

Focus on the Kingdom

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Trinitarian Confessions

Why *Not* to Believe the Trinity in Their Own Words

by Greg Deuble, Australia
from the 2026 Online Theological Conference

To introduce our subject today, I thought it might help by opening with this little poem. Its genre would be classified as satire, and so it conveys an element of truth through good-natured humor.¹

The Trinity Explained

by Mark Long

There's God the Father, the Holy Ghost and the Son,
But the churches teach that these are one.
Not one but three, and the three are one,
Then one of them of a woman was born!²

Mary was the mother of JC,
But not of the other two, you see?
They're all co-equal, and co-eternal,
But God came first, so he's paternal.

They're all the same but different too,
I'm trying to make this clear for you.
God is one, but in essence three,
Sitting by Himself, eternally.

Christ descended into hell, says the Apostles' Creed,
Stayed three days, then left with speed.
Back to heaven and the other two,
No longer a couple but a few.

¹ Kindly supplied to me from good friends, Dudley, Sherrill and Jeremy Barnes. With appreciation to fellow believers in the one true God of the Bible and in His Son, our Saviour and Lord Messiah Jesus.

² I have taken the liberty of altering this fourth line, which originally read, "The Holy Ghost is God, and they're both the Son." My reason is that not many these days are Modalists (Oneness) believers.

It may be truthfully stated that the doctrine of the Trinity is the most fiercely fought for, and promoted, doctrine in all of Christendom today. All who confess that God is Three Persons in one Godhead receive the "right hand of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9). You're in. You're in with the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and pretty much all of the Protestant denominations.

However, question it, investigate it, ask intelligent questions about it, challenge it, weigh it up against both the Scriptures and the laws of logic and reason, and you will quickly feel the left boot of dis-fellowship! You're out. You're a lost soul; you're a "heretic."

When I first began to realize the doctrine of the Trinity had more holes in it than a block of Swiss cheese, I found myself outside the fence of the acceptable majority. However, to my enormous surprise and indeed encouragement, I actually found myself in very good company on the other side of that so-called "orthodox" fence. Jesus warned about following the majority. Sometimes the protest voice is well worth listening to.³

And I am not primarily referring to the many sane witnesses throughout Church history whose testimony to the Unitary Monotheistic faith that the one true God of the Bible is a single Person — the Father — gave me great comfort. Nor am I particularly referring to the company of modern-day saints who encouraged me.⁴

No. I am going to stun you by saying that I found tremendous encouragement from within the so-called "orthodox" Trinitarian camp itself! Yes. I derived then — and to this day still derive — immense encouragement and confidence from the confessions of the very scholars who say they are Trinitarian in their faith, yet whose honest

³ For all the non-Roman Catholic and all the non-Eastern Orthodox folk reading this, don't forget that a Protestant is one who protests, and your group was once the minority voice!

⁴ I owe an incalculable debt to folk like Anthony and Barbara Buzzard, Charles Hunting, Bill Wachtel et al. Indeed, not a few of the quotes that follow are from Anthony's research, and I am indebted to him for this.

confessions undermine their own precious doctrine.

Trinitarian Confessions as to Why Not to Believe the Trinity

I'll be honest and say it's quite a challenge selecting from the huge pile available, but we must draw the line somewhere, otherwise you would be reading well past your bedtime! I'll be surprised if this little sampling doesn't embolden you to question their insistence that God is three Persons in one Being.

How about this staggering claim from Professor Millard Erickson, one of today's foremost systematic theologians, and considered one of the best contemporary Trinitarian apologists. Erickson writes in his *God in Three Persons*:

The Trinity **"is not clearly or explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture**, yet it is widely regarded as a central doctrine, indispensable to the Christian faith. In this regard, it goes contrary to what is virtually an axiom of biblical doctrine, namely, that there is a direct correlation between the scriptural clarity of a doctrine and its cruciality to the faith and life of the church."⁵

As well as admitting that the Trinity "is not clearly or explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture" (!?) Erickson frankly admits that "another difficulty" with the doctrine stems from the fact that those who worked out and defined the Trinity used Greek categories such as "substance" or "essence" to correspond to their Latin and Greek concepts, instead of sticking to the Hebrew thought-forms of the Bible:

"The question, however, is this. It is claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a very important, crucial, and even basic doctrine. If that is indeed the case, **should it not be somewhere more clearly, directly, and explicitly stated in the Bible?** If this is the doctrine that especially constitutes Christianity's uniqueness, as over against unitarian monotheism on the one hand, and polytheism on the other hand, **how can it be**

only implied in the biblical revelation? In response to the complaint that a number of portions of the Bible are ambiguous or unclear, we often hear a statement something like, 'It is the peripheral matters that are hazy or on which there seem to be conflicting biblical materials. The core beliefs are clearly and unequivocally revealed.' This argument would appear to fail us with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, however. For **here is a seemingly crucial matter where the Scriptures do not speak loudly and clearly.**

"Little direct response can be made to this charge. **It is unlikely that any text of Scripture can be shown to teach the doctrine of the Trinity in a clear, direct, and unmistakable fashion**" (p. 108-109).

Hmm. How tempting to stop there and read Erickson's mind-boggling admission again. The doctrine which is not clearly taught in Scripture, and yet is considered central to the faith that saves, is actually without a single text to support it! That's the admission of this foremost Trinitarian scholar. And here's another shocker from Erickson:

"It may be necessary...to utilize what analytical philosophers would term 'logically odd language'...I have sometimes said of the Trinity, 'He are three,' or 'They is one'" (p. 270).

Let's push on for some more Trinitarian confessions that are good for my biblical unitarian monotheistic soul! The *Oxford Companion to the Bible* agrees:

"Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine, **it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. Likewise, the developed concept of three coequal partners in the Godhead found in later creedal formulations cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon.**"⁶

Wow! There's a speed bump designed to rattle the Trinitarian bus and jolt its passengers out

⁵ Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 1995, p. 12. Emphasis (bold) in this, and all following quotes, is mine.

⁶ "Trinity," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, eds., 1993, p. 782.

of their seats! So, make sure your seat belts are buckled up because it takes a lot more ditches to stop this bus!

Brother-in-law to Cardinal Newman, the Rev. Mozley also admits:

"I ask with all humbleness where the idea of Threeness is expressed in the New Testament with a doctrinal sense and force. **Where is the Triune God held up to be worshipped, loved, and obeyed? Where is He preached and proclaimed in that threefold character?** We read 'God is one'; as, too, 'I and the Father are one,'⁷ but **nowhere do we read that Three are one**, unless it be in a text long since known to be interpolated...⁸

"To me the whole matter is most painful and perplexing, and I should not even speak as I now do, did not I feel on the threshold of the grave, soon to appear before the throne of all Truth...

"Certainly in Scripture we do not find the expression 'God the Son,' or 'God the Holy Ghost.' Whenever I pronounce the name of God simply and first, I mean God the Father, and I cannot help meaning that if I am meaning anything."⁹

Dr. W.R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, in *God in Christian Thought and Experience* adds to these honest confessions:

"It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of the Trinity, as a doctrine, formed no part of the original message. St. Paul knew it not, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed" (p. 180).

And A.T. Hanson, Professor of Theology at the University of Hull, in *The Image of the Invisible God* makes this grand admission:

"No responsible New Testament scholar would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity

was taught by Jesus, or preached by the earliest Christians, or consciously held by any writer in the New Testament. It was in fact slowly worked out in the course of the first few centuries in an attempt to give an intelligible doctrine of God" (p. 87).

Karl-Heinz Ohlig in *One or Three?* states:

"It is certain that the doctrine of the Trinity as it finally became dogma in the East, and even more so in the West, **possesses no biblical foundation whatsoever.**"

A. and R. Hanson in *Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith* (1980) agree:

"In order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity it is necessary to understand that the doctrine is a development, and why it developed...**It is a waste of time to attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine directly off the pages of the New Testament**" (p. 171).

State of the art in evangelical world scholarship, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, reads:

"The New Testament does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity.

'The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e. as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, **which go beyond the witness of the Bible**, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity' (Karl Barth)" (Vol. 2, p. 84).

A Trinitarian, Christopher B. Kaiser, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Western Theological Seminary in *The Doctrine of God: A Historical Survey* (1982), confesses:

"The Church's doctrine of the Trinity would seem to be the farthest thing from

⁷ The context of Jesus' words in John 10:30 is not ontology — matters relating to the Being of God — but rather oneness of purpose and oneness of mission.

⁸ Mozley is using euphemism here. He means 1 John 5:7 as found in the KJV is an obvious fraud with no Greek manuscript support!

⁹ Thomas Mozley, *Reminiscences*, 1887, Vol. 2, p. 347-348.

[the New Testament writers] minds, and today's reader may well wonder if it is even helpful to refer to such a dogma in order to grasp the theology of the New Testament. When the Church speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity, it refers to the specific belief that God exists eternally in three distinct 'persons' who are equal in deity and one in substance. In this form **the doctrine is not found anywhere in the New Testament**; it was not so clearly articulated until the late fourth century AD" (p. 27).

Another Trinitarian, A.W. Argyle in *God in the New Testament*, observed:

"The fully developed Christian Doctrine that God is three Persons in one Godhead is nowhere explicitly stated in the New Testament" (p. 173).

Even John Calvin was:

"forced to admit that nothing to support the dogma [of the Trinity] 'can be pointed out in Scripture in so many syllables.'"¹⁰

Trinitarian apologists have tried in vain to find the Trinity in the "apostolic fathers" or even the "ante-Nicene fathers" (before the Council of Nicea). For instance, Roger E. Olson and Christopher Hall in *The Trinity* (2002) ask:

"What do we find in the writings of Christian leaders during roughly the first sixty years of the second century CE? As we might expect, we do not find the developed trinitarian language or theology that will blossom from the fourth century on...We will be disappointed if we expect to find developed trinitarian reflection in the early post-apostolic writers. It is simply not there" (p. 16, 20).

George Burnap exposed the problem of the Trinity:

"A man demands my assent to the proposition, 'There are three Persons in one God'; I ask him what he means by 'person'? I ask him if he means a separate independent intelligent

Being? He answers, he does not. [He says] he does not use the word in the common sense, but in a sense peculiar to this case. I ask him what that sense is? He cannot tell. You demand of me then, I answer, to assent to a proposition which conveys to my mind no intelligible idea, and, it appears to be equally unintelligible to you. We both in reality, in assenting to it, assent to nothing but words, and if they convey to us no intelligible meaning, to us they are nothing, and we assent to nothing. Were these words in the Bible, then I might say that I believed they expressed truth, though I could not understand it. But not being in the Bible, or any words of the same import, I consider them the mere invention of fallible men. I cannot believe on their authority. So far from supposing them to be true, as I cannot understand them myself, and no one can explain them to me, I think it fair to conclude that those who framed them had no clear ideas."¹¹

James Yates, a non-Trinitarian, expressed my reaction to all this admirably in 1816 in *A Vindication of Unitarianism*:

"Might we not expect that our Lord himself might at least *once* have stated the doctrine of the Trinity in express language, and have insisted on the importance and necessity of believing it? Would he not, at least once, have declared formally and explicitly that the first commandment was no longer to be understood in its plain and literal meaning; the meaning in which all his hearers had been accustomed to understand it?

"The word *God* occurs nearly 1300 times in the New Testament, and might we not suppose, that in one of these passages, we should be expressly told that the term is meant to include not simply *one*, but *three* persons or subsistences, to each of which that title is applicable? If, in every instance where this word is used alone, it implies a plurality in the divine nature, should we be unable to find one solitary example of the application of plural pronouns in the whole New Testament?

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1963, Vol. 27, p. 299.

¹¹ *Lectures on the Doctrines of Christianity*, 1835, p. 18-19.

Would neither our Lord, nor any one of his Apostles, have left a single sentence in which the whole doctrine of the Trinity can be fully and accurately expressed? Should we expect to find no care to make accurate and evident distinctions between the doctrine of a Trinity and the dangerous polytheistic notion of the heathens?

“The doctrine of the unity of God is more than once introduced in the New Testament, and laid down most clearly and solemnly. Our Lord himself repeats these most impressive words to the scribes. ‘The first of all the commandments is, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.”’ Now could we have supposed that, as our Saviour knew this would be construed by all his hearers as teaching that there is only one object of supreme worship, he would have omitted such an occasion as this of declaring that in truth there are three?

“Could we have supposed that, since the main argument for the Trinity from the Old Testament rests on the plural form of *Elohim*, the evangelist would have chosen to destroy this argument by using the singular noun God (*theos*) which all know it is impossible should be translated otherwise than simply God?” (p. ix).

Of course this does not seem to bother Roman Catholic believers, because for them, Church tradition trumps Scriptural authority. But what can we say in defense of Protestants who supposedly elevate Scripture above church tradition and church authority? It seems Protestants, including evangelicals, are comfortable with accepting man-made imagination above clear Scriptural statements. ✧

The Gift of Languages as a Sign, Not a Missionary Work

by Carlos Xavier

The gift of languages (“tongues”) in the New Testament is often assumed to have been given so that Christians could travel to foreign countries and preach without having to learn local languages. Yet nowhere does the New Testament say this was the purpose of the gift. Rather, the gift of speaking a language unlearned was a miraculous sign to confirm the Gospel of the Kingdom first proclaimed by the lord Jesus and later preached by his church (Heb. 2:3-4).

At Pentecost, the disciples did not travel to foreign nations. Instead, people from many nations were living in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). God miraculously enabled the disciples to speak foreign languages so that those gathered could witness a sheer miracle. But Peter did not speak his sermon in Acts 2 in foreign languages! He spoke in the common language which all could understand anyway (Greek or perhaps Aramaic). After all the audience was *living* in Jerusalem. Their day-to-day communication would have been in Greek or Aramaic.

The gift’s function as a miraculous sign is also seen in Acts 10:44-46, when Cornelius and his household spoke in foreign languages after receiving holy spirit. The miracle was not intended to prepare them for overseas missionary work, or to communicate with those present. (Again, Peter was not giving a message in foreign languages, and all those present understood him, v. 44.) Rather, as Peter later made clear at the Jerusalem Council, the miracle of foreign languages served as a witness that God had given the Gentiles holy spirit just as He had given it to the Jews, making “no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9).

Likewise, in Acts 19:6, believers at Ephesus spoke in foreign languages and prophesied when the holy spirit came on them. Again, nothing is said about the gift being necessary for communication.

Later, writing to the church at Corinth, Paul clearly explains the gift of languages as “**a miraculous sign**, not for believers, but for unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22).

Paul also shows that when foreign languages were used in the church, they required translation so that others could understand and benefit from it (1 Cor. 14:13, 27-28). He even says, “In the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, so that I can instruct others, than ten thousand words in another language” (1 Cor. 14:19). The setting and purpose in that case are for the church.

In summary, the New Testament shows that the gift of languages functioned primarily as a miracle to confirm the message, not as some kind of supernatural missionary language course. The Great Commission is for Christians to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the nations, with the gift of languages serving as a witness to that Gospel, not as a means for missionaries to overcome language barriers. ✧

The End of the Age in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

by Anthony Buzzard

There is a great need for Christians to share Paul’s simple program for the end of the age. This is beautifully laid out by the Apostle in many of his epistles, but more distinctly than anywhere else in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Popular interpretations of the Bible often reflect a failure to examine the context of any given verse. It is essential in reading the Bible (or any piece of written information!) to follow the logical progression of the writer. The chapter breaks in our Bible have sometimes allowed us to wreak havoc on what Paul wrote. We simply must not disturb the movement of Paul’s thought by interrupting the flow of his thinking with arbitrary gaps, or reading one verse without its context.

Let us see how important this is in the Thessalonian letters.

The Coming of Jesus

Paul has his eye on the second coming as he writes. It is a major concern of his to keep his flock properly instructed about that great event of the future. “For who is our hope or joy or crown of pride? Is it not you in the presence of our lord Jesus at his coming?” (1 Thess. 2:19). Yes, the lord is coming. So Paul prays that “he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before

our God and Father at the coming of our lord Jesus with all his holy ones” (1 Thess. 3:13).

1 Thessalonians 4

A question had arisen in the Thessalonians’ minds. How were the Christians who had already died to meet Jesus at his coming? The answer is given by Paul as “the word of the lord” (4:15) — i.e., based on sayings of Jesus to which Paul had access, some of which were later written down in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 (the Olivet discourse). The plan is quite simple:

“We who are alive, who remain until the coming of the lord, will not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. For the lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, accompanied by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the lord in the air. In this way we will be with the lord always...About the times and seasons, brothers and sisters...,” Paul continues (the chapter break must be ignored), “you know well that the **Day of the Lord** [which he has just been describing] will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 4:15-5:2).

That is to say, when the *world* is saying “We have peace and safety,” then sudden destruction will come on them, like birth pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (5:3). In other words, disaster will overcome the godless unexpectedly like a thief. “**But you**, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, so that the day would surprise you like a thief” (5:4). That “day of the Lord,” which Paul had just described as the time when the saints would be caught up to meet Jesus, will not overtake the church as a thief. It will, however, have a catastrophic effect on the world.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul continued his theme, adding new material deliberately. This was to counteract the deceptive influence of a “spirit” or “letter pretending to come from us,” maintaining that this great event, the coming of the Lord, was immediately at hand (2 Thess. 2:2).

The Scheme for the End

Paul had one burning desire. It was to reinforce, against false teaching, what he had already taught the Thessalonians in his first letter.

So in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 he begins by telling the church that they must expect to suffer tribulation until the moment of relief arrives. What is that moment? Until *when* must they expect to be persecuted? Verse 7 tells us: God will give you relief from tribulation “**when** the lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire dealing out punishment to those who do not know God” (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

This is precisely what Paul had said in his first letter, though now he adds further details. Christians must be ready to be caught up to meet the lord at his coming. They will then be safe, while the lord’s appearance will overwhelm the heedless world.

Tribulation Until Christ’s Coming in Power

Not only must the church expect tribulation right up to the moment when Jesus is revealed from heaven (2 Thess. 1:7), but they must also realize that certain events must happen before Jesus comes back (2 Thess. 2:1-3). In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul opens by restating his subject. He wants to instruct his readers further about the “coming of our lord Jesus Messiah and our being gathered together to him” (v. 1).

His readers will remember from 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that they will be gathered to meet Jesus. This event, the day of the Lord — he had already called it the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 — cannot happen before the apostasy and the revelation of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3). The restrainer — it is a singular male being (v. 7) as well as a neuter force (v. 6) — will hold back the Antichrist until he is finally allowed to appear. Later, Jesus will arrive. This arrival is his coming, and his coming means our gathering together to meet him (2:1). That great event will save the Christians as 2 Thessalonians 1:7 had said, and it will mean the end of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:8) as well as punishment upon the godless world (1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:8).

Summary

Paul was evidently most unhappy about misconceptions in regard to the second coming. He wanted to assure the Thessalonians that dead Christians would not be left out of the great second coming event. They will meet Jesus in the air with the Christians who survived until the

great day. The day will take the wicked world completely by surprise. The world will be as unprepared as a homeowner who does not expect a thief to break into his house.

Later a wrong idea began to circulate in the church — that the promised day of the Lord was to come without any further delay. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians 2 specifically to correct this idea. He says that “the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together” to him (v. 1) cannot occur before two things happen: 1. The falling away (apostasy) and 2. The appearance of the Antichrist. Following the reign of Antichrist Jesus will appear in glory and destroy the Antichrist. This is the simple program described by 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. The church’s task is to guard the information faithfully and teach it to others.

A coherent picture of the end emerges, provided the text is allowed to coerce us. Interference with the message sometimes occurs when our own presuppositions block our understanding and deafen us to Paul’s words. We must be careful that we do not drown Paul’s instructions with our own noisy ideas! ✧

Comments

- “I really enjoyed ‘Discernment Is Everything’ (September). It was well written and thought-provoking. I loved when Barbara Buzzard said this: ‘Thinking is the non-negotiable companion to discernment; perhaps we should say strenuous thinking.’ It’s amazing how many churchgoers I encounter who rarely think about the Bible at all.” — *Delaware*

- “I just want to say how much I appreciated your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*. I have spent many years being uneasy with Trinitarian thought, songs etc. I had reached the one God conclusion a few years ago and had researched much from many good unitarian people. But after reading *The Doctrine of the Trinity* everything finally fell into place. I have been ostracized by my church. I can no longer preach, teach, or corporately pray. Yet I feel I’m being called to bring this truth to others. You will never know just how much your tireless work has helped us to learn about our one great God and our wonderful Lord and Savior.” — *Australia*