

THE DOGMA OF THE TRINITY AND RELATED ISSUES

Triune God

“There has never been a single formula adopted by the majority of Christians designed to express the doctrine of the Trinity...” (Hanson, *The Search for the Doctrine of God*, 677)

TERMS

- Essence (οὐσία): that which makes something what it is
- Hypostasis / person (ὑποστάσις): that which is the existence of a substance
- Theology and economy / God in himself and God for us / Immanent Trinity and economic Trinity

TRUTHS ABOUT THE TRINITY

- God is One
- God is One in Three Persons
 - The essence of God does not exist other than in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - All names for God apply to each of the divine persons except those that designate the relationships between them
 - The Father is fully God and is different from the Son and Spirit only because he is not Son or Spirit
 - The Son is fully God and is different from the Father and Spirit only because he is not Father or Spirit
 - The Spirit is fully God and is different from the Father and Son only because he is not Father or Son
 - God is one mind; one will; one power; one love; one God
- There are two processions in God
 - Generation of the Son from the Father
 - Breathing forth (Spiration) of the Spirit from the Father and/through the Son
 - These two processions are the bases for the two missions of in the economy
 - Mission of the Son
 - Mission of the Spirit
- There are three persons in God
 - “Person” means distinct, subsisting reality
 - Father, Son, and Spirit are truly 3
- There are four relations in God
 - Father to Son: generation
 - Son to Father: filiation
 - Father and Son to Spirit: spirating
 - Spirit to Father and Son: being spirated
- All activity of God in the economy is one, yet is one triunely
 - God creates triunely
 - God redeems triunely
 - God sanctifies and sustains triunely
 - To apply an activity of God in the economy to only one of the persons, even if that person is most clearly visible in that action, borders on tritheism.
- The dogma of the Trinity is not a scientific or rational statement.
 - It is the (only) means by which our minds can be directed to God.

- It is a statement of faith, which means it is the shape or form of our attitude to God and thus our attitude to all knowing
- The names of God do not allow us to understand God; they are the key to understanding ourselves
- The Trinitarian names come from revelation; their explanation comes from reason.
 - They are not understood based on their use in the economy; instead, their use in the economy should be deepened by reflection on their application to God
 - The Trinitarian names are linguistically masculine in gender, and God is properly referred to as "he", with each of the persons properly referred to as "he".
 - This does not infer that God is properly known as masculine; there is nothing of the masculine in God that is not at the same time feminine.
 - The division of creatures into male and female does not place one or the other closer to or more like God.
- God is known through his works; thus every creature is an analogy of God. God can be properly named through creaturely images, so long as any limitation or deformity is removed.
 - Masculine and feminine images are equally appropriate ways of praising God and lifting our minds and hearts to God.
- God cannot be known by the mind alone. A mind influenced by sin is not a clear mind. Knowledge of God deepens as one grows in holiness. Growth in grace is required for progress in Trinitarian knowledge.

CREEDS

I believe in God,
 the Father Almighty,
 Creator of heaven and earth,
 and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died and was buried;
 He descended into hell;
 on the third day He rose again from the dead;
 He ascended into heaven,
 and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
 from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the Holy Catholic Church,
 the communion of Saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and life everlasting.

CREED QUICUMQUE VULT ("ATHANASIAN CREED")

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith.
 Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
 And the Catholic Faith is this:
 That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.
 For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

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 incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty.

And yet they are not three Almightyies, 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. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord,

So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, here be three Gods, or three Lords.

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 afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another;

But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.

So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;

God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world;

Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting;

Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood.

Who although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ;

One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God;

One altogether, not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ;

Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 676-790.