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The Trinity

An Essential for Faith
in Our Time

Edited by Andrew Stirling



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The Trinity Against the Spirit of Unitarianism

Victor A. Shepherd

FACED with the cultural and religious pluralism of the twenty-first century, the church (at least in the West) appears extraordinarily anxious or extraordinarily accommodating, and perhaps extraordinarily accommodating just because it is extraordinarily anxious. The church, thinking its pluralistic setting to be novel, is tempted to fear the world and therein tempted to think it can preserve itself by isolating itself from the world; or else it is tempted in its bold engagement with the world to tailor itself to the world and therein to squander the “deposit” (2Ti 1:12) that it has been charged to guard. Those prone to anxiety are more likely to insist on retaining a doctrine of the Trinity, if only to preserve continuity with their forebears in faith and discontinuity with the mindset of modernity, not realizing that “if only” reduces the doctrine to an artifact, even a curiosity-piece, in the museum of intellectual history. On the other hand, those eager to meet challenges are more likely to jettison any doctrine of the Trinity as an encumbrance that inhibits the church in its witness to the gospel and its exemplification of the gospel amidst the common life of the world.

One issue facing the church, then, is this: is the doctrine of the Trinity baggage that is not only unnecessary but is actually a threat to the seaworthiness of the ship (church) as it appears to flounder in the storms of secularity? Or is it ballast in the ship’s keel apart from which even moderate winds will blow the ship hither and thither, eventually to capsize it?

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I submit that apart from the doctrine of the Trinity, “gospel” is rendered indistinguishable from religious aspiration or projection, while “Spirit” is reduced to a magnification of anything that the Fall-darkened heart and mind of humankind may conceive, and “church” becomes nothing more than one more social group (albeit in religious guise) which seeks to promote the agenda of its constituents. In short, without the doctrine of the Trinity the arch counter-miracle will occur: wine will be turned into water as the gospel is denatured.

In maintaining the doctrine of the Trinity to be essential to the faith I am not holding up as etched in stone the expression of any one thinker’s understanding; neither Augustine’s nor Aquinas’s nor Calvin’s nor Barth’s. Nonetheless, I am convinced that just as these thinkers were impelled to speak on behalf of the triune God in order to forestall the acculturation of the gospel in their day, we must do as much in ours, all the while endeavoring to obey the fifth commandment; namely, to honor our parents (including our theological foreparents) in order that the days of the church may be long in the land which God gives us.

Scriptural Building Blocks of the Doctrine

True, a fully-articulated doctrine of the Trinity is not found in Scripture. Nonetheless, the building blocks of the doctrine incontrovertibly are. Consider the following:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19).

This Jesus God raised up...Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out that you both see and hear (Ac 2:32f).

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2Co 13:14).

For through [Jesus Christ] both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2:18).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all...But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift (Eph 4:4-6).

...God chose you as the firstfruits for salvation, through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Th 2:13),

...chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood (1Pe 1:2).

Throughout its consistent attestation of the incursion of the Word, Scripture constrains us to understand God as eternally triune. A doctrine of the Trinity makes explicit what is everywhere implicit in the "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" and for which faith, the apostle tells us, we must ever "contend" (Jude 3).

Oneness of Divine Being

Christian faith is rooted in the oneness of being between Jesus Christ and God the Father. In the gospel, God has revealed himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Without the divine activity of the Holy Spirit we should not *know* of the deity of Father and Son.) In this self-unveiling God has revealed himself in such a way as to disclose that what God is in himself, God is toward us, and what God is toward us God is in himself, throughout His saving acts in history. In other words, what God is eternally in himself, that is, in His internal relations as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God is in His activity toward us through the Son and in the Spirit.

If the oneness in being between Jesus Christ and God the Father is cut, then the substance and heart of the gospel is lost. For if what Christ does is not what God does, then *before God* humankind's predicament is unrelieved. Again, if God himself has not come among us

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in the Incarnation, then God's love for us (despite God's good intentions!) stops short of *God's* full identification with us sinners; in truth it is not finally love (or at least it is woefully deficient and defective love) and the redemptive activity of God is finally ineffectual.

The oneness in being among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, however, does not imply any oneness in being between the Creator and the creation. In fact there is no intrinsic ontological similarity between the eternal being of God and the contingent being of creatures. The two spheres of being—divine and creaturely—are ontologically distinct and are joined only by grace. Scriptural monotheism is never to be confused with philosophical monism. Awareness of the foregoing, it must be noted, is a predicate of the triune God's self-disclosure *as* triune. In short, knowledge of God (with all that this implies with respect to knowledge of the relationship of divine to creaturely being) is the work of God himself, never the work of rational inference or philosophical speculation. To say the same thing slightly differently, faith in this Triune God arises only as God himself generates it; only as God himself attests and interprets (the activity of the Holy Spirit) God's own Word (the activity of the Son). This can only mean that the fact of faith, that is, the presence of men and women who believe, testifies to the utter priority of God over all thought concerning Him. We can think correctly about God at all only because God includes us in His self-knowing.

In conjoining "Spirit" and "Holy," Scripture insists that God is the only fit witness to himself; only God can disclose God. And since God has given himself to us in the person of the Son or Word, then Spirit and Son (Word) are inextricably linked. Or in the idiom of the written Gospels, Jesus Christ is the unique bearer and bestower of the Holy Spirit. This is but to say that one cannot pronounce "Spirit" except in reference to Jesus Christ. (In this way the apostles insist that while Christless spirits do indeed abound, they can only be less than holy!) This point is reinforced by scripture's depiction of the Spirit as being sent from the Father in the name of the Son, never in the Spirit's own name; the Spirit speaks only of the Father and of the Son, never of himself. Put simply, the Spirit is like floodlighting. Floodlights are

positioned in such a way that one does not see the floodlight itself, only that which it lights up and to which it therefore directs attention. (Recall our Lord's words, "He (i.e., the Spirit) will glorify me" (Jn 16:14). The Spirit imports no new substance into faith's knowing, but rather facilitates faith's knowledge of the Son, who is the substance of the Father.

Operative Unitarian Doctrines

While the foregoing is formally espoused throughout the church catholic, it is materially contradicted frequently in the various "unitarianisms" found at all levels in all denominations. (While the stated theology of any Christian body is Trinitarian, the stated or official theology should not blind us to the operative theology that tends to characterize the denomination or at least aspects of it.) Several of these operative unitarianisms are outlined briefly below.

A UNITARIANISM OF THE FATHER.

This popular "unitarianism" certainly preserves the truth that God is exalted, "high and lofty"; that God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor our ways God's ways (Isa 6:1; 55:8). God is the sole, sovereign, eternal one. God is not an aspect of His creation-at-large (the cosmos) nor an aspect of His creation-at-small (humankind). While by God's permission, invitation, and facilitation we may genuinely *apprehend* God (in both senses of "apprehend": *understand* the nature of God and *seize* Him as we are first seized by Him), we never *comprehend* God. We never grasp God so as to master Him, domesticate Him, render Him an object. The one who is irreducibly subject never gives himself over to us (while always giving himself for us and to us!), never allows himself to be that upon which we can perform those operations which bend natural objects, for instance, to our purposes and our control. God is inviolably GOD, never a tool that we may deploy, never one with whom we may trifle.

However, the God who is *only* "high and lofty," without differentiation, tends to be so exalted as never to humble himself, so far beyond us as not to render himself accessible, sovereign with more

than a suggestion of severe, unknowable in the sense of arbitrary, a creator who is also (or may be) capricious.

Eighteenth-century deism portrayed God as the Creator who fashioned the universe and then effectively absented himself from it. Here God was “high and lofty” so as to be inaccessible. On the other hand, seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism portrayed God not so much as remote in himself but as inaccessible with respect to His “ways.” The notion of double predestination, for instance, could only render God ultimately capricious in His activity on behalf of humankind. God, it was said, foreordained elect and reprobate *as such* even before they were born, and therefore before they even had opportunity to sin. When confronted with the arbitrariness of the twofold decree (all alike merit condemnation, even as some are condemned prior to their being able to merit anything, while others are recipients of a Spirit-facilitated gospel-pronouncement that the reprobated are never permitted genuinely to “hear”) its proponents insisted that its irrationality was only seeming; God has His “reason,” and to this reason no person is privy. The “reason” is hidden inscrutably in the innermost recesses of God. Therefore it is not our place to enquire, only our place to adore. While all Christians would admit that it *is* our place to adore the Holy One whose ways are not our ways (Isa 55:8), it is not our place—i.e., it is never God-honoring to “adore” an absurdity. The more the hidden justice of this arbitrariness and irrationality was advanced, however, the more apparent the injustice of it all was to many. In view of the unqualified remoteness of God, or the arbitrariness of God, or the injustice of God that a unitarianism of the Father seems to imply, this particular unitarianism, paradoxically, ends in the denial that God is parent in any sense.

A UNITARIANISM OF THE SON.

Undifferentiated transcendence is overcome as Jesus Christ is acknowledged to be God-with-us. So far from disdaining the complexity and sin, anguish and frustration of the human situation, God has identified with it all in its variegated multi-dimensionality. Jesus Christ

is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, is tempted at all points as we are (Heb 4:15), even becoming one with sinners, as His baptism attests, by being made sin for us (2Co 5:21). In the same manner He is subject to the principalities and powers; He can restore a creation now groaning in its futility (Rom 8:21-22) just because He identifies himself fully with it.

At the same time, to *collapse* God into God the Son distorts even the truth of the Incarnation. For the Christian understanding of Incarnation, it must be remembered, is not to be confused with pagan incarnations wherein the deity collapses itself into the creaturely in such a way as to forfeit transcendence. In such a subtly paganized “unitarianism of the incarnate one” the nearness of God the Son is affirmed at the expense of God’s holiness; affirmed, that is, at the expense of God’s very Godness. Here God-with-us is demeaned as pal. This saccharine Jesus finds no paradigm in Scripture. No one who met Jesus Christ in the flesh ever spoke of Him in this manner or found Him cozy. The written Gospels, rather, customarily depict Him as One whom people do not understand and cannot tame. Even disciples, newly made aware in His presence of their systemic sinfulness, can only plead with Him to leave them alone. The apostles never confuse proximity with presumption. So far from being the grand aider and abettor and guarantor of human schemes, Jesus is the One who does *not* supply answers to questions, always refusing to endorse whatever understanding the people before Him have brought with them. Throughout the written Gospels, Jesus refuses to answer the questions put to Him, preferring instead to reply with His own questions. Plainly, He will not underwrite the standpoint or the perception or the purpose of the questioner; plainly, He will not endorse the questioner’s question as a legitimate question. In disallowing the question put to Him, in insisting on interrogating the questioner so as to change the latter from aggressor to defendant, He shows the speaker to dwell in spiritual unreality (i.e., suffer from spiritual psychosis). In the same way, He does not lend himself to the schemes and dreams of those who think that their piousness concerning Him supplies the boost that is needed to ensure the full-flowering of their

plans for themselves. And lest we think this to be an insignificant over-subtlety, the apostolic discernment that makes the stories of Simon Magnus, plus Ananias and Sapphira, normative for Christian understanding should correct us!

A UNITARIANISM OF THE SPIRIT.

It is the Spirit who imparts vitality and vibrancy in believer and congregation alike. It is the Spirit who supplies zeal, warmth, boldness, effectiveness. It is the Spirit whose gifts equip the congregation for ministry and whose fruits adorn the gospel, in all of this exhibiting the truth of God as the power of God and not mere ideation.

One New Testament word for the Spirit, "*arrabon*," a "down payment" or "pledge" (in modern Greek it means a woman's engagement ring), plainly means that there is more to come. While the Spirit satisfies the restless human heart, the satisfaction it yields never satiates; believers, contented as never before and nowhere else, are nonetheless "hungrier" than ever even as they know that one day they will be fed so as to leave them hungering no more. The entire experiential aspect of primitive Christianity—e.g., the question in Galatians 3:2 that asks, "did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" plainly directs the attention of the readers of the epistle to an identifiable experience—is much undervalued in most expressions of the church today.

Notwithstanding, when the Spirit is magnified disproportionately and experience put forward unnormed, then "Spirit" ceases to be the power in which Jesus Christ acts himself and that He pours forth on His people. "Spirit" instead lends itself to frenzy, the suspension of the intellect, and the identification of God with that which is indistinguishable from the intrapsychic proclivities and pressures of the devotees themselves, as well as from the supra-individual forces that thrive amidst institutions, ideologies, images, and diverse "isms."

It appears that whenever the Trinity is denied through the aforementioned unitarian view of redemption, the heart of Scripture is denied as well. In the first instance, God's transcendence is upheld in such a manner as to render God remote, distant, inaccessible, with the

result that the creation is left unaffected. The older discussions of God's impassibility had the same result: the God who is beyond suffering is scarcely able (or willing) to do anything for those whose suffering is as undeniable as it is inescapable. In the second instance, God is so identified with the creation as not to transcend it so as to be free for it. This was surely the problem with Schleiermacher and his theological descendants, indeed with the liberal school of theology that accepts the world's self-understanding as the presupposition for humankind's understanding of God. In the third instance, God is identified with human intra-psychic processes so as to deify them.

It is the triune God who alone saves, for it is the triune God who alone can. Only that God can save who transcends the world and is therefore free from it so as to act for it; who also loves it and identifies himself with it so as not to forsake it in any respect; and who also invites the beneficiaries of His love to know *Him* in such a way as to distinguish themselves from Him, and their psycho-physical immediacy from intimacy with the One who ever remains "other."

Modern Denials of the Trinity

SEPARATING THE SON FROM THE FATHER.

In many areas of the church catholic today, the doctrine of the Trinity is denied not merely materially but formally as well. Such a denial occurs whenever, for instance, the deity of the Son is impugned. In Scripture, the phrase "son of" has the force of "of the same nature as"; to modify it to mean "of a similar nature" is to deny what the church has always confessed in terms of the Incarnation.

Here we must recall the cruciality of Athanasius's triumph over Arius at the Council of Nicaea. While both Athanasius and Arius spoke of Jesus as "Son of God," Athanasius' insistence on *homoousios* (the *same* nature or substance) over against Arius's *homoiousios* (a *similar* nature or substance) was nothing less than the preservation of the gospel. For if the Father is not *essentially* identified with the activity of the Son, then all that the Son said, suffered, and did is without saving significance; devoid of redemptive significance, it is also without revelatory significance. (Those

who are impatient with this discussion and others like it, speaking disdainfully of the controversy over an iota, the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, must be reminded that there is no little difference between asking others to “run” your business for you and asking them to “ruin” it!)

Formal denial need not be blatant; in fact it is no less a formal denial for being subtle. Whenever the question, “Is Jesus the Son of God?” is answered, whether waggishly or sincerely, “Of course He is; all of us are sons and daughters of God,” the Incarnation is denied and therefore the Trinity as well. And because the being of God is intrinsically related to the knowledge of God, any departure from acknowledging the Trinity of God imperils the knowledge of God. The current preoccupation with “Creation Spirituality” is such a subtle yet formal denial.

“Who is God?” is a question that Scripture answers only indirectly. It answers this question by first asking and answering two others: “What does God *do* (outside of us, yet for our sake)?” and “What does God *effect* (in us)?” We can know who God is only as we first learn what God has done on our behalf, for our sake in the Son (and learn this *from* God), and also only as we become beneficiaries of this work on our behalf through the power of the Spirit. In sum, we know God as we are included in God’s work for us and as we are illumined concerning this work. To become acquainted with the living God, then, is to be drawn into God’s own life and be made a participant in God’s self-knowing; it is to overhear God talking to himself as we are permitted to listen in on Him and therein have answered our question, “Who is God?”

An unavoidable implication of this is to understand that the creation is not God. It is too frequently overlooked that the non-divine status of the creation has to be *revealed*, or else why should the creation not be assumed to be divine, as in fact it often is? As it is only by grace (i.e., by the action of God himself) that we learn that the triune one is God, so it is only by grace that we learn that the creation is not God but rather is creaturely. Creation Spirituality, on the other hand, is predicated on the postulate that the creation either is God or mediates God. Biblical prophets and apostles reject this postulate

consistently. Because God is God and we are but creatures of God, the order or logic of revelation generates the order or logic of our knowledge of God. And because the creation does not reveal the triune God, the creation (itself fallen and in bondage to death) is not the vehicle of that life which the Spirit (who is God) alone effects.

Any diminution of the Son as one with the being of the Father is an explicit denial of the Trinity. Such diminution of the Son invariably fosters an idolization of the creation. And idolatry, everywhere in scripture, is not merely ignorance of God (in the sense of lack of information about Him) but rather an estrangement from Him the consequences of which are unimaginably deleterious.

SEPARATING THE SPIRIT FROM THE SON.

Any sundering of Spirit from Son is a similar denial with similar consequences. Sundering the Spirit from the Son means that the Spirit ceases to be holy, ceases to be intrinsically related to the Word (as the reformers, following the apostles, were careful to note), and becomes instead the religious legitimization of human fancy or fantasy. Since, as was seen above, it is only through the truth that truth is known and non-truth recognized and only by reality that illusion is discerned, then only through revelation can we gain proper perspective on and understand assorted claims to truth, reality, godliness, and goodness.

These modern attempts to deny the Trinity can have destructive consequences. Despite its apparently ascendant secularism, our era is startlingly religious. It is assumed that religion is good and that Christianity is religious. Christianity may indeed be, but is *faith* religious? Prophets and apostles attest that the gospel exposes religion as non-gospel, non-faith (i.e., unbelief). Elijah on Mount Carmel does not suggest to the Baal spokespersons that they are religious, he is religious, and therefore they should all pool their religiosity, seeking out a common denominator, maximizing convergence and minimizing divergence. On the contrary, Elijah maintains that shortly Yahweh will act in such a way as to expose Baalism for what it is. This is not to say that Israel's faith remained free of religion; the prophets continually deplore the religious invasion of Israel and continually recall Israel to

the God, who displayed His outstretched arm in delivering them from slavery, and formed them as His people at Sinai, and now nurtured them like a mother with her child at her breast.

It seems that the church today thinks itself to be meeting religious pluralism for the first time, when in fact the faith of Israel and of Israel's greater Son came to birth and had to survive in the context of competing religious claimants. To be sure, this pluralism always encroached upon the faith of God's people, threatened to dissolve them, and therefore had to be resisted as grace freed faith to be irreligious. Significantly, while Paul begins his sermon on Mars Hill (Ac 17:19ff) by acknowledging the phenomenon of religions (the Greek word he uses, *deisdaimon*, also means "superstition"), he quickly moves to an unambiguous declaration of Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and the coming judgement. Nowhere do the apostles counsel seeking commonalities with contiguous religious manifestations.

Unless the church recovers its discernment of how revelation discloses itself as distinct from religion, how will the church be able to recognize and repudiate the religious accretions to the gospel, and even the most subtle (yet no less spiritually harmful) psycho-religiosities that attach themselves to our own believing and attempt to transmogrify faith? How will it distinguish between the truth that God, for the sake of His glory and our salvation, has freely justified us of His own free grace, and the religion which attempts to justify ourselves before a god whose mercy and pardon we plainly doubt?

Again, as soon as Spirit is sundered from Word (Jesus Christ is the *one* Word of God we are to hear and heed in life and in death, according to the Barmen Declaration), the Spirit is co-opted as the legitimization and even the divinization of culture. Aesthetic riches with their concomitant delight are then spoken of as "spiritual experience." All experiences of the creaturely order in its own mysterious depths are denoted as spiritual because *genuinely* mysterious (i.e., non-reducible in terms of psychology, sociology or biology) are confused with the work of the Holy Spirit of God. The obvious conclusion from this confusion is that cultured people are spiritually superior and that culture saves.

The Germans, as usual, have a polysyllabic word for it: *Kulturprotestantismus*. The culture-religion which had permeated the German church left people unable to distinguish between God himself and the awesome depths of God's creation; between having "God's love...poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5) and being moved by natural beauty or artistic talent. When *Kulturprotestantismus* went beyond viewing aesthetics as the vestibule to the kingdom and affirmed culture and kingdom to be synonymous, the nazification of the land of Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, not to mention the world's leading medical research, demonstrated that culture can readily cloak the conflict between Holy One and evil one. It demonstrates too that *Kulturprotestantismus* supplies neither the ability nor the urge to remove the cloak.

The spectacle of most television religious programming, replete with references to "God," "Holy Spirit," and "faith," raises the issue of narcissism. Narcissism is preoccupation with oneself, preoccupation with one's own comfort, advantage, recognition, advancement, and reward. Narcissistic people look upon themselves (however unconsciously) as the focal point of the universe and the measure of it as well. The televised "gospel" enhances this more often than not. It is only as the Spirit is known to be always and only the Spirit of Him who had nowhere to lay His head, of Him who appoints would-be followers to leave all and shoulder a cross; it is only as the Spirit is known to be the Spirit of Him to whom all judgement has been given (Jn 5:22), that the self-preoccupation of pietistic self-measurement is identified as the narcissistic counterfeit of faith.

In the same way, once the Spirit is divorced from the One who is the guarantor of the kingdom (i.e., the creation healed), once pneumatology is separated from Christology, people are theologically/spiritually defenseless against psycho-religious pathology. Jonestown need not be recalled; suffice it to recollect those whose "faith" has rendered them ill, or rendered them more ill.

Less dramatically, once pneumatology is separated from Christology, once the Spirit is (falsely) identified with "religiously-tinged" interiority, there appears to be little or no ground for distinguishing

between neurotic and real guilt, little or no help for disentangling them or for seeing how the neurotic may cloak the real or the real obscure the neurotic.

In short, once pneumatology is separated from Christology it becomes difficult to see how pastoral psychology can be genuinely pastoral: how it subserves a “cure of souls” and not merely a “cure of psyches.”

Hope of Restoration

When Jesus Christ is confessed as the unique bearer and bestower of the Spirit; when the Spirit is known as the power in which Jesus Christ acts, to the glory of God the Father, then distortions that bedevil the church are avoided and Trinitarian doctrine preserves proper balances.

Reference has already been made to the question Paul put to the Christians in Galatia, “Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?” (Gal 3:2). The question directs his readers to recall and reflect upon an aspect of their life in Christ, which they cannot deny, an event (however protracted), moreover, which is so common as to provide an indisputable beginning-point for his subsequent reasoning with them.

As the church today recovers its experience *of God* (for experience of God is the only experience the Spirit of Jesus Christ facilitates), the theological content of the gospel will no longer be arid intellectualism. It is the Spirit who prevents the gospel (so-called) from becoming the preserve of the intellectually gifted, from degenerating into a western philosophy that happens to employ a religious vocabulary. The gospel must not become one more abstraction to be assessed along with other “worldviews,” when in truth the gospel, ultimately, is the presence and power of the living Lord Jesus Christ in His person. Doctrine, indubitably, is necessary, or else we have renounced all notion of truth and any suggestion that we can apprehend truth (however fragmentarily) and articulate truth (however provisionally). Yet in the light of the Spirit’s repudiation of intellectualism, faith can never be reduced to the grasp of doctrine.

When the Spirit is honored as the power of God which renders Jesus Christ forever contemporaneous, then living faith will always triumph over traditionalism. "I'm a Lutheran," when uttered in the apparent absence of throbbing faith in the living Word, usually means that the Lutheran Church is the one someone stays away from! The same phenomenon is seen in those whose Protestantism consists in their anti-Catholicism.

Faith's triumph over traditionalism in no way belittles the place of tradition. Tradition, as G.K. Chesterton reminds us, allows the dead to vote! Permitting the dead to vote is crucial, since a church without tradition resembles an amnesiac. The most ominous feature of those afflicted with amnesia isn't that they cannot remember where they have left their umbrella; rather, it is that they have no identity, and therefore cannot be trusted. A church disdainful of tradition is a church not to be trusted.

When "Spirit" and "Word" are acknowledged to imply each other then institutionalism will not supplant adventurous discipleship. No longer subserving itself or an un-gospel agenda, the institution will subserve the community which lives for the praise of God's glory. The institution will resist calling for that obedience which is owed God alone. Neither will it attempt to forfend criticism by accusing dissidents of disloyalty. In trusting the promise that the powers of death shall not prevail against Christ's people, it will soberly remember that institutional remains litter the landscape of history even as God's peculiar treasure is safeguarded unto the day of its vindication.

Where the Spirit is recalled as the Spirit of Him who insists that harlots and tax-collectors enter the kingdom of God ahead of the "righteous" the placebo of moralism will be detected and dropped. The Christian life will not be impoverished until it becomes precisely what the world misunderstands it to be: conformity to a code, success at which breeds self-righteousness while failure precipitates despair. Because Jesus died for the ungodly and not for the immoral, morality will be seen for what it is: the barricade behind which people attempt to hide from God rather than the vestibule to God's kingdom. Evident

instead will be glad obedience to the living Person of Jesus Christ, motivated by gratitude for deliverance from the sin of moralism.

Where the Spirit is trusted to lend effectiveness to proclamation in Christ's name evangelism will not give way to assorted techniques for proselytizing or garnering adherents. To evangelize is to set forth the gospel of the Son in reliance upon the God whose Spirit is sufficient to empower the saints' testimony. In other words, the outcome of our evangelism can be left in God's hands.

A church that does not trust the Spirit to honor witness borne to the Son is a church that confuses evangelism with conversion; which is to say, a church which cannot distinguish between its work and God's work. Moreover, a church that thinks that conversion (rather than witness) is its responsibility is a church that coerces; the harassment can be physical, social or psychological, but it remains coercion. Paradoxically, the church that thinks that *it* has to generate the fruit of its diligent "God-talk" announces to the world that it does not believe in God, since it cannot trust God to vivify God's own Word! To trust that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son or Word is to be freed from anxiety concerning the results of mission and therein spared the fear of failure and the concomitant temptation to coerce.

As the Spirit brings women and men to faith in the crucified, the Son's cross will be recognized as the limitless vulnerability of the Father, and the Son's resurrection as the limitless triumph of this vulnerability. Trusting the triumph of God's vulnerability, God's people can allay all anxiety concerning the prosecution of the Christian mission, even as they forego the seeming shortcut of strong-arm tactics.

The Trinity and the Church's Mission

A recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity would do ever so much to assist mainline denominations with respect to the catholicity of their mission. Despite mainline Protestantism's protestations that it sides with the victimized, the marginalized, the oppressed, and those disadvantaged in any way, it remains almost exclusively an occurrence within the ascendant middle class. That segment of the socio-economic spectrum from which the mainline draws its people is becoming

smaller as it also becomes more affluent: we are attracting fewer and fewer people, virtually all of whom are more and more wealthy. We attract no poor people, even remarkably few who are not upwardly socially mobile.

In times of economic turbulence, the rich are cushioned against material misfortune and remain rich; the poor are not cushioned, but neither do they have anything to protect, with the result that they remain poor. The rising middle class, however, is unrelievedly vulnerable. In times of economic dislocation, it is precipitated downwards. It collapses into that segment of the socio-economic spectrum with which mainline denominations have no credibility at all. In other words, simply as a result of uncontrollable economic convulsions they would be deprived of their constituency. A recovery of Trinitarian faith, especially with respect to the self-appointment of God in the person of the Son, would commission us to re-examine our socio-economic exclusiveness. After all, the Word of God is baptized in dirty water at the hands of someone who will be forever out of place among the socially slick. The pronouncement heard at this baptism, "You are my Son the Beloved; with You I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22) is a conflation of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. Psalm 2 is God's appointment of the Royal Ruler, the One possessed of genuine authority. Isaiah 42 speaks of God's approval of the Servant of the Lord, commonly known as "the suffering servant," the One who was despised and rejected by humankind...and we esteemed him not (Isa 53:3). The mission of God himself in the Son will ever be effective (God *is* sovereign), but its effectiveness will materialize through a servanthood that entails hardship and sacrifice and social rejection. Then to be Christ's follower is to be commissioned to a ministry of service, not domination; of self-forgetfulness, not personal advantage; even of social rejection rather than public congratulation. Would not a new appreciation of the Son's mission, when the Son is one with the Father himself, be the recovery of our identification with the Son who cherished the very people to whom the mainline churches cannot relate? In that Son who is of the same substance and nature as the Father, God effectively loved the world entirely, not merely one aspect of the world

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(i.e., social aspirants whose psycho-social needs are apparently served through church affiliation).

The recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity will foster the recovery of Trinitarian faith; this in turn will mean a return to the catholicity of the gospel. And such a return will spell recovery of mission and service on behalf of *all* the “far off” who have been “brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). For “through him both [Jew and Gentile, which is to say all human beings equally, despite apparently insurmountable barriers] have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 3:18).

The tetragrammaton, יהוה, contains no vowels. Lacking vowels, it is unpronounceable. Because it is unpronounceable it is untranslatable; for this reason there can be no substitute for it. There can be no substitute for the name of the God who has named himself Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To know God, honor and obey and adore God, is to find that the doctrine of the Trinity is neither the museum-like security-blanket of the nervous nor the jettisonable baggage of the naive. The doctrine of the Trinity rather will ever orient us to the living God whose love for a dying world commissions us to love it no less.