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DEVELOPING DEFENDERS OF THE HISTORICAL  
FAITH AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,  
COBDEN, ILLINOIS

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
John Ed Falgout  
May 2020

**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING DEFENDERS OF THE HISTORICAL  
FAITH AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,  
COBDEN, ILLINOIS

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## PREFACE

The completion of this project has been made possible by the contributions of many people. I am first grateful to the body of First Baptist Church of Cobden, Illinois, for their love and care for me and my family. Their prayers, words of encouragement, and financial resources have made this endeavor a reality.

I am thankful for the patience and encouragement of my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Matt Haste. Dr. Haste offered wise counsel and made himself very accessible through this experience.

I also am overwhelmed by God's grace as He has blessed me with a beautiful, godly, and faithful wife. Mrs. Tiffany Falgout has stood by my side with love, gentleness, patience, and a resolve to see the kingdom of God born in our home and in the hearts of our children.

I am eternally indebted to the faithful mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has called me by His grace out of death and into life. He fuels me by His strength and the pleasure of His presence.

My hope is that this project will serve to encourage and strengthen the kingdom of God.

Ed Falgout

Cobden, Illinois

May 2020

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The challenge of First Baptist Church of Cobden, Illinois, could be summed up in the words of Jude 1:3: “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” It is the obligation of every Christian generation to contend for that faith that was once for all handed down. The task of contending for that same faith must include seeing the historical continuity of sound doctrine being passed on from one Christian generation to the next.

#### **Context**

First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois (FBC) is an eclectic group of faithful believers. There is a great zeal for God, His church, and His mission. FBC has faithfully supported missions both at home and abroad. The church has spent thousands of dollars and hours doing dental and optometry ministries in many villages and one orphanage in Mexico over the last fifteen years. It has also faithfully given to the cooperative program over 10 percent of its budget annually for over 50 years. The Carmi Children’s Home has received much support from the church as well. Several families have adopted children through the years through that same children’s home. For the last four years the church has sent a team to serve alongside Baptist Church Builders of Texas. This ministry serves to build Southern Baptist Church facilities in North America for recently planted churches. FBC is currently two years into a five-year plan to evangelize every home in its school district. This plan includes a door to door visit with every residence with an ultimate goal

of sharing the gospel and praying for each home. FBC also has a group of retired men that serve the church and community through a ministry called BMEN. BMEN is an acronym for Being Men Engaged Now. This group of men does service projects for people in and outside of the church. These and many more areas of service define the body of Christ at FBCs.

God has assembled many gifted individuals at FBC. Creativity and skill seem to run rampant. Talented musicians and even people gifted in the arts are abundant. Every service is filled with excellence in worship and organization for ministry. For example, the church puts on an annual Christmas production entitled *A Night in Bethlehem*. This three-night event in December is attended by over 1,400 people every year. To put that number in perspective, the town of Cobden only has 1,200 people. The church is truly a unique and faithful congregation.

While FBC is commendable in their mission mindedness and gifted in ministry abilities, a fissure still exists in the area of biblical literacy and particularly the ability to contend earnestly for the faith. This breach has led to some teaching from the laity that has been muddled at the least and bordering heresy at worst. One example of this occurred in a small group setting when a leader made the comment that Jesus was human and that all humans have the sin nature of Adam, therefore while Jesus did not sin He still had the sin nature of Adam. Another example was that during a men's Bible study the leader said that the Holy Spirit is the "third part of God." A final example is that a member of FBC was confused about my unwillingness to have a Oneness Pentecostal pastor come and share from our pulpit. These issues may seem harmless to some but they can and will lead to major dysfunction and ultimate disruption in the church. Discipleship methodology in the church is being addressed in a few ways at present. First and foremost, an expository methodology of preaching has been adopted over the last four years. The initial focus of the pulpit ministry has been twofold. First, the emphasis has been to get Christ "right." To that end the preaching ministry has gone through the book



of Hebrews for the first year and a half during my ministry. Second, the emphasis has been to get the gospel right. To that end, we have taken the congregation through the book of Romans for the last two- and one-half years. Beyond a constant diet of verse-by-verse exposition through possibly the two most doctrinal books of the New Testament, a class on systematic theology has been started. Most of the deacons and adult Sunday school teachers have gone through the entire fifty-seven-week program at least once in the last two- and one-half years. While great strides have been made to shore up the theological foundations at FBC Cobden, there is still work to be done. One of the weaknesses that remained was the need to have a clearer understanding of the nature of God as Trinity according to theological truths, historical development and the practical experience of worshipping one God in three persons. It is my hope, by the grace of God, that this can be changed at FBC.

### **Rationale**

Based on the contextual factors, three reasons support the need for developing defenders of the historical faith. First, the need to defend the historical faith is significant because people behave in direct connection with what they believe. To believe wrongly is to behave wrongly. How one behaves toward God and others is directly impacted by how clearly he or she grasps the revelation of God in His Word. The hope to bring theological clarity is driven by the greatest commandments as articulated by Jesus Himself, when He said that believers are to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and also to love their neighbor as themselves. Theological confusion negatively affects the right love of God. Theological confusion also negatively affects the right love of neighbor. A robust theology supported by historical affirmation will truly transform the people of God and also become the means to evangelize one's neighbor.

Second, there is a need to familiarize oneself with the collective wisdom of how the early church, along with every ecclesiastical era, addressed dangerous heresy. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9 that there is nothing new under the sun. This proverb is

certainly true in regard to theological history. Most contemporary heresies are basically repackaged heresies of years gone by. Therefore, to stand on the shoulders of historical saints will fast track one's ability to understand the fundamental flaws of heresy and how the earlier church addressed them.

Also, there is the need to tie oneself to the overall stream of church history by leaning on the councils and creeds that have come out of faithful men and women contending for the faith. In this pursuit one will find not only plausible arguments but courage that will sustain when difficulties come.

Finally, all these efforts to teach and train the leadership of FBC in biblical and historical theology are for the purpose of developing faithful teachers in Trinitarian doctrine and leading them into deeper worship of the Triune God.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop a core group of believers who can defend the doctrine of the Trinity through a theological, historical and doxological apologetic.

### **Goals**

Five goals drove this project. These goals are listed in the order in which they were implemented in the project.

1. The first goal of this project was to enlist a minimum of eight adult leaders to participate in the project.
2. The second goal of this project was to assess the participants' knowledge regarding the theological, historical and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine.
3. The third goal of this project was to develop an eight-week curriculum that focused upon the theological, historical, and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine.
4. The fourth goal of this project was to increase the participants' knowledge regarding the theological, historical, and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine by teaching the newly created curriculum.
5. The fifth goal was to assess the ability of project participants to articulate Trinitarian theology.

The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to enlist a minimum of eight adult leaders who would commit to twelve weeks of combined class, including pre-test and post-test, reading Michael Reeves' *Delighting in the Trinity*, reading the prepared curriculum, and giving an oral presentation to the class reflecting the knowledge and passion gained of and from Trinitarian theology.

The second goal was to assess the participants' knowledge of the theological/historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity by administering the twenty-statement pre-test. The pre-test evaluated the exposure that participants have had to theological/historical Trinitarian theology in their discipleship process.<sup>1</sup> The pre-test also served to determine what each participant's knowledge is of this historical development. This goal was successfully met when each participant completed the pre-test and the data was analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the participants' knowledge.

The third goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip participants to understand the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity. This goal was measured by a panel of three ordained evangelical pastors who utilized a rubric to measure the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>2</sup> This goal was successfully met when the minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met and exceeded the sufficient level. A revision process was included until the curriculum reached the 90 percent proficiency rate.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1.

The fourth goal was to increase the participants' knowledge in the theological/historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity and to stir the participant to greater heights of devotional fervor toward the God of the Bible from this project. This goal was measured by administering a post-test that measured each participant's knowledge of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>3</sup>

A fifth goal was to assess the participants' ability to articulate Trinitarian theology in a clear and succinct manner. This goal was measured by having each student prepare a written essay on Trinitarian theology and reading the essay to the class. A rubric measuring the student's ability to articulate trinitarian theology was employed.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, each participant submitted an essay outlining the orthodox understanding and historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, accompanied by an oral presentation of the material. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test<sup>5</sup> for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically positive and significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores.

### **Definitions and Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

*Historical theology.* Historical theology is the study of the interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine by the church of the past, according to Gregg Allison.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 3.

<sup>5</sup> The *t* test was selected for this analysis as it compares the means of the scores from the pre-test and post-test which measured doctrinal knowledge among the select group of median adults.

<sup>6</sup> Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 23.

*Systematic theology.* Systematic theology is succinctly defined by John Frame as “what the whole Bible teaches about any subject.”<sup>7</sup> It includes all of the Scripture and makes it relevant for the present.<sup>8</sup>

Two delimitations were placed on this project. Participants were required to be members of FBC and to have completed the one-year study of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. This project was also limited to twenty-seven weeks. The full completion of twenty-seven weeks included enrolling participants, developing rubrics for curriculum evaluations and oral presentations, developing curriculum, teaching and participants’ oral presentations.

### **Conclusion**

The theological and historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity is relatively lost on the contemporary church. Also, the passionate experience of enjoying one God manifest in three persons seems foreign in the church today as well. The following chapters survey key biblical passages that anchor Trinitarian doctrine and trace significant periods during the historical development of the Trinity. Finally, the project explores the intimate joy of knowing and experiencing the Triune God.

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<sup>7</sup> John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 187.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS THAT AFFIRM THE ORTHODOX VIEW OF THE TRINITY

Eight key texts are used in this project to affirm Trinitarian theology taught in the Christian scriptures. Two texts from the Old Testament and six texts from the New Testament are broken down to see the biblical mechanics of Trinitarianism as these texts are rightly harmonized with the rest of Scripture to coalesce into the orthodox reality of the Trinity. While a myriad of texts remain affirming the doctrine of the Trinity, these eight are the focus.

While the word *Trinity* is not mentioned specifically in the Bible, and while a specific definition of *Trinitarianism* is not stated, for nearly two millennia the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has embraced Trinitarianism as the orthodox understanding of God's nature. Simply defined, *Trinitarianism* teaches that one being of God exists in three persons; these persons (Father, Son and Spirit) are coequal, coeternal, and simultaneously distinct. This doctrine was articulated as the church sought a faithful commitment to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. The components of Trinitarianism are clearly born out in the Scriptures. First, the component of monotheism (one God) is clear in the Bible. For instance, Deuteronomy 6:4 teaches, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"<sup>1</sup> Also, the distinction of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all possessing characteristics of biblical personhood and divinity, is seen throughout the pages of Scripture. These components of the clear witness of Scriptures are the biblical mechanics of Trinitarian theology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from The New American Standard version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 36-44. For this project,

## Genesis 1:26

Students of Scripture are not able to read the first chapter of the Bible without being confronted with components of Trinitarianism. Genesis 1:26 states, “Then God said let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.” These first person, plural pronouns in verse 26 identify some sense of plurality and complexity within God. However, verse 27 uses a third person singular pronoun explaining another aspect about the God that creates, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Here the careful observer reads these third person singular pronouns and sees the unity of God made clear. While no Trinitarian argues for an explicit teaching on the Trinity here, the components of unity and plurality do emerge. However, a few differing interpretations have been offered to understand the plural pronouns used in verse 26.

According to Kenneth Mathews, these interpretations are “(1) A remnant of polytheistic myth; (2) God’s address to creation, ‘heavens and earth’; (3) a plural indication of divine honor and majesty; (4) self-deliberation; (5) divine address to a heavenly court of angels; (6) or divine dialogue within the Godhead.”<sup>3</sup> Commentators argue against polytheistic interpretations because the elevated theology of 1:1-2:3 would not tolerate that type of intrusion.<sup>4</sup> Medieval rabbi Moses Gerundensis proposes that the plural pronouns refer to God speaking to the earth because God gathered the dust of the earth

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*divinity* is defined as possessing these attributes of fourteen perfections according to Ryrie: eternity, freedom, holiness, immutability, infinity, love, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, righteousness, simplicity, sovereignty, truth and unity. Matt Slick writes, “Some people think that a person must have a body of flesh and bones, but theologically speaking ‘personhood’ does not necessitate that. Instead, personhood is defined as having a will, self-awareness, emotions, being able to recognize others, speaking, etc. Therefore, angels would be persons since they have wills, speak, etc. God would be a person too.” Matt Slick, “How Do We Tell if God Is a Person?” accessed January 17, 2019, <https://carm.org/is-god-a-person>.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 161.

<sup>4</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 161.

and breathed in life,<sup>5</sup> but verse 27 identifies God alone as creator.<sup>6</sup> The honorific plural falls short because the focus of verses 26 and 27 is not on the majesty of God but the unique relationship of God and man.<sup>7</sup> Claus Westermann held to the fourth position, seeing God in conversation with himself.<sup>8</sup> Mathews argues that this is attested to in places like Psalm 42:5, 11, but never using the plural forms, invalidating Westermann and others.<sup>9</sup> Other Jewish tradition seeks to affirm the fifth position, like the Targum of Jonathan wherein is proposed that “God conferred here with the angels who would be co-agents in the creation of man.”<sup>10</sup> However, according to Kiel and Delitzsche, “This view is irreconcilable with the words ‘in our image, after our likeness;’ since man was created in the image of God alone.”<sup>11</sup> The sixth consideration is that a divine dialogue is taking place in the Godhead. Victor P. Hamilton makes a strong statement for the plurality of persons when he writes,

The best suggestion approaches the trinitarian understanding but employs less direct terminology. Thus Hasel calls the use of verse 26 a “plural of fullness,” and Clines is close to that with the phrase “duality within the Godhead.” According to Clines, God here speaks to the Spirit, mentioned back in v.2, who now becomes God’s partner in creation. It is one thing to say that the author of Gen.1 was not schooled in the intricacies of Christian dogma. It is another thing to say he was theologically too primitive or naïve to handle such ideas as plurality within unity. . . . True, the concept may not be etched on every page of scripture, but hints and clues are

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<sup>5</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, accessed June 17, 2018, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/genesis/1.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 161.

<sup>7</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 161.

<sup>8</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 144.

<sup>9</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 161.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Ben Uzziel, “The Targum of Palestine Commonly Called the Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Book of Genesis, Section 1, Berashith,” accessed September 21, 2018, <http://targum.info/pj/pjgen1-6.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Friedrich Kiel and Franz Delitzsche, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, accessed September 21, 2018, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/kad/gen001.htm>.



dropped enticingly here and there, and such hints await their full understanding “at the correct time.”<sup>12</sup>

On Genesis 1:26, Derick Kidner writes, “With whom took He counsel? It is rather the plural of fullness, which is found in the regular word for God (‘*elohim*’) used with the singular verb; and this fullness, glimpsed in the Old Testament, was to be unfolded as triunity, in further ‘we’ and ‘our’ of John 14:23.”<sup>13</sup> Sinclair Ferguson makes this sober assessment:

If the triune character of God is a biblical idea, should it not already be evident in the Old Testament? Thus, in Genesis 1, the use of the plural form *Elohim* for God and the enigmatic words, “Let us make . . .” (1:26-27) were often seen as indications of a threefold hypostatization in God’s being. . . . A more sober approach to biblical theology emerged in the Reformation’s historical reading of the text and its principle that doctrine be drawn from the text of Scripture only by good and necessary consequence.<sup>14</sup>

The argument presented concerning this passage is not that a clear Trinitarian doctrine is affirmed in this text. However, a plurality in the Godhead can be adequately established. Kenneth Mathews writes,

This position can only be entertained as a possible “canonical” reading of the text since the first audience could not have understood it in the sense of a trinitarian reference. Although the Christian Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be derived from the passage. This was the essential line of argument among the Reformers who expanded this thought by appealing to the New Testament for corroboration.<sup>15</sup>

### **Psalm 110**

Psalm 110 is another example of an Old Testament passage that affirms the biblical reality of Trinitarianism. Again, Trinitarianism is simply defined as One God in three persons. While the Spirit of God is here again not specifically mentioned, the

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<sup>12</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 134.

<sup>13</sup> Derick Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1967), 51-52.

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 163.

student of Scripture continues to see the co-equality and simultaneous distinction of two of the three persons of the Trinity, both Father and Son.

This text is massively important. Arguably, its context is a Psalm pointing to the ascension of Christ after His atoning work on the earth. The work here is the familiar work of the gospel where Jesus the eternally begotten Son takes on a human nature at the incarnation. He lived His life in faithful compliance to the law of God and died a substitutionary death for sinners. He was resurrected the third day and then forty days later ascended into heaven to take his seat at the right hand of God. He sits there today having accomplished the work of the atonement and continues his mediatorial work for his people until the fullness of his kingdom has come. A second point of significance to this particular Psalm is the fact that it is the most quoted and alluded to Old Testament passage in all of the New Testament. A final point of significance to this Psalm, as mentioned, is that it points to the co-equality and simultaneous distinction of both God the Father and God the Son.

It is important to see the authorship of this Psalm. The Holy Spirit inspired King David to write this Psalm. This is a Psalm of David not a Psalm about David. In Luke 20:42, Jesus explicitly states that David wrote this Psalm about the LORD (*Yahweh*) and his Lord (*Adonai*). Plumer, writing before much of the confusion of higher criticism, said, “David is the author of this Psalm. So clearly is this matter settled that no respectable commentator doubts it.”<sup>16</sup> Some have sought to reject Davidic authorship, like Leslie C. Allen, who writes, “The composer of Psalm 110 was evidently a court poet . . . the poet appears to celebrate the capture of Jerusalem and David’s ascension to the Jebusite throne”<sup>17</sup> Another that would deny Davidic authorship would be Nancy Walford, who

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<sup>16</sup> William S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 972.

<sup>17</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalm 101-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 114, 115.

states, “The origins of Psalm 110 may most likely be found within the monarchic period of ancient Israel’s history (ca. 900-586 B.C.E.)”<sup>18</sup> Again, to reject Davidic authorship is to ultimately reject Jesus’ authority. If David is writing this significant Psalm about persons other than himself, the question is who and what are these persons? Again, theologians must consider the who and what questions as they wrestle with God’s revelation of himself to humanity in the sacred Scriptures. The who addresses the persons of Father, Son and Spirit, while the what addresses their single being, essence or one God.

While all seven verses speak to the rule and reign of the seated Christ, this work will consider verse 1 in its pursuit to identify the two persons about whom David is writing. Answering this who question will further unveil the theological mechanics of Trinitarianism as the relationship of the Father and the Son is more clearly seen.

First, one must consider that there is a conversation taking place between two persons. Psalm 110:1 says, “The LORD says to my Lord.” One aspect of personhood is the ability to relate to other persons. Communication is an aspect of relating to other persons. Here is seen two simultaneously distinct persons relating in communication to one another.

Next, one might ask what are these persons? To answer, one turns to the language of the text. In English translations, the first word “LORD” is spelled with all caps. The use of all upper-case letters denotes the covenant name for God or the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. Next, the second “Lord” includes the lower case, denoting the Hebrew word *Adonai*. While the covenant name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* refers to the one God of Judaism, the word *Adonai* also is interchanged in the Old Testament for the one God of Judaism. One of the many clear examples can be found in Exodus 4:10: “Then Moses said to the LORD (*Yahweh*), ‘Please Lord (*Adonai*), I have never been eloquent.’” This

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobsen, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014) 834.

context in Exodus demands that Moses is only taking to God his petition, yet he refers to God with both divine titles. The argument can be made that *Adonai* is also used in other places in the Old Testament to refer to persons other than God. Unitarian Sir Anthony Buzzard argues that there is a difference in the Hebrew word *Adonai* with another Hebrew word *Adoni*, suggesting that *Adoni* only reflects a non-deified human agent and that *Adoni* is used in Psalm 110:1 and therefore is not referring to a divine agent.<sup>19</sup> However, Al Garza addresses this Unitarian claim by showing the reader that the alleged difference in the two Hebrew words only came around the 5th century AD when the Masoretic Text was developed, including the vowel pointing that was distinct from the only consonantal Hebrew text of the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>20</sup> Garza goes on to say that the Jewish community had a vested interest in undermining any Old Testament text that would infer two distinct persons sharing the one nature of deity as upheld in orthodox Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Further evidence against this claim that this first *Adonai* in verse 1 cannot be the divine name is that with the same vowel pointing the second *Adonai* found in verse 5 is considered by most as the divine name. The text is clear that the first *Adonai* and the second *Adonai* are the same persons. The names in this Psalm show a singleness of deity, yet also a distinction of persons as they relate to one another.

Beyond the words *Adonai* and *Yahweh* are two contextual keys that must be considered. First, the “Lord” (*Adonai*) possesses an eternal priesthood, according to Psalm 110:4. This eternal priesthood seems to be of a quality that can only be explained divinely. Second, the fact that this “Lord” is a priest at all undermines any potential that this is any king in Israel, according to the Mosaic law. For example, when Israel’s king

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<sup>19</sup> Frank W. Nelte, “Unitarianism: An Answer to Sir Anthony Buzzard,” accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.franknelte.net/article.php?article>.

<sup>20</sup> Al Garza, “Answering Psalm 110,” accessed March 20, 2020, <https://thejewishinstitute.wordpress.com/2013/09/07/answering-psalm-1101/>.

<sup>21</sup> Garza, “Answering Psalm 110.”

Uzziah usurped the priest's role and defiantly burned incense on the altar of incense, God struck him with leprosy until the day of his death (2 Chron 26:16). A dual role king would only be a king after the order of Melchizedek, according to Hebrews 7, that could fulfil both these offices in one person. Therefore, with the biblical warrant of seeing both *Yahweh* and *Adonai* as divine titles, the divine characteristics of an eternal priesthood pronounced by *Yahweh* to *Adonai*, and the fact that this address could not be an address to a king of Israel according to the ceremonial law, any sober reading demands that this text was a mystery for Old Testament saints that can only be explained by what would become known as the Triune nature of God.

Affirming further that this "Lord" (*Adonai*) shares the same nature of divinity as this "LORD" (*Yahweh*), the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) translates both Hebrew names into a form of the Greek word *Kurios*. *Adonai* and its Greek counterpart (*Kurios*) serve as a kind of divine title when used in relationship to either Father or Son. This divine title points to the sovereign possessor of all things (Gen 15:1, 2). Therefore, when the first century church was called to pledge their allegiance to Caesar as Lord (*Kurios*) they refused unto death, for an unwillingness to break the first commandment. Jesus raises this question in Luke 20 when He asks a question from the Psalm 110 text: "Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?" It is also important to remember that, in 2 Samuel 7:16, God made a promise to King David that he would always have from his own heritage a successor to the throne. This successor would rule and reign and give Israel victory over her enemies. This successor would be the deliverer, or in other words, the Messiah (Christ the anointed One). Jesus's point was that David's Lord (*Adonai*), while he would come after David in human history would be equivalent to *Yahweh* in deity. Charles Spurgeon affirms this when he writes, "Though David was a firm believer in the Unity of the Godhead, he yet spiritually discerns the two persons, distinguishes between them, and perceives that in the second he has a peculiar

interest, for he calls him ‘my Lord.’ This was an anticipation of the exclamation of Thomas, ‘My Lord and my God.’”<sup>22</sup>

While Jesus left His detractors to wonder Who would fulfill this role, Peter answered the question in his sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:29-36, quoting from Psalm 110. The sovereign Lord and Christ, the eternal Son of the heavenly Father, who has been raised in glorified flesh and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, is none other than “this Jesus whom you crucified.” This New Testament quote of Psalm 110 is what led Matthew Henry to write, “This Psalm is pure gospel; it is only and wholly concerning Christ the Messiah promised to the fathers and expected by them.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the theological mechanics of Trinitarianism are clearly seen, especially in the Old Testament and specifically in Psalm 110. While these two persons are in intimate conversation, they share the same being and title of the sovereign possessor of heaven and earth. This title is fit for none other than God Himself. This Psalm establishes the simultaneous distinction and co-equality of the persons of God (*Father and Son*) while maintaining the unity of God in his being.

### **Matthew 3**

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in Matthew 3 serves as another significant text affirming Trinitarian theology. Craig Blomberg suggests, “With the conjunction of God, Son, and Spirit at Jesus baptism, there is an incipient Trinitarianism.”<sup>24</sup> While Jesus’ insistence on being baptized by John was so that He might “fulfill all righteousness” according to Matthew 3:15, the presence and identity of

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 460.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 717.

<sup>24</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 82.

the Father and the Spirit simultaneous with the Son are paramount. Certainly, the Father's voice is one of great approval, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17), but as Timothy George clarifies, this was not a proclamation of Christ's ministry but of His identity.<sup>25</sup> While the word *Father* is not specifically used in the text, it is emphatically implied. Here are two realities first, the simultaneity of presence with Father, Son and Spirit, and second, the distinct relationships of persons. In Jesus' baptism account are found significant biblical truths that forge the orthodox position of Trinitarian theology.

Looking first at the simultaneity of presence one sees all three persons of the Triune God present at Jesus' baptism: the Son standing in the water, the Father speaking from heaven, and the Spirit descending on Jesus. The Scriptures force the theological understanding of what has been succinctly articulated in the Athanasian Creed: "And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped."<sup>26</sup> Again, the eternal and simultaneous distinction of all three persons of the Triune God are made clear in the economic work of all three persons in redemptive history. Sinclair Ferguson, speaking in the context of the conception of Christ, says, "As such, it underlines the principle that, in the work of redemption which Christ spearheads, each person of the Trinity is engaged. The patristic maxim that all persons of the Trinity share in all external acts of God (*opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt, 'the external works of the Trinity are undivided'*) is here (as in the resurrection) perfectly illustrated."<sup>27</sup> Therefore while the creedal language of

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<sup>25</sup> Timothy George, "Recovering the Baptismal Theology of the Early Church," Nevin Lectures, Trinity House Institute, 2014, accessed January 14, 2019, [https://theopolisinstitute.com/leithart\\_post/nevin-lectures-2014/](https://theopolisinstitute.com/leithart_post/nevin-lectures-2014/)

<sup>26</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Greek and Latin Creeds*, vol. 2, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), 66-70.

<sup>27</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 43.

co-eternality speaks to the immanent reality of God, his immanent reality is closely joined in the same creeds with God's economic reality. For example, the Constantinople Creed of 381 said, "Lord Jesus Christ . . . being of one substance with the Father . . . and for our salvation came down from heaven . . . incarnate by the Holy Spirit."<sup>28</sup> Colin Gunton argues that Christians faced with the fact of the incarnation began to talk about persons as sharing a common essence, yet distinct individuals with their own properties of personal identity.<sup>29</sup> This economy of God *ad extra* seen again at Jesus incarnation and baptism undermines the claim of modalism that asserts that Father, Son, and Spirit are only different manifestations of one God and not three simultaneous and distinct persons.

Beyond the reality of the co-eternality of Father, Son, and Spirit is the distinction of their personhood, seen in this baptismal passage. Michael Horton maintains that at Jesus baptism "there are not simply three names but three actors."<sup>30</sup> These are not interchangeable names given to different manifestations of the one God but distinct actors (persons) with distinct names. Sixth century Roman philosopher Boethius defined personhood as "the individual substance of a rational nature."<sup>31</sup> Giles Emery remarks of Boethius definition, "This metaphysical understanding of the person . . . does not exclude the psychological, moral, and relational features of the person, nor the importance of action. . . . Rather it enables one to integrate these aspects and guarantees their foundation"<sup>32</sup> So, for Boethius, the individual substance of a rational nature obviously

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<sup>28</sup> Philip Schaff, *The History of Creeds*, vol. 1, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), 28-29.

<sup>29</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 9.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 275.

<sup>31</sup> Boethius, "A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius," in *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H. F. Stewart (London: Heinemann, 1918), 85.

<sup>32</sup> Giles Emery, *The Trinity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 102-4.



has two parts. The individual substance is that subsistence, hypostasis or person that is distinct and possesses non-communicable attributes. Fred Sanders remarks, “What is to be excluded from personhood is anything general. It is this particularity, which dictates that personhood must be individual and incommunicable. Incommunicability is at the heart of the mystery of personhood, and of what differentiates it from nature.”<sup>33</sup> The rational nature as nuanced by Thomas Aquinas is that which is endowed with intelligence and will.<sup>34</sup> While the distinctions exist of Father, Son, and Spirit in their persons, they share the same nature as defined by Aquinas.

Michael Horton, commenting on John of Damascus, recognizes that attributes were shared as the common essence of the person (essential attributes) and attributes were unique to each person (personal attributes).<sup>35</sup> For Boethius and Aquinas this definition was rooted in the theological context of Trinitarian conversation. It can be said that while there can be analogical comparisons between metaphysical relationships of the persons in the Trinity and human relationships, one cannot speak univocally. Also, in the analogical one must order all comparisons moving from God to the creation and not impose comparison on God from creation. This metaphysical truth undermines the idea that persons in the godhead must possess a corporeal existence. The question is in what way each person in the godhead is distinct or bearing incommunicable attributes? Stephen Holmes said for Aquinas the question is answered in the processions.<sup>36</sup> Holmes further writes, “These processions must be understood as internal, and that which proceeds must, in each case be understood substantially identical with that from which it proceeds. . . .

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<sup>33</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Godmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 143.

<sup>34</sup> Giles Emery, “The Dignity of Being a Substance: Person, Subsistence, and Nature,” *Nova et Vetera* 9, no. 4 (2011): 994.

<sup>35</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 286.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2012), 157.

The processions give rise to relations . . . relations in the divine being, then do not change what God is . . . they simply are what God is.”<sup>37</sup> Fred Sanders agrees: “They are called persons because they have proper things to distinguish them, and these distinctions are made not in nature but in relation and order.”<sup>38</sup> Following this idea of the distinctions of the three persons in the Godhead according to relation leads one to see the Father as the unbegotten and paternal one, the Son as the begotten and filial one, and the Spirit as the proceeding one or the one with the distinct personal property of spiration. While it is apparent that the individual distinctions in each person of the Trinity can be seen as relations, Horton argues that these three must be seen “in relations. . . . It is not simply that begetting, being begotten, and being spirated are essential to their identity, but that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are essential to each other’s identity.”<sup>39</sup> Essentially, there is no Father without the Son, and there is no Son without the Father, and there is no Spirit without the Father and the Son.

While there is the ontological and immanent reality of God’s existence revealed to his church through his Word there is also the economic or *ad extra* missions of God in his world. The Father sending the Son, the Son being sent and the Spirit empowering the human nature of the Son are all realities in this baptismal text. The theological truth in regard to the personhood of God affirms God’s ability and desire to be personable with his creation. His personable inter-trinitarian relationships define his personable nature. Therefore, without change to his nature he can relate personally to his creation.

This intimate picture of the Triune God at Jesus’ baptism is good news for believers. As believers place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are brought into the

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<sup>37</sup> Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 157.

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, *The Triune God*, 144.

<sup>39</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 302

intimate community of the Triune God of heaven and earth and the love they have reciprocated toward one another for all eternity we now experience.

### **Matthew 28**

Matthew 3 and 28 serve as Trinitarian bookends in Matthew's gospel. Beginning in chapter 3 with the baptism of Jesus and the inauguration of his earthly ministry is a clear picture of the Triune God in personal relationship as the Son is present in the Jordan with John, the Spirit is descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and the Father is speaking words of affirmation and approval to his only and eternally-begotten Son. Some twenty-five chapters later comes the consummation of Matthew's Gospel and herein lies another astonishing Trinitarian text. As Jesus commissions his people to take the gospel into the world he gives specific commands concerning the discipleship of the nations. These commands include teaching them to observe all that he has commanded and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus' command to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is what Craig Bloomberg calls "the clearest Trinitarian 'formula' anywhere in the Gospels."<sup>40</sup>

A closer look at this prepositional phrase, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (v. 19), reveals some interesting grammatical realities. First, it is important to note that the word *name* in the Greek language is a singular noun, not names, but name. Therefore, this one name is tied to these three distinct persons: Father, Son and Spirit. According to William Hendriksen, that singular name is not a reflection of any single person in the Trinity but of the one being in God, himself.<sup>41</sup> According to Greek scholar Charles Quarles,

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<sup>40</sup> Bloomberg, *Matthew*, 432.

<sup>41</sup> William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, The New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 1000.

The use of the singular “name” with three genitives of possession, indicate that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share a single name. The phrase “the name” is probably used in typical Jewish fashion to refer to the divine name Yahweh. Thus, the construction affirms the deity and unity of the three persons and implies incipient trinitarian doctrine.<sup>42</sup>

The theological significance is that each person of Father, Son, and Spirit share in that one being, God.

Not only does this *name* speak to the one God of Christian monotheism, but it also refers to the authority vested in the one being of God. According to A. T. Robertson, the *name* here means “power” or “authority.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, each person mentioned in this “commission text” shares the authority of the *name*. Further support for this reality is seen when previously in this Great Commission text Jesus says that “all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18). The Jews were constantly questioning Jesus’ authority. In Matthew 9, when Jesus healed the man with palsy he said, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven” (v. 2), then certain scribes said, “This fellow blasphemes” (v. 3). These scribes were questioning his power and authority to forgive sins. Also, in Matthew 21, while Jesus was in the temple the day after he had purged it from the money changers, the chief priests and the elders question Jesus, saying, “by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?” (v. 23). These religious leaders rejected his authority because they rejected his person. They believed in God, they also believed in God’s authority, but they rejected God’s son. However, orthodox Christianity at the council at Chalcedon in AD 451 hammered out the biblical theology that Jesus is in one person both truly God and truly man. While Jesus person cannot be divided, the nature of his deity and his eternal authority was at the incarnation united to his humanity. The reality of Jesus’ eternal deity and authority is manifest in both natures of his single person. The importance of this doctrine directly relates to the baptismal formula in

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<sup>42</sup> Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 352.

<sup>43</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, concise ed. (Nashville: Holman 2000), 65.

Matthew 28 and the passages in Acts where Christian converts are told to be baptized in Jesus name (Acts 2:28, 8:12, 10:48, 19:5). These passages in Acts do not serve as a replacement for the formula in Matthew 28 but speak to a theological reality that Jesus has come and in his person is embodied the power and authority of his deity. The illustration of a police officer calling a perpetrator to stop in the “name” of the law is a similar expression. Those that reject the authority of the name of the Son also reject the authority of the name of the Father. Therefore, as 1 John 2:23 affirms, those that reject the Son (person) have not the Father (person). Also, while these texts in Acts speak to the authority of the “name” of Jesus in baptism, they are not specific narrative accounts of New Testament baptisms. A survey through Acts reveals that at the four separate commands to be baptized in Jesus’ authority (2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5) are three different word combinations that indicate that these statements were not a specific formula recited at a baptism event. It can be easily defended that while the early church baptized in the authority (the name) of Jesus, in keeping with his authority they pronounced the formula at individual baptisms that he authorized, “in the name of (or by the authority of) the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (v. 19). Witness to this reality can be found in the historical document of the *Didache* (also known as the teaching of the twelve), a first century Christian document that bears testimony to the practice of the first century church in the ordinance of baptism. Article 7 in the *Didache* states, “Concerning baptism thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, ‘baptize, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,’ in running water.”<sup>44</sup> So, here is explicit evidence that the early church understood Jesus to mean that all three persons of the Trinity are to be used when baptizing a believer into water baptism. Jesus’ instruction and the early church’s practice should remain in every church throughout all history.

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Kirby, *Didache*, accessed January 12, 2019, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>.

Therefore, in one of the only two sacred ordinances that the church has been commanded to practice throughout her pilgrimage on this earth she is to bear testimony to the true nature of the Triune God. William Hendriksen captures the essence of Jesus' baptism formula when he comments,

Accordingly, when through the preaching of the Word a person has been brought from darkness into light, and confesses the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be the one Object of his faith, hope, and love, then the sacrament of baptism is the sign and seal that God the Father adopts him as his son and heir; that God the Son washes his sins away by his precious blood; and that God the Holy Spirit dwells in him and will sanctify him.<sup>45</sup>

### **John 1:1**

John's prologue may be the most explicit passage in the Bible regarding the specific theological components of Trinitarianism. While only God and the Word are stated, verse 1 reveals the Trinitarian dynamic of one God in more than one person. Later John climactically unveils that this Word is the eternal Son of the Father made incarnate (in flesh).

"In the beginning [Greek, "*en-arche*"] was the Word . . ." is the same Greek phrase used in the Septuagint's translation of Genesis 1:1, speaking of the eternal existence of God that precedes that of time and space. John employs this phrase to show the eternal nature of the Word. Gerald Borchert writes, "John started at the very beginning as Gen 1:1 does, when there was just God. He linked the incarnation with the Word that was present even prior to the beginning of time (John 1:1)."<sup>46</sup> D. A. Carson confirms that the Greek word for beginning (*arche*) often bears the meaning "origin" and

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<sup>45</sup> Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 1001.

<sup>46</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 102.

further says that John wanted to show that the starting point of the gospel is traced back before the beginning of the entire universe.<sup>47</sup>

Next, John says that “the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Here one sees the eternal Word in unique relationship to God. There would be no doubt in the mind of the orthodox Jewish reader when John penned the Greek name for God (*Theos*) that he was contemplating the Jewish God of monotheism found in Deuteronomy 6.<sup>48</sup> However, John’s words include this pre-existing entity (*Word*) that is in some way in eternal relationship with God (*Theos*). Therefore, when one reads this Greek phrase (“in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”) two ideas are made apparent here. First, there is a personal distinction as *Word* and *Theos* relate to one another; and second, there is an ontological oneness as the *Word* is *Theos*.

The verb *pros* in the Greek, translated “with,” is literally translated according to Borchert as “toward God.”<sup>49</sup> Leon Morris cites A. T. Robertson in his commentary where Robertson translates the verb *pros* as “face to face” and writes, “*Pros* establishes a relationship with God but also distinguishes the two from each other.”<sup>50</sup> Morris agrees that the whole existence of the Word (*Logos*) was oriented toward the Father.<sup>51</sup> This intimacy in personal relationship was eternally existent before any part of creation is brought into being and will be further designated by John as a relationship in the Godhead described by Father and Son.

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<sup>47</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

<sup>48</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Borchert, *John 1-11*, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 76.

However, while the Word was “with God” in face-to-face relationship, at the same time the Word “was” God, co-equal, co-eternal sharing fully in the Godhead. The second part of this relational reality is exegetically born from a plain reading of the text. John from a Deuteronomy 6 commitment to monotheism writes that this one God, while in no way divided, shares a definite ontology with this Word. Morris explains that this third clause is somewhat climactic: “The high point is reached in the third affirmation. . . . Moffat renders the Logos was divine . . . though the writer regarded monotheism as a central tenet in his religion yet he could not withhold from the Word the designation of God.”<sup>52</sup> Some argue that the lack of the definite article implies the necessity of the indefinite article, “a god,” as if to say a god among others. Daniel Wallace states, “An established rule defines what this structure communicates: an anarthrous (without the article) preverbal predicate nominative is normally qualitative, sometimes definite, and only rarely indefinite.”<sup>53</sup> Klink writes on the heels of this statement by Wallace that “not only is the indefinite meaning for God rare (i.e., ‘a god’) but it would also need to be reflected by the context which it clearly is not!”<sup>54</sup> Klink crafts the expression in this way: “The Word is fully God, but God is not fully the Word.”<sup>55</sup> Among many that deny the deity of the Word, they argue that the “word” only has qualities of divinity. Kostenberger describes this as a “dubious argument.”<sup>56</sup> The exegetical force of this rebuttal is that accessible to John was the Greek word *theios*. According to Kostenberger, Carson, Borchert, and other scholars, this word is the correct word for defining someone or

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<sup>52</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 76-78.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 256, 262.

<sup>54</sup> Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 92.

<sup>55</sup> Klink, *John*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Kostenberger, *John*, 28.



something with merely divine qualities. The specificity of the language as directed by the Holy Spirit demands affirmation of an airtight case for co-equality of essence and a distinction in persons between *Theos* and *Logos*. Concluding the biblical investigation of the relationship of the Word with God, it is clear that the Word is both distinct as a person from the Father and yet simultaneously God in same essence with the Father.

### **Acts 5:1-6**

In Acts 5:1-6 is the story of two members of the early church being dishonest about the sale of a piece of property and the proceeds given to the church. Certainly, the issue addressed is the necessity of the purity of the early church. The consequences of the dishonest couple, Ananias and his wife, Saphira, were extremely severe and harken back to the dishonesty of Achan and his sin in Joshua 7. However, embedded in this narrative is another Trinitarian reality. Many texts in the Scriptures show a detailed relationship between the Father and the Son but here is one of several that shows specific realities about the person of the Holy Spirit. Simon Kistemaker writes, “Peter identifies the Holy Spirit as God: He is the third person of the Trinity.”<sup>57</sup> First, one sees the Holy Spirit called God. Acts 5:3-4 states, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. . . . You have not lied to men but God.” This text is one of the three texts proofed by Charles Ryrie identifying the Holy Spirit as God.<sup>58</sup> Second, one sees the Holy Spirit display a specific characteristic of personhood. Peter mourned the fact that the dishonest couple lied to the Holy Spirit. To lie to someone is to be dishonest in personal relationships. Third, one sees the active, personal presence of God the Holy Spirit, “present with His people.”<sup>59</sup> Behind this presence of the Spirit being faithful and intimately active is the

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<sup>57</sup> Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, The New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 184.

<sup>58</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 104.

promise made by Jesus in John 14:16: “I will ask of the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth.” In John 15:26, Jesus says He will send the Helper. The Spirit of God has been sent by Father and Son to fulfill His role in the work of redemption. This text recaps Trinitarian truth as the Spirit is God. The Spirit is a person and the Spirit is distinct from Father and Son in both person and economic work of redemption.

### **Second Corinthians 13:14**

Second Corinthians 13:14 is what Simon Kistemaker has called the richest benediction in the entire New Testament.<sup>60</sup> He says this because of its Trinitarian formula. Paul, at the hands of the Corinthian church, is facing personal attack. While Paul has had to defend his apostleship, he stills holds a deep love for this immature body of believers. This love is manifest in his benediction/blessing at the conclusion of this epistle: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). Here one sees, as noted by David E. Garland, “all three persons of the Trinity according to their roles in relationship to believers”<sup>61</sup> In Trinitarian theology, the Bible brings to light three realities concerning the nature of God. First, in the being of God a unity can be accurately described as monotheism (the Lord your God is One). Next, in the being of God is a plurality of three persons or subsistences. Finally, in the persons of the Godhead is an economy. This economy as described is the three persons’ roles in relationship to believers. This text in Paul’s epistle is similar to the text in Peter’s epistle (1 Pet 1:2). Here one sees the necessity of Trinitarianism as it relates to the work of redemption by God among those being saved. These three roles are identified by the phrases in verse 14: “Grace of the

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<sup>60</sup> Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 459.

<sup>61</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 108.

Lord Jesus Christ . . . love of God . . . fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” Paul is praying over these believers this incredible Trinitarian prayer wherein he asks that they might live and exist in the experience of these three persons and their specific work in believers’ redemption.

First, Paul prays that they might be transformed through the experience of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul has already used this phrase in 8:9 when he writes, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” The poverty of Christ is seen again in Paul’s letter to the Philippians when he writes that Jesus “emptied Himself taking the form of a bondservant.” He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (2: 7, 8). Here the grace of God is the ministry in time and space of the person of the eternal Son made flesh to live and die for the redemption of the elect.

Next, Paul prays that they might live in the experience of the love of God. God mentioned here by Paul through the flow of the text is God the Father. This is consistent with the witness of the Scripture that while God the Son stepped into time and space to accomplish redemption, He did so having been sent by the Father and according to the will of the Father.<sup>62</sup> Galatians 4:4-7 reminds the believer that the Father sent the Son. Also, the dramatic experience of Jesus in the garden (praying for the Father to remove this cup from Him, however, not his will but the Father’s be done) is hard Scripture evidence of the love of God displayed in the sacrificial work of sending His Son to experience the wrath of God. This is consistent with the witness in John 3:16 where the

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<sup>62</sup> It must be noted here that the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 recognized that in the one person of Jesus there abides two natures. Jesus is defined as truly God and truly man. The Dyothelite (two wills) model teaches that each of Jesus’ natures possesses its own will. Jesus’ divine will is a communicable property of his divine nature shared with all three persons of the Trinity. There is only one will in God. Therefore, in the *pactum salutis* (God’s eternal plan to redeem a people) the person of Jesus freely volunteered according to the synonymous will of Father and Spirit to be sent. However, his human will was in subjection to the divine will that he referenced to his Father in his earthly ministry.

Scripture says that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that Whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have ever lasting life.

Finally, this Trinitarian benediction concludes with Paul's prayer that the Corinthian believers experience and enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. While a physical body is not necessary to be a person in a theological sense. The Holy Spirit according to the Scripture possesses divine realities that affirm His deity and also personal attributes that affirm his person. Here one sees the divine person of the Holy Spirit active in the believer's life faithfully fulfilling His role in redemption. Also, this is not a dry theological proposition, but an intimate experience of communion and fellowship made possible by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. A repeated reality throughout the Bible regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the work of regeneration. Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit, like the Son, has been sent by the Father and also the Son to affect the work of redemption planned by the Father and accomplished at Calvary by the Son. Galatians 4:6 says, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." That communion and confidence in communion with Father and Son is enabled and sustained by the Spirit.

Paul closes this epistle with what Geoffrey Wilson describes, "the richest and most comprehensive of all the benedictions in the New Testament, the one which the Christian church in every land and of every age has found, and will find as long as the world lasts"<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Geoffrey Wilson, *2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 175.

## First Peter 1:2

First Peter 1:2 not only gives clear evidence of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity but frames the reality of the Triune nature of God in the context of the atonement. Peter writes this epistle to believers scattered throughout various places that are experiencing persecution and alienation. Considering the context wherein Peter writes to the people of God under constant threat, with what theological reality does he seek to encourage them? That theological reality is none other than the biblical hope that their salvation is vested in the sovereign work of the Triune God.

Tom Schreiner writes of the opening of Peter's epistle, "We note here the Trinitarian work of the Father, Spirit, Son."<sup>64</sup> First Peter 1:2 states, "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." Commenting on verse 2 in Peter's introduction, David Helm writes, "Peter plants his thoughts in the soil of the Trinitarian formula."<sup>65</sup> First, one sees the sovereign choosing by God of His people done by the person of the Father before time began. Peter goes on to write that God's choice of His own was according to foreknowledge and while certainly the Greek word for foreknowledge, *prognosin*, does mean to know beforehand it must also mean more. Peter Davids writes, "Foreknowledge, which is not to say that God simply predicted their conversion, but as in Paul, that they experienced a personal relationship with a group of people which originates in God Himself."<sup>66</sup> Commenting on the prepositional phrase, "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," Karen Jobes states, "Peter reminds his readers that the God who took the initiative in their lives has drawn them into an intimate, loving, and

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<sup>64</sup> Tom Schreiner, *1 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 49.

<sup>65</sup> David Helm, *1 Peter and Jude, Sharing Christ's Sufferings* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 27.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Davids, *The First Epistle to Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 48.

redemptive relationship with him.”<sup>67</sup> J. Ramsay Michaels agrees: “‘The foreknowledge of God the Father’ focuses on the beginning of this election or calling and, therefore, belongs in eternity past. Christ himself was foreknown before the creation of the world (1:20) and the election of ‘God’s chosen people’ is derived from and dependent on Christ’s election to be their redeemer and example (cf. 2:4, 5, 9).”<sup>68</sup>

The next prepositional clause in verse 2 identifies the Spirit’s role to sanctify the elect. This same thought is seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” Schreiner argues that while the term *sanctifying* refers to progressive holiness, here the context demands the idea of conversion, and conversion through the preaching of the gospel according to 1 Peter 1:12.<sup>69</sup> Jobes agrees, saying, “Here is almost certainly to be understood as Holy Spirit, who is the instrument, or agency, by which God makes his electing foreknowledge operative in the lives of those who come to faith in Christ.”<sup>70</sup>

The final clause in this verse points to the work of Christ in the atonement to provide the sacrifice that would be pleasing and acceptable to God, and able to satisfy the just requirement of His holiness against sin “to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (v. 2). Greek scholar A. T. Robertson writes that “‘sprinkled blood’ is a reference to the death of Christ on the Cross.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore, it is clear here in 1 Peter 1:2 that the love of the Father, the power of the Spirit, and the sacrifice of the Son economically working together as three persons in the one being of God enable the redemption of

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<sup>67</sup> Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 69.

<sup>68</sup> J. Michael Ramsay, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 10.

<sup>69</sup> Schreiner, *1 Peter, Jude*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 69-70.

<sup>71</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 609.

mankind. In an article on the doctrine of the Trinity and its relationship to the atonement, Fred Sanders affirms, “Trinitarian theology is an interpretation of the work of atonement. It takes up all the material of salvation history together as a whole and places it against the horizon of God’s eternal being, in order to specify the Christian God by describing the connection between God and the economy of salvation.”<sup>72</sup>

First Peter 1:2 serves as another powerful passage in Trinitarian theology. Especially in times of difficulty, as Peter has sought to comfort his readers, so are believers in every era comforted in that they serve a personal God that loves them and calls them to himself as his children. The evidence of God’s personal love cannot be more strongly established than the revelation of the specific persons of Father, Son, and Spirit faithful in the work of redemption.

### **Conclusion**

Every faithful student of Scripture possesses a commitment to the faithfulness of Scripture itself. A serious commitment to the Bible’s inerrancy will move the student to wrestle with texts that when compared together can seem to be incongruous. However, the problem is not with the inspired Bible but with fallen sinners. It becomes the task of the exegete to diligently labor in God’s Word with the presupposition that God has not erred in his revelation and that with hard work and the Spirit’s illumination Bible harmony will be achieved. The doctrine of the Trinity is the systematic distillation of what the whole Bible has to say about the being and work of God. The eight texts reviewed here are only a small sampling of this towering doctrine. However, to faithfully preach the gospel is to clearly discern the nature of the God of the gospel. The Trinity and the gospel are not connected in some distant way but, according to Sanders, “Trinity and the gospel have the same shape . . . when the outlines of both are clear, we should experience

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<sup>72</sup> Fred Sanders, “Trinity and Atonement Essay,” accessed August 10, 2018, <http://scriptoriumdaily.com/trinity-and-atonement-essay/>.

the shock of recognition. . . . This is because the good news of salvation is ultimately that God opens his Trinitarian life to us.”<sup>73</sup> What an amazing truth that to trust the gospel is to be brought into the eternal community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>73</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 191.



## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO TRINITARIANISM

The church throughout history has faithfully sought to understand and articulate the revelation God has given. The church has labored in this endeavor particularly when it comes to the biblical reality that one God exists in unity and distinction. These truths held in tandem are what Bruce Ware has called “tension faced by the early church fathers.”<sup>1</sup> However, the ramifications of getting the nature of God right are immense and practical. Michael Reeves frames the importance of this doctrine: “The truth is that God is love because God is a Trinity.”<sup>2</sup> Nothing about the message of Christianity is more crucial than the love of God directly tied to His very being. The significance of this truth was not lost in the early years of church history, as evidenced by the Pre-Nicene church fathers, the first two ecumenical councils, and the fifth-century church father, Augustine. These events and the people surrounding them serve as part of the rich theological heritage of orthodox Trinitarianism. The church must familiarize itself with Trinitarian theology and history for the purpose of defending the Christian faith and leading God’s people into the devotional bliss of communion with the true God.

#### **Pre-Nicene Church Fathers**

When speaking on the doctrine of the Trinity, R. C. Sproul said that, historically, heresies and heretics have been unwittingly helpful for the church to clearly articulate the

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2012), 9.

orthodox faith.<sup>3</sup> This statement has certainly been true in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. Nathan Busenitz, instructor of theology at The Master's Seminary, in an address on the historic reality of Trinitarian doctrine, exposed many ludicrous claims that argue this doctrine was a historic invention of the fourth century and not a biblical doctrine affirmed prior.<sup>4</sup> For example, Dennis A. Beard, a oneness Pentecostal preacher writes, "The Doctrine of the Trinity did not exist until 325 A.D."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, unitarian author P. R. Lackey asserts, "[At Nicaea] a whole new theology was formally canonized into the Church."<sup>6</sup> Interesting enough is that the cover of Lackey's book is illustrated with the sixteenth century heretic Michael Servetus being killed for his heresy. Unitarian Robert Spears explains, "It is an unquestionable historical fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is a false doctrine foisted into the Church during the third and fourth centuries; which finally triumphed by the aid of persecuting emperors."<sup>7</sup> The publishing arm of the Jehovah's Witness cult, The Watchtower Society, writes in an article, "The testimony of the Bible and of history makes clear that the Trinity was unknown throughout Biblical times and for several centuries thereafter."<sup>8</sup>

Are these claims sustainable, suggesting that the early church did not hold to an understanding that God is one being existing simultaneously as three distinct persons? No! The historic record of the church fathers prior to the time of the first ecumenical

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<sup>3</sup> R. C. Sproul, *What Is the Trinity?* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Busenitz, "Did Constantine Invent the Trinity? The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church Fathers," *Master Seminary Journal* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 217-42.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis A. Beard, *The Errors of the Trinity: The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2003), 28.

<sup>6</sup> P. R. Lackey, *The Tyranny of the Trinity* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2011), 261.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Spears, *The Unitarian Handbook of Scriptural Illustrations and Expositions* (London: British Foreign and Unitarian Association, 1883), 96.

<sup>8</sup> The Watchtower Society, "Should You Believe in the Trinity?," accessed October 9, 2018, <https://www.scribd.com/document/299915150/Watchtower-Should-You-Believe-in-the-Trinity-1989>.

council at Nicaea reveals an understanding of Trinitarian doctrine that was yet to be hammered out in a confessional order. A brief sampling of Pre-Nicene (before AD 325) statements will affirm that the church was wrestling with the biblical realities that one God exists in unity and distinction.

Affirming the reality that Jesus is fully God, Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 50–117) wrote, “For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God’s plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Affirming both the deity of Father and Son, Polycarp of Smyrna (69–155): “Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal high priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth . . . and to us with you, and to all those under heaven who will yet believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead.”<sup>10</sup>

Affirming the distinction between God the Father and the Son, Justin Martyr (100–165) wrote,

Reverting to the Scriptures, I shall endeavor to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not in will. For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world—above whom there is no other God—has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with.<sup>11</sup>

The first known use of the word *Trinity* in Greek is made by Theophilus of Antioch<sup>12</sup> (120-190) when he wrote on the creation of the sun and moon on day 4 of creation: “In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types

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<sup>9</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians*, accessed November 2, 2018, [https://www.orderofstignatius.org/files/Letters/Ignatius\\_to\\_Ephesians.pdf](https://www.orderofstignatius.org/files/Letters/Ignatius_to_Ephesians.pdf), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, accessed November 2, 2018, <http://www.agape-biblia.org/literatura/PolycarpToPhilippians.pdf>, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, accessed November 12, 2018, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 233n16.

of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom.”<sup>13</sup> Because of Theophilus’ use of the word “triad” in this context, Calvin Beisner assumes that the idea of Trinity was commonplace and had been in theological circulation five decades prior to his letter.<sup>14</sup>

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 202) writes concerning the one God:

Now, that this God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul the apostle also has declared, [saying,] “There is one God, the Father, who is above all, and through all things, and in us all.” I have indeed proved already that there is only one God; but I shall further demonstrate this from the apostles themselves, and from the discourses of the Lord. For what sort of conduct would it be, were we to forsake the utterances of the prophets, of the Lord, and of the apostles, that we might give heed to these persons, who speak not a word of sense?<sup>15</sup>

Tertullian (c. 160–225) also wrote affirming the deity, distinction, and simultaneity of Father, Son and Spirit:

Not as if it were untrue that the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and each is God; but because in earlier times Two were actually spoken of as God, and two as Lord, that when Christ should come He might be both acknowledged as God and designated as Lord, being the Son of Him who is both God and Lord. Now, if there were found in the Scriptures but one Personality of Him who is God and Lord, Christ would justly enough be inadmissible to the title of God and Lord: for (in the Scriptures) there was declared to be none other than One God and One Lord, and it must have followed that the Father should Himself seem to have come down (to earth), inasmuch as only One God and One Lord was ever read of (in the Scriptures), and His entire Economy would be involved in obscurity, which has been planned and arranged with so clear a foresight in His providential dispensation as matter for our faith. As soon, however, as Christ came, and was cognized by us as the very Being who had from the beginning caused plurality (in the Divine Economy), being the second from the Father, and with the Spirit the third, and Himself declaring and manifesting the Father more fully (than He had ever been before), the title of Him who is God and Lord was at once restored to the Unity (of the Divine Nature).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Theophilus, *To Autolycus*, accessed January 11, 2019, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/theophilus-book2.html>, chap. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, accessed January 11, 2019, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book2.html>, chap. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian17.html>, chap. 13.

William Rusch writes, “Tertullian is actually the first to introduce the Latin *trinitas* into Christian literature . . . and his clear distinction between the three that are of one substance will be an important element in the Nicene formulation.”<sup>17</sup>

The sum of this brief sampling is evidence that plurality of persons in the one God was not a politically-motivated manufacturing of the fourth century but a theological conviction held by pre-Nicene fathers that gave themselves to the due diligent study of the Scriptures.

### **Council of Nicaea in AD 325**

The Council of Nicaea in AD 325 was the first ecumenical council, and it served to shore up the biblical reality that one God exists in three persons. Two dominant heresies sought to undermine the biblical reality of God’s nature and work in redemption: the third-century heresy of Modalistic Monarchianism and the fourth-century heresy of Arianism. Modalistic Monarchianism or Sabellianism (named after its proponent Sabellius) rejected the idea of distinct persons in the Godhead in favor of separate manifestations or different modes of the one God. According to Gregg Allison, “The early church rejected Modalistic Monarchianism from its traditional understanding of the oneness of God and the threeness of the Father, Son and Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> Arianism would err in another direction and so separate the persons of Father and Son to deny their equality of substance. The battle against Arianism would be long and hard fought.

Arius was born in Cyrenaica and was a Christian presbyter and ascetic of Berber origin, and priest in Baucalis in Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>19</sup> Historian Socrates of Constantinople recorded that, in AD 318, Arius was in attendance while Alexander,

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<sup>17</sup> William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 42.

Bishop of Alexandria, was teaching on the likeness of the Son with the Father in a Sermon titled “The Great Mystery of the Trinity in Unity.” Socrates recorded that Arius objected openly.<sup>20</sup> Arius’ doctrinal dispute with Alexander led to one of the most significant debates in the history of the early church and the first ecumenical council in AD 325. The question was, who is the Son in relation to the Father? Alexander would continue the orthodox position made by his predecessor, Tertullian, that the Son shares the same substance with the Father and has eternally generated from the Father. Alexander was the Bishop over the diocese where Arius served and confronted Arius and expelled him from his position as presbyter. Arius had many sympathizers and began politicking his theology, especially in the eastern churches. Meanwhile, Alexander convened meetings in his diocese continuing to condemn Arius.<sup>21</sup> A council was held in AD 325 at Nicaea in Bithynia. There are few historical accounts in existence from those in attendance. The gathering began in late May, at the command of the Roman emperor, Constantine. He arrived on June 14, and the council closed July 25 that same year.<sup>22</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea recorded that Constantine funded the entire council and paid not only for the travel and boarding of the Bishops but also up to two priests and three deacons per Bishop.<sup>23</sup> The doctrinal schism became a major issue for the Roman government. Constantine, who was a professing convert to Christianity, was also a politician, and in his eyes the schism was affecting the unity of Rome. Constantine proved to be more of a politician than an orthodox Christian as he vacillated back and forth from one position to the other during his reign.

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<sup>20</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, “The Dispute of Arius with Alexander, His Bishop,” accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.iv.v.html>.

<sup>21</sup> J. J. Herzog et al., *A Religious Encyclopaedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), 1:53.

<sup>22</sup> Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3:624.

<sup>23</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:623.

Athanasius of Alexandria was a deacon to Alexander and became a major defender of Trinitarianism. Athanasius recorded 318 in attendance at the council and gave historical insight to its details.<sup>24</sup> The issue of Trinitarian doctrine dominated the council's attention. Therefore, the specific language of Nicaea, carried over from second and third century theologians was necessarily adopted to rightly define orthodoxy. The particular word that set Arianism apart from biblical orthodoxy was the word *homoousion*. *Homoousion* is the Greek word that means, same substance. This one word put in right biblical relationship the Father and the Son and affirmed that the Son was of the same substance as the Father. The Arian party, according to Beisner, understood precisely what the word meant and how it was used—and they rejected the concept, not only the term.<sup>25</sup> The Arians pushed for the idea of *heterousian* (different substance) while they deceptively were using the softer language of *homoiousian* (like substance). The council agreed by way of supermajority in that all but two Bishops affirmed the *homoousian* position<sup>26</sup> that Jesus, while distinct in person, shared the exact same substance of deity as the Father. The original statement of the Nicene Council of 325 read as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. But those who say: "There was a time when he was not;" and "He was not before he was made;" and "He was made out of nothing," or "He is of another substance" or "essence," or "The Son of God is created," or "changeable," or "alterable"— they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to the Bishops of Africa 2*, accessed February 11, 2019, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xxiv.ii.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndall House, 1984), 92.

<sup>26</sup> Warren H. Carroll, *The Building of Christendom* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom College Press 1987), 2:12.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, *The History of Creeds*, 6th ed. (New York:

Controversy continued the following decades and the young deacon Athanasius would take Bishop Alexander's place at Alexander's death in AD 328. While Athanasius would continue the good fight, he would be excommunicated five times in the back and forth vacillation of Constantine and later Constantine's sons in regard to orthodoxy.<sup>28</sup> It was not until 381 at the Council of Constantinople that the question of Trinitarian orthodoxy was settled in the church universal. Athanasius' tenacious spirit was highlighted when some of his contemporaries told him that the whole world was against him in his stand for orthodoxy. Athanasius replied, "Then Athanasius is against the whole world."<sup>29</sup>

### **Council of Constantinople in AD 381**

As indicated, the quest for orthodoxy in the church, while defined at Nicaea in the single word *homoousian*, took more than fifty years to be settled after Nicaea. The first council of Constantinople in AD 381 brought an end to the long-fought battle for Trinitarian orthodoxy. The official creed of orthodoxy is the product of Nicene/Constantinople collaboration.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.<sup>30</sup>

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Harper & Brothers, 1931) accessed February 17, 2019, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds1.iv.iii.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:887.

<sup>29</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:886.

<sup>30</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1169.



This fifty-year period after Nicaea was a time of great tension as the church and Rome grappled within their ranks for theological ascendancy. While Athanasius refused to back down from the orthodox position of Jesus as same substance with the Father, God began to raise up others that would be faithful to the cause of orthodoxy. Amid many faithful were a group known as the Cappadocian Fathers, who together were from the same region of Cappadocia. The Cappadocian Fathers included Basil the Great (330–379), who was bishop of Caesarea; Basil’s younger brother Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–ca. 395), who was bishop of Nyssa; and a close friend, Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389), who became Patriarch of Constantinople. These three men were influential in defending the orthodox position of Trinitarianism.

In the providence of God, Pro Nicene Emperor Theodosius rose to power over both the east and west divisions of the empire. In AD 380, Theodosius issued the decree of *Cunctos populus* found in the Codex Theodosius XVI.i.2 which stated, “Let us believe the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equally majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since in our judgement, they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics.”<sup>31</sup>

Next, in AD 380, Theodosius appointed Gregory of Nazianzus as Patriarch over Constantinople. The following year Theodosius called for the second council of the church at Constantinople. Gregory of Nazianzus would be given charge over the council as its superintendent before he would later resign. Schaff writes that the final suppression of heathenism is usually ascribed to the emperor Theodosius I (379-395). Schaff also remarks that Theodosius procured Nicene Orthodoxy at the second ecumenical council (381 Constantinople) and issued a series of rigid laws against heretics.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:63.

The theological legacy of the Cappadocian Fathers in Trinitarian orthodoxy is at least threefold. First, according to Gregg Allison, “they clarified the orthodox formulation of one substance (*ousia*) and three persons (*hypostases*).”<sup>33</sup> Also, this council, influenced by the Cappadocians, brought a more exhaustive statement on the role and person of the Holy Spirit. A view denying the deity of the Holy Spirit was adopted by the Macedonians, who were named after their theological teacher, Macedonius of Constantinople. Macedonians were also known as Pneumatomachians, meaning Spirit fighters.<sup>34</sup> Macedonius was bishop of Constantinople between 341 and 360 and taught that the Holy Spirit was a servant and creature and subordinate to the Father and the Son.<sup>35</sup> The Cappadocians further articulated the necessity of the Spirit’s deity with doctrine of redemption. Basil wrote a treatise of the work and person of the Holy Spirit tying the necessity of the Spirit’s deity with the redemptive work of salvation. Pelikan cites Basil in his work on the Holy Spirit saying,

Basil argued that rejecting the Holy Spirit (as God) meant casting away the meaning of salvation itself; and on the day of judgement he would defend himself by this. This generation took place through baptism “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If the last named was a creature, “the rite of initiation which you reckon to perform is not entirely into the Godhead.”<sup>36</sup>

Basil continued to affirm the person and deity of the Spirit in another important doctrinal distinction known as the “inseparable operations” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This doctrine was important in that it set forth the understanding that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in all divine activity. In *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil wrote,

Let us then revert to the point raised from the outset, that in all things the Holy Spirit is inseparable and wholly incapable of being parted from the Father and the Son. . . . Peter’s words to Sapphira, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Ye have not lied unto men, but unto God,” how that sins against the Holy Spirit and against God are the same; and thus you might learn that

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<sup>33</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 239.

<sup>34</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 436, 437.

<sup>35</sup> Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 135.

<sup>36</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 1:217.

in every operation the Spirit is closely conjoined with, and inseparable from, the Father and the Son.<sup>37</sup>

A third major contribution of the Cappadocians was the concept of perichoresis.<sup>38</sup>

Perichoresis is similar to the concept of inseparable operations. This verb *perichoreo* was later used by John of Damascus and others to describe the “perichoresis” as the interpenetration of the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup> Allison explains that the idea is that the three engage in mutual and magnificent glory giving, and quoting Gregory of Nyssa, says, “You see the revolving circle of the glory moving from like to like.”<sup>40</sup>

### Augustine

Beyond the Cappadocians and Constantinople is the contribution of Augustine in his work *De Trinitate*, written over a period of nineteen years.<sup>41</sup> Augustine serves as somewhat of a bookend to the affirmation of Trinitarian theology in the early church with his work on the Trinity. “With the Cappadocians in the East and Augustine in the West, Patristic thought on the doctrine of God obtained its finished form.”<sup>42</sup>

Augustine’s work on the Trinity contains fifteen books and, as Matthew Bates has opined, “is the loftiest pinnacle of the most majestic mountain in the range” of Trinitarian theology.<sup>43</sup> In book 1, Augustine states that his purpose is to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against “those who sophistically assail the faith of the Trinity, through

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<sup>37</sup> Basil, “On the Holy Spirit,” chap. 16:37, accessed August 12, 2018, <https://www.elpenor.org/basil/holy-spirit.asp?pg=41>.

<sup>38</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 239.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 178.

<sup>40</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 239, 240.

<sup>41</sup> Ware, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, 40, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

misuse of reason.”<sup>44</sup> Augustine calls the reader to doctrinal sobriety when considering the Trinity in the statement: “In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.”<sup>45</sup> There also seems to be a humility in Augustine and his work when he suggests that if “other men” have written more clearly on the doctrine of the Trinity then put down his book and even throw it away and labor with those whom he [the reader] understands.<sup>46</sup>

Augustine’s work begins with the necessity of demonstrating Trinitarianism from the Scriptures. One major tool in Bible interpretation is the hermeneutic method of harmonization. Harmonization is the ability to take two seemingly different ideas found in Scripture and join them in a way that does not do violence to either. There is a presupposition to this method and that is a confidence that all Scripture is inspired by God and without error or contradiction. Augustine employs this method when defending what in his time had become historic Trinitarian orthodoxy received from “all those catholic expounders.”<sup>47</sup> The harmonization of One God existing in three persons was considered by Augustine a difficulty. In chapter 5 of book 1 his heading was simply, “Of difficulties concerning the Trinity: In what manner three are one God, and how, working indivisibly, they yet perform some things severally”<sup>48</sup> However, a commitment to Scripture has led the faithful church to this great mystery in regard to the nature of God. This becomes evident in Augustine’s work as he interacts with many places in Scripture that affirm that one God exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The breadth of Scripture interaction is one of the great strengths of Augustine’s work.

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<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity, De Trinitate* (n.p.: Veritatis Splendor, 2012), 56.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 60.

<sup>48</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 65.

Augustine affirmed his predecessor's understanding of the relationship of the three persons, as the Father who begets, the Son who is begotten and sent and the Holy Spirit who proceeds.<sup>49</sup> He contributed uniquely to what was later called the double procession of the Spirit from both Father and Son.<sup>50</sup> Augustine also introduced what can be called his famous psychological analogies of the Trinity.<sup>51</sup> One of these compared the Trinity to memory, intellect, and the will.<sup>52</sup> Another compared the Trinity to One that loves, the thing loved, and love itself.<sup>53</sup> While these analogies seemed to be wordy and by Augustine's own estimation weak, they were an attempt to see the human soul, made in the image of God, the Trinity.<sup>54</sup>

The significance of the first 500 years of the church and its journey to hammer out biblical orthodoxy in creedal confessions cannot be overstated. These catholic confessions both in the early Nicene Creed and the cumulative Constantinople creed, are in part what Allison refers to as "essential matters."<sup>55</sup> These essentials, according to theologian Wayne Grudem, delineate the differences in "false churches" and "true churches."<sup>56</sup> Churches that willfully deny these truths about the nature of God are ultimately rejecting the God of Scripture and worshipping another God. These creedal affirmations of Nicaea and Constantinople are definite positions to which the church must hold fast. The consequence of failing to hold high these doctrinal truths will not just be

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<sup>49</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 241.

<sup>50</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 241.

<sup>51</sup> Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 135.

<sup>52</sup> Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 135n39.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 312.

<sup>54</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 535.

<sup>55</sup> Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 175.

<sup>56</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 873.

that the church's knowledge of God will be compromised but also that the churches' devotional intimacy with God will be compromised.

### **The Devotional Realities of Trinitarian Theology**

Joe Thorn writes, "The doctrine of God leads to devotion to God."<sup>57</sup> In C. S. Lewis' preface to a reprint of Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, he made an astounding statement on the devotional richness of concentrating on the theological realities of doctrine, and here particularly, Trinitarian doctrine:

For my own part I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that "nothing happens" when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand.<sup>58</sup>

The Bible is a clear picture of the God that has brought his people into communion with himself, and that picture is one of great love and intimacy. John Owen writes,

Unfortunately, many Christians often have a distorted view of the heavenly Father. We tend to view him as angry and full of wrath toward us. While, we imagine Jesus as the one who loves us, the Father is portrayed as full of hesitation toward us—distant at best, furious at worst. It is as if Jesus pleads with the Father to put up with us and to let us live, perhaps even against the Father's desire. We often view Jesus as the "kind" person of the Trinity, with the Father only wanting us punished. Is the Father, in fact, really reluctant to show tenderness toward people?<sup>59</sup>

One can answer Owen's rhetorical question with a resounding no! The message of the gospel is that believers are brought into the community of the Triune God to share in the love and personal intimacy of God's Triune life. The immanent Trinity focusing on what

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<sup>57</sup> Joe Thorn, "Doctrine Leads to Devotion," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/doctrine-leads-devotion/>.

<sup>58</sup> C. S. Lewis, preface to "St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria," *On the Incarnation: Greek Original and English Translation* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>59</sup> John Owen, quoted in Adrian Warnock, "John Owen, the Trinity, and the Atonement," September 25, 2007, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2007/09/john-owen-trinity-and-atonement/>.

God is (eternal love and community in three persons, including the Father) is accessible to sinners through the economic Trinity (the indivisible work of the three persons in redemption). Therefore, believers' hearts are warmed as they focus on God immanently and economically.

In the distinct persons of the Trinity the church is brought face to face as it were with the first person of the Triune God, the heavenly Father. Romans 8:15 declares, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" While some may have had terrible experiences as children with deranged and unloving dads, the general rule is that the idea of a father is one of comfort and security.<sup>60</sup> A quick survey of the gospels will show that Jesus' favorite designation of God is that of Father. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary* cites John's Gospel showing at least 100 references by Jesus to God as Father and over 60 times in the Synoptics.<sup>61</sup> While it is right to understand that the only begotten eternal Son of God calls God his Father, it is overwhelming that Jesus invites and enables repentant sinners to embrace God as their Father. For instance, in the prayer prescribed by Christ in Matthew 6:9, believers are told to address God as "Our Father." In John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary Magdalene to report His resurrection to his "brothers" and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." While Fredrick Bruner makes the distinction between "my-your" as being the difference between Jesus only begotten status and believers adopted status, believers still have Jesus' Father as their own.<sup>62</sup> As loving and diligent as any father may be or may have been, all sinners fall short of the ideal. In some ways, all fathers pass on some sort of

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<sup>60</sup> Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 25. French philosopher Michel Foucault experienced a dysfunctional relationship with his surgeon father, who would make him witness amputations to "toughen up the young boy." Foucault's association with his father was parallel to dark images of fatherhood.

<sup>61</sup> "Fatherhood of God," accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/fatherhood-of-god.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Fredrick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1154.

baggage to their children and may even embitter them to some degree. However, the child of God through the work of Christ has been brought into the adoption of sons of God and possess now Christ's Father as his own. First John 3:1-2 affirms, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God."

Not only do believers share in a communion with the heavenly Father as adopted sons and daughters, but they also share in the communion with His eternally begotten Son whom the Scriptures refer to as their elder brother. Hebrews 2:17 says, "Therefore He had to be made like His brethren." While there are many dimensions of Christ's relationship with his brethren, at least three are found in the book of Hebrews.

First, He is their prophet *and He proclaims to them*. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." Christ is the believer's great Prophet and He has revealed to them the Father. Christ has revealed to them the person of the Father as well as the substance of the Father. Christians owe their humble and life transforming understanding of the Father to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, one sees that he is their Savior and that *he paid for them*. Hebrews 2:14,15 says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." A beautiful picture can be painted in the work of the cross in that the believer's elder brother came among his spiritually-handicapped siblings and at great cost saved them from eternal ruin.

Also, the Bible teaches that He is the believers' intercessor and *He prays for them*. Beyond worship and gratitude for the prophetic and redemptive work of Christ Jesus, believers also offer up gratitude to the Lord Jesus as they are reminded according



to the text in Hebrews 7:25, “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:16 says that his priesthood is in the likeness of Melchizedek, meaning he possesses an indestructible life. The implication is that the only possibility that he will fail in his intercession of his own is if he ceases to be. Also, his being in the likeness of Melchizedek means that he holds the dual office that no priest in the Old Testament possessed. The word Melchizedek, according to Hebrews 7:2, is the transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning, “King of Righteousness.” Jesus priesthood is like that of no other Aaronic priest in that He was both Priest and King. This one who prays for believers without end is also the sovereign King in who possesses all authority in heaven and earth. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus tells Peter that the devil has “begged”<sup>63</sup> permission of God to sift Peter like wheat. However, Jesus comforts Peter with the words that He has prayed for him. The text in Luke seems to indicate that the sifting will be allowed, yet Peter will not be lost. This circumstance was similar to the book of Job where God “allowed” the devil to touch Job, yet even in this the devil was given parameters that the devil himself had not the power to cross. William Gurnall writes of Satan, “But he is under command; he stands like a dog by the table, while the saints sit at this sweet feast of comfort, but dares not to disturb their cheer; for the Master’s eye is on him.”<sup>64</sup> His power to pray for His own is secured in his unending life and in his kingly authority. Reflecting in devotion on the great work of the believer’s elder brother drives a deep sense of worship and adoration for the Son, as reflected in Lewis’ aforementioned quote.

Joe Thorn writes, “If you neglect the Spirit, you will miss the Son, and if your love for God the Spirit does not heighten your dependence on Jesus, then it is not the

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 1517.

<sup>64</sup> William Gurnall, “The Christian in Complete Armour,” accessed January 27, 2018, <http://www.ccel.org/g/gurnall/armour/gurnal05a.htm>.

Spirit at work in you. It is something else.”<sup>65</sup> While multiple volumes have been written regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, arguably His greatest work is the work of regeneration. This work of regeneration, according to Titus 3:5, was “not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” This work of regeneration is probably best articulated in John 3 when Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and Jesus tells him that he must be born again. Allison rightly affirms, “This new birth comes about through the Holy Spirit’s personal agency and the instrumentality of the word of God”<sup>66</sup> First Peter 1:23 states, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” Jesus illustrates the Spirit’s power in the new birth as similar to the wind moving. As the wind can animate leaves, so the Spirit animates hearts born dead in the trespass of sin.

Another point of similarity that Jesus points to in the work of the Spirit to regenerate is the sovereign prerogative of the Spirit. He said in John 3:8 that “the wind blows where it wishes.” Also, in the conversation with Nicodemus it is important to understand that the Greek word translated “born again” actually means “from above.”<sup>67</sup> The text drives the idea that this work does not come from anything or anyone below, but from God alone above. This birth is a supernatural work that comes from above, accomplished by the Holy Spirit. A. W. Pink celebrates the person of the Spirit: “The Lord God designed that all the Persons in the blessed Trinity should be honored in the making holy of His people, so that each of them might be distinctively praised by us.”<sup>68</sup> Pink goes on to say, “God the Spirit makes good the Father’s decree and imparts to them

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<sup>65</sup> Joe Thorn, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 126, 127.

<sup>66</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 475.

<sup>67</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 189.

<sup>68</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification* (Memphis, TN: Bottom of the Hill, 2011), 92.

what the work of Christ procured for them: the Spirit is actual Securer of sanctification, applying it to their persons. Thus, the believer has abundant cause to adore and glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>69</sup> Some might argue that Scripture should steer one away from worshipping the particular person of the Holy Spirit, but Puritan John Owen strongly disagrees:

The person of the Holy Ghost, revealing itself in these operations and effects, is the peculiar object of our worship. Therefore, when he ought to be peculiarly honored, and is not, he is peculiarly sinned against. Ananias is said to lie to the Holy Ghost—not to God (Acts 5:3); which being taken essentially, would denote the whole Trinity, but peculiarly to the Holy Ghost.<sup>70</sup>

### Conclusion

There is never a fear of any type of “Tritheism” when believers consider in devotion and worship the glory of each person of the Trinity. More likely what Gregory of Nazianzus described in summation of the Trinity is apt to happen: “No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one.”<sup>71</sup> First John 4:19 declares, “We love, because He first loved us.” Marcus Rainsford poignantly expresses the first part of John’s sentiment with these words, “The Father’s love gave Christ to them, Christ’s love gave Himself for them, and the Holy Ghost’s love reveals and applies to them the salvation of God.”<sup>72</sup> The nature of God is Trinitarian, the nature of the gospel is Trinitarian, and the nature of the believer’s devotion and worship should also be Trinitarian.

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<sup>69</sup> Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 92.

<sup>70</sup> John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 421.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Holy Baptism, Oration 40.41*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts et al., 2nd series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 375.

<sup>72</sup> Marcus Rainsford, *The Lord’s Prayer for Believers: Thoughts on St. John 17, the Lord’s Prayer for Believers throughout All Time*, 5th ed. (London: Thynne, 1904), 159.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

This chapter focuses on the methodology used for teaching orthodox Trinitarianism to the leadership of First Baptist Church Cobden, Illinois. The project included a pre- and post-test for evaluating knowledge of orthodox Trinitarianism both before and after implementation,<sup>1</sup> the development of a curriculum for teaching orthodox Trinitarianism that was evaluated by an expert panel,<sup>2</sup> and the enlistment of twelve participants that serve in leadership capacity at FBC. A syllabus was developed for nine, two-hour classes over a period of nine weeks. Each participant was given a packet with a pre-test/agreement to participate form, a syllabus, and a copy of Michael Reeves' *Delighting in the Trinity*. The syllabus included reading a chapter of Reeves' work before each class to be discussed along with the prepared curriculum. The last class session included a ten-minute presentation on Trinitarian theology by each participant.

#### **Preparation**

##### **Project Participants**

The 12 participants consisted of current leaders in several capacities at First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois. These leaders varied from youth worship leaders to teachers, elders, and deacons. The age demographics of the participants included 3 participants ages 13-16, 2 participants ages 33-36, 7 participants ages 50-72. Out of 30 prospective candidates for the project, these 12 were able and willing to commit to the project and its requirements. The 12 participants were given a packet that included a pre-

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1.

test, a class syllabus, a copy of Michael Reeves' *Delighting in the Trinity*, and chapters 2 and 3 of this project.

### **Expert Panel Review**

The expert panel review consisted of two local pastors and one Associational Missions director. Each participant has a Master of Divinity degree from a Southern Baptist seminary. Their task was to evaluate the curriculum according to its (1) biblical faithfulness, ensuring that the content of this curriculum is hermeneutically sound and that all Scripture is properly interpreted and explained; (2) scope, that the content of the curriculum covers the breadth of historic development of Trinitarian theology through the fifth century; (3) methodology, that the teaching methods are designed to promote a dialogical approach for learner discovery; and (4) practicality, that the curriculum include an opportunity for each participant to articulate Trinitarian doctrine in a peer setting.

The consensus of the panel was that the curriculum met all the objectives stated by the evaluation rubric they were given.<sup>3</sup> One suggestion made by the panel was to include more time for discussion among the participants in the class. The panel also agreed that some terms in the curriculum needed more lengthy explanation and definition. These changes were made and proved to be helpful. After interaction with the panel and slight changes made to the curriculum, we were all in hearty approval to move forward in teaching the curriculum.

## **Implementation of the Nine-Week Course**

### **Pre-Test**

Each participant was given a pre-test and survey questions. Completion of the survey and pre-test served as the basis for participation in the project. The survey began with demographic questions that asked age, the length of time as a Christian, church

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 1.

background, and average time spent weekly in corporate and private devotion and discipleship, then continued with twenty statements surrounding Trinitarian theology. These statements focused on biblical texts. For example, statement 10, “Matthew 28:19 is a text that points to the Triune nature of God.” Three statements focused on historical events surrounding Trinitarian theology. For example, statement 17, “A central issue of the Nicene Council related to the person of Jesus.” Other statements, such as 8, “To reject the doctrine of the Trinity is to ruin the doctrine of the atonement,” revealed why the doctrine of the Trinity matters and is even crucial in Christianity.

### **Pre-Class Reading**

I asked the participants to read *Delighting in the Trinity* and to be prepared to discuss the reading in the beginning of each class. The reading and discussion were scheduled for each week throughout the course as outlined in the syllabus. I chose Reeves’ work for three reasons. First, it is easy to understand and brief. Second, the work was devotional and included historical biographies associated with the Trinitarian conversation that were beyond the length allowed in chapter 3 of this project. Finally, I wanted to introduce the participants to trusted voices in contemporary evangelicalism, like Reeves.

The class time consisted of nine, two-hour classes that met every Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. The class during that period worked through Reeves’ book and chapters 2 and 3 of the project. Each class opened in Trinitarian specific prayer, including address to Father, Son, and Spirit. Each class allowed time for limited interaction, including questions and comments. Each class covered all the material designated per that class according to the syllabus.

### **Class 1**

The first three classes addressed the biblical mechanics of Trinitarian theology from eight selected texts beginning in the Old Testament and continuing with the new.

Class 1 looked closely at Genesis 1:26, and Psalm 110. However, at the start of each class, a review of Reeves' book served as an introduction. Reeves' work has at its core the idea of devotional delight in the Triune God of heaven and earth. While chapter 3 of this project addresses these devotional truths, Reeves' work kept the devotional reality a part of every class meeting. Reeves' statement in his introduction, "The truth is that God is love because God is a Trinity,"<sup>4</sup> was a stirring reality that made the entire course a cherished pursuit.

Before exegeting the Old Testament texts, a few concessions were made. First, the class would be defending a doctrine not specifically named in the Bible, and also the class would be defending a doctrine not particularly defined in the Bible. Beyond these two concessions was the overwhelming reality that in that same Bible God has revealed himself systematically as one God in three persons. I briefly addressed the hermeneutical necessity of harmonizing texts like Deuteronomy 6, where God is one and then other passages that clearly speak of the divinity of the Father, the divinity of the Son, and the divinity of the Spirit. I then coined a term called "biblical mechanics," that when these aforementioned texts are harmonized, they develop the orthodox definition of Trinitarianism. I also labored to clarify the biblical and theological definition of personhood, using Boethius' definition. Last, before looking at Genesis 1:26, I gave the orthodox definition of Trinitarianism, which states, "That in the one being of God there exists the three persons of Father, Son and Spirit who are co-equal, co-eternal and simultaneously distinct."

Next, I began looking at Genesis 1:26, and specifically at the plural pronouns "us" and "our," comparing them with the singular pronouns "he" and "his" in verse 27. I considered the two verses held in tandem revealing a sense of unity and plurality in the being of God. The case was made for the plural pronouns of verse 26, reflecting a divine

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2012), 9.

dialogue in the Godhead. The other competing views were addressed, and their weaknesses treated. Here the biblical mechanics of unity and distinction and biblical personality were seen by the class in the divine dialogue as well as co-equality seen in the unified use of *Elohim*.

Psalm 110 was also addressed as one of the Old Testament texts that clearly reiterates the biblical mechanics of Trinitarianism found in the Old Testament. In this most quoted Old Testament passage found in the New Testament the class was able to answer “what” and “who” God is as he has revealed himself in his Word. Students began to understand the significance of this text as it is quoted by Jesus in Luke’s gospel. Students realized that while Jesus was speaking to his detractors, at the same time he was pinning them in a theological corner by asking how David’s descendant could be both his physical son and sovereign Lord. Unpacking the text and seeing Jesus’ use of Psalm 110 made clear for the students the fact that the incarnate person of Christ possessing two natures are the mechanics of Trinitarianism seen in the co-equality of Father and Son and the simultaneously distinct, personal relationship of Father and Son. Class 1 was helpful in developing the ability to spot the mechanics of Trinitarianism found in the Scriptures consistent with the definition of orthodox Trinitarianism.

## **Class 2**

Class 2 began with an opening prayer that focused on praying to the Father in the name of the Son and in the power of the Spirit. Next, I reviewed the previous class briefly to have our minds re-oriented to the flow of Trinitarian thought from the Old Testament to the New Testament. I then reviewed chapter 1 of Reeves’ book and considered the theological reality found in John 17:24 that before the creation of the world the Father was loving the Son.<sup>5</sup> This truth brought to bear by Reeves reminded the class of the personal intimacy of Father and Son, which has been an eternal intimacy. The

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<sup>5</sup> Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 21.



rest of the class time was spent looking at the baptism narrative of Jesus in Matthew 3, the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28 and John 1:1.

The baptism narrative of Jesus clearly displayed for the class the simultaneous distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit. The students commented on the narrative speaking to the distinct identity of Jesus as the Person of the Son, while assuming the person of the Father. Some commented that they never thought about the text driving the theological necessity of Trinitarianism. In this text I focused on the relationship of persons found in the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit. The voice of the Father affirms his relationship with his Son in the very physical presence of his Son. As I continued to emphasize the mechanics of Trinitarianism from the text, the class saw the relationship of persons and the simultaneous distinction of those same persons.

In Matthew 28:19 the class was alerted to a text that serves as a bookend text combined with Matthew 3 and Jesus' baptism. The students began to think about these two texts, one at the end and one toward the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, clearly highlighting God's Triune nature. I spent time stressing the idea that the word "name" in this verse speaks to the idea of authority. It became evident to the class this authority is co-equal amid all three persons of the Trinity. Students were excited to be armed with biblical and theological foundations, knowing that when some unitarians deny the equality of Jesus with the Father, they are wrong and also, when Modalists deny the unity and distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit, they also are wrong. The class was trained to understand that every cultic group that swerves from the orthodox position of the Triune reality of God does it at the rejection of the co-equality and simultaneous distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit of Matthew 28:19.

Another important truth I led the class to consider was the application of the persons in the Christian rite of baptism. The students evaluated the Oneness Pentecostal claim that in the book of Acts the early church only baptized in Jesus' name. This point

was relevant especially to two participants that came out of a Oneness background and still have family members in the Oneness movement.

The class rehearsed numerous times the three points undermining the Oneness Pentecostal claim. First, the class saw the reality that in the Acts accounts of believers being baptized in Jesus' name, four separate commands use three different word combinations. The students saw that these combinations represent a lack of consistency that any baptismal rite recitation would possess. Students understood that the authority of Jesus' name would ultimately be an authority that he would command in Matthew 28 to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Students were also excited even to learn that the record of the early church's practice of baptism as recorded in the *Didache* explicitly mentions the formula found in Matthew 28 as the formula recited during the ordinance. Matthew 28 was a significant text instructing the class on the glory of God in Trinity.

The last text addressed in class 2 was John 1:1. Here I taught the personal distinction of the Word with God along with the ontological reality of the Word as God. The class was led to see these two truths clearly articulated in John's gospel with specificity of language as a solid component of biblical Trinitarianism. I continued to compare these biblical mechanics with the definition of orthodox Trinitarianism. I taught the class to always compare biblical text with the orthodox definition of Trinitarianism eliminating the accusation that it is a made-up doctrine foisted on the church in the fourth century.

### **Class 3**

Class 3 began with an opening prayer that was specifically Trinitarian in nature. Next, was a brief time of review for any questions that pertained to class 2. There were no questions, but there were comments expressing greater clarity in the biblical mechanics of Trinitarianism from the texts of the second class. Some comments expressed a level of great excitement to see that clarity. Before moving on to the biblical passages of Acts

5:1-6, 2 Corinthians 13:14, I reviewed chapter 2 of Reeves' book and discussed the idea that even creation is the overflow of God's Triune love. The point in Reeves' work that caught the most attention was his reflection on Colossians 1:15-16; in particular, the apostle Paul saying that "all things were created through Him and for Him" stood out as the driving force to see that creation is the gift of the Father to and for His only begotten Son.

I explained to the class that while many of the texts considered thus far have dealt specifically with the Trinitarian relationship of Father and Son, Acts 5:1-6 deals expressly with the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The class saw two specific Trinitarian realities affirmed here of the Spirit. The first reality reflected on was the reality of the Holy Spirit's deity. Many commented on how explicit a reference this text is to that fact. Reading in Acts 5:3, Peter tells Ananias that he has lied to the Holy Spirit. In verse 4, Peter tells Ananias that he has not lied to men but to God. Students observed embedded in this text the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit separate from the Father and the Son. Students articulated that the personhood of the Holy Spirit is evident in the fact that Ananias and his wife both lie to Him. At this point in the curriculum the class was able to see that lying can be a relational experience that one person perpetrates on another and this is what the persons of Ananias and Sapphira did to the person of the Holy Spirit. So again, in this text I took the biblical mechanics of Trinitarianism, and went back to the orthodox definition of the Trinity, and saw the agreement of Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Next, I turned to the text of 2 Corinthians 13:14. I taught the distinction of each person in the godhead in this benediction Paul gives to the church at Corinth, as each of the three persons of the godhead is named. Again, I paralleled this text with the orthodox definition of Trinitarianism to see that the theological mechanic of simultaneous distinction among the persons was clearly established. However, another significant component of Trinitarianism was addressed from this text and that is the economy of the Trinity in

salvation. The idea of economy was explained as the work that each distinct person in the godhead contributes in the work of redemption. This was a major point of encouragement as each participant expressed wonder and awe of the significance and necessity of the Trinity in redemption. The class began to see the economic work according to this text as the grace of Christ in giving His life, the love of the Father in sending His Son, and the regenerating and abiding presence of the Spirit indwelling the life of the believer.

#### **Class 4**

Class 4 began with an opening prayer by a member of the class intentionally addressing all three persons in the godhead. Next, I briefly reviewed class 3 and the responses of the participants centered around the economic work of the Trinity in salvation and the encouragement received from that theological reality. Turning next to Reeves' work in chapter 3, I considered the Father's sending the Son in salvation as the deepest expression of God's love for sinners. The class understood the reciprocation of love among the persons in the godhead spills over into his creation and especially sinful humanity in need of salvation. Students also saw the ontology of God being love, only works in a Trinitarian framework and the economy of salvation only works in a Trinitarian framework.

Class 4 concluded with a look at 1 Peter 1:2. Specifically in this text I looked again at a Trinitarian text depicting the need for each distinct person in the godhead accomplishing the work of redemption. One particular mention made by a participant in the class was that the idea of economic Trinitarianism was a repetitive theme in the New Testament. I explored the idea of the foreknowledge of the Father in the election of His people. Foreknowing was defined as more than just a prescience but an intimate love. The class concluded that this biblical truth, while serving to further fortify the economic work of the Father loving His own even in eternity past and setting salvations plan in motion, also linked many of the ideas from Reeves' work. Students saw that the overflow of God's relational love with the other persons of the Trinity becomes the basis for his

love for sinners in salvation. Beyond the Father's foreknowledge in Peter's text I also led students to see the Spirit's sanctification. The Spirit's sanctification is not only a progressive holiness but also a setting apart through regeneration where the foreknown of God are quickened to salvation. The class was led to also see that this Trinitarian text includes the fact that the elect are sprinkled by the blood of Christ unto the obedience of covenantal faith. In unison the class was able to confess that believers are loved by the Father, set apart by the Spirit, and brought into the new covenant by the blood of Christ. The class also reflected on the fact that, from the Gospels to the Pauline and Petrine Epistles, the whole New Testament is chocked full of an explicit Trinitarian commitment that serves to bring multiplied grace and comfort to God's persecuted people.

### **Class 5**

Class 5 began with an intentional prayer reflecting each person of the Trinity. The class continued with a review of the former week's lesson. Again, much of the feedback resonated with the repetitive theology of the necessity of Trinitarianism in the economic work of salvation. Next, the class reviewed Reeves' book, specifically chapter 4, where Reeves reminds believers that the Father has given the Spirit where by they are awakened to life and to love of the Father and the Son. Through the giving of the Spirit God has loved and enabled the church with the joyful all satisfying capacity to love God and even neighbor. Reeves' affirmation of the economic work of the Spirit in the believer's life to enable love and affection articulated a strong devotional dimension that each participant in the class appreciated.

From the biblical mechanics of Trinitarianism, class 5 moved on toward a historical look at the doctrine of the Trinity in the church. The class began with Trinitarian prayer and then reviewed the session prior. In the review many were excited that they were able to see the economic work of the Trinity as an apologetic for the necessity of the Trinity. There seemed to be building excitement from week to week as biblical Trinitarianism and its tie to redemption became clearer.

Next, I led the class to see that the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity articulated prior to the fourth century in church history is that it undermines the claims of unitarians that the Trinity was a fourth century invention and not a biblical and historical reality. Beginning with the works Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 50-117), all the way through Tertullian (ca. 160-225), I looked at specific historical references to Trinitarian theology from these early Fathers.

Next, I looked at the people, events, and outcomes related to the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, including the major players involved leading up to the first ecumenical council of the church. Both ecclesiastically and politically God providentially moved in his church to bring an orthodox consensus within His church in rightly defining his being.

One of the components of this council that I stressed to the class was the way God used different heretical claims upon the Scripture to propel the church into defining orthodoxy in a creedal and confessional way. Modalistic Monarchianism and Arianism were two heresies pressing in on the early church that demanded a biblical rebuttal. The class became very fluent in recognizing that one heresy denied the simultaneous distinction of the persons of Father, Son, and Spirit, and the other denied the co-equality of the persons of Father, Son, and Spirit. The council landing on the Nicene statement that affirmed the “One God” (monotheism), and the “Lord Jesus Christ . . . essence of the Father . . . very God of very God,” was assessed by the students as a biblical necessity. Students were enlightened to see the theological specificity needed in semantics and syntax exemplified in words like *homoousian* and *homoiousian* when determining right theology. I also stressed to the class that beyond the theology articulated in regard to Trinitarianism was the church’s need to be fluent with her history, especially when battling heresy. Participants pondered the reality that modern day heresies in many ways are only repackaged ancient heresies and the means used to defend the faith then do not need to be reinvented today. Another takeaway beyond the careful articulation of Trinitarian theology was the need to adopt creedal and confessional statements that clarify systematic truths found in Scripture.

## **Class 6**

Class 6 began with prayer intentionally including all persons of the Trinity. Second, I reviewed class 5 and the majority of reflection centered on the providence of God using heresy to cause the church to hammer out its theological commitments in confessional form. Next, the class reviewed chapter 5 in Reeves' book. Reeves defended the necessity of seeing God as specifically Triune and therefore unique among other gods. He emphasizes that when the church sets this distinction aside as too philosophical or academic the door is flung wide open to the criticism that God is arbitrarily hostile and not just an irrelevant concept but an evil one. God's eternal Triune being in eternal loving relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit guarantees His love to His creation.

Continuing down the road of the historical affirmation of Trinitarianism in the early church I turned attention to the second ecumenical council at Constantinople in AD 381. Again, I looked at the people, places, and politics surrounding this reaffirmation and clarification of Trinitarianism ratified at Nicaea some 56 years earlier. Noted among the contributors explored were the Cappadocian Fathers and the Roman Emperor, Theodosius. The sum of the study taught the ultimate conquest of Trinitarian orthodoxy that had been defended by Athanasius in the years following Nicaea. I also led the class to see how Constantinople gave more exhaustive expression to the person of the Holy Spirit, co-equal to Father and Son.

Finally, in class 6 I looked at the late fourth-and early-fifth-century church father, Augustine. Specifically, I introduced the class to his fifteen book work, *De Trinitate*. I focused on Augustine and his contributions from the hermeneutic of Bible harmonization to the double procession of the Spirit from both Father and Son and recognized his work to be somewhat of a capstone to Trinitarian theology articulated in the first 500 years of church history.

## Class 7

Class 7 began with prayer and a brief review of session 6. We reviewed some of the people, places, and issues surrounding Constantinople in 381 and the evolving credal form defining Trinitarianism. Next, I reviewed the conclusion to Reeves' book. Reeves' conclusion summarizes the whole of his work in showing that the nature of God according to his being in his persons is one that enables intimacy, fellowship, and reciprocating love. Reeves wrote of Athanasius: "Athanasius had a God of love, a kind Father who draws us to share his eternal love and fellowship"<sup>6</sup> Reeves also reminded that people become what they worship and, like Arius, to embrace a cold, loveless, and inward-focused god is to become the same.

Finally, in session 7 I began to focus on some devotional realities peculiar to Trinitarian worship. While many of these devotional realities are already alluded to in the exegesis portion of this project, I led the class to think more systematically of what it is to be in fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This session focused on the Father and the Son.

While thinking devotionally about each person of the Trinity I turned their thoughts to the Father. The class agreed that, for the most part, believers have misunderstood the Father to be wrathful and unforgiving while Jesus seeks to coerce him into being merciful. However, the biblical reality is that the Father foreloved the church even in eternity past to sending both the Son and the Spirit for her adoption unto himself. Therefore, when the Scriptures teach believers to call out to him, *Abba*, and Father, it is because He has always been a Father and has always been fatherly. The class continued to agree that a non-Trinitarian understanding of God will demand one to dismiss the notion of God's fatherly mercy because it will destroy the fact that he is an eternal Father. Reflecting on the fact that believers have a Father that has loved them and will continue

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<sup>6</sup> Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 129.



to love them as a Father because he has always been and will never not be their Father drives a warmth of heart and celebration of soul.

Last, class 7 looked at the devotional realities of embracing the second person of the Trinity. The class thought not only about the reality of Christ being the eternally begotten Son of the Father but, in accordance with Hebrews 2, he is at the same time the elder brother of the church.

The class looked specifically in John 5:26 at Jesus statement, “For just as the Father has life in himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.” D. A. Carson explains, “The impartation of life-in-himself to the Son must be an act belonging to eternity, of a piece with the eternal Father/Son relationship, which is itself of a piece with the relationship between Word and God, a relationship that existed ‘in the beginning.’”<sup>7</sup> The essence of eternal deity possessed by the Son is an essence eternally generated by the Father.

The elder brotherhood of Christ to the church provoked a storm of conversation about what it means to be a faithful brother. Some in the class even reflected on the faithfulness of older biological brothers in their immediate family with warmth. However, the joyful theme embraced by the students was that this “Brother’s” love is demonstrated in that he would stand in for all his siblings in life and death; in life keeping the law they could not have and in dying the death they should have. Conversation even harkened back to the Genesis account where Cain raised the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper.” This question was raised in sinful sarcasm, but no doubt a question revealing the deep darkness of Cain’s depraved heart. So, where Cain answered the question, no! in the murder and disregard of his brother, Jesus answered the question, yes! in the salvation and love of his brethren. The class was truly stirred in thinking

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 257.

deeply about God's only begotten Son and the faithful elder brother, Jesus, the second person of the Triune God.

### **Class 8**

Class 8 began with Trinitarian prayer and continued with a brief review of chapter 7. The reviews revealed the thoughts that stuck with the students from the week prior. The consensus of the class was that there is great affirmation and assurance in the life of the believer as he worships God according to the distinct work of each person in the Trinity. This review transitioned to the next section of class 8 describing the devotional realities of life in the Spirit where I focused on the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration. I led the class to look specifically at texts like Titus 3:5 and Jesus conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. The class agreed with Gregg Allison's assessment that "this new birth comes about through the Holy Spirit's personal agency and the instrumentality of the word of God"<sup>8</sup> The class also agreed with Puritan John Owen, who wrote, "The person of the Holy Ghost, revealing itself in these operations and effects, is the peculiar object of our worship. Therefore, when he ought to be peculiarly honored and is not, he is peculiarly sinned against"<sup>9</sup> While the scope of the project only allowed for space on the regenerating work of the Spirit, the class took time to emphasize other aspects of the Spirit's work in believers' lives. Reflecting at length on the Spirit of God and the believer's life in him stirred a sense of richness in devotion that according to the class had never been deeply considered.

Class 8 ended with assigning a ten-minute essay on the Trinity to be written and read the following class by each student.

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<sup>8</sup> Greg Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 475.

<sup>9</sup> John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 421.

## **Class 9**

Class 9 was rich, rewarding, and possibly the most fulfilling part of the entire project. Each presenter gave a cogent and articulate defense of Trinitarianism from one or more distinct aspects covered in the curriculum. I took notes and responded with encouragement to each presenter after all papers had been read.

## **Post-Test**

Eight weeks after the class was completed, a post-test was administered that was an exact copy of the pre-test.<sup>10</sup> The length of time between the conclusion of the class and the administration of the post-test was purposed to see how much was retained after the class. The class scores on the post-test indicated a significant increase in knowledge.

All the goals were met in the implementation of the nine-week course. The course was also on schedule without delays and faithful to the stated calendar. After the course, a process of evaluation followed.

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix 2.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

This final chapter analyzes, evaluates, and reflects on the project of teaching Trinitarianism to believers at First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois. This chapter begins by analyzing the research data gleaned and evaluating the project goals. Next, an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the project are assessed, along with theological and personal reflections regarding the fruitfulness of the project. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overall assessment of this Doctor of Ministry experience.

#### **Evaluation of Research Data**

Two means were used to assess the overall success of the project. A pre-test and a post-test evaluation were used to measure the quantitative effects of the project,<sup>1</sup> and a post-project essay assignment was read in class to measure the qualitative effects of the project. The essay assignment for each participant was assessed through an oral evaluation rubric.<sup>2</sup>

The quantitative results were measured using a twenty-statement pre-test, based on a six-point Likert scale. This pre-test measured the initial understanding of each participant regarding Trinitarian theology prior to the project. The same test was administered at the conclusion of teaching the participants the Trinitarian theology curriculum. Each question was graded from a “1” for “strongly disagree” to “6” for “strongly agree.”

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3.

The quantitative results were positive and signaled an increase in orthodox Trinitarian understanding and an overall success of the project. Using a *t*-test with a *t*-value of 3.08 and a *p*-value less than 0.05 determined the statistical significance of the test. The data suggested that the variance was reduced by 2/3 and the average significantly increased as well. Therefore, the increase in knowledge in the categories of biblical, historical, and devotional Trinitarianism all increased.

An example of the increase in knowledge of historical Trinitarianism can be seen in statement 15. Statement 15, “A heretic of the third century that argued the unorthodox view of modalism was Sabellius,” averaged a 3.25 in the pre-test but after the class was taught the post-test average increased to a 6. The general response went from a somewhat disagree to an accurate strongly agree with the standard deviation from pre-test to post-test moving from a 1.5 to a 0.4.

The qualitative portion of assessment was seen in the essays read at the end of the project. A balanced and accurate understanding of orthodox Trinitarianism was demonstrated through each presentation. The categories of biblical faithfulness, overall scope of content (theological, historical, and devotional), and presentation of the essay were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 meaning an insufficient understanding and 4 being an exemplary understanding.<sup>3</sup> For biblical faithfulness, the overall average assessment was 3.8 with the lowest score being 3. For scope of the presentation, a class average of 3.36 was attained with the lowest score of a 3. For presentation, the class average was 3.27 with the lowest score being a 3. One theme that seemed to echo in each paper was the significance of understanding the very personal nature of God coupled with necessity of Trinitarianism for an accurate doctrine of redemption. These essays were graded by the instructor.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3.

## Evaluation of Project Goals

Five goals drove this project: (1) enlist a minimum of eight adult leaders to participate in the project; (2) assess the participants' knowledge regarding the theological, historical, and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine; (3) develop an eight week curriculum that focused on the theological, historical, and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine; (4) increase the participants knowledge regarding the theological, historical, and devotional realities of Trinitarian theology by teaching the created curriculum; and (5) asses the development of project participants understanding and spiritual formation through their class participation and their oral presentations.

The first goal was accomplished through reaching out to faithful men and women at First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois, and recruiting their participation in the project. Each individual was given a syllabus that included a schedule of the class meetings and the subject content along with all requirements for successfully participating in the class. Each individual's agreement to participate was confirmed by completing a project pre-test that assessed their knowledge and was turned in a week in advance of the scheduled start date for the class.<sup>4</sup>

The second goal of the project was accomplished by developing a comprehensive pre-test that measured the class participants' knowledge of the theological, historical, and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine. This pre-test also served as the post-test to measure the increase of each participant's knowledge. The pre-test/post-test included twenty statements that allowed a measured response of either strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree. Statements ranged from interpretations of Trinitarian texts, statements concerning church councils and historical figures in the development of Trinitarian theology, and statements of devotional significance related to Trinitarian theology. This goal was realized when the pre-test/post-test was administered to the class participants and then assessed through grading.

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 2.

The third goal of this project was accomplished when an eight-week curriculum was developed that affirmed theological, historical, and devotional realities surrounding Trinitarian theology. The curriculum was developed and then assessed by a panel of experts, including three pastors that each possessed accredited Master of Divinity degrees from evangelical seminaries. Each pastor reviewed the curriculum and assessed it on the evaluation rubric provided for them.<sup>5</sup> The curriculum scored a 95 percent approval rating from the expert panel defining the curriculum to be within the 90 percent approval need for use, according to the stated goals for the curriculum.

The fourth goal to increase the participants knowledge in Trinitarian theology was accomplished by teaching the project participants the approved curriculum and assigning a textbook on Trinitarian theology to be reviewed in each class session. The success in this goal can be seen in the pre-test/post-test comparison chart.<sup>6</sup>

The fifth goal to assess the students' understanding and spiritual formation was accomplished through each student's class participation and each student's completion of an essay project on class gleanings, which was written and read aloud to the class. This assessment was graded with a rubric for evaluation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Strengths of the Project**

Overall, the project was rewarding and accomplished all its goals while affirming its rationale. I was encouraged at the turnout and level of commitment from each participant. While the goal for participation was that at least eight adult leaders participated, three youth joined in as well. The class touched nearly every demographic of our fellowship. Looking at the strengths of the project must begin with the subject of the project itself. No doctrines rate in more importance than that of Trinitarian theology.

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 5.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 3.

Therefore, a great strength of the project was the subject matter itself. Learning about and being able to defend the very being of God and persons in the godhead as taught in the Bible have life and world changing implications. The subject itself moved me and the class to commit ourselves to the most diligent effort possible to teach and learn.

Another strength of the project was rooted in a comprehensive approach to understanding Trinitarianism. The three branches of study focused on sound biblical exegesis, a historical understanding, and the devotional joys of rightly understood Trinitarianism. While some participants knew some aspects of Trinitarianism, none possessed a comprehensive understanding across all three branches. This comprehensive approach created a sense of humble confidence in this doctrine that has been faithfully defended by the church throughout its history.

Another strength of the project was introducing, through the historical component, each participant to faithful churchmen, especially prior to the fifth century. Looking at Tertullian, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Augustine gave a sense of connectedness to the class and the church at large throughout history. The continuity of the church throughout every age proved to be an “aha” moment for each participant. Not only did each class member look back to the history of faithful men and women in the stream of Trinitarian conversation, but we also listened to contemporary voices celebrate the Triune God and His glory among His people. One voice was that of Michael Reeves. Reeves’ *Delighting in the Trinity* was excellent for its content, but it was also important because it introduced to participants to a faithful evangelical author. Believers seeing themselves in community across the globe and across the ages lends to the strength and encouragement they have as kingdom heirs together.

Another important strength of the project was the participation component. Each participant carefully writing out and articulating the overall understanding of Trinitarian theology and history and then commenting on its devotional significance proved rewarding to both the participants and me. Their ability to understand



Trinitarianism biblically and organize and articulate their thoughts in a written apologetic served as a great tool of encouragement to each student and also a great source of encouragement to me. The essays, even more than the post-test, affirmed the grip that each student had on Trinitarianism.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Probably the greatest weakness of the project was the limited time to go through the curriculum. Although two hours were set aside for each of the nine sessions, the class still seemed to be rushed to get through all the curriculum. The first eight sessions were used to teach the curriculum, including a brief review of each weekly reading from *Delighting in the Trinity*. While the class got through all that the syllabus outlined, it felt like we were in a race each class. This limited the discussion per class and left the less vocal participants with possible unanswered questions or clarifications. While I made myself available after each class, the classes were scheduled to coincide with other subsequent ministries offered that evening in the church. When I teach this project to another class in the future, I will add some additional days to enable a less rushed teaching environment. Also, scheduling the class when subsequent church ministries are not scheduled for that same evening will probably aide in people asking me questions that they might not ask during class in front of other students.

Looking back at the implementation of the project, it could have been more effective if I had incorporated a PowerPoint presentation. A PowerPoint presentation could have been helpful because of the spelling of words and definitions associated with Trinitarian doctrine. While each student had the curriculum in hard copy, a visual could have helped to highlight some of the language that was important to the conversion and at the same time more difficult. In the future I will build a PowerPoint presentation to teach the class that may well include pictures of geographical places and people important in the historical development of Trinitarian theology.

While self-imposed time constraints have already been bemoaned, one of the fallouts from a lack of time was the inability to schedule time for each student to evaluate one another's essays on Trinitarian doctrine. I gave positive feedback and commendation on each presentation, but the class was not given a formal task in evaluating one another. Certainly, that could have not only been informing but even rewarding to hear each other's feedback. Each presentation was really good and as stated, the essays may have been the most rewarding experience in the entire project.

Another weakness that became evident after everyone commented on how much they enjoyed reading Reeves' book was that I had not included a bibliography of books on the Trinity written at a lay level. I have since gone back and built a lay-man's bibliography for Trinitarian theology that includes a little book by R. C. Sproul on the Trinity, and James White's book, *The Forgotten Trinity*. Many points that I made in the project curriculum were echoed and expanded by Reeves. Having the church read books that are faithful to sound doctrine creates a support for one's own preaching and teaching ministry. When people are exposed to sound doctrine in their local church pulpit and then hear trusted voices affirm that same doctrine it builds credibility for that local ministry. Not only can other authors faithful to the text support one's local church ministry but many times published authors have a level of giftedness that can bring even greater clarity than one's own ministry. If everyone is concerned with only God being glorified as his people are disciplined, then the employment of a resource that exceeds one's own giftedness will never be a problem.

Using the Likert scale instead of a binary yes or no response on the pre-test and the post-test seemed to be confusing. In further implementations of the project a simple yes or no to questions on these tests will be applied.

A final weakness exposed in reflecting on the project was the failure to implement an assessment tool for the class to be filled out by the students. I did myself a disservice by not hearing the feedback of the class more specifically. The disservice was

twofold at least. First, I failed to hear from them what could have been done better, and second, I failed to experience the encouragement of what was done well. Also, in the building of a rubric for assessment, the goals of the class could have been even more focused. The next time the class is taught, this assessment and a rubric for evaluation will be included.

### **Theological Reflections**

After twenty-five years in ministry, equipped with an undergraduate degree in theology and an Master of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, it was shocking and refreshing to experience the new insights this project afforded me in regard to Trinitarian theology. Certainly, many theological components were made clearer, but others were discovered for the first time. Preparing chapters 2 and 3 enabled a more robust understanding of the Trinity in my own life and ministry.

Possibly the greatest insight was found in the Old Testament where the idea of Trinitarianism is most contested. Looking at the first chapter of the Bible through the lens of biblical theology, and God revealing himself progressively, it becomes clear that there is something plural in the being of God. Conceding that the clear doctrine of Trinitarianism cannot be exegeted from this passage the text does affirm that the plural nouns and pronouns used as referents to God are consistent entirely with the further and progressive revelation of full blown Trinitarianism. Kenneth Mathews and others forcefully dismiss objections raised by commentators who deny this revelation of plurality in the being of God for some other explanation. Hearing these objections dismissed handily was something I had never encountered, and it stands now in my mind as further confirmation of the continuity of God's revelation from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

From Genesis to Psalms, the progressive reality of God's revelation continues as one moves from the simple idea of unity in plurality to the more specific reality of three persons within the one being of God. Psalm 110 sees the Eternal Father in redemptive conversation with the Eternal Son. This passages firmly rooted in the Old Testament is

clearly interpreted in the New Testament as the two persons of the Godhead displaying the mechanics of their personhood while at the same time possessing their co-equality in deity. This texts and others instilled greater continuity for the systematic reality of God's Triune nature, beginning in the Old Testament and progressing to the New Testament.

Another great theological component tied to Trinitarianism is the redemptive reality. The economic work in redemption of each of the three persons in the godhead is an astounding truth. The eternal love of the Father for his Son and his people, motivating the sending of his only begotten Son for the faithful work of redeeming his spiritual broken siblings affirms that fact that God is love. Also, the mission of the Spirit from both Father and Son to regenerate and renew spiritually dead men, women, boys, and girls necessitates the Trinitarian nature of God for salvation to be possible at all. This theological truth became a powerful point in making Trinitarian theology a fundamental of Christian orthodoxy.

Hammering out theological confessions throughout historic church councils brought about an awareness of the need for confessional statements in the contemporary church today. Contrary to the mantra of many, it is not a faithfulness to biblical doctrine that brings disunity in the church but an unfaithfulness to doctrine that brings disunity. While confessional statements are not inerrant and should be subject to change when found in error, they are still important to rightly reflect theological commitments. It is very possible that some church leaders are unwilling to create, adopt, and stand by confessional statements because they do not want to be assessed and scrutinized by those statements. However, a faithful and honest church with its leaders will faithfully embrace and biblically defend those articles of faith. Following the church historically as it defended Trinitarian theology and articulated it first at Nicaea and later at Constantinople proved to be a great example for the contemporary church in defining and defending the fundamentals of orthodox faith, once delivered.

Theological and historical reflection leads to more than just a dry or inanimate orthodoxy, but it leads to vibrant, life breathing transformation. Romans 12 reminds believers that they are transformed by the renewing of their minds, and certainly their minds in the knowledge of God, according to his Word. The clarity of seeing three persons in the one being of God, especially in the work of redemption creates a greater level of adoration and devotion in the hearts of God's people. Trinitarian theology not only honors God as it rightly reflects his being, but it also fuels great joy in the body of Christ.

### **Personal Reflections**

Reflecting on the entire Doctor of Ministry experience yielded three points of great appreciation. Interaction with the seminary, interaction with the subject matter of my project, and interaction with the class I taught have served to be great points of life transforming experience.

My interaction with the seminary has been a cherished experience. My initial draw to Southern Seminary began with my attraction to the theological commitments of the school. Affirming the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, as seen through the lens of the Abstract of Principles, is a confessional stance that excited me as a place to further my education. Beyond the theological position of the seminary, five particular points of interaction were extremely encouraging.

First, the seminars were invaluable as they challenged me to look at contemporary conversations in expository preaching. Conversations about the redemptive-historical hermeneutic, were discussions I had never really thought about. However, these conversations brought to light an entire paradigm shift for me in preaching Old Testament narratives. Our entire cohort preaching collectively through the book of Philippians was also a great experience. Hearing other brothers preach and seeing how they outlined texts was something that served as a major point of Spirit-filled edification. Second, the professors for each seminar were stimulating and patiently helpful during the seminar

experience. On one occasion, professor T. J. Betts took time to explain a passage in Genesis that had alluded my understanding. His prowess in theology and the language illuminated this obscure and troubling text for me. At the time I felt like his explanation was worth the entire Doctor of Ministry experience all together. Third, the campus alone created a sense of nostalgia and respect. Albert Mohler's legacy at Southern Seminary is well known and respected convention-wide and being there was at first almost overwhelming. From the chapel to the library and everything in between, the reality of God's presence preparing his people to change the world with the gospel is thick. Fourth, sharing the Doctor of Ministry experience with my cohort was rewarding. I developed friendships that are still maintained today. We shared more than just the topics and material covered in the seminars and projects but we in many ways shared our lives. I was reminded that ministry is difficult and rewarding at the same time, regardless of where one serves. Because I am older than the average seminarian, I was encouraged to see many younger men responding to God's call to prepare for faithful gospel ministry. Finally, the interaction I had with Gregg Allison, Matt Haste and Kyle Claunch was very encouraging. Hearing their input served to be instrumental in the production of my project. They were encouraging and informative at the same time. While our interaction was limited due to their demanding schedule, it still allowed for me to see their love for the Lord and for those called to theological training.

My interaction with the subject matter of my project was rewarding in at least two ways. First, my knowledge of Trinitarian theology, biblically, historically, and systematically grew exponentially. Second, my love for the Triune God has grown while going more deeply into the biblical and historical realities of trinitarian theology. The biblical discipline of orthodox Trinitarianism has helped me systematically connect the dots of other theological disciplines, like soteriology.

Interacting with both the expert panel that reviewed my curriculum and the class of project participants was an extremely rewarding experience. First, the expert

panel was made up of two pastors and one associational director. All were members of our local association. Some of what came out of this part of the project was a deeper friendship and association with faithful brothers that pastor and serve in my community. I certainly appreciated the time they invested in their portion of my project and they seemed to appreciate me including them. We met on a couple of occasions to discuss the curriculum and their feedback was invaluable. Most of all stronger bonds were built between me and these men that will only prove to be fruitful in the permeating of the gospel in our community. Also, the interaction that I experienced with the members of our fellowship was possibly the most rewarding part of the entire Doctor of Ministry experience. To see these brothers faithfully participate in the class and experience the joy of growing in the truth of God's Word was nothing short of amazing. Their remarks each week expressed words of gratitude for the class and a growing systematic understanding of our Triune God. Finally, at the completion of the class each participant prepared and read aloud an essay on the doctrine of the Trinity. These essays were superb and articulated a deeper knowledge of the Triune God and a deeper love for Him. From my perspective, the mission was accomplished.

### **Conclusion**

The Doctor of Ministry experience at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary proved to be a shaping and molding process in my life. The discipline and time along with rare seasons of frustration hammered in me some habits of perseverance for which I am grateful. The friendships and relationships that this experience has brought me in contact with has enriched me as well. The interaction with my own church family in this project has grown us closer together as a body. The influence of seeking to be all I can be as a faithful pastor for the church has made an impact on my wife and children. The truth of who and what God is (one God in three persons), faithfully taught and therefore preserved for generations to come has been the ultimate aim and I hope and believe has been accomplished.

APPENDIX 1

RUBRIC EVALUATION FOR THE THEOLOGICAL,  
HISTORICAL AND DEVOTIONAL CURRICULUM  
OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY



<b>Theological/Historical/Devotional Development of Trinitarian Theology Curriculum</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<u><b>Biblical Faithfulness</b></u> The content of this curriculum is hermeneutically sound. All scripture is properly interpreted, explained and applied.					
<u><b>Scope</b></u> The content of the curriculum covers the breadth of theological/historical and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine.					
<u><b>Methodology</b></u> The teaching methods are designed to promote a dialogical approach for learner discovery.					
<u><b>Practicality</b></u> The curriculum includes an opportunity for each participant to articulate Trinitarian doctrine in a peer setting.					

APPENDIX 2  
PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST OF  
TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of spiritual leadership of the participant. This research is being conducted by John Falgout for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will respond to statements before the project and you respond to the same statements at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

1.	The Bible specifically uses the word Trinity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2.	The Bible affirms the doctrine of the Trinity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3.	Genesis 1:26 affirms a plurality within the being of God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4.	A simple definition of the Trinity can be that one God exists in three persons, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5.	Genesis 1:26 denies the “Heavenly Court of Angels argument” in that man is only made in the image of God and not angels.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6.	Co-creator and co-eternal are aspects of deity that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7.	Athanasius of the 4th century was an important figure in Trinitarian development.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8.	The Cappadocian Fathers were key figures in Trinitarian development.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9.	John’s prologue to his gospel has technical language that affirms Trinitarian doctrine.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	1 Peter 1:2 associates salvation with the Triune nature of God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11.	In John’s prologue to his gospel he uses Genesis 1 in affirming the eternity of the Son.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	The doctrine of the Trinity was taught in the Nicene creed of the 4th century.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	The doctrine of the Trinity was further articulated at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	Church Fathers prior to the Council of Nicaea argued for the doctrine of the Trinity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

- |                                                                                                                                            |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 15. A heretic of the third century that argued the unorthodox view of modalism was named Sabellius.                                        | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. A heretic of the fourth century that argued against Jesus' deity was named Arius.                                                      | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. A central issue of the Nicene council related to the person of Jesus.                                                                  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. 1689 Second London Confession of Faith is a Baptist confession that affirms the doctrine of the Trinity.                               | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. Jehovah's Witness, Mormonism and the Oneness Pentecostal Movement are 21st century cults that claim Christianity yet deny the Trinity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. One cannot be a Biblical Christian and refuse to believe the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.                                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 3  
EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR ORAL PRESENTATIONS  
ON TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

<b>This tool evaluates the oral presentation of each participant on the Historical development of Trinitarian Doctrine.</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b><u>Biblical Faithfulness</u></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The content of this presentation is hermeneutically sound. All scripture is properly interpreted, explained and applied.					
<b><u>Scope</u></b> The content of the presentation displays that the presenter is aware of the theological, historical and devotional realities of Trinitarian doctrine.					
<b><u>Presentation</u></b> The presentation of this paper is communicated well and within a 10 minute time window.					

APPENDIX 4  
PROJECT SCHEDULE



## **Project Schedule**

The ministry project began on July 1, 2019, and ended completed on October 2, 2019. A timeline for the components of the project were as follows:

1. July 1-Enlisted expert panel to evaluate curriculum then made revisions as suggested by panel, which met the 90 percent approval rating.
2. July 17- Enlisted class and administered the pre-test/agreement to participate form.
3. July 31-Discussed syllabus and reviewed Reeves introduction and taught Trinitarian mechanics from Genesis 1, and Psalm 110.
4. August 7- Reviewed July 31 class session, discussed Reeves chapter 1 content, and taught Trinitarian mechanics from Matthew 3, Matthew 28, and John 1:1.
5. August 14-Reviewed August 7 class session, discussed Reeves chapter 2 content, and taught Trinitarian mechanics from Acts 5, and 2 Corinthians 13.
6. August 21- Reviewed August 14 class session, discussed Reeves chapter 3 content, and taught Trinitarian mechanics from 1 Peter 1.
7. August 28- Reviewed August 21 class session, discussed Reeves chapter 4 content, and taught Trinitarian history from the Pre-Nicene Church Fathers through the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.
8. September 11-Reviewed August 28 class session, discussed Reeves chapter 5 content, and taught Trinitarian history from the Council of Constantinople to Augustine's contributions.
9. September 18- Reviewed September 11 class session, discussed Reeves conclusion, and considered the devotional realities of experiencing God as our Father who foreknow us.
10. September 25-Reviewed September 18 class session and considered the devotional realities of experiencing Jesus as our elder brother that paid for us and the Holy Spirit that regenerated us to spiritual life. Entertained all questions concerning essay presentations.
11. Oct 2- Heard and discussed oral essays from each participant.

The duration of the research project was fourteen weeks.

APPENDIX 5

PRE- AND POST-TEST COMPARISON CHART

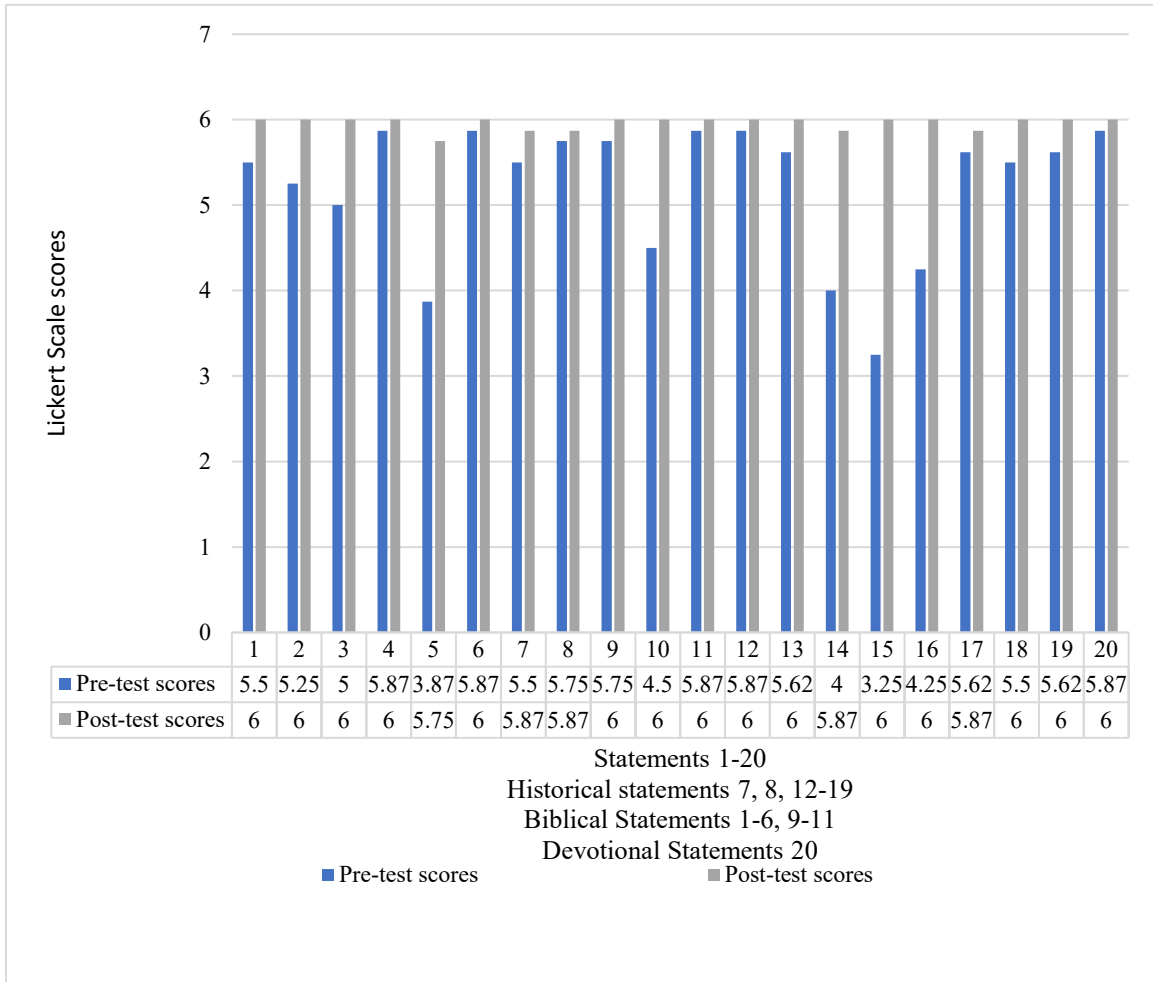


Figure A1. Pre-test and post-test comparison chart

APPENDIX 6  
SAMPLE ESSAY OF PARTICIPANT

## SAMPLE ESSAY OF PARTICIPANT

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to the foundation of Christianity. While we may not understand fully everything about the Trinity, it is possible to get a solid grasp of what it means for God to be three in one.

We have learned that the word Trinity is not found in the Bible and the definition of Trinitarianism is not stated, yet the church has embraced that God's nature is Trinitarian which is One God in three persons; Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Many of the early church fathers faced tension when they sought to understand the truth of the gospel and getting it right about the nature of God. Finally, in 381 at the council of Constantinople, it was settled. So, for us today, we need to have a clear understanding of the Trinity. We must see in the scripture the truth that the three, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, are simultaneously distinct, co-equal, and co-eternal.

### Simultaneous distinction–

Gen. 1:1-2 - The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters during creation. While God the Father was speaking through the Word (Jesus) creation into being.

Gen. 1:26 - Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. The plural pronouns identifying distinct persons.

John 17:24 – Jesus says to the Father, “You love me before the foundations of the world.” Jesus addresses the Father in the eternal relationship they possessed before creation as distinct Father and Son.

### Co-equality –

Phil. 1:2 – Grace and Peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Both addressed as co-equal in salutation.

Titus 2:13 – Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Acts 5:3-4 – Lied to the Holy Spirit and not lied to men but to God.

Co-eternality –

Psalm 90:2 – Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

The Son, Col 1:17 – He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

The Spirit, John 14:16 – I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper that He may be with you forever.

One God having one essence and in three persons. The same being or essence in each person yet each person being distinct. Remember in theology, personhood does not necessitate flesh and bone. Personhood is defined as having a will, self- awareness, emotions, being able to recognize others speaking. Essentially being in relationship with others of a same nature yet each distinct and possessing incommunicable properties.

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING DEFENDERS OF THE HISTORICAL FAITH AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, COBDEN, ILLINOIS

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This project entails the development of defenders of the historical faith at First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois. Chapter 1 includes the purpose, rationale, and five goals of the project. The chapter also includes a brief history of First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois. Chapter 2 addresses the biblical foundations for the historical and orthodox understanding of Trinitarian theology from both the Old and New Testaments. Chapter 3 presents a historical understanding of Trinitarianism through the fifth century along with the devotional significance of Trinitarianism. Chapter 4 provides the curriculum and implementation of the work. Chapter 5 includes the evaluation of the project's effectiveness along with its strengths and weaknesses.

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BA, Baptist College of Florida, 1996

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Associate Pastor, Corinth Baptist Church, Lake Park, Georgia, 1993-1995

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