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The Trinity in the Bible and Selected Creeds of the Church: Resources for Study



Theological Accents

Theologische Akzente

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I In the Bible

This study assumes that the classical Christian teaching on the Trinity is consistent with the Bible, though this claim will not be documented at length. The reader who is uncertain that the Triune nature of God is taught in the Bible should carefully consider some of the many relevant biblical texts on this theme. Though the technical language of the classical Christian creeds is not used in the Bible, this careful way of speaking about God flows organically from the entire Bible. A few selected texts which the reader may want to consider:

- ❑ Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–13; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:29–34
- ❑ Matthew 28:18–20
- ❑ John 1:1–18
- ❑ John 14:16, 26; 15:26–27; John 16:5–15
- ❑ Romans 1:1–6
- ❑ 2 Corinthians 13:14
- ❑ Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:14–22
- ❑ Colossians 1:15–18
- ❑ 1 Peter 1:1–2

Though the teaching about the Trinity comes mostly in the New Testament, there are many places where the Old Testament points toward understanding God as a Trinity. This is sometimes connected with descriptions of complexity within the Godhead, sometimes with clear distinctions between the work of God as Creator and as Redeemer.

Some of these texts are:

- ❑ Genesis 1:26–27
- ❑ Isaiah 43:10–11; 44:6; 48:16; 63:7–16
- ❑ Psalm 2
- ❑ Psalm 45:6–7
- ❑ Psalm 110

Our understanding of the Trinity is closely associated with our understanding of Jesus, the Christ, who is fully God and fully man, yet one Person. This classical Christian teaching is also assumed in this study, though it will not be defended at length. A few biblical texts the reader may wish to consider on this topic, in addition to the Psalms mentioned above:

- ❑ Isaiah 9:6–7
- ❑ Daniel 7:13–14
- ❑ Zechariah 12:10
- ❑ Matthew 9:1–8; 11:25–30; 14:22–32
- ❑ Mark 4:35–41
- ❑ John 3:16–36; 5:16–27; 20:24–29
- ❑ Romans 5:15–17; 9:1–5
- ❑ 1 Corinthians 2:6–10
- ❑ Colossians 2:9
- ❑ Hebrews 1:1–13; 2:5–18; 4:14–16; 5:7–9
- ❑ 1 John 1:1–4; 4:1–3
- ❑ 2 John 7–8

II Early Christian Creeds

The Creed before the Apostles' Creed

From the early centuries of the church Christians used summaries of the faith to maintain consistency of basic teaching among the churches and from generation to generation. There were a few very similar creeds that were slowly replaced by the 'Apostles' Creed.' As an example of a creed of which we have a complete text that was a forerunner of the Apostles' Creed we include the creed of Irenaeus (130–202 AD).

Although the church is dispersed throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, it has received this common faith from the apostles and their disciples: [We believe] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and the sea, and everything that is in them

And in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation

And in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed the [divine] dispensations through the prophets, including the advents, the birth from a virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, as well as his [future] coming from heaven in the glory of the Father, when he will 'gather all things in one,'¹ And to raise up again all flesh of the whole human race, in order that 'every knee should bow and every tongue confess'² to Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, our Savior and king, according to the will of the invisible Father, and that he should execute righteous judgment toward all. That he may send 'the spirits of wickedness'³ and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly and unrighteous, wicked and profane among human beings, into everlasting fire, but in the exercise of his grace may grant immortality to the righteous and holy, and to those who have kept his commandments and persevered in his love and may clothe them with everlasting glory.⁴

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed was not written by the apostles but it contains the central elements of the gospel proclaimed by the apostles and is apostolic in that

sense. (We have not seen convincing evidence for the claim, repeated occasionally in Christian history, that there was a council of the apostles in the first century which wrote this creed.) With very slight variations in wording, it has been used as a simple summary of central Christian beliefs since very early in Christian history. Almost this exact wording has been used since about 390 AD.

In early Christian history it was recited, especially at the time of baptism, as a Triune statement of faith which nicely explained baptism 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' This creed is one of the sources of the common Christian way of talking about 'Three Articles' of the faith, about the Father, about the Son, and about the Holy Spirit. This outline shows how the early church saw the doctrine of the Trinity as not only central to knowing God but also the leading way to outline the entire faith.

I believe in God the Father
Almighty, Maker of heaven and
earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son,
our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy
Spirit,

Born of the Virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was
crucified, dead, and buried;

He descended into hell;

The third day he arose again from
the dead,

He ascended into heaven and sits
at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty;

From thence he shall come to judge
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

The Holy Catholic Church, the
communion of the saints,

The forgiveness of sins, the resurrec-
tion of the body, and the life ever-
lasting.

The Nicene Creed

The 'Nicene Creed' contains the teaching approved by the Council of Nicea in 325, but the exact wording and format come from the Council of Constantinople in 381. (In contrast, the exact wording of the creed approved at Nicea is sometimes called 'The Creed of Nicea.') For this reason it is sometimes also called 'The Creed of Constantinople' or 'The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.' The teaching of the creeds from Nicea and Constantinople were fully approved at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The text of the Nicene Creed follows:

We believe in one God the Father
All-sovereign, maker of heaven and
earth, and of all things visible and
invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the
only-begotten Son of God, Begot-
ten of the Father before all the ages,
Light of Light, true God of true God,
begotten not made, of one substance
(homoousion) with the Father,

through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and comes again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end;

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceeds from the Father,⁵ who with the Father and the Son is worshipped together and glorified together, who spoke through the prophets:

In one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church:

We acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins. We look for a resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.⁶

The Definition (or Creed) of Chalcedon

This creed is often called a definition, not a creed, because its focus is on defining the relation between the two natures of Christ, not on confessing our entire trinitarian Christian faith. It is included here because the Christian understanding of the Trinity is closely associated with the Christian understanding of Jesus, the Christ, being both fully God and fully

human. It was adopted by the Council of Chalcedon (also called the Fourth Ecumenical Council) in 451 AD. It has been generally accepted by most Christians except those who belong to the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood;

truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body;

consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood;

in all things like unto us, without sin;

begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood;

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;

the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same

Son, and only begotten God (monogene theon), the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ;

as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

The Athanasian Creed

This creed was named after the important pastor and writer of the fourth century, Athanasius (293–373), but it was probably written in the fifth or sixth century, long after the time of Athanasius. In this text the term ‘catholic’ refers to all those Christians who did not follow one of the important heresies of the ancient world; the Christian church was not yet divided between Protestant and Roman Catholic, nor between eastern and western churches. It has been used by many Evangelical churches, though its didactic character makes it more suitable to a classroom or personal use than to a worship service.

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son;

and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither

made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Essence of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood by God. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and

Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

III The Trinity in the Medieval Reform Movements

While the various medieval reform movements within Christianity often focused on moral reforms and concerns regarding the sacraments, some of the many movements desired to be clear that their reforms were based on classical Christian doctrine. As an example we mention the **Waldenses Confession of 1120**. It not only explicitly affirms the Apostles' Creed; the fourteen articles of the Waldenses appear to be a development of the twelve articles of the *Apostolicum*.

1. We believe and firmly maintain all that is contained in the twelve articles of the symbol, commonly called the apostles' creed, and we regard as heretical whatever is inconsistent with the said twelve articles.

2. We believe that there is one God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. We acknowledge for sacred canonical scriptures the books of the Holy Bible. (Here follows the title of each, exactly conformable to our received canon, but which it is deemed, on that account, quite unnecessary to particularize.)

4. The books above-mentioned teach us: That there is one GOD, almighty, unbounded in wisdom, and infinite in goodness, and who, in His goodness, has made all things. For He created Adam after His own image and likeness. But through the enmity of the Devil, and his own disobedience, Adam fell, sin entered into the world, and we became transgressors in and by Adam.

5. That Christ had been promised to the fathers who received the law, to the end that, knowing their sin by the law, and their unrighteousness and insufficiency, they might desire the coming of Christ to make satisfaction for their sins, and to accomplish the law by Himself.

6. That at the time appointed of the Father, Christ was born – a time when iniquity everywhere abounded, to make it manifest that it was not for the sake of any good in ourselves, for all were sinners, but that He, who is true, might display His grace and mercy towards us.

7. That Christ is our life, and truth, and peace, and righteousness – our shepherd and advocate, our sacrifice

and priest, who died for the salvation of all who should believe, and rose again for their justification.

8. And we also firmly believe, that there is no other mediator, or advocate with God the Father, but Jesus Christ. And as to the Virgin Mary, she was holy, humble, and full of grace; and this we also believe concerning all other saints, namely, that they are waiting in heaven for the resurrection of their bodies at the day of judgment.

9. We also believe, that, after this life, there are but two places – one for those that are saved, the other for the damned, which [two] we call paradise and hell, wholly denying that imaginary purgatory of Antichrist, invented in opposition to the truth.

10. Moreover, we have ever regarded all the inventions of men [in the affairs of religion] as an unspeakable abomination before God; such as the festival days and vigils of saints, and what is called holy-water, the abstaining from flesh on certain days, and such like things, but above all, the masses.

11. We hold in abhorrence all human inventions, as proceeding from Antichrist, which produce distress (Alluding probably to the voluntary penances and mortification imposed by the Catholics on themselves), and are prejudicial to the liberty of the mind.

12 We consider the Sacraments as signs of holy things, or as the visible emblems of invisible blessings. We regard it as proper and even necessary that believers use these symbols or visible forms when it can be done. Notwithstanding which, we maintain that believers may be saved without these signs, when they have neither place nor opportunity of observing them.

13. We acknowledge no sacraments [as of divine appointment] but baptism and the Lord's supper.

14. We honour the secular powers, with subjection, obedience, promptitude, and payment.⁷

IV The Trinity in Classical Protestant Confessions

From the beginnings of Protestantism, the ancient and classical doctrine of the Trinity was affirmed and taught as a central theme of the Christian faith. This is seen in the several branches of Protestantism that developed from the time of the Reformation in the 16th century. There is overwhelming consensus regarding the Trinity in the Protestant confessions. The following selections show that similarity among churches that had disagreements on questions regarding sacraments, liturgy, and other church policies.

The Augsburg Confession

This was and is the primary doctrinal standard of the Lutheran churches, written and officially accepted in 1530.

1] Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; 2] that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and 3] yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the term 'person' 4] they use as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself. 5] They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans, who assumed two principles, one Good and the other Evil: also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. 6] They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who, contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that 'Word' signifies a spoken word, and 'Spirit' signifies motion created in things.

The Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican Church

In 1562 the developing the Church of England adopted its ‘Thirty Nine Articles’ which became its standard teaching. Its first two articles summarized the themes covered in the early statements of the church.

Article I:

Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Article II: Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

The Second Helvetic Confession

This confession was written by Heinrich Bullinger in Switzerland in 1564 and enjoyed widespread use in Protestant churches in Scotland, Hungary, Poland, and France, as well as Switzerland. It shows the extent to which the Protestant Reformers were conscious of carefully following the early Christian creeds

GOD IS ONE. We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting in himself, all sufficient in himself, invisible, incorporeal, immense, eternal, Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the greatest good, living, quickening and preserving all things, omnipotent and supremely wise, kind and merciful, just and true. Truly we detest many gods because it is expressly written: ‘The Lord your God is one Lord’ (Deut.6:4). ‘I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me’ (Ex. 20:2–3). ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other god besides me. Am I not the Lord, and there is no other God beside me? A righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me’ ((Isa. 45:5, 21). ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Ex. 34:6).

GOD IS THREE. Notwithstanding we believe and teach that the same immense, one and indivisible God is in person inseparably and without confusion distinguished as Father,

Son and Holy Spirit so, as the Father has begotten the Son from eternity, the Son is begotten by an ineffable generation, and the holy Spirit truly proceeds from them both, and the same from eternity and is to be worshipped with both.

Thus there are not three gods, but three persons, consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal; distinct with respect to hypostases, and with respect to order, the one preceding the other yet without any inequality. For according to the nature or essence they are so joined together that they are one God, and the divine nature is common to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For Scripture has delivered to us a manifest distinction of persons, the angel saying, among other things, to the Blessed Virgin, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God' (Luke 1:35). And also in the baptism of Christ a voice is heard from heaven concerning Christ, saying, 'This is my beloved Son' (Math. 3:17). The Holy Spirit also appeared in the form of a dove (John 1:32). And when the Lord himself commanded the apostles to baptize, he commanded them to baptize 'in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28:19). Elsewhere in the Gospel he said: 'The Father will send the Holy Spirit in my name' (John 14:26), and again he said: 'When

the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me,' etc. (John 15:26). In short, we receive the Apostles' Creed because it delivers to us the true faith.

HERESIES. Therefore we condemn the Jews and Mohammedans, and all those who blaspheme that sacred and adorable Trinity. We also condemn all heresies and heretics who teach that the Son and Holy Spirit are God in name only, and also that there is something created and subservient, or subordinate to another in the Trinity, and that their is something unequal in it, a greater or a less, something corporeal or corporeally conceived, something different with respect to character or will, something mixed or solitary, as if the Son and Holy Spirit were the affections and properties of one God the Father, as the Monarchians, Novatians, Praxeas, Patripassians, Sabelius, Paul of Samosata, Aetius, Macedonius, Anthropomorphites, Arius, and such like, have thought.

The Bohemian Confession of 1575

This confession has a slightly different character from some Reformation era documents because it was accepted by a very wide range of churches and Christians including the Hussite Ultraquists, the Unitas Fratrum (Unity of the Brethren) which was a Protestant Church from eastern Bohemia dating from 1457, along with some Lutherans

and Roman Catholics. This confession articulates significant applications of the doctrine of the Trinity to the questions of the era: the second article of the Creed is applied to justification by faith in a manner one would expect from Lutherans and Calvinists while the third article of the Creed is applied to personal holiness and sanctification in a manner that looks forward to the Moravia Brethren, successors of the *Unitas Fratrum*, who later influenced John Wesley. This confession also includes both the preached Word and the Sacraments as applications of the basic confession about the Holy Spirit in the manner which was distinctive of the Reformation.

Of the Holy Trinity, or the Differences of Person in Divinity

1. We believe and confess, that the eternal God the Father is the first person of the Deity, omnipotent and eternal, of unfathomable and inconceivable power, wisdom, justice, holiness, and goodness, who from eternity begat a Son, the substantial and perfect image of his being, and from whom as well as from the Son comes the Holy Spirit, and who together with the Son and the Holy Spirit was pleased to create all things visible and invisible from nothing in the acceptable time of his divine majesty, and according to his divine purpose provides, preserves, directs, and governs. And so concerning the divine being and substance as well as concerning the divine external acts, such as the

creation, preservation, and direction of all things, we make no difference between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. We believe and with the mouth confess that the second person in the Deity, that is the eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was pleased to take on himself human nature in the body of the blessed Virgin Mary by the action of the Holy Spirit, so that dual nature divine and human in unity of person to eternal indivisibility is united, one Christ, true God and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, who for all human kind, truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried in order that he might reconcile us with God the Father. And he was the redeeming sacrifice not only for original sin, but also for all other sins that people commit. And this same Lord of ours, the divine Christ, descended into hell, and truly on the third day he rose from the dead for our justification. Afterward he ascended into heaven, sits on the right hand of God the Father, reigning eternally and ruling over all creation. He justifies all who believe in him, he sanctifies them, sending into their heart the Holy Spirit, who would rule, comfort, and revive them against the devil and the power of sin. And so he is the perfect mediator, advocate, and intercessor with God the Father, reconciler, redeemer, and Savior of his Church, which he gathers by the Holy Spirit, preserves,

protects, and rules until completion of the number of the elect of God. Afterward that same Lord Christ will truly come again to judge the living and the dead in such manner as Christian faith and the Apostolic teaching declare more widely.

3. We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Deity, from eternity coming from the Father and the Son, substantial and eternal, revealed as the Father's love to the Son, and as the Son's to the Father, as power and goodness inconceivable. He is seen not only in the creation and the preservation of all things, but also especially in those works which he pleased to do from the beginning of the Church in the sons of God, working in them through the ministry of the word of God, through the sacraments and the living faith to eternal salvation which is deposited in God's elect in Lord Christ from the foundation of the world.⁸

The London Baptist Confession of 1689

Because this confession is a century later than the first Reformation confessions but carefully repeats the same themes of the earlier Protestant confessions, it shows the tremendous extent to which the several branches of Protestantism shared a highly developed doctrine of the Trinity which was regarded as foundational to the Christian faith.

God and the Holy Trinity

1. The Lord our God is the one and only living and true God; Whose subsistence is in and of Himself

- Who is infinite in being and perfection; Whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself;

- Who is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions

- Who only has immortality

- Who dwells in the light which no man can approach, Who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute;

- Who works all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory;

- Who is most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth;

- Who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin;

- Who is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him;

- and Who, at the same time, is most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin and Who will by no means clear the guilty.

2. God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and from Himself, is unique in being all-sufficient, both in Himself and to Himself,

not standing in need of any creature which He has made, nor deriving any glory from such.

- On the contrary, it is God Who manifests His own glory in them, through them, to them and upon them. He is the only fountain of all being; from Whom, through Whom, and to Whom all things exist and move.

- He has completely sovereign dominion over all creatures, to do through them, for them, or to them whatever He pleases.

- In His sight all things are open and manifest; His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and not dependant on the creature.

- Therefore, nothing is for Him contingent or uncertain.

- He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands.

- To Him is due from angels and men whatever worship, service, or obedience, they owe as creatures to the Creator, and whatever else He is pleased to require from them.

3. In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit. All are one in substance, power, and eternity; each having the whole divine essence, yet this essence being undivided.

The Father was not derived from any other being; He was neither brought into being by, nor did He issue from any other being.

- The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

- The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

- All three are infinite, without beginning, and are therefore only one God, Who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties, and also their personal relations.

- This doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and our comfortable dependence on Him.

V The Doctrine of the Trinity, Recent Developments

A striking characteristic of the global evangelical missions movement of the 20th and 21st centuries has been the serious thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity which both builds on the classical statements and then understands the calling of Christians and of the church in light of Trinitarian doctrine. We include two examples, from Amsterdam 2000 and Capetown 2012.

The Amsterdam Declaration 2000

1. God

The God of whom this Declaration speaks is the self-revealed Creator, Upholder, Governor and Lord of the universe. This God is eternal in his self-existence and unchanging in his

holy love, goodness, justice, wisdom, and faithfulness to his promises. God in his own being is a community of three coequal and coeternal persons, who are revealed to us in the Bible as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Together they are involved in an unvarying cooperative pattern in all God's relationships to and within this world. God is Lord of history, where he blesses his own people, overcomes and judges human and angelic rebels against his rule, and will finally renew the whole created order.

2. Jesus Christ

The Declaration takes the view of Jesus that the canonical New Testament sets forth and the historic Christian creeds and confessions attest. He was, and is, the second person of the triune Godhead, now and forever incarnate. He was virgin-born, lived a life of perfect godliness, died on the cross as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, was raised bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, reigns now over the universe and will personally return for judgment and the renewal of all things. As the God-man, once crucified, now enthroned, he is the Lord and Savior who in love fulfills towards us the threefold mediational ministry of prophet, priest and king. His title, 'Christ,' proclaims him the anointed servant of God who fulfills all the Messianic hopes of the canonical Old Testament.

3. Holy Spirit

Shown by the words of Jesus to be the third divine person, whose name, 'Spirit,' pictures the energy of breath and wind, the Holy Spirit is the dynamic personal presence of the Trinity in the processes of the created world, in the communication of divine truth, in the attesting of Jesus Christ, in the new creation through him of believers and of the church, and in ongoing fellowship and service. The fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the knowledge of Christ and the enjoyment of new life in him dates from the Pentecostal outpouring recorded in Acts 2. As the divine inspirer and interpreter of the Bible, the Spirit empowers God's people to set forth accurate, searching, life-transforming presentations of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and makes their communication a fruitful means of grace to their hearers. The New Testament shows us the supernatural power of the Spirit working miracles, signs and wonders, bestowing gifts of many kinds, and overcoming the power of Satan in human lives for the advancement of the gospel. Christians agree that the power of the Holy Spirit is vitally necessary for evangelism and that openness to his ministry should mark all believers.²

The Capetown Commitment of 2010

This newest main document of the global missions movement, released at the Third Lausanne Congress on World

Evangelisation in October 2010, also displays a developed doctrine of the Trinity which builds on the statements of the early church. Not surprisingly, the practical application of the Trinitarian understanding of God is primarily related to world missions.

Article 3. We love God the Father

Through Jesus Christ, God's Son, – and through him alone as the way, the truth and the life – we come to know and love God as Father. As the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children, so we cry the words Jesus prayed, 'Abba, Father', and we pray the prayer Jesus taught, 'Our Father'. Our love for Jesus, proved by obeying him, is met by the Father's love for us as the Father and the Son make their home in us, in mutual giving and receiving of love. This intimate relationship has deep biblical foundations.

Article 4. We love God the Son

God commanded Israel to love the LORD God with exclusive loyalty. Likewise for us, loving the Lord Jesus Christ means that we steadfastly affirm that he alone is Saviour, Lord and God. The Bible teaches that Jesus performs the same sovereign actions as God alone. Christ is Creator of the universe, Ruler of history, Judge of all nations and Saviour of all who turn to God. He shares the identity of God in the divine equality and unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as God called Israel to love him in covenantal faith, obedi-

ence and servant-witness, we affirm our love for Jesus Christ by trusting in him, obeying him, and making him known.

Article 5. We love God the Holy Spirit

We love the Holy Spirit within the unity of the Trinity, along with God the Father and God the Son. He is the missionary Spirit sent by the missionary Father and the missionary Son, breathing life and power into God's missionary Church. We love and pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit because without the witness of the Spirit to Christ, our own witness is futile. Without the convicting work of the Spirit, our preaching is in vain. Without the gifts, guidance and power of the Spirit, our mission is mere human effort. And without the fruit of the Spirit, our unattractive lives cannot reflect the beauty of the gospel.

Recent Mennonite Theology and Ethics

Though some early Mennonite confessions, such as the Schleithem Confession of 1527, did not discuss the Trinity at length, this gap has been very competently addressed in recent times. As an example we include the version of the Confession of Faith of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church (2004).

We believe in the one, true, living God, Creator of heaven and earth. God is almighty in power, perfect in wisdom, righteous in judgment, over-

flowing in steadfast love. God is the Sovereign who rules over all things visible and invisible, the Shepherd who rescues the lost and helpless. God is a refuge and fortress for those in need. God is a consuming fire, perfect in holiness, yet slow to anger and abounding in tender mercy. God comforts like a loving mother, trains and disciplines like a caring father, and persists in covenant love like a faithful husband. We confess God as eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father

God the Father is the source of all life. In Him we live and move and have our being. The Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth, and hears the prayers of all who call on Him. In the fullness of time, the Father sent the Son for the salvation of the world. Through Jesus Christ the Father adopts all who respond in faith to the gospel, forgiving those who repent of their sin and entering into a new covenant with them. God gives the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to all His children. God's creative and redemptive love sustains this world until the end of the age.

God the Son

The Son, through whom all things were created and who holds all things together, is the image of the invisible God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Jesus took on human nature to redeem this

fallen world. He revealed the fullness of God through his obedient and sinless life. Through word and deed Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. Christ triumphed over sin through His death and resurrection, and was exalted as Lord of creation and the church. The Savior of the world invites all to be reconciled to God, offering peace to those far and near, and calling them to follow Him in the way of the cross. Until the Lord Jesus returns in glory, He intercedes for believers, acts as their advocate, and calls them to be His witnesses.

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the Counselor, is the creative power, presence and wisdom of God. The Spirit convicts people of sin, gives them new life, and guides them into all truth. By the Spirit believers are baptized into one body. The indwelling Spirit testifies that they are God's children, distributes gifts for ministry, empowers for witness, and produces the fruit of righteousness. As Comforter, the Holy Spirit helps God's children in their weakness, intercedes for them according to God's will and assures them of eternal life.¹⁰

*The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?
An Agreed Statement, 2003*

One of the continuing discussions between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches has been whether or not the filioque clause should be included in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381. Evangelicals and Protestants have generally followed the western or Roman Catholic version of this creed, though not with 100% consistency. Evangelical teachers should take note of this selection from the North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultation, 2003.

We are aware that the problem of the theology of the Filioque, and its use in the Creed, is not simply an issue between the Catholic and Orthodox communions. Many Protestant Churches, too, drawing on the theological legacy of the Medieval West, consider the term to represent an integral part of the orthodox Christian confession. Although dialogue among a number of these Churches and the Orthodox communion has already touched on the issue, any future resolution of the disagreement between East and West on the origin of the Spirit must involve all those communities that profess the Creed of 381 as a standard of faith. Aware of its limitations, our Consultation nonetheless makes the following theological and practical recommendations to the members and the bishops of our own Churches:

- that our Churches commit themselves to a new and earnest dialogue concerning the origin and person of the Holy Spirit, drawing on the Holy Scriptures and on the full riches of the theological traditions of both our Churches, and to looking for constructive ways of expressing what is central to our faith on this difficult issue;
- that all involved in such dialogue expressly recognize the limitations of our ability to make definitive assertions about the inner life of God;
- that in the future, because of the progress in mutual understanding that has come about in recent decades, Orthodox and Catholics refrain from labeling as heretical the traditions of the other side on the subject of the procession of the Holy Spirit;
- that Orthodox and Catholic theologians distinguish more clearly between the divinity and hypostatic identity of the Holy Spirit, which is a received dogma of our Churches, and the manner of the Spirit's origin, which still awaits full and final ecumenical resolution;
- that those engaged in dialogue on this issue distinguish, as far as possible, the theological issues of the origin of the Holy Spirit from the ecclesiological issues of primacy and doctrinal authority in the Church, even as we pursue both questions seriously together;

- that the theological dialogue between our Churches also give careful consideration to the status of later councils held in both our Churches after those seven generally received as ecumenical.
- that the Catholic Church, as a consequence of the normative and irrevocable dogmatic value of the Creed of 381, use the original Greek text alone in making translations of that Creed for catechetical and liturgical use.
- that the Catholic Church, following a growing theological consensus, and in particular the statements made by Pope Paul VI, declare that the condemnation made at the Second Council of Lyons (1274) of those 'who presume to deny that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son' is no longer applicable.

We offer these recommendations to our Churches in the conviction, based on our own intense study and discussion, that our traditions' dif-

ferent ways of understanding the procession of the Holy Spirit need no longer divide us. We believe, rather, that our profession of the ancient Creed of Constantinople must be allowed to become, by our uniform practice and our new attempts at mutual understanding, the basis for a more conscious unity in the one faith that all theology simply seeks to clarify and to deepen. Although our expression of the truth God reveals about his own Being must always remain limited by the boundaries of human understanding and human words, we believe that it is the very 'Spirit of truth,' whom Jesus breathes upon his Church, who remains with us still, to 'guide us into all truth' (John 16.13). We pray that our Churches' understanding of this Spirit may no longer be a scandal to us, or an obstacle to unity in Christ, but that the one truth towards which he guides us may truly be 'a bond of peace' (Eph 4.3), for us and for all Christians.¹¹

Annotation

Anmerkungen

¹Eph. 1:10.

²Phil. 2:10–11.

³Eph. 6:12.

⁴This quotation is taken from Gerald L. Bray, (Ed.), *We Believe in One God* (Intervarsity Press, 2009), 4, quoting Irenaeus, *Prescriptions Against Heretics*.

⁵At this point the Western churches later added the phrase ‘and the Son’ (*filioque* in Latin) to indicate that the Holy Spirit was sent out at Pentecost by both the Father and the Son and has similar relationships with the Father and the Son.

⁶This text is taken from *Documents of the Christian Church*, second edition, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (Oxford University Press, 1963), 26. (English spelling and grammar modernized).

⁷<http://www.freechurch.org/resources/confessions/waldenses.htm>. Viewed 8 November, 2013.

⁸<http://moravianarchives.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Bohemian-Confession-1575.pdf>. Viewed 8 November, 2013.

⁹<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/augustweb-only/13.0.html?start=6>. Viewed 9 November, 2013.

¹⁰http://www.mbconf.ca/resource/File/PDFs/Confession_of_Faith_v.1.pdf. Viewed 8 November, 2013.

¹¹<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/filioque-church-dividing-issue-english.cfm>. Viewed 14 November 2013.

The Author

Über den Autor



Thomas K. Johnson received his Ph.D. in ethics from the University of Iowa (1987) after a research fellowship at Eberhard-Karls Universität (Tübingen). He received a Master of Divinity (*Magna Cum Laude*) from Covenant Theological Seminary (St. Louis, 1981) and a BA from Hope College (Michigan, 1977). After serving as a church planter in the Presbyterian Church in America he became a visiting professor of philosophy at the European Humanities University in Minsk, Belarus, 1994–1996. (UHU is a dissident, anti-Communist university, forced into exile by the Belarusian dictator in 2004.) Since 1996 he and his wife have lived in Prague, where he taught philosophy at Anglo-American University (4 years) and at Charles University (8 1/2 years). He is now Vice President for Research, Martin Bucer European School of Theology and Research Institutes; Academic Council, International Institute for Religious Freedom (WEA); Professor of Philosophy, Global Scholars, and Senior Advisor to the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance. His wife, Leslie P. Johnson, is director of the Christian International School of Prague.

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