint what shall be necessarily believed by everyone he will justify. What is the faith which he will accept and account for righteousness depends wholly on his good pleasure... Nobody can add to these fundamental articles of faith, nor make any other necessary, but what God himself hath made and declared to be so.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>*On the Reasonableness of Christianity*, published originally in 1695, Chicago: Henry Regeny, 1965, 190, 191, quoted in Joseph Symmonds, “John Locke, Justification, and Christian Unity,” *The Christian Quest*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1988, 30.