

# TRINITARIAN CONFESSIONS AND TRICKS: WHY **NOT** TO BELIEVE THE TRINITY *IN THEIR OWN WORDS!* (Part 1)

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It may be truthfully stated that the doctrine of the Trinity is the most fiercely fought for, and defended, doctrine in all of Christendom today. All who confess it receive the “right hand of fellowship” (Galatians 2:9). You’re in.

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

When I first began to realise the doctrine of the Trinity had more holes in it than a block of Swiss cheese, I found myself outside the fence of the majority “orthodoxy”. However, to my enormous surprise and indeed encouragement, I actually found myself in very good company on the other side of that fence. Sometimes the protest voice is well worth listening to. <sup>1</sup>

And I am not primarily referring to the many sane witnesses throughout Church history whose testimony to the unitarian monotheistic faith of the Bible gave me great comfort. Nor am I particularly referring to the company of modern day saints who encouraged me. <sup>2</sup>

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

However, before sampling a few trinitarian confessions and tricks and learning why **not** to believe that God is Three in One, let me start with this insightful poem to introduce our subject. <sup>3</sup>

## The Trinity Explained by Mark Long

There's God the Father, the Holy Ghost and the Son,  
But the churches teach, that these are one.  
Not one but three, and the three are one,  
And one of them from a woman was born! <sup>4</sup>

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> For all the non-Roman Catholic and all the non-Eastern Orthodox folk reading this, don't forget that a Protestant is one who protests and your group was once the minority voice!

<sup>2</sup> I owe an incalculable debt to folk like Anthony & Barbara Buzzard, Charles Hunting, Bill Wachtel *et al.* Indeed, not a few of the quotes that follow are from Anthony's research, and I am indebted to him for this.

<sup>3</sup> Kindly supplied to me from good friends, Dudley, Sherrill and Jeremy Barnes. With appreciation to fellow believers in the one true God of the Bible and in His Son, our Saviour and Lord Jesus the Messiah.

<sup>4</sup> I have taken the liberty of altering this fourth line, which originally read, “The Holy Ghost is God, and they're both the son”. My reason is that not many these days are Modalists, if you get what I mean.

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

This poem sets the scene beautifully for us as we firstly consider,

## TRINITARIAN CONFESSIONS

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

How about this staggering claim from Professor Millard Erickson, one of today's foremost systematic theologians, and considered one of the best contemporary Trinitarian apologists. Erickson writes in his *God in Three Persons*, 1993,

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

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

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

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

Little direct response can be made to this charge. It is unlikely that any text of Scripture can be shown to teach the doctrine of the Trinity in a clear, direct, and unmistakable fashion.<sup>5</sup>

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

But let's push on for some more trinitarian confessions that are good for my biblical unitarian monotheistic soul! Bruce Metzger, highly respected Greek scholar and co-editor of the *Oxford Companion to the Bible* agrees,

Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine it is striking that the term does not appear in the NT. Likewise the developed concept of 3 coequal partners in the Godhead found in later creedal formulations cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon. (Art. "Trinity")

Wow! There's a speed bump designed to rattle the trinitarian bus and jolt it's passengers out of their seats!

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<sup>5</sup> Underlining emphases in this, and all following quotes, are mine.

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

I ask with all humbleness where the idea of the Threeness is expressed in the New Testament with a doctrinal sense and force? Where is the Triune God held up to be worshipped, loved and obeyed? Where is he preached and proclaimed in that threefold character? We read 'God is one' and 'I and the Father are one.'<sup>6</sup> but never do we read that the three are one, except in one interpolated text (I John 5:7).<sup>7</sup>

To me the matter is most painful and perplexing and I should not even speak as I do now, if I were not on the threshold of the grave, soon to appear before the throne of all truth. Certainly we do not find in Scripture the expression God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost. Whenever I pronounce the word God simply, and first, I mean God the Father, and I cannot help meaning that if I am meaning anything.

Dr. W.R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's in *God in Christian Experience*, p 180 adds to these honest confessions,

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

And this from A.T. Hanson, Professor of theology at the University of Hull in *The Image of the Invisible God*,

No responsible New Testament scholar would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by Jesus, or preached by the earliest Christians, or consciously held by any writer of the New Testament. It was in fact slowly worked out in the course of the first few centuries in an attempt to give an intelligible doctrine of God.

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

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

A. and R. Hanson in *Reasonable Belief, A Survey of the Christian Faith* (1980, p. 171) agree,

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

State of the art in Evangelical world scholarship, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, in Vol. 2, p84, under the entry "The Trinity" reads,

The New Testament does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are of an equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God Himself.

And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e. as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the two-fold content of the church doctrine of the Trinity.

Trinitarian, Christopher B. Kaiser, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Western Theological Seminary in *The Doctrine of God, A Historical Survey*, p.23 (1982),

The Church's doctrine of the Trinity would seem to be the farthest thing from [the New Testament writers] minds and today's reader may well wonder if it is even helpful to refer to such a dogma in order to grasp the theology of the New Testament. When the Church speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity, it refers to the

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<sup>6</sup> The context of Jesus' words in John 10:30 is not ontology --- matters relating to the Being of God --- but rather oneness of purpose and oneness of mission.

<sup>7</sup> Mozeley is using euphemism here. He means this verse as found in the KJV is an obvious fraud with no Greek manuscript support!

specific belief that God exists eternally in three distinct 'persons' who are equal in deity and one in substance. In this form the doctrine is not found anywhere in the New Testament; it was not so clearly articulated until the late fourth century AD.

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

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

Trinitarian apologists have tried to appeal to the "apostolic fathers" or even the "ante-Nicean fathers" (before the Council of Nicea). For instance, Roger E. Olson and Christopher Hall in *The Trinity* ( Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002, pp 16,20) ask,

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

James Yates, a non-trinitarian expresses my reaction to all this admirably in *Vindication of Unitarianism*, 1816, p.ix, ,

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

The word God occurs nearly 1300 times in the New Testament, and might we not suppose, that in some one of these passages, we should be expressly told that the term is meant to include, not simply one, but three persons or subsistences, to each of which that title is applicable?

If, in every instance where this word is used alone, it implies a plurality in the divine nature, should we be unable to find **one solitary example** of the application of plural pronouns in the whole New Testament? Would neither our Lord nor anyone of his apostles have left a single sentence in which the whole doctrine of the Trinity can be fully and accurately expressed? Should we expect to find no care to make accurate and evident distinctions between the doctrine of the Trinity and the dangerous polytheistic notion of the heathen?

The doctrine of the unity of God is more than once introduced in the New Testament, and laid down most clearly and solemnly. Our Lord himself repeats these most impressive words to the scribes. "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear O Israel' the LORD our God is one LORD."

Now could we have supposed that as our Saviour knew this would be construed by all his hearers as teaching that there is only one object of supreme worship, he would have omitted such an occasion as this of declaring, that in truth **there are three?**

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

The Catholic Church's Encyclopedia says,

The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be proved from scripture.

Of course this does not seem to bother Roman Catholic believers, because for them, Church tradition trumps Scriptural authority. But what can we say in defence of Protestants who supposedly elevate Scripture above church tradition and church authority? It seems Protestants, including Evangelicals, are comfortable with accepting man-made imagination above clear Scriptural statements. For instance, Lutherans will be horrified to learn that Martin Luther himself confessed,

[Nothing to support the dogma \[of the Trinity\] can be pointed out in Scripture.](#)

So much for this very small sampling of trinitarian confessions as to why we should **not** believe in the Trinity! Are you still sitting comfortably in that bus after all those speed bumps? But there's more. In Part 2 we will consider some trinitarian tricks ...