

EARLY MODERN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Triune God

16TH-18TH CENTURIES

REFORMERS

- Martin Luther
- John Calvin

ANTI-TRINITARIANS

MICHAEL SERVETUS (1511-1553)

- Scripture is primary
- The Trinity is a later development that distorts the Scriptural account (see Holmes, 170)

FAUSTUS SOCINUS (D. 1604)

- Minor Reformed Church of Poland (Polish Bretheren)—anti-Trinitarian
- Scripture is the only norm, not later councils
- Jesus does not have to be understood as literally the son of God; he received his exalted status and role as judge through his obedience
 - Socinus defended worship of Christ against others in the Minor Reformed Church (see Holmes, 171)
- *Racovian Catechism* (1605, revised in 1680)
 - The divine essence is one and cannot be three persons since a person is a single essence
 - Jesus is called God, and called upon as God, by way of honor

JOHN BIDDLE (“FATHER OF ENGLISH UNITARIANISM”)

- *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity according to the Scripture* (London, 1648)
- *XII Arguments Drawn out of Holy Scripture* (London, 1647)
- See also William Whiston, *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd in Four Parts* (London, 1712) and Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity, in Three Parts* (London, 1712)

PIETISM

- Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705): religion of the heart not the mind (Farrelly, 112)
- Count von Zinzendorf (d. 1760): personal experience and community are paramount (Farrelly, 112)
- Moravian Brethren

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

- George Fox (1624-1691): inner light is what is important (Farrelly, 112)
- William Penn: Trinitarian belief is not necessary for Christians (Farrelly, 112)
- U.S. Society of Friends (Quakers): belief in the Trinity is not necessary (Farrelly, 112)

ARMINIAN AND MENNONITE CHURCHES OF THE LOWLANDS

- Trinity is not what defines Christians (Farrelly, 112)

ENLIGHTENMENT INFLUENCE ON RELIGION

Religion is most true when it conforms to reason; Christianity expresses what was known in all cultures since the beginning of time.

Deism

- Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate* (1624)
- Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation: or, the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1731)

- John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious, or a Treatise Shewing That There is Nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above It, and That No Christian Doctrine Can Properly Be Call'd a Mystery* (London, 1696)—cited in Holmes, 176
 - True religion is what is accessible to all people through reason
- John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) rejected the Trinity
- David Hume
- Voltaire
- Transcendentalists
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson
 - Divine in the human
- Rousseau
- Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781)
 - History shows that we should surpass the doctrine of the Trinity towards more noble truths based in reason (Farrelly, 113)

KANT (1724-1804)

- Jesus is an example of perfect humanity; the concept of Trinity cannot refer to the true being of God, an act which is impossible for human knowing

RATIONAL TRINITARIANS: 19TH CENTURY

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

See the treatment in Holmes, 183-184

- The ultimate reality is Will, which manifests itself as Mind and as such must contemplate itself as Idea; the Mind and Idea are united in a bond of love, which is the Spirit, completing the primordial will in three realities which remain nothing other than Will

GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770-1831)

See the treatment in Farrelly, 114-115 and Holmes, 184-186

- God is identity giving itself over to otherness and realizing itself as unity between identity and otherness
- Creation is the working out of this eternal Trinitarian dynamic in reality
 - The space of creation is the abyss between identity and otherness, between Father and Son
- Trinity comes to be in history when Godhead becomes what is not God
- The Spirit is constituted by the Church, which is the union of divinity and creation
- God needs the world to realize his true nature

F. D. E. SCHLEIERMACHER (1768-1834)

See the treatments in Farrelly, 116, Hill, 87-89, and Holmes, 186-190

- Theology must continually rethink and restate the tradition to respond to modern questions; the doctrine of the Trinity had not been engaged in this way since medieval times
- Theology must make sense of the inner experience of God
 - The truth of religion is the feeling of absolute dependence
 - God is the source of this feeling and, as such, is not objectifiable
 - Theology seeks to express and enhance Christian self-consciousness
- The dogma of the Trinity uses language which is outdated (referring to obsolete concerns) and thus not understandable or livable to the modern Christian
- The doctrine of the Trinity is a summary statement (“the coping-stone of Christian doctrine” – *The Christian Faith*, 170.1, quoted in Holmes, 189), the culmination of theological reflection, not the beginning. It is a secondary derivation of Christian self-consciousness that is not essential for Christian living: Christians live either the oneness of God or the threeness, only the dogma holds the two together.

CHARLES HODGE

See the treatment in Holmes, 190-191

- “Truth is in order to holiness. God does not make known his being and attributes to teach men science, but to bring them to saving knowledge of Himself.” (*Systematic Theology*, 1.443, quoted in Holmes, 190)
- Trinity sums up Christian religious convictions
- Christian experience is mistakenly perceived as modalism; the doctrine of the Trinity shows how the threefold divine experience indicate a reality in God

ISAAK A. DORNER

See the treatment in Holmes, 191-196

- God must be thought not as substance but as person
- Goodness is identical with God’s life, but this supreme goodness must be active. It must be willed and chosen, it must be ethical and not just metaphysical.

OTHER VOICES

See the accounts in Farrelly, 116-118 and Holmes, 196-198

- Aubrey Moore
 - Defended the importance of the Trinitarian doctrine
- Albrecht Ritschel
 - The truth of theology is in its ethics
 - Theology must have firm grounding in history
- Adolph von Harnack
 - The doctrine of the Trinity is a distortion of the teaching of Jesus due to the influence of Hellenism
- Johann Adam Möhler
 - Demonstrated the importance and centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity
- Anton Günther (1783-1863)
 - The trinity can be deduced from the dynamic nature of self-consciousness
 - Condemned as semi-rationalism in 1857
- Joseph Kleutgen
 - Developed the importance of the Trinity in contemporary Thomism