

PAGAN TRIADS, THE TRINITY, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT¹

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Regardless of one's viewpoint concerning the Trinity in the 21st century, all roads from the 4th century onward ultimately lead to the philosophical and "Christian" schools of Alexandria, Egypt. However, the conception of a triune God is older than Egypt itself.

Generally, every city and town had its triad, which consisted of a local deity and two other associated gods. The latter shared his authority and power, but were much less honored and revered. Of the three, two were usually gods — one old, one young. The third was a goddess. She was usually the wife of the older god and the mother of the younger. The younger god, the son, possessed all the authority, power, and abilities of the older. We see in this formula the Nimrod-Semiramis-Ninyas triad of the Babylonian mystery religion.

Both the Egyptian and Babylonian systems were theosophical in nature, and both had their roots in the same Satanic deception that originated with Cain on the plain of Shinar. Theosophical doctrine, which teaches the existence of a feminine element in the Godhead, was the common denominator of all pagan religions. The Bible, however, categorically denies any such idea.

Nevertheless, present-day Trinitarians persist in the notion that the Trinity is fully revealed in the pages of the New Testament as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From a purely theosophical standpoint, the only person of the Trinity who could represent the female essence is the Holy Spirit.

The Roman Catholic Church, true to her pagan origins, was quick to recognize this apparent opening and seized the opportunity to elevate the

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virgin Mary to the Godhead. Thus, it is she who really is the Holy Spirit in Roman Catholic dogma. However, she is not the original. She is a substitute of the role model established by Semiramis in Babylon and adopted by the Egyptians as the goddess Isis.

In the south of Egypt the worship of Isis persisted until the opening of the 5th century. It was about this time that in other parts of Egypt the Virgin Mary took the place of Isis, and Christ took the place of Horus, her son. Isis, the “mother of God,” was no longer Isis, but Mary, the “mother of God.” This most blatant of heresies virtually steamrolled its way into Christianity. How was this possible? E.A. Wallace Budge gives us a good explanation:

The probability that many of the heresies of the early Christian Church in Egypt were caused by the survival of ideas and beliefs connected with the old native gods which the converts to Christianity wished to adapt to their own creed...The rapid growth and progress of Christianity in Egypt were due mainly to the fact that the new religion...so closely resembled that which was the outcome of the worship of Osiris, Isis, and Horus.²

So it was that thousands entered Roman Catholic “Christianity.” The problem was that the gospel did not come to the masses of Egypt with the power and authority required to suppress Roman Catholicism’s pagan teachings. Had it done so the Isis-Mary heresy would never have attained a foothold, the Arian heresy may never have materialized, and the Council of Nicea might never have been convened. However, because of thousands of years of superstition, the new converts who had given their worship and devotion to Semiramis, Isis, Diana, Athena, Artemis, and Aphrodite found it an incredibly simple matter to transfer their adoration to Mary and continue unrestrained to pay homage to their blessed Trinity.

But we are talking about the beginning of the 5th century, 400 years after the birth of Christ. The term “Trinity” was not used until late in the 2nd century by the Christian apologist Theophilus (c. 180). Since then Trinitarian doctrine has become firmly entrenched in western religious thought. There are, however, beginnings of a movement among biblical scholars to refute any unqualified Trinitarianism in the New Testament. R.L. Richardson declares:

There is the recognition on the part of exegetes and biblical theologians, including a constantly growing number of Roman Catholics, that one should not speak of Trinitarianism in the New Testament without serious qualification. There is also the clearly

² A.E. Wallace Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, Dover, 1969, Vol. 2, 220.

parallel recognition on the part of historians of dogma and systematic theologians that when one does speak of an unqualified Trinitarianism, one has moved from the period of Christian origins to, say, the last quadrant of the 4th century. It was only then that what might be called the definitive Trinitarian dogma “one God in three persons” became thoroughly assimilated into Christian life and thought.³

The Philosophers

The single factor that allowed this definitive Trinitarian dogma to become “thoroughly assimilated into Christian life and thought” was the output of the philosophical schools of Alexandria. Therefore, one cannot speak of the history of Trinitarian doctrine in the New Testament era without mentioning the role of the philosophers.

The Gnostic philosopher Plato strongly influenced Christian thought with his purely abstract theories concerning the make-up of the Godhead. Subsequent philosophers merely followed Plato’s lead, and their influence spilled over into the Christian Church through the writings of early Roman Catholic fathers such as Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Cyprian, Tertullian, and later Augustine, who wrote no less than 13 treatises on the Holy Spirit.

That the “Christian” idea of God has been influenced by Plato is common knowledge among theologians and historians, but few of the laity are aware of this fact. What is more, fewer are familiar with the method he used. His was the allegorical method, and he used it to explain just about everything that was otherwise inexplicable, including the Trinity.

The Alexandrian catechetical school followed Plato’s reasoning. It held Clement and Origen in high esteem and considered them to be the greatest of the Greek church theologians. As the leaders of the Church they used Plato’s allegorical method to explain and illustrate Scripture. Hubert Jedin says of this school: “Its thought was influenced by Plato: its strong point was theological speculation. Athanasius...had been included among its members.”⁴

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, more than any other, was responsible for establishing the divinity of the Son at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Even by 385 AD the church fathers were uncertain and disagreed about how to define the Holy Spirit. Athanasius’ efforts eventually led to the acceptance of the Trinity as the prime Roman Catholic doctrine. Nevertheless, the Trinity as it was presented in the Roman Church was

³ “Holy Trinity,” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Catholic University of America Press, 1967, vol. 14, 295.

⁴ *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church*, Herder, 1960, 28.

derived directly from Plato's teachings. Cornelius Hagerty says that "Christian philosophers and theologians have always followed Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in distinguishing between substance and accidents, reality and appearance, nature and phenomena."⁵

Nevertheless, Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and later Greek and Roman theologians were never able to fully explain the Trinity through the allegorical method. Gibbon testifies of Plato that:

The vain hope of extricating himself from these difficulties, which must ever oppress the feeble powers of the human mind, might induce Plato to consider the divine nature under the threefold modification: of the first cause, the reason or *Logos*, and the soul or spirit of the universe. His poetical imagination sometimes fixed and animated these metaphysical abstractions: the three *archical* or original principles were represented in the Platonic system as three Gods, united with each other by a mysterious and ineffable generation.⁶

Despite a lack of scriptural evidence for this "mysterious and ineffable generation," the Platonists and neo-Platonists among the early church fathers used the respectability of this pagan philosopher's name as the fulcrum upon which to support the "truth" of the nature, the generation, the distinction, and the equality of the three divine persons of the mysterious triad.

Athanasius and the Council of Nicea

The emperor Constantine demonstrated considerable favor to the Christians of his empire after his "conversion" from Mithraism. There was a rapidly growing body of Christians but the vigor and unity of the Church and the empire was being threatened by the Arian heresy. Arius admitted to the Deity of the Father, but categorically denied the Deity of the Son. He had nothing whatever to say about the Holy Spirit.

It is understandable that it was to the best interest of Constantine and the empire that the unity of the Church be maintained. Hosius, Bishop of Cordova, suggested to him that if he would convene a synod of the whole Church, both east and west, the matter could be resolved. Constantine himself could not have cared less about the Arian dispute. His motivation for bringing the matter to a close was purely political.

⁵ Cornelius Hagerty, *The Holy Trinity*, Christopher, 1976, 179.

⁶ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Wordsworth, 1999, 410.

From Alexandria came the sharp-minded young bishop Athanasius, who was the protégé of former bishop Alexander. Again we hear from Gibbon:

We have seldom an opportunity of observing, either in active or speculative life, what effect may be produced, or what obstacles may be surmounted, by the force of a single mind, when it is inflexibly applied to the pursuit of a single object. The immortal name of Athanasius will never be separated from the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity, to whose defence he consecrated every moment and every faculty of his being.⁷

The Arian controversy was not the only one that threatened the stability of the Church and the empire by 325 AD. The Macedonians freely admitted the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father but denied the existence of three gods. It was to the Arian and Macedonian disputes that Athanasius mostly applied himself.

The disputes chiefly revolved around the consubstantiality of the Father and Son, but the opinions expressed about the Son were extended and applied to the Holy Spirit. The subordinate relationship of Christ to God was held only by a small group of Arians, and perhaps even a smaller group of delegates sided with Athanasius. The majority of the delegates stood between the two extremes. They rejected Arius' view and refused to accept Athanasius'. However, the young bishop won out. Arius was humiliated and exiled for his beliefs.

Athanasius established not only the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father but also that of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Moreover, he introduced into Roman Catholicism for the first time a consistent definition of the Trinity. By this the victorious Athanasius cleared up the ambiguous language of some of the respectable "doctors," confirmed the faith of the Catholics, and condemned the Macedonians. The deity of the Holy Spirit was ratified and the mysterious Trinitarian doctrine was received and accepted by every nation and every church in the so-called Christian world.

Unfortunately, the truth of the matter had been overlooked in the confusion generated by a multitude of differing opinions. The synod was blinded by Athanasius' intellectual prowess and his brilliant defense of the Trinitarian concept. Had these learned scholars bothered to check the facts, following the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11), they would not have been taken in by so obvious a Satanic ploy. They would have seen Athanasius' definition of the Trinity for what it was, an echo of past

⁷ Ibid., 426.

generations of ignorance and superstition so beloved and so readily embraced by the pagans. James Bonwick notes:

Though it is usual to speak of the Semitic tribes as monotheistic, yet it is an undoubted fact that more or less all over the world the deities are in triads. This rule applies to eastern and western hemispheres, to north and south. Further, it is observed that, in some mystical way, the triad of three persons is one...The definition of Athanasius...applies to the trinities of all heathen religions.⁸

The logical conclusion, then, is that a Trinity is not unique to Christianity so-called. Christianity adopted paganism's Trinity as conceptually true. However, the Hebrew concept of the Godhead patently denies such a possibility. "Christianity, of course, added the trinitarian terms to the Jewish description of God."⁹ It follows that if the Trinitarian terms were not present in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible, neither are they present in the New Testament when exegeted in its proper Jewish context.

Modern Trinitarianism continues to ignore both exegetical and historical facts. The entire basis of present-day Trinitarian doctrine rests with the early church fathers. But even they are ignored by the Trinity-in-Unity advocates when those fathers speak against the Holy Spirit as a distinct person. Hagerty declares:

St. Augustine was the first to teach explicitly that communicating the divine nature to the Son the Father communicates His will fecund with power to spirate so that the Son cooperates with the Father in spirating the Holy Ghost. Hence the Holy Ghost *proceeds from the father and son as a common product of their will-act*. St. Augustine says the Son is active principle, together with the Father, of the Holy Ghost; and both spirate because both have the same nature, energy, and will.¹⁰

What could be clearer? To spirate is to breathe in the sense of the Old Testament *ruach* which was considered to be God's active life principle. If, as Augustine says, this spiration is the active principle of the Father and Son of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit is the nature, energy, power, force, and will of the Father and Son, not a third Person! And if the Holy Spirit is not a (third) Person there can be no Trinity in the Christian Godhead.

⁸ James Bonwick, *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*, C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1878, 396.

⁹ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, Vintage Books, 1989, 48.

¹⁰ Hagerty, 171, emphasis added.

The “Plurality” in the New Testament

According to Trinitarians, the account of the beginning found in John 1:1-3 supposedly reveals, if not a Trinity, the beginnings of a Trinitarian understanding of God. In Genesis 1:2 the Holy Spirit is spoken of as brooding like a dove over the face of the waters, but no distinct personality is indicated. It is merely assumed by Trinitarians. In John 1:1-3 the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned, and yet we know that it was present. The Trinitarians working from a preconceived notion begin to clutch at straws and draw mistaken conclusions. Because the Father and word are mentioned the inference is that automatically there must be an element of Trinitarianism. However, according to Dr. W. N. Clarke, “There is no Trinity in this; but there is a distinction in the Godhead, a *duality* in God. This distinction, or *duality*, is used as basis for the idea of an only-begotten Son, and as key to the possibility of an incarnation.”¹¹

If there is no Trinity in this the very beginning of all things, how can there be a Trinity subsequent to these events unless God decided on a whim to change His nature to appease the pagan elements of society and therefore allow them to dictate the manner in which they should worship Him? There is no evidence for such a change. Regardless, man stubbornly refuses to accept such a notion, and even Dr. Clarke, who denies the Trinitarian concept above, almost acquiesces a page later when he says:

The New Testament begins the work [of illustrating the concept of the Trinity], but does not finish it; for it contains no similar teaching [like John 1:1-18 concerning the divinity of Christ] with regard to the Holy Spirit. The unique nature and mission of Christ are traced to a ground in the being of God; but similar ground for the divineness of the Spirit is nowhere shown. Thought in the New Testament is never directed to that end. Thus the Scriptures take the first step toward a doctrine of essential Triunity, or threeness in the being of one God; *but they do not take that second step by which alone the doctrine could be completed.*¹²

Why would God, through His holy and incorruptible word, take that first step toward a doctrine of “essential” Trinity and not take the second step which would complete it, leaving no doubt in the mind of mankind as to His true character and make-up? We are asked to believe that Trinitarianism, though merely hinted at in the New Testament and not

¹¹ William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, 1898, rep. Kessinger, 2006, 167, emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid.*, 167-168, emphasis added.

really revealed as an immutable truth, is fully developed throughout its pages.

Neither the gospel of John nor the rest of the New Testament contains a sharply delineated doctrine of the Trinity, not even in the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. The text should read “into” the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. There is no indication that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons because the baptism is to be accomplished in the “name,” singular, not “names,” plural, of the Godhead. The singular word “name” merely denotes the object and purpose of the baptismal rite and is the final definition of the “name” of the one true God, i.e. God the Father, or *Yahweh Elohim*. God the Father is “*the Holy Spirit*,” God’s very personal operational presence and power, because this name denotes His character and attributes as the true God and Creator of the universe. The true God is holy and is spirit. This holiness and spiritness is manifested as the active life principle, the energy, force, and power by which God imparts His will upon the universe. However, Trinitarians are still not convinced.

The “Personhood” in the New Testament

The personhood of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is viewed by orthodoxy strictly from the presupposition that God is a Trinity. Regardless of facts to the contrary, this error is not easily dislodged from the minds of present-day evangelicals, or, for that matter, from the teachings of the Catholic Church. We have already seen that she categorically denies the existence of Trinitarian doctrine prior to the 4th century AD. However, despite her denial she espouses the “gradual revelation” of the personhood of the Holy Spirit in the pages of the New Testament. She declares, “Although the NT concepts of the Spirit of God are largely a continuation of those of the OT, in the NT there is a gradual revelation that the Spirit of God is a person.”¹³

If the New Testament concept is merely a continuation of the Old Testament concept of the Spirit of God, how can it be a person? It cannot for the Old Testament holds to no such concept. The Hebrew people would have abhorred such a problematic doctrine, which devalued and made a mockery of their strict monotheistic beliefs. Nevertheless, evangelicals persist in following the Roman Catholic Trinitarian doctrine. Billy Graham is a leader in the dissemination of the triune God. His strictly “orthodox” approach to the Trinity is that “The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a *person*. Jesus never referred to ‘it’ when He was talking about the Holy

¹³ *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, 575.

Spirit...He spoke of the Holy Spirit as 'He' because He is not a force or thing but a person. *Whoever speaks of the Holy Spirit as 'it' is uninstructed, or perhaps even undiscerning.*¹⁴

According to Graham, then, such people as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David, the prophets, and even modern-day Jews were and are either uninstructed or undiscerning about the true makeup of the Godhead. Despite the fact that the Jews reject Jesus Christ as the true Messiah, they have been the keepers of God's oracles through the ages and have kept much of His truth intact (Rom. 3:1-2).

It is illogical in the face of mountains of material written by scholars and historians that modern-day evangelicalism should continue to cling to a Trinitarian dogma. When one looks closely at what eminent biblical scholars have to say about the makeup of the Godhead, one cannot but believe that Graham et al are the ones who are uninstructed and undiscerning. They have read little of their predecessors in biblical scholarship. Consider the following: "In thinking of the personality of the Holy Spirit the most obvious and important 'truth' to stress is that 'He' is a person," or "Because the Holy Spirit is a person, we can and indeed must treat him as a person," or "When Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would descend upon man, He seemed to particularly stress the fact of His personality by use of the personal pronoun."¹⁵

It is not enough that we *must* treat the Holy Spirit as a (third) person just because Jesus stressed the fact of his personality by the use of the personal pronoun; we must also believe that those who fail to accept the personhood of the Holy Spirit are in a sorry state indeed. Graham candidly states, "Anyone who fails to recognize this [that the Holy Spirit is a person and is a member of the Trinity] is robbed of his joy and power. Of course a defective view of any member of the Trinity will bring about this result because God is all important."¹⁶ It is ironic that Trinitarians cannot avoid the use of the word "power" in describing the Holy Spirit.

The Johannine Comma

Some evangelicals still preach that 1 John 5:7-8 is proof beyond reasonable doubt that God is indeed a Trinity. Their "proof" hinges on the formula presented in the last part of verse 7 and the first part of verse 8: "For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one. And there are three that bear

¹⁴ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, Thomas Nelson, 2000, 2, emphasis added.

¹⁵ Eric S. Fife, *The Holy Spirit, Common Sense and the Bible*, Kingsway, 1980, 18-19.

¹⁶ Graham, 11.

witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.”

These verses indeed seem to imply that God is composed of three “persons.” However, upon further investigation it will be seen that the last part of verse 7 and the first part of verse 8 are glosses which were not part of the original manuscripts. In fact, the NKJV note states:

NU (the modern eclectic or “critical” text), M (Majority text) omit the rest of v. 7 and through *on earth* of v. 8, a passage found in Greek in only four or five very late mss. The verses should read, “For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.”

The text says “these three agree as one,” not that they are one! In the commentary by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown we read:

The only Greek mss. *in any form* which support the words “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one; and there are three that bear witness in earth,” are the Montfortianus of Dublin, copied evidently from the *modern* Latin Vulgate; the Ravianus, copied from the Complutensian Polyglot; a ms. at Naples, with the words added in the margin by a recent hand; Ottobonianus, 298, of the fifteenth century, the *Greek* of which is a mere *translation* of the accompanying Latin. *All the old versions omit the words.* The oldest mss. of the *Vulgate* omit them: the earliest *Vulgate* ms. which had them being Wizanburgensis, 99, of the eighth century. A scolium quoted in *Matthaei*, shows that the words did not arise from fraud, for in the words in all *Greek* mss. “there are *three* that bear record,” as the Scholiast notices, the word “three” is *masculine*, because the three things (*the Spirit, the water, and the blood*) are symbols of the Trinity. To this Cyprian, 196, also refers, “of the *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, it is written, ‘*and these three are one*’ (a unity).” There must be some mystical truth implied in using “three” (*Greek*) in the *masculine*, though the antecedents, “spirit, water, and blood,” are *neuter*.¹⁷

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states:

The text of this verse should read, “Because there are three that bear record.” The remainder of the verse is spurious. *Not a single manuscript contains the trinitarian addition before the fourteenth century, and the verse is never quoted in*

¹⁷ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Scranton, 1878, Vol. 2, 536.

*controversies over the Trinity in the first 450 years of the church era.*¹⁸

From *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, we discover:

The famous interpolation after "three witnesses" is not printed even in the RSV, and rightly. It cites the heavenly testimony of the Father, the logos, and the Holy Spirit, but is never used in the early trinitarian controversies. No respectable Greek ms. contains it. Appearing first in a late 4th-century Latin text, it entered the Vulgate and finally the NT of Erasmus.¹⁹

Conclusion

Unitarians invite criticism when they constantly speak of the Holy Spirit as *impersonal*. This overlooks the fact that the spirit is the very personal spirit of God and of Jesus. The spirit is the operational presence and power of God. The spirit, which is never worshiped and never sends greetings, is certainly not a *third* Person. But it is certainly personal and can, as Paul says, be grieved. John mentions the spirit as the comforter or advocate four times in the gospel and once in 1 John 2:1, where the advocate (*parakletos*) is Jesus himself. This echoes Paul's statement that the Lord is the spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Jesus left the church as the human being who had been with them but promised to come to them in spirit and as the spirit. Thus God and the Son promise to dwell in the believer. Thus the spirit is definitely not a cold "power" like electricity but the very personal presence of God or of the risen Jesus with us to the end of the age.

How does all this affect us? It has to do with what we believe and practice. What we believe and practice affects our very being and existence. God is explicit about His displeasure at Trinitarian doctrine and the pagan rituals extant in Christianity today. It is well known to Bible students that God declares Himself a jealous God (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). God also states in Exodus 20:1-3 that Israel is to have no other gods before (in place of) Him. Idolatry is a very serious thing to God.

America has become a nation of idolaters through her religious practices and her acceptance and teaching of Gnostic doctrine in the majority of her churches. If we as a nation do not repent of our false beliefs, God will judge us severely for our rejection of Him as the only true God (John 17:3). It is time that America and the world woke up to the fact that the god the Trinitarians worship cannot be identified with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, the One

¹⁸ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds., *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Moody, 1990, 1477, emphasis added.

¹⁹ *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Routledge, 2001, 1038.

God of Israel and the Shema (Deut. 6:4), and the God of Jesus. We need to adhere rigorously to the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles in regard to our definition of God (Mark 12:29; 1 Tim. 2:5) and contend for the faith once delivered (Jude 3). We must reject, under all circumstances, any teaching that God is other than He really is, for to worship Him as something He is not constitutes idolatry. As the apostle John concluded, we are to flee from all forms of idolatry (1 John 5:21).