

A Recommendation to American Evangelicals: Focus on the Trinity as an Alternative to Arguments about “Islamic Terrorism”

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This essay notes why American evangelicals may feel beleaguered after a string of perceived losses in cultural contests. The US media’s use of the term “evangelical” to mean cultural conservatism may woo them on to other such arguments, for example, about jihadism and “Islamic terrorism.” Even if there is a benefit to being more informed about such matters, it is argued here that any cultural contest, even arguments over Islam, are unproductive if the real distinctiveness of Christianity is not advanced. The key issue is the deity of Christ and thus the doctrine of the Trinity. How can Christians gain access to this doctrine that is perhaps the most difficult one to understand? A recommendation is offered: Gather Scripture texts that ground the doctrine of the Trinity and summarize how they work together for the proclamation and defense of Christianity.

Introduction

American evangelicals in the twenty-first century face an identity crisis. “American” is increasingly burdened with a negative connotation having little to do with geography and “evangelical” suffers from the media’s use of it to designate a Republican voting bloc. Hard times have fallen on the notion of America as a “Christian nation” as well, and the references to a “Judeo-Christian heritage” may mean little more than the culture having civil religion. There does exist a loose camaraderie of Protestants in non-industrial states away from the coasts, where people see themselves as “culturally conservative,” holding a “biblical worldview,” and decrying the loss of “traditional values.” Their doctrinal commitments can be traced back to R. A. Torrey’s “fundamentals,” contemporized by Carl Henry, and preached by Billy Graham and his spiritual descendants. But “beleaguered” might also express what they *feel* identifies them.

Evangelicals see their world “turned upside down” in just the opposite way that Acts 17:6 meant it, when Thessalonian Christians so influenced their culture that such a charge could be made. Now it is evangelicals who sense their influence diminishing and it is their world that seems to have toppled. Older evangelicals find that their younger counterparts reject denominational identity and seem not to rely on clear biblical parameters for defining gender, marriage, family, sex, morality, sin, religion, tolerance, citizenship, property, education, security, and even the meaning of life itself. Consider as well the

antagonism directed at evangelical views on such matters. One study concludes:

There is evidence that within the U.S. strong disparities in religious belief versus acceptance of evolution are correlated with similarly varying rates of societal dysfunction; the strongly theistic, anti-evolution south and mid-west having markedly worse homicide, mortality, STD, youth pregnancy, marital and related problems than the northeast where societal conditions, secularization, and acceptance of evolution approach European norms It is the responsibility of the research community to address controversial issues and provide the information that the citizens of democracies need to chart their future courses.¹

What the study means by “controversial issues” are those commitments evangelicals do tend to make and it deems them the cause of societal dysfunction. The “research community” is called upon to help before things get “markedly worse,” so this is no “war on Christmas.” This is a scientific study arguing that evangelical views are dangerous to democracy!

Odd, since many evangelicals tend to think it is the “war on terror” that has been defending democracy. Since 9/11 designations such as that have been bandied about as a *shibboleth*: not to use it means one is weak on national security, to use it reveals one’s cultural insensitive. Such is the state of affairs in the eyes of this inside observer of both the evangelical and political movements of twenty-first century America.

American evangelicals need not lose hope. These cultural contests are not hills to die on. Evangelicals, whoever they are, should define themselves not by stances taken on various issues that arise. They are defined by the evangel, the good news. It is that which gives them the means to make a defense for the hope that is found in Christ (1 Pet 3:15). But who is Christ? We have the answer to that question as well. It is in the doctrine of the Trinity, and that is the hill to die on. Cultural contests are entirely secondary by comparison. So we do not lose hope in defending that doctrine as the crux of Christianity. The thesis here is that the doctrine of the Trinity must be foremost in the minds of Christians for evangelism and to express it is best done by having familiarity with the biblical texts which reveal it.

This essay highlights pitfalls found in the pursuit of one cultural issue, “Islamic terrorism.” A pivot is then made to challenge evangelicals to have at hand a biblical summary of why we argue that Jesus Christ is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. This is not meant to be a guide to evangelizing Muslims, nor a treatise on the development of Trinitarianism. But even if a typical American evangelical never has an evangelistic encounter with a Muslim, it is argued that any Christians living out the New Testament should

¹ Gregory S. Paul, “Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies,” *Journal of Religion & Society* 7 (2005): 8.

want everyone to accept Jesus Christ as Lord. The Trinity need not be the only topic of conversation, and terrorism need not be avoided in an assessment of Islam. The point is that the doctrine of the Trinity stands at the heart of Christianity, so understanding it is not just a matter of orthodoxy, it is how one should be preparing for any and every evangelistic encounter.

Of course, when news accounts identify Muslims as the ones committing acts of extreme violence in America some might say the doctrine of the Trinity is not really a pertinent issue, “Islamic terrorism” is. Yet, consider the Christians in Acts 17:6. It is hard to imagine they “turned their world upside down” making arguments against Roman violence. Luke’s message seems to be that they were spreading the good news of the risen God-Man Jesus Christ, and that is what upset the prevailing culture. Evangelicals today should not hesitate to follow their example and relate what the Bible reveals as the real distinction between Christianity and all other religions and life views. Scriptures on the Trinity are that doctrine’s best argument, so use them to share the One to whom they refer, for “how will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14).

Beware of Unproductive Arguments against Islam

The designation “Islamic terrorism” can be an important issue to discuss, yet may be unproductive as the focus when comparing Islam and Christianity in an evangelistic encounter. Consider how that argument might be made: If *jihadists* derive from Islam their justification for acts of terrorism, then Christianity is preferable as the true “religion of peace” when compared to Islam. Evangelicals may feel that this scores a point, and it is hard to ignore the fact that a string of atrocities can be listed to bring that point home. Yet, what is gained if a refutation is made listing a number of Christian atrocities? But that is not the real reason evangelicals should be wary of initiating such arguments. The “New Atheists” employ the very same approach to condemn all religions. In their view, extreme religion rises directly out of moderate religion, so acts of violence by radical religionists are *religious* acts, not just aberrations from the religion’s norm. Richard Dawkins put it this way:

The take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious extremism—as though that were some kind of terrible perversion of real, decent religion. Voltaire got it right long ago: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.” So did Bertrand Russell: “Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do.”²

If evangelicals make this same case against Islam—that the religion is what leads to the acts of violence—then what strange bedfellows evangelicals have made for themselves.

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Mariner Books, 2008), 345.

Consider as well the broader public's perception of such disputes. They seem to have a Schleiermachian notion that all religions can be cooked down into a pluralistic stew with moral equivalence the best sauce to serve with it.³ "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" they might say, for at their core all religions are the same. If that is true, then the only wrong view is the view that says one's view is right. Weight is given to this public perception at the highest level of American culture. In 2015, President Obama compared the terrorist tactics of groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram with acts done "in the name of Christ" during the crusades or in the Jim Crow South.⁴ His point was to warn Christians not to get on a "high horse" that might fuel anti-Islamic sentiments. He then called on Christians to be humbled by Christianity's history of abuses.⁵

The cognitive disconnect in the President's remarks was striking: Islam is *not* to be tainted by the acts of some Muslims because Christianity *is* tainted by the acts of some Christians. Still, a lesson for evangelicals might be garnered from the President's statements. Focusing on the acts of individuals is not an accurate way to judge a religion. Generally speaking, religions are top down systems, so throwing a spotlight on bad actors at the bottom hardly deconstructs the religion itself. In other words, religions transcend the foibles of individual followers. The argument that Christianity is the better religion because of bad actors in Islam would imply Christianity has no such problem, and that is hardly true. Besides, evangelicals themselves ask not to be judged on the basis of bad actors in those cases when someone actually has bombed or murdered "in the name of Christ." Christians quickly condemn them as *mis*representing Christ's teachings. Focusing on *jihadists* acts would need the same courtesy, it would seem, at least in the eyes of the public. So it may be

³ See D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 80–81; Carl Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 48; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, "Beyond Foundationalism: Theology after Modernity," in *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 35, as well as the entire section "Liberal and Evangelical Modernists," 35–38.

⁴ Barak Obama, "Remarks by the President at the National Prayer Breakfast," National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC on February 5, 2015, WhiteHouse.gov (accessed 2/7/15), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/05/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>. A video version is available on YouTube.com (accessed 2/7/15), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XU7RuilNq4w&feature=youtube_gdata.

⁵ For a focus on the historical issues, see Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions: A Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). For a focus on the theological discussion, see Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). The latter is by a former Muslim answering questions on Jihad, Sharia, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, God vs. Allah, etc.

that a focus on *jihadists* is not productive in conveying any real distinction between Christianity and Islam.⁶

Evangelicals might hone their argument that it is *jihadism*, rather than *jihadists*, that is the problem. The argument would be that the Qur'an commands acts of violence against non-Muslims⁷—*jihadism*—but no verse in the New Testament promotes such acts. Is this a more effective approach? Perhaps, but evangelicals would have to investigate more fully the variety of views on such texts within Islam itself. And if the Bible, not just the New

⁶ A full treatment of the issue is found in David Cook's 2005 work *Understanding Jihad*. His Introduction contrasts the common notion of *Djihad* found in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*: "In law, according to general doctrine and in historical tradition, the jihad consists of military action with the object of the expansion of Islam and, if need be, of its defense," with the other extreme, *jihad* as spiritual "striving" (David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005], 1–2). Cook notes of the latter religious meaning: "This position, predominant among Muslim apologists writing in non-Muslim (primarily Western) languages, is disingenuous." He adds, "Given the complexity and sensitivity of jihad's associations—the term is at once at the heart of polemics against Islam and of apologetics for Islam—it is easy to slip away from the facts and fall into polemics oneself" (*ibid.*, 2). The point of this essay is that as Cook's work is for a full appreciation of these issues, the hurdle remains regarding the distinctiveness of Christianity in the deity of Jesus Christ, and it deserves priority.

⁷ The "sword verse" in Surah 9, *At-Taubah* "Repentance," says non-believers who refuse to pay the *Jizyah* tax must not remain alive: "Kill the *Mushrikun* [i.e., non-Muslims] wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush. But, if they repent and perform *As-Shalat* [the Islamic statement of faith], and give *Zakat* [alms required of Muslims], then leave their way free" (v. 5). All citations of the Qur'an are from *The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, trans. Al-Hilali and Khan (Madinah, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, n.d.). Cook states that this "is one of the most important verses on the subject of jihad. It is usually called the 'Verse of the Sword' and is said to abrogate all other verses in the Qur'an on the subject of war and peace. While its immediate subject is the pagan Arabs—a narrow application sustained by early commentators—later Muslim jurists would use the verse to proclaim a universal jihad against all non-Muslims" (*Understanding Jihad*, 10).

Also in Surah 9: "Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the last day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad], (4) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth [i.e., Islam] among the people of the Scripture [Jews and Christians], until they pay the *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (v. 29). It is interesting in Cook's commentary that "This sura is the only chapter of the Qur'an that is not preceded by the phrase 'In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful,' which in itself indicates the martial nature of the text" (*ibid.*)

Testament, is the authority for evangelicals' doctrines,⁸ they must be ready to answer a similar charge that it too advocates violent acts. "Holy war" passages such as 1 Sam 15:3 say that God directed the utter destruction of people. We would respond that there is no directive for the church to do such a thing today, and excellent academic sources deal with this issue, but even they voice a variety of perspectives.⁹ So, do Islamic interpretations of the "sword verse" likewise vary? I would argue that Christians engaged in such discussions can address this question biblically and effectively, but wonder where it would lead in the end. Would any real distinction between the two religions on this issue prepare evangelicals for evangelistic encounters?

Holy war passages in the Bible do seem applicable to Israel's founding as a theocratic state: God sanctioned military activity for that purpose. Now, however, evangelicals do not call for a Christian state while Muslims do call for an Islamic state.¹⁰ According to a BBC program in 2014, most Muslims do want a caliphate, a single Islamic nation that joins together all Muslims under one political structure: "The last caliphate—that of the Ottomans—was officially abolished 90 years ago this spring. Yet, in a 2006 Gallup survey of Muslims living in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia and Pakistan, two-thirds of

⁸ George M. Marsden, "Introduction," *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix, 43. Marsden notes that historical, social, political, educational, and doctrinal factors typically define "evangelicalism" compared to mainline Protestantism or Roman Catholicism, for example, but the role of scriptural authority in evangelicals' theological formations is clear. See also Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 6; and Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 59. Evangelicals see "correct" doctrine correlating to biblical texts in a derivative way because the text is revelation from God. This view of the Bible, and the doctrine of the Trinity derived from it, are co-requirements for membership in the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS): "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory" ("Doctrinal Basis," in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 4 [December 2014]: inside front cover).

⁹ Christians should be engaged in the argument that defends the authority of the entire Bible, even those OT texts containing "holy war" passages. It is not, however, lightly done. For an excellent treatment of the issues, and the admission that they are not quickly resolved, see the essays edited by Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan in *Holy War in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

¹⁰ The acronym ISIS refers to *Islamic State* in Iraq and Syria. President Obama's administration prefers ISIL, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, a term used by 15th c. Europeans to mean lands east of Italy (L. *levare* "to rise" indicating lands toward "the rising" of the sun). As a synonym for "the middle east," the Levant connotes Crusade lands: Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt. To use ISIL acknowledges their goal to consume Israel.

respondents said they supported the goal of ‘unifying all Islamic countries’ into a new caliphate.”¹¹

Does the fact that Muslims have this aspiration necessarily mean that the Qur’an sanctions violent acts against others? Do Christians aspire to see God’s kingdom manifested on earth as it is in heaven? What does each side mean by such aspirations? Of course, to ask these questions is to make the point. Any arguments focused on Islam’s aspirations may be countered by similar aspirations on the part of Christians and vice versa. And what does the watching public gain from such a debate? If the Hebrews conquered Canaan under Joshua’s sword and Christian armies retook the Iberian Peninsula in the Reconquista, why should not Muslims have the right to conquer the lands they believe that Allah has given to them?

In the long run, it seems that a focus on *jihadist* acts or *jihadism* in the Qur’an would frustrate evangelicals who wish to promote the difference between Christianity and Islam (or any other religion). Debating such matters does tend to reaffirm only what each side already believes, and the general public, with a keen eye for fair play, would not be convinced by some evangelicals’ attempts to draw distinctions on these matters.

Again, there is no reason why some Christians should not prepare to engage in these discussions. There is one argument, however, that should never be made. It is the one that conflates America’s interests with Christianity’s core concerns. No nation-state, no matter how exceptional, rises to that level. In the opening paragraph it was said that the term “American” suffers from a negative connotation. American corporatism¹² is denounced as the new imperialism sapping the wealth of non-white lands and leaving those people in poverty.¹³ Western values in general, and American greed in particular, are the cause of social and economic inequities and that is what creates the conditions for violent extremism, whether by Muslims or others. And this view has also been voiced at the highest levels of American culture.¹⁴ So, when

¹¹ BBC.com, “What’s the Appeal of a Caliphate?” October 25, 2014 (accessed 3/5/15), <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29761018>.

¹² Robert Locke, “What is American Corporatism,” Frontpage.com, September 13, 2002 (accessed 3/16/15), <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=22594>.

¹³ Sam Muhho, “The Neo-Imperialist Corporatist Order and the ‘Men Behind the Curtain,’” Centre for Research on Globalization, November 18, 2013 (accessed 3/16/15), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-neo-imperialist-corporatist-order-and-the-men-behind-the-curtain/5358572>. Most standard texts on Liberation Theology by its advocates will express this perspective as well.

¹⁴ US State Department deputy spokesperson Marie Harf, interviewed on MSNBC’s *Hardball* with Chris Matthews on February 16, 2015, explained the cause of “violent extremism” in response to Matthews’s reference to the video of 21 Egyptian Christians beheaded by ISIS members in Libya the day before:

evangelicals think they might want to identify Christianity with America's success as a means to elevate Christianity over Islam or its people, its lands, or its sacred text then they should think again. Such an argument has little to do with what Christianity is or with the mission Christ has given his church. It would only offer Christianity in the same way the "Prosperity Gospel" does, as a "better option" based on observable results. Scripture warns, however, that a commitment to Christ may not be a "better" life at all. It may mean participation in his suffering (2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 1:8; Jas 5:10; 1 Pet 2:19; 5:9). It would seem the same would apply to a "Christian nation" as well, if such a thing exists. The mission of the church is to offer the biblical gospel, the good news for everyone that Christ is the *only* way to *any* life with God (John 14:6), not just a "better" life of ease, pleasure, or success.¹⁵

The Real Distinction between Christianity and Islam

What, then, is the approach that Christians should take when engaging an increasingly hostile culture? What should be in the minds of evangelicals who want to distinguish between Christianity and Islam? I would argue that the answer to both questions is the same. The secular American and the follower of Islam reject, at some level, the Lordship of Jesus Christ and, by extension, the doctrine of the Trinity. And who is Jesus Christ? The answer is in the biblical revelation of the one God's triune nature: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is true that many learned Christians seem not to understand the

It's not just a fight about dropping bombs on terrorists. It's really how we stop the causes that lead to extremism. . . . We need, in the longer term—medium and longer term—to go after the root causes that lead people to join these groups, whether it's lack of opportunity for jobs. . . . We can work with countries around the world to help improve their governance. We can help them build their economies so they can have job opportunities for these people. . . . There is no easy solution in the long term to preventing and combating violent extremism, but if we can help countries work at the root causes of this—what makes these 17-year-old kids pick up an AK-47 instead of trying to start a business—maybe we can try to chip away at this problem, while at the same time going after the threat, taking on ISIL in Iraq, in Syria, and helping our partners around the world.

Transcribed from the video of MSNBC's *Hardball* with Chris Matthews found on TheBlaze.com (accessed 2/28/15), <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2015/02/16/obama-admin-spokeswoman-says-u-s-cant-defeat-islamic-state-by-killing-them/>.

The US State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki confirmed Harf's perspective the following day, February 17, 2015 as found in the "Daily Press Briefing" transcript from the US State Department at [www.State.gov](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2015/02/237553.htm) (accessed 3/1/15), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2015/02/237553.htm>.

¹⁵ An important focus in Hebrews is the "better" covenant administered by Christ, but the end of the "faith chapter," Hebrews 11, does describe a "worse" life for some who lived by faith. The point is that our eyes must be fixed on Jesus Christ (Heb 12:2), not anything "better" or "worse" that we experience in this life.

Trinity, or at least seem not to convey it well enough for the average believer to repeat it. That is why the recommendation is made that the basis for the doctrine be familiarity with what God's word says on the matter. And even if Muslims reject Christ for a different reason than the secular American does, they both still need him as the doctrine of the Trinity reveals him to be.

For Muslims, the *Shahada* is the first of the "Five Pillars" of Islam. It says, "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger." Jesus cannot be accepted as Christians proclaim him, for that foundational premise, "There is no god but Allah," would mean the divine oneness, *tawhid*, excludes any others, including 'Isa (Arabic for Jesus in the Quran).¹⁶ This served Islam's cause in the seventh century AD, the formative years of Islam, when Arab tribes were required to put away their pagan polytheism.¹⁷ And this kind of absolute monotheism is why Muslims today would reject what Christians believe about Jesus Christ. Yet, this is where evangelicals need to make their stand. Why focus on *jihadism*? If the deity of Christ is Christianity's core claim, if Jesus Christ truly is "God with us," and if believing in him is to have eternal life (John 17:3), then how is this not the real issue? Is this not what the world needs to know, whether Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, secular humanist, or neo-atheist?

A recommendation follows that can help evangelicals understand what makes Christianity different from any and all religions: The nature of God as one, yet known in the distinction of Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

¹⁶ Al-Hilali and Khan, Appendix II, "*Shahada*—(Confession of a Muslim)," 894, *The Noble Qur'an*. "All kinds of worship are meant for Allah alone (and none else, whether it be an angel, Messenger, Prophet 'Isa [Jesus]—son of Maryam [Mary], 'Uzair [Ezra], Muhammad, saint, idol, the sun, the moon and all other kinds of false deities)." Islam allows that Jesus was virgin born, a prophet, and a miracle worker, but the Qur'an specifically states that "the son of Maryam," meaning Jesus, was not like Allah, nor Allah's partner to be worshiped, nor to be associated with Allah's nature (cf. Surahs 5:17, 72, 116; 19:34–35).

One polished and winsome approach to the denial of Jesus's deity is the "Jesus in Islam" page on the OneReason.com website (www.onereason.org/http://www.onereason.org/interfaith/jesus-in-islam/ [accessed 3/1/15]). Although directed at young, western, media-savvy minds, Christians familiar with the attacks on the deity of Christ from theological liberals to Jehovah's witnesses will find the arguments here very familiar.

Discussions with Muslims about God's oneness can be a starting point for a credible engagement since Christians reject the charge that Trinitarianism = Polytheism. Christopher Evan Longhurst, Professor of Philosophy in the School of Humanities and Social Studies at Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco, makes such a case in his short article, "*Tawhid* and *Homoousios*: Narrowing the Gaps between Muslim and Christian Understanding of God's Divine Oneness," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 255–58.

¹⁷ Willard G. Oxtoby, "Rivals, Survival, Revivals" in *World Religions Western Traditions*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 499–500.

To understand and to convey this doctrine of the Trinity, the best method for evangelicals is to begin with a collection of Bible texts that ground it. Other approaches delving into church councils and the creeds they formulated, or plumbing theories about *perichoresis* and *coinherence*,¹⁸ eventually can have their place. First, however, texts must be gathered which speak about the nature of God, the deity of Christ, and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. This is the sequence undertaken below.

A Recommended Approach for Evangelicals: A Biblical Summary of the Doctrine of the Trinity

If the Bible reveals the truth about God, then the doctrine of the Trinity is one of those revelations. Detractors would point out that the word “Trinity” is not a biblical term at all, and of course it is not, *per se*. It is a coined Latin term based on “tri-unity,” so it is not a Hebrew or Greek word in the original texts. Nevertheless, it was used in the early church to encapsulate a truth that the Bible reveals: there is one God (monotheism), yet this one God’s nature is uniquely known in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the one God, the Son is the one God, and the Spirit is the one God; but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father.¹⁹

Early believers in Jesus Christ were committed to the fact that he died, as a mortal being, but he was also God, the eternal Being, with power over death. His death and his resurrection revealed he was able to die as man, able to rise from death as God (John 10:17–18), and therefore he was worshiped to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5–11). If Father and Son share the same nature, the nature of God, that was the critical first step in establishing

¹⁸ *Perichoresis* is from the Greek preposition *peri-* “around” with the verb *chorein* “to contain” to mean, in Torrance’s view, a “mutual containing,” or “enveloping of realities” specifically attempting to convey the *inter*-relatedness or innate communion of the Persons of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is also discussed under the Latin *circumincersion* to convey notions of “interpenetration” or “co-inherence” when expressing how God’s unity is upheld while the distinction of each Person is not diminished by the presence of the others. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102.

¹⁹ Many theology texts present this kind of statement in summarizing the doctrine of the Trinity. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 231–39, is followed here. For a full treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, see Torrance, *Doctrine of God*, cited above. Other excellent works over the last two decades include Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relations, Roles, and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2000); Timothy George, ed., *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). Of interest to some would be John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

what became known as the doctrine of the Trinity. Similar arguments were then made concerning the Spirit.

Below are many of the Bible verses that ground this doctrine of the Trinity. Some are quite direct. Others are more subtle, not seeming to address the doctrine directly until placed alongside others verses. Taken together these verses show that the doctrine is derived from the text itself. The effort begins with one of the clearest truths derived from Scripture, the doctrine of monotheism found in the declaration that “the Lord is one.”

God’s Unity—Christians Are Monotheists

Monotheism, There Is One God

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (Deut 6:4).²⁰

The section that follows is probably the most difficult part of the entire enterprise to work through. It begins with the wholehearted affirmation that the Bible teaches the *oneness* of God. Christians are monotheists, committed to the fact that deity is that *single* self-existent One responsible for all else that exists. In the context of the original revelation of Scripture, this commitment would set God’s people apart from the polytheism and henotheism²¹ surrounding them. However, Scripture reveals more than the mere fact that there is only one deity. It reveals the nature of that one deity as a unity that entails a plurality of Persons. For early Christians, Messiah was one who also had God’s nature. Thus, God is the Sender, and the One sent is also God, *Immanuel* “God with us” (Matt 1:23). But subsequent discussions clouded the issue.

Historically, the church has expressed the notion that God is “one” in metaphysical terms, using the ancient concept of *simplicity*—God’s essence is simplex rather than composite.²² That idea is somewhat analogous to the way

²⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), The Lockman Foundation (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1996).

²¹ Henotheism, from the Greek *heno-* “one” (cf. Latin *unus*), is the notion that only one God should be worshiped (i.e., “monolatry”), but does not, like *monotheism*, reject out of hand the fact that multiple deities may exist. A discussion of this belief can be found in Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 232–33; cf. Steven W. Holloway, “Monotheism” in *Eerdman’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freeman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 916–17.

²² In Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 3, Article 7: “Whether God is altogether simple?” he argues: “There is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of matter and form; nor does His nature differ from His ‘suppositum’ [individual existing substance]; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple” (New Advent.org, 2nd and rev. ed., 1920 by Fathers of the

the human soul is not lessened even if, for example, the body's limbs are lost. The soul is one *kind* of thing, so any of it is all of it. Regarding God's essence, simplicity guarded against the idea that God was made up of disparate parts. God is one *kind* of essence, so any of God is all of God.

The Bible reveals more, however. The Bible reveals the fact of the Persons of God. It might seem that these persons are each "parts" of God, each a third, like the lobes on a clover leaf. It might seem that the Persons are three gods (polytheism). It might seem just one Person is God, but showing up in different modes (modalism). So, there is a real benefit to the notion of simplicity, for it reminds us that any of God is all of God—the three distinct Persons are each fully God. By itself, though, simplicity only indicates something about *what* God is in essence, which is insufficient. Scripture's focus is to reveal *who* God is, and it does so in God's Persons. The Father sent his Son, the Son died for our sins, the Holy Spirit indwells those who receive him, and all of this to the glory of God the Father—this is how we *know* the one God through the Persons.

Christianity's offer of a relationship with God is not, therefore, an offer to understand divine simplicity. Gerald Bray expresses it well in his comments on Christianity's movement away from that metaphysical notion to Scripture's invitation to a relationship with God's Persons:

As a concept, simplicity has played an important historical role which continues to manifest itself in the field of comparative religion. Christianity has always been obliged to explain the Trinity by positing a level of objective reality in God which is not governed by simplicity. This distinction has failed to penetrate Judaism, and it has been decisively rejected by Islam, so that both these religions, and especially the latter, tend to regard Christianity as a form of concealed polytheism. Both cling to the belief that true monotheism means the worship of a God who is a simple being. To this Christians reply that we worship not the essence of God, but his persons. Of course, both Jews and Muslims would say that God is personal, but in their understanding, personhood is really an attribute of the divine essence. Christianity denies this, maintaining that the persons are subsistent realities in their own right. At the level of the person, which is the point at which we enter into relationship with God, Christians insist that there is a plurality in unity, which is not to be confused with the simplicity of God's impersonal essence. The result is that everything which belongs to God's fixed and immutable essence is mediated to us through the relationship which we have with the persons.²³

English Dominican Province Online Edition, 2008 (accessed 3/21/15), <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>).

²³ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 95.

In this view, then, Christians affirm the biblical statements regarding the essential oneness of God, monotheism, but God's revelation provides more.

Scripture also uses both a singular noun (*YHWH*) and plural noun (*Elohim*) to refer to the one God, as well as singular and plural pronouns used by God in a self-referential way: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Anti-Trinitarians object, of course, that no theological import is intended, or that God is speaking to angels, or that God employs the "royal we."²⁴ Such explanations are not easily reconciled with the intention of biblical verses, however, for humans are created in God's image, not angels', and the "royal we" is not a biblical method for statements made by either God or kings. Furthermore, that would be difficult to reconcile with Gen 3:22.²⁵ Still, textual arguments at this level would be shaky ground for the entire doctrine of the Trinity to stand on if no other evidence were available. What these texts do is begin the argument that the doctrine is derived from the text itself and *never* makes an appeal to the existence of three gods. Christians are monotheists. Though God's essence is one, that oneness is uniquely three Persons. This is not an irrational, mystical, or inconceivable notion. It is a biblically derived notion about what is *God's* nature, thus different from anything else.

God Self-identifies as Both "I" (sg.) and "Us" (pl.)

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen 1:26)

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me." (Isa 6:8)

God, Who Is One, Speaks to Another Who Is "God"

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. (Ps 45:6–7)

Messiah's Title Is "God with us"

The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isa 7:14;

²⁴ The Qur'an uses the plural pronoun of majesty, the "royal we."

²⁵ Expulsion from the Garden, thus the issue in the fall, was that humans strove for God-likeness, not royalty or angelic likeness. For a full treatment of such issues see, John S. Feinberg, "OT Intimations of Plurality in the Godhead" in *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 448–56.

Immanuel in Hebrew is “with us *El*” [God]; Matt 1:23 translates, and in English, is “God with us.”)

Messiah Is “Mighty God” in Isaiah’s Prophecy

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:6)

These verses reveal more than what we might suppose Deut 6:4 to mean when it says “the Lord is one.” They convey more than a denial of polytheism or a theological notion of God’s simplex essence. Scripture reveals that God’s unity is a plurality of distinct Persons.

The Persons Are Distinct

There are distinct Persons in the unity of the Godhead. Deniers object in some way to this integral aspect of the doctrine. Modalism is the heretical view that the unity of God allows for only a single “person” manifested in three forms or modes at different times: Yahweh in the Old Testament, Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit in the church age. Matthew 3:17 makes this view untenable since all three Persons are present in distinct ways at Christ’s baptism (see also Matt 17:5 and Peter’s commentary at 2 Pet 1:17). Others object by saying only one of the three Persons actually is God, the others are some lower class of being. They point to some of the terminology in the New Testament, such as the greetings in Paul’s letters where “God” refers to the Father but “Lord” to Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2–3; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2–3, 17; 5:20; Phil 1:2). They argue for subordinationism here, that Jesus is a lesser being compared to “God,” for Jesus is only “Lord.” But these greetings are not indicating subordinationism, the heresy of Arius.²⁶ These greetings affirm what the Trinitarian doctrine says about the distinction of co-equal Persons in the Godhead. There is no ontological hierarchy buried in the terms “God” and “Lord,” for the essence of Father and Son is the same (the deity of Christ will be established below). So Paul’s terms highlight the *unity* in the Godhead enjoyed by the *distinct* Persons. He is not describing a single Person in different modes or an ontological hierarchy of dissimilar beings:

²⁶ Richard C. Kroeger and Catherine C. Kroeger, “Subordinationism” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elsel (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1153. This is also the concern for the Nicene perspective utilizing the terminology of *homoousios*. See Craig Blaising, *ibid.*, s.v. “Homoousios.”

Jesus, Spirit, and Father Are Distinct as Persons at Christ's Baptism

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matt 3:16–17)

We Baptize in "the name" (sg.) of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (pl.)

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

One God, One Lord: Not Different Categories of Being

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (1 Cor 12:4–6)

Paul's Letters Close with a Unified Concept of the Persons: Lord Jesus Christ, God, Holy Spirit

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

Paul's Default Concept of God Is of One Spirit, One Lord, and One God and Father

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:4–7)

The Work of God Is through the Three Distinct Persons: Father, Spirit, and Jesus Christ

. . . chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1 Pet 1:2)

Even if the terminology is at first awkward, the doctrinal focus is clear. Believers know God in three Persons, "the Holy Spirit," "God," and "the Lord Jesus Christ":

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. (Jude 20–21)

The Son Is God—Scripture Reveals the Deity of Christ

The distinction of the Persons in the Godhead is not subordinationism if the deity of the Son of God is revealed, for then Father and Son have the same nature: deity. If that premise stands, the foundation of the Trinity is laid, so it is attacked as the bedrock issue for Christianity.²⁷ But if it is not true, and the deity of Christ is not revealed, then more than the doctrine of the Trinity falls, the very meaning of the atonement falls as well. Consider the question: If Jesus Christ were *not* God, what effect would his death have? Anselm's argument in *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God [became] Man") was an early attempt to answer the question. Anselm argued that sin so devastated creation that the punishment for it could not be less than the effect it produced, so total annihilation would be the only recourse unless a greater sacrifice could stand as a substitute. Evangelicals now speak of Christ's atonement as "vicarious" or "substitutionary" to indicate that he died in our place.

If Christ were only a man, even a perfect one, his death would not have atoned for all of humanity's sin for all time. That is too great a leap, for only God could bear such a load. That is why it is such good news that "[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24). So, if Christ is *not* God, there is no good news for there is no substitutionary atonement, only the vain hope to be saved from the wrath of God by the blood of one who is nothing other than a creature as we are. If that is what it takes to appease the wrath of God for sin, then someone has exaggerated how bad sin is. The biblical view of sin and salvation is different, however, revealing that the atonement was accomplished only through the Son who himself "existed in the form of God," yet he humbled himself, taking our form, and taking our place (Phil 2:5–8). The glory of God's grace is that God would die for us and some of the verses that reveal the deity of the Lamb who was slain are featured below.

The Word Is God

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The Word in Flesh, Jesus Christ, Is therefore God "Incarnate" (Latin "in flesh")

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Jesus Addressed by Thomas as "God"

Thomas . . . said to Him [Jesus], "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

²⁷ Longhurst, "Tawhid and Homoousios," 255–56.

Jesus Responds to Being Addressed as “God,” Affirming It

Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” (John 20:28–29; Scripture prohibits treating as God anyone who is not God, thus the angel corrected the Apostle John in Rev 22:8–9)

The Son Identified with God’s Radiance, Glory, Nature, Power, and Saving Work

He [the Son, v. 2] is the radiance of His [the Father’s, v. 1] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb 1:3)

The Father Addresses the Son as “God”

Of the Son He [God, v. 1] says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.” (Heb 1:8)

The “blessed hope” Is the Return to Earth of One Who Is “God,” Jesus Christ

... looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:13)

Jesus Christ Is Both God and Savior

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:1)

Paul, in Reference to Christ’s Ancestry, Refers to Christ as “God”

[Paul speaks of his kinsmen, the] Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 9:5)

Christ Is Deity in Bodily Form

For in Him [Christ, v. 8] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. (Col 2:9)

The Holy Spirit Is a Personal Being— Scripture Reveals His Personhood

The doctrine of the Trinity must also defend the third Person, the Holy Spirit. The issues, however, are different than when defending the Second Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit, as the text of Scripture makes clear. Yet, many deniers of the Trinity claim that the Spirit of God is nothing more than God's activity or a force coming from God. Muslims deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit in a different way, arguing that Jesus's promise of a "comforter," another like him who is to come, is a prophecy about Muhammad.²⁸ The following verses show the falsity of such claims, for they reveal the Holy Spirit is God, having the attributes of deity (not those of a human, even a prophet), and they reveal the Holy Spirit is a Person, just as the other Persons of the Trinity (he does what one with personhood does).

To Lie to the Holy Spirit Is to Lie to God

Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:3–4)

Believers Are God's "temple," and the God within Is the Holy Spirit

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. (1 Cor 3:16)

The Holy Spirit Is Omnipresent, an Attribute of Deity

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. (Ps 139:7–8)

The Holy Spirit Is Omniscient, an Attribute of Deity

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Cor 2:10)

²⁸ Al-Hilali and Khan, Appendix II, "Biblical Prophecy on the Advent of Muhammad," in *The Noble Qur'an*, pp. 909–10. The New Testament passages cited in this Appendix are John 14:15–16; 15:26–27; 16:5–8; 16:12–14, 16. The first refers to "the Father" giving "another Comforter" who would "abide with you forever." The translators explain: "Muslim theologians have said that 'another Comforter' is Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah; and him to 'abide forever' means the perpetuity of the laws and way of life (*Shari'ah*) and the Book (*Qur'an*) which was revealed to him."

The Holy Spirit Does What a Person, Not a Force, Does

I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. . . . But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you. (John 16:7–8; 13–15)

Other Actions of the Holy Spirit as a Person

Regenerating, giving “new birth” (John 3:3–5; cf. Rom 6:4 and Col 2:13); justifying (1 Cor 6:11); baptizing into Christ (1 Cor 12:13, which is how we are “in Christ,” 2 Cor 5:17; cf. Eph 4:4–6; and thus have Christ’s eternal life, 1 John 5:11–12); sealing believers in Christ as well as being that seal of God’s saving work (1 Cor 6:16–17; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:21–22); being grieved by believers’ refusal to live in a Christlike way (Eph 4:30).

Putting It Together

The doctrine of the Trinity, at its core, is the claim for the deity of Jesus Christ, that the Son of God is God the Son. Once this truth is understood, we can accept that the *oneness* of God is not merely a simplex essence, but God’s unity is a plurality of Persons, and this is so because Scripture reveals it. That God the Holy Spirit is a co-equal member of the Godhead, as a Person, follows without further argument if Scripture’s claims of his deity and personhood are accepted as well. If Scripture’s claims are rejected, however, any doctrinal stance can be summoned. But that is not an option for orthodox Christians, and especially evangelicals.

Christians should make known these texts from the Bible that ground the doctrine of the Trinity. But there are other verses that some might have missed. These are verses separated from each other textually, such as one from the Old Testament and one from the New, yet when put together are parallel conceptually. In other words, together, they reveal something neither did separately. Of interest here are parallel texts that reveal the deity of Christ. For example, the Old Testament says Yahweh/Jehovah is the only savior, yet the New Testament says the same of Jesus Christ. Together they refer to what only God can do, save from sin, but they also reveal that this applies both to Jehovah *and* to Jesus Christ, establishing the deity of Christ. To put it simply,

both have the same saving nature that only God has.²⁹ Several such parallels are offered below.

Who Is Savior—No One Other Than Jehovah and the Son?

“I, even I, am the LORD (literally, Jehovah), and there is no savior besides Me.” (Isa 43:11; cf. also Isa 45:21, 49:26; 1 Tim 4:10, 14)

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

By the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . . is the stone which was rejected. . . . And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:10–12)

Similar comparisons of texts also bring together an understanding of the one divine nature in the distinct Persons. What is true about Jehovah applies as well to Jesus Christ:

Who Claims the Personal Name of Deity, YHWH [Yahweh/Jehovah], “I AM”?

Jehovah identifies himself as “I AM.” (Exod 3:14)

Jesus identifies himself with the name “I AM.” (John 8:58, cf. the response to this in v. 59, the Jews hearing this understood his claim as blasphemy.)

Whose Is the Glory?

I am the LORD [Yahweh/Jehovah] that is My name; I will not give My glory to another. (Isa 42:8)

Both God the Father and the Lamb are worthy to receive “honor and glory.” (Rev 5:11–14)

Honoring the Father Is Honoring the Son, and to Dishonor the Son Is to Dishonor the Father

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:22–23)

²⁹ The transitive property in algebra states this: If $a = c$ and $b = c$, then $a = b$. The point is simply that Scripture uses such a pattern to express that the Father and Son have the same saving nature, both do that which only God does. Thus, even though Father and Son are distinct, coexisting, coequal Persons, they are the *one* God.

Knowing/Seeing Jesus = Knowing/Seeing the Father

If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:7–9)

Other Summary Statements about Christ’s Equality with the Father Found in John’s Writings:

To know Christ is to know the Father. (John 8:19)

To believe in Christ is to believe on the Father. (John 12:44)

To confess the Son is to have the Father. (1 John 2:23)

To deny the Son is not to have the Father, to hate the Son is to hate the Father. (John 15:23)

Finally, perhaps the most direct revelation of parallel concepts for YHWH/Jehovah and Jesus Christ is from texts that answer the question, Who is properly worshiped? Scripture reveals clearly that God alone is to be worshiped. Exodus 20:1–6, the first of the Ten Commandments, states this and later we are told why: “You shall not worship any other god, for the LORD . . . is a jealous God” (Exod 34:14). Jesus himself likewise affirms it: “For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’” (Matt 4:10). Revelation 22:8, 9 teaches the same when John bowed before an angel in awe but was rebuked for even taking the posture of worship (obedience) before a created being: “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God!” Yet, Scripture reveals Jesus Christ is rightly worshiped:

Jesus Christ Is Worshiped

And when He [God the Father, v. 5] again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” (Heb 1:6)

All Things Worship Jesus Christ the Lamb

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him

who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped. (Rev 5:11–14)

It Is Not Blasphemy, but Glory to the Father, When the Son Is Worshiped

That at the name of Jesus every knee will bow . . . and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:10, 11)

Other Instances of Christ Being Worshiped in Matthew

The magi (2:11); the Gadarene demoniac (5:6); a leper (8:2); a Jewish ruler (9:18); the disciples (14:53); a Canaanite woman (15:25); the mother of James and John (20:20); two Mary’s at the Resurrection (28:9); and the eleven disciples at the Ascension (28:17).

What conclusion can be reached? From these passages it is clear that only God is rightly worshiped. From these passages it is clear that Jesus Christ is rightly worshiped. So the logic is undeniable:

One rightly worshiped is God.
Jesus Christ is one rightly worshiped.
Therefore, Jesus Christ is God.

The logic is sound and verifies what Scripture reveals. Deniers of the Trinity can reject the logic or the revelation or both when they warn believers that worshiping Jesus Christ is somehow improper, like polytheism or idolatry. But with love, Christians must warn them that treating God profanely is, by definition, blasphemy, and that is the desperate position they have put themselves in by denying the deity of Christ.³⁰ They are profaning God the Son.

Conclusion

A summary of biblical texts has been presented in the pages above highlighting the verses from Scripture that any Christian can both know and convey regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible provides for us God’s own statements that the *one* God exists eternally, yet uniquely as three distinct Persons who are the one God we know: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No paradox exists in this claim. Each of the Persons of the Godhead has divine glory, is worshiped, creates, saves, and so forth—it is God who is doing what any Person of the Godhead does. Therefore, Christians can and should ac-

³⁰ The Qur’an actually calls it blasphemy to believe in the Trinity. Surah 5:73 says, “They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a trinity.”

cept the reasonableness of this truth found in Scripture and commit to expressing it as the doctrine of the Trinity when called upon to answer for what is unique about the Christian faith.

When I came to Christ in the mid-1970s, I was confronted with these very issues. Searching for help at a Christian bookstore I found a pamphlet written by Arthur Wallis offering the simple comparison of verses that became a model for much of what was presented above. I even typed out the verses and his summation to tape them into the back cover of my Bible. My first witnessing encounter soon followed and using them helped, in part, to bring a Christian Science friend to Christ. During the last 40 years, every Mormon and Jehovah's Witness who has come to my door has heard Wallis's summary of the Apostle John's texts on what those verses mean:

If you know Christ, you know the Father also [John 8:19; 14:7]; if you believe on Christ, you are in fact believing on the one who sent him [John 12:44]; if you confess the Son, you have the Father also [1 John 2:23]. On the other hand, if you honour not the Son, you honour not the Father; if you hate the Son, you hate the Father also [John 5:23]. It is therefore a moral and spiritual impossibility to have one attitude to God, and quite a different attitude to Christ. You cannot acknowledge the deity of the Father and deny the deity of the Son, for a denial of the Son constitutes a denial of the Father. Whether or not you understand it, whether or not you believe it, your attitude to Christ *is* your attitude to God. "What think ye of Christ?" is now the acid test of your relationship to God, and your answer will determine the destiny of your soul. Listen to his own solemn words, "Except ye believe that I am, ye shall die in your sins" [John 8:24].³¹

The good news is that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved (Rom 10:13; Joel 2:32), and that doing so is to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11). This is where evangelicals must stand, for it is only through Jesus Christ that it is possible to have eternal life, as he himself said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6).

³¹ Arthur Wallis (1922–88), *Jesus of Nazareth: Who Is He?* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1956), 49.