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The Adopted Life

Trinity and Humanity, Together

Too Much Trinity

It's come to our attention here at *The Adopted Life* that too many people are talking too much about the Trinity. Heaven forefend! What a disaster!

Everyone knows the Trinity is a wonderful doctrine. In fact, it's so wonderful that it's best left to the thoughts and words of really wonderful people – like theologians and (maybe) certain pastors with a little too much time on their hands. But the Trinity is just that – it's a doctrine, and therefore it's boring, and hard to understand. So take my advice: don't try.

And please, don't try to talk about the Trinity with people who aren't Christians. Can you imagine what kind of weirdoes they'll think we are? People already think we're strange when we talk about "God," but at least the concept of "God" is amorphous enough to allow other people to fill in their own ideas of whatever they think "God" might be. If you start talking about the Trinity then you force the other person to think about a very specific, clear, and weird picture of God. You force the other person to think about God as three persons in one.

We've even heard horror stories that some people are talking about the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit during baptismal counseling instead of talking about "God." Can you imagine? What in the world could the Trinity possibly have to do with baptism?

I want to apologize for whatever role *The Adopted Life* has played in this mess. To be honest, though, it's not entirely our fault. Various miscreants in the history of the Church have contributed their fair share to the problem. Consider St. Patrick. Everyone knows the story of him using the clover leaf to explain the Trinity to the Irish. That's an example of someone who not only discussed the Trinity with non-believers but talked about the Trinity with pagans who had never even seen a Bible! What was he thinking?!

Fortunately we know better today. We know it's better to just talk about "God" in a general sense. Or better yet, don't talk at all. Let the non-believer do all the talking. C.S. Lewis once told the story of a friend of his who had been taught, as a child, that God was a "perfect substance" and so she ended up imagining him as a "vast tapioca pudding" (*Miracles*, p. 17). This is exactly the sort of thinking we want to reinforce: pudding, pie, clouds in the sky – anything but the fearsomely free and wild heart of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This reinforcing is best done by shutting up about the Trinity and letting the non-believer talk about what he thinks God is.

A little bit of Trinity – as icing on the cake, so to speak – is not a bad thing when given in small amounts to mature Christians. But all this talk of announcing the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to the world at large is just too much Trinity. And too much Trinity might bring crashing down all the grand philosophical ideas of "God" that humanity has spent so many millennia constructing. And I don't think any of us want to live in a world like that.

~ Rt. Rev. Pstr. Jonathan Stepp, M.Div., O.C., G.Q.



Some All

A Trinitarian Christ-centered paraphrase of Romans 4.1 – 5.19

(4.1) Let's go back to father Abraham. What did he get, and how did he get it? (2) Did his own moral efforts create a right relationship between him and Papa? That certainly would have been impressive (to us, though not to Papa). (3) The Bible says: "By entrusting himself to Papa, Abraham entered into what he had been given – a right relationship with Papa and the world."



(4) Abraham was not earning a paycheck; he was receiving a gift. BIG difference! (5) It is not we who are working hard to earn a right relationship with Papa. It is Papa who (with his Son and their Spirit) has already worked hard to create a right relationship with people like us! Though we have earned nothing, we have been given everything! As we trust in the Giver, we begin to share in the incarnate Son's right relationship with his Papa and with all things in their Spirit.

(6) David himself celebrates those who receive this gift, as distinct from those who work to somehow earn it: (7) "How wonderful it is to be forgiven, to have my wounds cleaned and bandaged! (8) How wonderful it is to know that Papa has chosen to never use my bad decisions as a weapon against me!"

(9) But wonderful for WHOM? To whom is this gift given? Only to the circumcised, or to everyone? We say "By entrusting himself to Papa, Abraham entered into what he had been given – a right relationship with Papa and the world." (10) Did he receive this gift AFTER his circumcision? No, it was BEFORE! (11) His circumcision was a SIGN testifying to the truth of an already-accomplished fact – his right relationship with Papa, a relationship he had already received through faith when he was still uncircumcised.

The whole point was for Abraham to become the forefather of ALL who receive a right relationship with Papa through faith. When he received this gift before his surgery, he became the father of all believers who have not had the surgery. (12) He also became the father of the believers who HAVE had the surgery, but also follow the example of his faith before his surgery.



(13) Papa promised Abraham the world. How did he receive that inheritance? How do we receive it? Not through our perfect commitment to Torah, but through trust in the One who is committed to perfecting US.

(14) If obedience to Torah earns our inheritance, then faith is worthless and the promise is no promise at all. (15) Think about it: Torah decrees punishment for people like us who violate it. If Torah is what it's all about, then we're all screwed. (Come to think of it, it is in some ways beneficial to be without Torah, because you can't break rules you don't have, right?).

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(16) We receive our inheritance not by keeping rules but by trusting in the One who rules and keeps US. What is promised is a gift, not an earned wage. The gift is received by all of Abraham's children – yes, the children who follow Torah, but also the children who share in his faith but DON'T follow Torah. He is the father of us all, (17) as the Bible says: "I have made you the father of MANY peoples."

We trust the One he trusted, the One in whom we live and move and have our being, the One who makes life out of death, the One who makes all things out of nothings. (18) Abraham rested in the promise of an impossible future in which he would be "the father of many peoples," with "descendants beyond number." (19) Despite the obvious anatomical facts that his and Sarah's bodies were utterly incapable of producing offspring.

(20) Over the years, not only did his trust endure, but it actually grew stronger as he thanked Papa for what had been promised, (21) being convinced of what is really the most rational of all beliefs – that Papa is able to do what he says he will do. (22) Thus, through his faith, "Abraham entered into what he had been given – a right relationship with Papa and the world."

(23) When it says "he entered into what he had been given," it's talking not just about Abraham (24) but about us as well. We also will enter into that gift as we trust in him who raised Master Jesus from the dead, Jesus who took human wrongness to the grave and then rose with the gift of human rightness for all.

(5.1) Therefore, since it is through faith that we receive the gift, we are now sharing in Master Jesus' peaceful relationship with Papa. (2) Jesus is our access into the Triune life in which we now live and move and have our being. We shout "WOOHOO!" as we share in the Great Dance and look forward to sharing in it even more in the future.

(3) We even shout "WOOHOO!" when we suffer, because even pain has been made to serve the Dance: Suffering strengthens (4) and refines the metal of our souls, producing in us hearts of steel with a chest-thumping readiness to take on the adventure of each new moment. (5) And we know adventure will come, because we know the wild heart of the One who has filled us to overflowing with Infinite Life through the Holy Spirit.

(6) When we were utterly incapable of goodness, the Master died for us, his enemies. (7) It's rare enough that someone would be willing to die for a good person (though I'm sure it happens now and then), (8) but the Triune Love is made plain in how the Master died for us, we who were doing everything we could to destroy eve-



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rything he loved.

(9) Now that's what I call assurance! Think about it: If he has spilled his own blood to right our wrongness, how much MORE sure can we be that he will continue to heal and guide us down the paths of wisdom, so that we will require as little fatherly butt-kicking as possible! (10) With his Son's death, Papa turned us, his enemies, into his friends. How much more surely will his Son's LIFE turn our brokenness into healing? (11) As grateful enemies-turned-friends, we join Master Jesus in shouting "WOOHOO!" about our amazing Papa.



(12) Just one man stood in for all humanity when he chose dysfunction and death, and it affected every person everywhere; all of us became broken, decaying things. (13) This disease existed long before Torah, but without Torah, it could not have been diagnosed. (14) From Adam to Moses, death ruled unchecked over human life, even over the "good people." Adam stood in for all humanity, and the result was catastrophic. But the good news is that a New Adam has come.

(15) And the Old Adam's curse is no match for the New Adam's gift. You have no difficulty believing that one man made a foolish choice and doomed all people to death. Then why is it so hard to believe that the one man Jesus could make a wise choice and doom all people to life? (16) Adam's curse and Jesus' gift are not even in the same league! In one action, Adam violated his relation to Papa and to the world, and the result was shame for many. But the free gift followed many violations, resulting in a healed human relation to Papa and to the world.

(17) Death was able to overcome the world through the wrongness of one man. How much more certain can we be that, through the rightness of the one man Jesus, those who receive the gift will overcome the world with wholeness and mercy!

(18) Just as one man's dysfunctionality infected all people with his shame, so one man's act of reconciliation has now infected all people with his healed relationship with all things. (19) When one man violated the boundaries appropriate to his nature, he gave to everyone his brokenness and death. But now in an even bigger way, one man has embraced human limitation, giving to everyone his wholeness and life.

~ John Stonecypher



When Theology Wears You Out

Let's face it. Theology can beat you up and wear you out! And by theology, I mean our thoughts about God the Trinity in the light of Jesus, His Son. This ought not discourage us, but encourage us!

Why? In your thoughts about God you are wrestling with nothing less than the tremendous and staggering reality of the Father, Son and Spirit! The Only Relationship that is uncreated and has always existed!

Trying to grasp how good Their Love is will drive any thinking, created person bonkers! Our human brains in and of themselves simply cannot compute a relationship that Stunning and Fabulous!

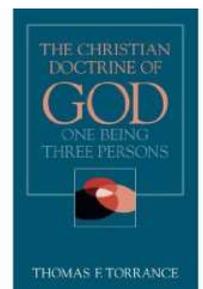
This is encouraging because if we could fully grasp God then we would be God, or His thinking would be as limited and faulty as ours! Can you imagine the horror of YOU being God? Me being God? Yikes! Ha-Ha!

And because we cannot fully grasp the Father, Son and Spirit, we now have more wiggle room in our brains to think positively about how far SHORT our thoughts actually are when we embrace that God is Good! When we can grasp just an inkling of how Good the Good News is, then imagine how Good the Gospel REALLY is! You can't, because it is far better than you can ever imagine or put into words! Wowsa!

With that brief introduction, I would like to share something deep and simple with you for those times when theology wears you out and discourages you. I will start with the deep stuff and then paraphrase it in my own simple way for your encouragement.

The late Thomas Torrance puts it this way:

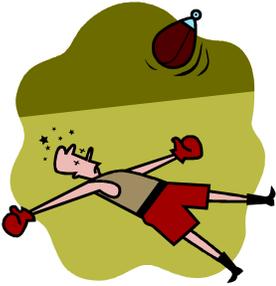
Hence, even when God draws near to us and draws us near to himself on the ground of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and gives us access to himself through Christ and in his Spirit to know him, in some real measure, as he is in the inner relations of his eternal being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he does not surrender (in Irenaean terms) his invisibility in the visibility, his incomprehensibility in the comprehensibility, of the incarnation, or therefore reduce knowledge of himself to what we can completely grasp or articulate. This is to say, in the mystery of God's self-revealing there is an inarticulate as well as an articulate ingredient, an unspecifiable as well as a specifiable factor, such that in our knowing God in his self-revelation it is the inarticulate or unspecifiable element that governs what is articulated and specified in the incarnation of his Son in Jesus Christ: we know more of him than we can ever tell. This is what St Paul, as we have seen, called the "great mystery of godliness," for the incarnate self-revelation of God is more to be worshipped in sheer wonder and praise than conceived and expressed, and as such regulates all sound doctrine. ~ The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons, pg. 81



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That man knew how to think so good and broadly about God (in the Holy Spirit's grace) that just reading that paragraph gave me a theological knockout punch and wears me out completely! In fact, that is about as much as I can read in one of Torrance's books at any one sitting before I am completely worn out and theologically punch drunk! Ha-Ha! But I must admit it is the kind of knockout punch I love!

Here is my simple paraphrase to explain why I love it and how it helps me (and perhaps can help you too!):

Even when God the Father, Son and Spirit helps us see Who He really is in His relationship by actually showing up in the flesh of Jesus, he doesn't show us everything. He still has some huge, invisible things about Himself that won't fit into the small pea brains of His adopted children, nor fitting for our babbling baby tongues to speak. God is so awesome there is something about him that must be spoken!

He is also so much more awesome than what we can speak that there truly are no fitting words! There is something so obvious about the closeness of God that you can put your finger on it. There is also something about the closeness of God that is so close you'll always miss the forest for the trees and never be able to put your finger on it.

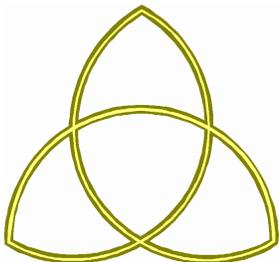
In fact, it is these unthinkable and unspeakable things that are the foundation of the things thought and spoken about through Jesus Christ, God's Son made flesh. The Father, Son, and Spirit are so close and near to us NOW that each of us knows more about this Fabulous Trinity than we can ever communicate to anyone else! It is this mystery the Apostle Paul was speaking of when he wrote about the "great mystery of godliness".

In the end, it is better to experience Jesus through worship and praise! Jesus is the fullness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! When theology beats you up and wears you out, simply stand speechless and in jaw-gaping wonder at Jesus. That is much better than stressing out trying to think about how vast God is and fumbling over just the right words that would make Him fully known to others. In fact, all sound doctrine is founded upon this experience of standing speechless before the Loving and Relational Being of God, as revealed in the Person of Jesus.

Yes, it is awesome to contemplate the Trinity and to try and understand Him! We are compelled to do so! It is the glory of kings (humankind) to seek out a matter! Proverbs 25:2b. But it is even better to experience the Trinity, especially since it is the glory of God to conceal a matter! Proverbs 25:2a. Ha-Ha!

I offer up this Good News to YOU in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Who not only Loves you more than He Loves Himself, but Who also Likes YOU (and I really do mean YOU!) very, very MUCH!

~ Tim Brassell



Short Story: *The Man in the Robe*

The man in the robe made a lonely scene, trekking over the barren plain under the noonday sun. He had come a long way from the city. His coarse, brown robe flapped against his skinny legs as his worn leather sandals crunched their way across the pale gravel. Far away was the blue wall of a mountain; closer, a few boulders of indeterminate size. Above, a cloudless sky of pale, white-hot blue.

Even the suburbs of the city, filled with jealousy and yelling as they were, would have been welcome to him now. His pack seemed impossibly heavy after so long a walk in such a wasteland. The water from the city's river that had filled his canteen that morning was gone now. Only the box remained, yet its weight seemed to grow with each step.

At last he saw the shimmering pool of water that he had expected for the last hour. Even in this vast nothingness that pool was there - not a mirage, but a real rest. He half fell, half knelt as he bent to scoop up water and drink. This was the half-way point. He rested quietly for a while, eyes closed. There was no sound, no wind, no one. Who knows how long he sat? It was always noon in that wilderness. At last the box impressed itself upon his mind and seemed to rouse him. He set off again on his journey.

Finally he could see the tent in the distance. A single black spot in the chalky white dirt of the desert. It grew imperceptibly larger with his every step, until at last he could distinguish a second black dot next to it. The man in the tent had seen him coming from far away and had come out to greet him.

Neither man spoke or waved until the man in the robe stood directly in front of the man in the tent. In all that long approach the two just looked at each other - the man in the robe walking, weighed down by the pack, and the man in the tent watching, arms crossed. Face to face they sized each other up and the man in the tent spoke.

"So, you've come again, and brought that bloody box of bread and wine, I guess."

The man in the robe winced at the profanity and simply answered "Yes, I've come."

"Well I won't eat it this time either," the tent-man said with arms folded. And at that moment something that might have once been compassion stirred in his arid soul. He saw the parched lips, the dust covered feet, the sheer exhaustion of the man in the robe. For a moment their eyes met - and then the man in the tent looked away quickly.

"I won't eat it, but you look like you need it. If you want, you can come into the tent while *you* eat." This was all the thing like compassion could move him to say.

"Thank you," said the man in the robe. He was elated. He had come there for what seemed like a thousand times, over what seemed like a million years, and this was the first time the man in the tent had ever invited him to come inside, in the shade, out of the heat.

It was a beginning. Only a little beginning, but a beginning none the less.

~ Jonathan Stepp



An Open Letter to an Atheist



Your Father in heaven isn't too concerned about whether you believe he exists.

To meditate on the question of something's existence is a purely academic exercise. It's like asking "if a tree falls in the woods, and there's no one around to hear it, does it still make a sound?" Academically we know that it does make a sound – but what difference does it make and who cares?

Your Father in heaven knows that you can believe that he exists and yet that belief can make no difference in your life - or, worse, it can even make a negative difference in your life. This is what the scripture means when it says "even Satan and the demons believe that God exists" (James 2:19.)

Your Father in heaven doesn't want you to simply believe that he exists, he wants to share with you the fullness of his own life, the way a loving Dad shares his life with his kids. The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (who we call the "Trinity") are in a dynamic relationship of active and loving embrace. Their life is filled with joy and patience and it is overflowing with committed, faithful love that never sins against others.

Whenever and wherever we experience that kind of life, we are experiencing and participating in the Divine Life of the Trinity.

And that is what your Father in heaven wants for you. Your Father in heaven wants you to experience the joy of this kind of life, the kind of life that he has always had and enjoyed with his Son in their Spirit.

So the secret of your life is that you are not excluded, you are included. In Jesus, God the Son has united humanity to himself, and therefore he has united us all to the kind of life he has with the Father and the Spirit. You are already included in the life the Father wants you to be a part of.

I know that many times in your life you do not feel like you are included in a life of joy, love, and embrace. But if you have experienced that kind of life, even if only once and for only one perfect summer afternoon in July, then you will forever know it when you see it and it will lead you home to the one who is the source of it. It will lead you home to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, in whose existence you have existence and in whose life you have life.

It may take years for you to come to see that this kind of life is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus is sharing with you, as a blessing from his Father. When you're included in something it is difficult to sit outside of it and study it, trying to decide whether it exists. The dancers in a square dance don't look for proofs of the dance's existence. They dance. Birds don't study the five reasons that air must be real. They fly. A five-year old doesn't wonder if "mommy" is a mere mental con-



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struct which once gave him an evolutionary advantage and that he's now outgrown. He runs to her arms.

So I'm not going to tell you to try to prove that your Father in heaven exists and loves you. I'm going to encourage you to get on with the living of life.

Really love people, don't just say you do. Chase after work that inspires you and don't give up. Bathe in the beauty of art, don't just hurry past it. Walk slowly through gardens. Hear music, don't just listen to it. See the world, don't just live in it.

As you do, be aware of who you really are: be honest with yourself about what you really think and how you really feel. Stop lying to yourself and others, and stop pretending that you like things just because it seems cool, or right, or to your advantage to like those things.

To live this way is to live in step with the Holy Spirit, and it is very hard to do – very hard. If you don't know that yet, then you will find it out as you get older. If you are able, even briefly, to see the world with clear eyes and to bathe in beauty, then you will also see the pain. You will see the pain of our failure as human beings, how we always mess things up – even when we're trying to do the right thing.

And eventually you will come to see your own part in the causing of that pain. You will see that you're not that different from others and that we are all in this thing called life together. It may take you all your life to see this. You may not really understand it until you have passed through death and death has stripped away from you everything you ever loved and held dear and left you feeling alone, naked, and in the dark.

When the day comes that you see how we are all in this together, then you will at last see that you have never been alone and you have never been excluded. And you will see that none of us were ever alone or ever excluded. We were always in the dance of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

On that day - whether it is tomorrow or some day after you have died - you will finally see how your Father has thrown his arms around you and you will be able to hear what he has always been saying to you your life whole life long: "You are the child I always wanted, I am so glad I have you with me."

On that day it will be hard to remember all the logical reasons that use to argue against his existence, but it will be easy to remember the times you danced and the days you flew. And you won't wonder anymore whether the Father is real. You'll be too busy enjoying your life with him.



~ Jonathan Stepp

Cyril of Jerusalem on Humanity's Redemption



We're sometimes asked "Are you sure the adoption of humanity is the gospel? I've never heard it before." That's why we like to bring in the thoughts of various theologians from throughout history to add to our understanding of the gospel.

This text is from the catechism of the 4th century bishop and theologian Cyril of Jerusalem. He wrote his catechetical lectures to explain the faith to those who were preparing to be baptized and to help other pastors and deacons to know how to educate and train those who were preparing for baptism. In this section he is talking about the cross and its effectiveness for all of humanity:

... the glory of the Cross led those who were blind through ignorance into light, loosed all who were held fast by sin, and ransomed the whole world of mankind. **And wonder not that the whole world was ransomed;** for it was no mere man, but the only-begotten Son of God, who died on its behalf. Moreover one man's sin, even Adam's, had power to bring death to the world; but if by the trespass of the one death reigned over the world, how shall not life much rather reign by the righteousness of the One? (Romans 5:17-18) And if because of the tree of food they were then cast out of paradise, shall not believers now more easily enter into paradise because of the Tree of Jesus? If the first man formed out of the earth brought in universal death, shall not He who formed him out of the earth bring in eternal life, being Himself the Life? ~ *The Catechetical Lectures*, lecture 13, para. 1-2. (Emphasis is ours.)



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