

## **TTS Foundations 2023/24 – [S3] “In One God” (P2/2)** **NOTES**

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### **Appendix: On Binitarianism**

## [1] Introduction – Reflection on Last Time

### [1A] The Glory of God – Scripture’s Major Theme

- BUT – this isn’t **just** about God being different from us...!
  - **LOOK:** Isa 48:9-11 (cf. Exo 20:4-5, re: 2<sup>nd</sup> Comm)
    - *“Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the end of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made”* [Isa 43:6b-7]
    - *“I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory”* [Isa 66:18]
    - *“I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory”* [Jer 13:11]
    - *“I will display my glory among the nations”* [Ezek 39:21]

**It’s not just that God is God** – and we are not.

**It’s also that God is FOR God** – he is for himself before he is for you.

This might sound strange. BUT – **God is not an idolater.**

- He puts NOTHING before himself!

### [1B] God is God, and God is FOR God

- **God is FOR God – his primary purpose in ALL things is to glorify himself.**
  - You won’t be able to ‘un-see’ this!
    - *“I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other”* [Isa 42:8]
    - *“All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name”* [Ps 86:9]
    - *“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God”* [1 Cor 10:31]
- **Part of the biggest and most beautiful themes of Scripture.**
  - *“The Gospel of the Glory of Christ...”* [2 Cor 4:4]
    - Why do mission? Why pray? *“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and faithfulness!”* [Ps 115:1]
      - **KEY: God is most kind when he seeks his own glory.**

### [1C] The Glory of God – Squaring the Circle

- **At this point, a paradox emerges.**
  - I.e. if God is all about his own glory, where do we fit in?
    - After all... **LOOK:** Isa 48:10-11 / 1 Thess 2:11-12
- **How does God square this circle?**
  - **LOOK:** John 17:22-23
    - We are found in Jesus – and because HE gets the glory, WE share in it too. What HE has, WE own.

**God is God, and God is FOR God**

**In being FOR Himself, he is FOR US!**

## [2] On the Trinity – An Introduction

### OUR FOCUS:

"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty..." (P2/2)

Looking at the doctrine of the Trinity.

**REFLECT:** What are your first thoughts / impressions?

How do you perceive the Trinity? Is it a comfort? A blessing? Intimidating? Confusing?

Do you struggle to understand or explain it?

### [2A] On the Reputation of the Trinity

- **As a doctrine, it's often misunderstood:**
  - Already mentioned Ligonier's *State of UK Theology* (C2018).
    - ON THE ONE HAND: 91% of Protestants agree that "there is one true God in three persons".
    - ON THE OTHER: 71% believe Jesus "is the first and greatest being created by God" – AND a third agreed that the HS "is a force but is not a personal being". (Another third disagreed; another didn't know.)
- **As a doctrine, it's often held at arm's length:**
  - Anecdotally, I've seen this happen many times.
    - The doctrine is for someone else, but not for me.
    - (As if it's theology's version of quantum physics...!)
- **As a doctrine, it's often sidelined:**
  - The Trinity is given lip service – i.e. the Father, Son and Holy Spirit might be named, BUT the Trinity is often not at heart of our worshipping.
    - Nor our praying, our living, our thinking, etc.
    - God may as well just be the general God of theism.
  - Infamously, e.g. Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* [1830].
    - No Trinity until the very end.

### [2B] A Very Different State of Affairs

- **The problem? It didn't always to be like this.**
  - There are many advantages to studying Church history.
    - E.g. these are our B+S, still *alive* in Christ, capable of teaching us ("Though he's dead, yet he speaks" [Heb 11:3]).
  - BUT ALSO – re: C.S. Lewis' *On the Reading of Old Books*.
    - Re: the 'clean sea breeze of the centuries'.
    - The modern Church takes so many things for granted; when in fact, WE'RE the odd ones out!
- **The doctrine of the Trinity is a very good example of this – we find that it once used to dominate the Christian world...**
  - **Ordinary, daily Christian life** used to *sound* Trinitarian:
    - E.g. 'the Paston Letters' – cf. the Pastons of Norfolk, c.1430-1504AD.
      - "The Blessed Trinity have you in his keeping, and send you health and good speed in all your matters" [Margaret to John Paston I, 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 1449].

- **Christian leaders** used to *sound* Trinitarian:
  - E.g. Gregory the Great's letters.
    - "Now may the Holy Trinity protect you with his hand, and render you always vigilant in the custody of souls, [that in the end] you may be counted worthy to be crowned" [*Epistles* VII.V]
    - "May the Holy Trinity make you to advance always in his fear, and so dispose your heart in moderation well-pleasing to him as both to grant to your subjects now joy from you, and to you from himself joy without end hereafter" [*Epistles* XIII.VII]
- **Christian mission** used to *sound* Trinitarian:
  - E.g. Columbana [c.543-615AD] in Lombard court.
    - "Let each man who wishes to be saved believe in God the first and last, one and three, one in substance, three in character; one in power, three in person; one in nature, three in name; one in Godhead" [*Instructio* I.2]
- **Christian worship** used to *sound* Trinitarian.
  - E.g. the *Gloria Patri* and Ambrose's *Te Deum*.
  - E.g. St. Patrick's breastplate ("I bind to myself today / The strong power of the invocation of the Trinity / The faith of the Trinity in the Unity / The Creator of the elements").
- **Christian kings and armies** even used to *look* Trinitarian!
  - Re: Henry V's banner at Agincourt.

"I love the Trinity. Does that sound strange to you? For most people, it *should* sound strange. Think about it: when was the last time you heard anyone say such a thing? ... Most Christians do not understand what the term means and have only a vague idea of the reality it represents. We don't love things that we consider very complicated, obtuse, or just downright difficult. We are more comfortable saying, 'I love the old rugged cross', because we *think* we have a firm handle on what that actually means and represents. But we confess how little we understand about the Trinity by how little we talk about it and how little emotion it evokes in our hearts.

Yet we seem rather confused at this point because most Christians take a firm stand on the Trinity and the fundamental issues that lead to it (the deity of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit). We withhold fellowship from groups like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses because they reject the Trinity and replace it with another concept. We hang a person's very salvation upon the acceptance of the doctrine, yet if we are honest with ourselves, *we really aren't sure exactly why*.

It's the topic we won't talk about: no one dares question the Trinity for fear of being branded a 'heretic', yet we have all sorts of questions about it, and we aren't sure who we can ask. Many believers have asked questions of those they thought were more mature in the faith and have often been confused by the *contradictory* answers they received. Deciding it is best to remain confused rather than have one's orthodoxy questioned, many simply leave the topic for that mythical future day 'when I have more time'. And in the process, we have lost out on a tremendous blessing"

[James White, *The Forgotten Trinity* [1998]]

**DISCUSS:** Do you think neglecting the Trinity is a problem? Why?

**[2C] FIRST: It is the faith "once for all entrusted to the saints" [Jd 1:3]**

- **As we'll see, Trinitarianism defined the content and life of the Church from the very beginning.**
  - Contra 'evangelistic' efforts of Jehovah's Witnesses, who often insist that the 'Trinity was made up by around 400AD'.
    - "For over all is the Father; and through all is the Son, for through him all things were made by the Father; and in us all is the Spirit, who cries 'Abba Father', and fashions man in the likeness of God. ... This is the rule of our faith, the foundation of our building, and what gives support to our behaviour" [Irenaeus – *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* V]

**[2D] SECOND: All Christian life and theology is Trinity-shaped.**

- **Christianity is NOT generic 'Theism' – we can't think 'Christianly' if we're not thinking 'Trinitarianly'.**
  - "With the confession of God's triunity stands or falls the whole of Christianity, the whole of special revelation. This is the kernel of the Christian faith, the root of all dogmas, the substance of the new covenant. From this religious, Christian concern the development of the Church's doctrine of the Trinity has sprung. What was really at issue was not a metaphysical theorem or philosophical speculation but the very heart and essence of the Christian religion itself. So strongly was this felt that all who still set store by the name of 'Christian' acknowledge and honour a positive Trinity. In every Christian confession and dogmatics the deepest question is this; how can God be one and yet also three? And precisely in proportion as this question is answered does Christian truth come either less or more into its own in all parts of Christian doctrine. In the doctrine of the Trinity beats the heart of the whole revelation of God for the redemption of mankind" [Bavinck, *Gereformeede Dogmatiek* 1918, Vol II, p. 346f]

**[2E] THIRD: To study the Trinity is to listen to the heartbeat of God.**

- Not just because it's precious to him.
  - But because it's ***the most intricate and intimate of all God's self-revelations.***
    - Not just a revelation of what God is DOING, but a tear in the veil – an insight into who (and what) God IS.
    - Closest parallel is Exo 3.
    - **The Trinity is the jewel in the crown of Christian theology.**

**[2F] FOURTH: To neglect this is to leave us without an answer.**

- **Other religions, heretics, apostates, and false teachers reserve their sharpest barbs for the Trinity.** (Re Nick.)
  - Why? Again, because it is the heartbeat of God.
    - The powers + principalities hate this doctrine.
  - If we neglect this, what is the result?
    - You are left without an answer.

**We've established that the Trinity is often neglected – but so what? What are we saying? Three things.**

1. God's people need *the freedom* to discuss the Trinity – in which they can say the right things in the wrong way.
  - a. This is precisely that forum; there is no judgement here.
    - i. Our theological car park – we're learning to drive!
2. God's people need *an opportunity* to discuss the Trinity – in which they can ask questions and hone our understanding.
  - a. This is precisely that forum; I will do my best to help.
    - i. (Although sometimes I have to check things too!)
3. Specifically for us – *we specifically* need to discuss the Trinity.
  - a. I want to be sensitive to this, but bear with me B+S.
    - i. When we moved to Derbyshire, I was shocked to learn that the Trinity is in question here.

### [3] On the Trinity – Three Key Challenges

For all these reasons, and because this is a complex issue for many, you won't be surprised to learn that there are challenges here.

#### [3A] The Pastoral Challenge

- **Because of everything we established a moment ago, I'm going to be strident in my defence of the Trinity.**
  - I.e. I leave no quarter for those who would attack this.
    - Indeed, I would go further – there are reasons to doubt the salvation of those who make a *conscious* denial of the Trinity.
- **BUT – the same rod that smites the wolf, must also support the sheep.** ('Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me' [Ps 23].)
  - Perhaps in your mind, you're thinking:
    - 'Oh goodness, I don't understand this'.
    - 'I wouldn't know how to defend the Trinity!'
    - 'I don't know why this is so important'.
    - 'I know I need to believe this, and I want to, and I do, but I'm so unsteady here'. (Etc.)
- **If that's you this evening, then please hear me:**
  - You are NOT dumb. You are NOT less of a believer.
    - You are a theologian after God's own image and calling – this is your forum and your opportunity.

#### [3B] The Pedagogical Challenge

- **It's going to be impossible to please everyone tonight...**
  - Made more complicated by two distinct tasks:
    - [A] The apologetic task – i.e. how do I define or even defend this?
    - [B] The pastoral task – i.e. what difference does this make to my life or that of the Church?
  - Even here, there are pitfalls.
    - On the apologetic task – it's easy to forget that the tools we use to define + demonstrate the Trinity are *technical* terms. (We should be grateful for them, but they can sometimes be confusing or leave one cold.)
    - On the pastoral task – we can reduce the majesty of this doctrine to our own tiny frame of reference, running the risk of ambiguity or even error.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Two examples from recent decades will suffice. **First, the 'Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son' (EFSS).** EFSS was proposed as an explanation of Godly submission within the home, e.g. children to parents, the wife to her husband, *etc.* EFSS suggests that the Son of God's submission to his Father was not just limited to his incarnate ministry but is inherent to the Triune relationship. EFSS proposes that his is an *eternal* submission, not of substance (i.e. he remains fully divine), but of function, and that this helps us to understand how (e.g.) a wife can submit to her husband whilst still being an equal image-bearer. We should sympathise with the desire to maintain godly submission within the home. However, EFSS has faced strong criticism and has now largely been abandoned by evangelical theologians. Why? Although everyone agrees that Jesus submitted to his Father during his incarnate ministry, the notion that

- **We could very easily make this a history lesson, an exegesis class, a sermon, or a practical guide.**
  - With that in mind, two things:
    - **FIRST:** we'll be walking a middle course between apologetic and pastoral.
    - **SECOND:** please be patient, we'll be coming back to this subject a lot in the future!

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submission is somehow intrinsic to the nature of the Son misunderstands the relationship between the divine persons. The Son's relationship to his Father is totally unlike anything in human society; there is no beginning or end, no superiority or inferiority, no cause and effect. The Son is *eternally begotten* of his Father and shares the same divine will. We don't need to commandeer the doctrine of the Trinity to make a Biblical case for godly submission within the home. **Second, the 'social Trinity'**. Academic theologians from different Christian traditions have made the case that the 'community' we observe in God (i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) can act as a model for human society. The problem is that this can – and has – been abused. Eastern Orthodox theologians (e.g. John Zizoulas) appeal to the Trinity to justify the kind of monarchical government common to their churches; liberal Protestants (e.g. Miroslav Volf) use the Trinity to justify egalitarianism, whilst Roman Catholics (e.g. Leonardo Boff) have used the Trinity to justify Marxist notions of 'liberation'. As we established above, to focus too much on the 'pastoral task' leads us to reduce the Trinity to our own frame of reference, which so often leads to error and/or ambiguity. In truth, the Trinity is a mystery revealed by faith; it supersedes anything in creation and cannot be tied to it. **Our first responsibility is to submit to the Trinity on *his own terms*.**



## [4] On the Use of Analogies for the Trinity

We've established that this subject is critically important, but also notoriously complex. It's understandable, then, that many believers look to analogies to help them grasp the Trinity.

**DISCUSS:** can we think of any analogies for the Trinity?

E.g. H2O / Three-legged stool / Clover (fidget!) / the same person being a Father, a Husband, and a Son / Egg, etc.

### [4A] On the Use of Analogies

- **Augustine's *vestigia trinitatis* - 'footprints' of Trinity.**
  - Specifically, Augustine identified man himself as the supreme example of such a 'vestige':
    - "We, however, are men, created in the image of our Creator, whose eternity is true and whose truth is eternal, whose love is eternal and true, and who is himself the eternal, true and beloved Trinity, in whom there is neither confusion nor separateness. As we run over all the works which he has miraculously established, let us consider his footprints, as it were, more deeply impressed in one place and more lightly in one another. ... Contemplating his image in ourselves, therefore, let us, like that younger son of the Gospel, come to ourselves, and arise and return to him whom we had forsaken by our sin" [*City of God* XI.28]
- **Augustine identified two kinds of analogy - one psychological, the other pertaining to the 'affections'.**
  - Psychological: *mind, knowledge, and love.*
    - "Just as we now retain our faith by remembering, and observe it by thinking, and love it by willing, so too we will retain it then by remembering our having had it, and we will recollect this fact and join the two together by willing as the third element, and thus the same trinity will continue in existence" [*De Trinitate* XIV.5]
    - ALSO: memory, understanding, and will [*De Trinitate* X.11+17] - i.e. I remember what I understand, and I act upon my understanding.
  - Emotional: *analogy of love.*
    - Lover / Beloved / Love that passes between them

### [4B] A Suggestion for Trinitarian Analogy

- **Analogy of a fire - used this before. (Re: John of Damascus!)**
  - The Fire itself corresponds to the Father.
    - Comports to Biblical imagery (God as "*consuming fire*" - Heb 12:29).
    - Tallies with Biblical imagery about Father as supreme - e.g. "*My Father... is Greater than all*" (John 10:29), the F will be made "*all in all*" (1 Cor 15:28).

- The Light of the fire corresponds to the Son.
  - Comports to Biblical imagery again ("*I am the Light of the World*" – John 8:12)
  - Describes how Jesus reveals the Father – He defines God ('Christlike'). (A fire without light? Not fire.)
- The Warmth of the fire corresponds to the Holy Spirit.
  - The One by whom we enjoy the Father and the Son – "*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*" [Rom 5:5]. (Again: a cold fire?)

#### [4C] Thinking Critically About Analogies

- **BUT – the question of Trinitarian analogies is not uncontroversial.**
  - For example, about those analogies mentioned before:
    - **H2O** – helps us to see God in three ways, but entails 'modalism' / **Three-legged stool** – helps us to see how FS+HS function together, but entails 'partialism' / **Three leaf clover** – helps us to understand how the three can share in the same essence, but entails 'partialism' again / **F,H,S** – helps us to reflect on the economy of God, but entails 'Unitarianism' / **Egg** – helps us to think in terms of three's, but entails 'Tritheism'.
  - Even Augustine was unsatisfied with his analogies.
    - Only accepted love because of its mysterious source.

"So wait, Nathan – are you saying it's hopeless, then?"

Quite the opposite: the Trinity is a *mystery revealed by faith*.

We can never *comprehend* it – re: 'God is God and we are not'.

But we can *apprehend* it – like Jacob in Gen 32. ON GOD'S TERMS.

## [5] Demonstration & Definition – Is It Biblical?

**LOOK:** 2 Pet 1:3 – *“everything needed for life and godliness”*

- **God has made himself known, and now we have all we need.**
  - “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life...” [West. Conf. I.6a (1647)]
- **DISCUSS:** Does God approve of drunk driving?
  - The answer seems obvious – but HOW do you know this?
    - There’s no verse that says, ‘Don’t drink and drive’.
    - The bible doesn’t even say anything about cars.
- **Scripture speaks INTO some things, and OVER other things.**
  - “... is either *expressly set down* in Scripture, or by *good and necessary consequence* may be deduced from Scripture” [West. Conf. I.6b (1647)]
    - This deduction is not always simple – it requires patience and wisdom.
    - Nevertheless, the Bible speaks into or over all things.

### **KEY POINT:**

**The Trinity is one of these “good and necessary consequences”.**

No single verse that describes it, in a neat and tidy package.

No formal doctrine until much later.

But that doesn’t mean it’s not Scriptural.

**REFLECT:** How would you justify the Trinity from Scripture?

**[5A] The Trinity is found:** in the NT pattern of worship.

- For the early Church, **the Trinity was experienced primarily as a *doxological reality*** – rather than as a ***dogmatic one***.
  - **LOOK:** *“And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”* [Gal 4:6] – what is the logic or pattern here?
    - **The early church worshipped the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.**

**[5B] The Trinity is found:** in several NT Trinitarian Constructions.

- We find many examples of the Scriptural authors **putting the Lego pieces together.** (Following the breadcrumbs!)
  - **LOOK:** Rom 8:15-17 / Eph 3:14-17 / Titus 3:4-7
    - *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* [Matt 28:19]

[5C] The Trinity is found: as a necessary consequence of NT Theology.

1. **LOOK:** Deut 6:4 – There is only **one God**.
  - **DISCUSS:** What *can't* we now believe, because of this?
    - Polytheism / tri-theism, atheism, etc.
2. **LOOK:** Matt 6:9 – The Father is both **divine and personal**.
  - **DISCUSS:** What *can't* we now believe, because of this?
    - Deism, Hellenic Theism, etc.
3. **LOOK:** John 1:1 – The Son is both **divine** and personal.
  - **DISCUSS:** What *can't* we now believe, because of this?
    - Arianism, Adoptionism, etc.
4. **LOOK:** John 14:26 – The Spirit is both divine and **personal**.
  - **DISCUSS:** What *can't* we now believe, because of this?
    - Binitarianism,<sup>2</sup> spiritualism, etc.
5. **LOOK:** John 14:16-17 – These three are **united but distinct**.
  - **DISCUSS:** What *can't* we now believe, because of this?
    - Modalism / Sabellianism, partialism, etc.

After all these have been ruled out – what are we left with?

**Answer: only the Triune God, of Scripture and Church history.**

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Binitarianism, see the Appendix at the bottom of this PDF document.

## [6] Demonstration & Definition – Is It Catholic?

Unsurprisingly, given this witness of Scripture, the Trinity is witnessed to immediately by the early Church.

### [6A] The Trinity and the Early Church

- **The term ‘Trinity’ itself is coined within a century of the NT being written.**
  - Theophilus of Antioch, the Greek *trias* (c.170AD).
  - Tertullian, the Latin *trinitas* (c.200AD):
    - “The numerical order and distribution of the Trinity they assume to be a division of the Unity; whereas the Unity which derives the Trinity out of its own self is so far from being destroyed, that it is actually supported by it.” [Against Praxeas III]
- **The witness then became like a tidal wave:**
  - “[We] bless the Maker of all through his Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost” [Justin Martyr – *First Apology* LXVII]
  - “For all things, I praise thee, I bless thee, I glorify thee, through the eternal and heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, through whom with him and the Holy Spirit be glory both now and forever and throughout the ages to come. Amen” [Polycarp, *Martyrdom* 14:3]
  - “This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity... No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light” [Gregory of Nazianzus – *Orations* 40:41]

### [6B] Heresy and the Need for Precision

- **In future, we’ll look at early heresies in more detail.**
  - For now, you just need to know about the onslaught:
    - E.g. Arianism / Sabellianism / Nestorianism / Apollinarianism, etc.
- **Over the course of about 150 years, the Church ransacked their theological vocabularies.**
  - First four ecumenical councils:
    - Nicaea [325AD] / Constantinople [381AD] / Ephesus [431AD] / Chalcedon [451AD].

With these councils, we can arrive at a precise definition of the Trinity.

**There is one and only one God – the LORD God of Israel – who has eternally existed as three totally distinct persons, each sharing the same divine being and one united will.**

- Because this is the faith of the whole Church, from East to West, you might notice different kinds of terms used for same thing.
  - The Latin Church in the West: one essence (*essentia*), or substance (*substantia*), and three persons (*persona*).
  - The Greek Church in the East: one being (*ousia*), and three 'hypostases' (individual realities, etc.) or 'person' (see below for Greek terms).
    - Singular: '*prosōpon*' [προσωπον] (pronounced 'pro-sow-pon').
    - Plural: '*prosōpa*' [προσωπα] (pronounced 'pro-sow-pa').
- IN SHORT: One 'what', three 'whos'.
  - "One God in three ways" [Barth].
    - E.g. I am human (my 'what-ness') but I'm also Nathan (my 'who-ness').
    - One being, one person in humans. But God is God. (Re: John of Damascus, John Piper on this.)
- Re: the Athanasian Creed.<sup>3</sup>
  - Co-eternal, consubstantial, co-equal.
    - Indwelling and inter-penetrating – perichoresis.
    - The F begetting, the S begotten, the HS proceeding.

## [7] Conclusion – A Trinity-Shaped Gospel

In all this, we cannot afford to lose sight of what we're talking about.

**LOOK:** Eph 1:3-14

God hasn't given us the doctrine of the Trinity so that we might have a cudgel to smack someone with, or a sudoku puzzle to solve. God has given us this doctrine because he loves us, and he wants us to know and praise him in fullness of life.

Its primary purpose? Awe.

Then comes: mission, worship, prayer, etc.

<sup>3</sup> We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. ... The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. ... The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, 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. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity. [Pseudo-Athanasian Creed, probably c. 500s AD.]

## Appendix: On Binitarianism

'Binitarianism' refers to the belief that there is one and only God, but that in him we recognise just *two* persons, realities, or modes. Historically, there has never been just one *kind* of binitarianism; the term itself is used to refer to a wide range of connected (but distinct) beliefs. However, these beliefs almost always have one thing in common: a denial of the full personhood and divinity of the Holy Spirit. For example, we can identify at least **three kinds of binitarianism**: [A] *binitarian modalism* (i.e. the Holy Spirit is the Father or the Son [but usually the Father]); [B] *binitarian instrumentalism* (i.e. the Holy Spirit is equivalent to the Father's will or working); [C] *binitarian creationism* (i.e. the Holy Spirit is a person in his own right, but he is a creation of the Father and so not an eternal, co-equal person of the Trinity [historically this is called 'pneumatomachianism']).

**What is wrong with binitarianism?** Let's first observe the three-fold distinction above. At no point, for example, do the Biblical authors ever teach that the Holy Spirit was created at a certain point of time or that he's a heavenly creature akin to an angel. Indeed, the Psalmist explicitly tells us that the Spirit is the one *involved* in the divine act of creation [Ps 104:30], not that he himself is created. This does away with the third kind of binitarianism (i.e. 'binitarian creationism'). But what is wrong with binitarian modalism and/or instrumentalism? We can observe three flaws:

1. They both involve a denial of the plain sense of Scripture.
2. They are both inconsistent in their handling of Scripture.
3. Neither can account for how Scripture describes the Christian life.

First, **binitarianism denies the plain sense of Scripture**. And by 'plain sense', we just mean the simplest way of understanding any given passage. There are certainly some portions of Scripture that are hard to understand [cf. 2 Pet 3:14-16], but more often the Lord has revealed himself plainly in his Word. And how does Scripture speak about the Holy Spirit? He is not the mere *instrument* of the Father's will or an aspect of his agency. Rather, he is described as a living person in his own right: capable of being grieved [Eph 4:30], of being opposed [Acts 7:51], and of being lied to [Acts 5:3ff]; of speaking [Acts 13:2], forbidding [Acts 16:6ff], warning [Acts 21:4], comforting [Acts 9:31], snatching [Acts 8:39], setting apart [Acts 13:2], of bearing witness and interceding [Rom 8:16+27]. The plain sense of Scripture would also recognise a distinction between the Father and the Spirit, such that the latter cannot possibly be a 'mode' of the former. For example, Christ explicitly distinguishes between the two in the Great Commission [Matt 28:19] and apportions different activities to both: the Father *sends* the Holy Spirit, who *himself* then teaches believers [John 15:26]. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is not exclusively associated with the Father; Paul talks about 'the Spirit of the Son' [Gal 4:6] and the "Spirit of Christ" [Rom 8:9]. The question is not whether the Spirit is *from* or even *of* the Father; this is not in dispute. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms this to be so. Rather, the question is this: do the Scriptures *distinguish* between the Father and the Spirit? Without denying the plain sense of Scripture – turning every page into a mystery incapable of understanding without 'secret' knowledge or insight – the answer is, clearly, yes.

Second, **binitarianism is inconsistent in its handling of Scripture**. Consider the suggestion that the Holy Spirit is just the breath of the Father. After all, the word often translated as 'Spirit' in the Old Testament (רוּחַ [ruach]) can also be translated as 'breath'. It is sometimes proposed that the Spirit is not a person in his own right, but a

Hebraic turn of phrase for the dynamic work and power of the Father. However, if this is true then it proves too much. The Scriptures also refer to Christ as God's *word*, as God's *wisdom*, as God's *image*; does this mean that Jesus is not fully divine, co-eternal with the Father? Of course not. Even though the Biblical authors employ such terms for Christ, this doesn't mean that they think of Christ as the mere 'agency' or 'instrument' of God or indeed as a creation of God. In which case, why assume differently when it comes to the Holy Spirit? Why must the 'breath of God' description refer to God's agency or power, but the 'word of God' refers to a distinct, fully divine person in his own right? Again, binitarianism is inconsistent in its handling of Scripture. It encourages you to make much of one kind of Biblical phrasing but think nothing of another that's essentially its parallel.

Third, **binitarianism cannot account for how Scripture describes the Christian life.** Simply put, if the Spirit isn't a person, then our salvation becomes impersonal. If the Spirit isn't a Co-eternal, Co-essential divine person, then 'he' isn't a 'he'; 'he's' an 'it', a way of describing the means and instrument of the Father's agency. (Akin to 'the love of God' or 'the hand of God'.) This means that God saves us at a distance. Over there somewhere, the Father sends the Son, who dies at Calvary, rises from the grave, and ascends. Whilst over here somewhere, we feel moved to come to faith. **What's missing? Our union with Christ by the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.** At best, all binitarianism can say is that the Father works a special providence in your life. Only Trinitarianism has the full Gospel of our personal union with Christ through the Holy Spirit: the Father sends the Son, who with the Father sends the Holy Spirit, who personally indwells us and unites us to the Son. This is not an abstract way of describing the Father's special work in our lives, but an actual spiritual union with the Godhead, making us participants in the divine nature, sharers in the glory of Christ, transforming us in the image of the Son, so that we might become a new humanity, made in his image. It is the Spirit who *personally* sanctifies us; it is the Spirit who *personally* inspires the scriptures and continues to do so; it is the Spirit who *personally* establishes elders and perseveres the church; it is the Spirit who *personally* sustains creation, minute by minute, hour by hour.

If the Holy Spirit is just the mere means and instrument of the Father, or if the Spirit is just another 'mode' of the Father, then we are only being *acted upon* by God; there is no indwelling of the third person of the Godhead, no spiritual union or participation with the divine nature, for the Father is never said to indwell someone. Likewise, if the Holy Spirit is just a *creation* of the Father, then his dwelling within us is no spiritual union with God; it's no more special than if an angel or some other heavenly creature had dealings with us. In this way, binitarianism doesn't just deny the clear testimony of Scripture: it also dissolves our spiritual union with God, in Christ, by the Spirit. It is forced to say that there's still daylight between you and the Godhead. He might be working on you at a distance, but the Triune God would no longer dwell within you, personally, by his Holy Spirit – and so Christ would be separate from you, and you from him.