Exploring the Grammar of the Christian Doctrine of God

TRINITARIAN DOGMATICS

D. Glenn Butner Jr.
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Introduction

How does one begin a book on the doctrine of the Trinity? To write of the Trinity is to write of God, eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, eternally one, unique, and indivisible. It is the triune God who creates, who redeems, who will come to renew creation, from whom and to whom are all things (Col. 1:16; Heb. 2:10). To write of the Trinity is therefore to write of that ultimate reality that lies behind all things as their source and whose tri-personal coming is awaited as the fulfillment of creation (1 Cor. 13:12; 15:28).

To comprehend the Trinity, one must know the infinite, a kind of knowledge proper only to God. Thus, knowing the Trinity is, as Karl Barth famously insists, contingent on God graciously taking humans as the object of his self-giving, an act that enables them to participate in God’s knowledge of God.1 Using the older language of Francis Turretin, our knowledge of God is finite and is “the image and ectype of the infinite and archetypal” knowledge that God has of himself.2 It is a bold endeavor that would make no headway apart from the grace of the God we seek.

Yet, it is necessary to write an account of the doctrine of the Trinity, to attempt the impossible, and to draw as close to God’s knowledge of God as he will graciously permit. The formulation of such doctrine is a means of fulfilling the evangelistic work of the church, since we may use the doctrine to describe the God whose mercy and grace we proclaim and the trinitarian structure of God’s self-giving for our salvation. It is also a means of ensuring proper worship. There are timely reasons to pursue the doctrine of the Trinity, for in modern times some argue that the Trinity is not biblical3 or claim that

1. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 63–178.
3. E.g., Leander Keck sees aspects of the Gospel of John, Hebrews, and Paul’s Letters as closer to the views of Arius than of Nicaea, where trinitarian theology began to coalesce (*Why Christ Matters*, 149–55). There have also been a number of exegetical challenges to specific
traditional formulations of the doctrine were corrupted by Greek philosophy or are philosophically incoherent. Even among those who defend the Trinity, there has been a tendency, as we shall see in later chapters, to shift the meaning of key trinitarian terms like “consubstantial,” a key descriptor of the sameness between Father, Son, and Spirit, or “person,” the fundamental term for describing what the Father, Son, and Spirit are in their uniqueness. Such shifts arguably stem from a general lack of understanding of key historical sources in the development of trinitarian thought. Much of this book, then, will be concerned with the exegetical foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity and with an accurate historical analysis of concepts that have become fundamental to any dogmatic account of the Trinity.

Despite the emphasis on historical theology and biblical exegesis—perhaps also partly because of this emphasis—this work is not a properly historical or exegetical work. This is a work of trinitarian *dogmatics*. It falls to me to explain how I am using the term “dogmatics” in the title. According to Emil Brunner, dogmatics emerges from a “threefold root,” the polemical struggle of theologians against heresies, the effort to develop a genre suited to instruction of catechumens and students, and the systematic exploration of the Bible. A dogmatic theology exceeds mere biblical exposition in that it requires attention to the historical development of various interpretations of Scripture, some eventually deemed orthodox, others deemed heretical, and still others seen as open to varying degrees of disagreement. Yet, there remain contemporary theological positions that this dogmatic account will engage with in polemical fashion—often briefly, given the extensive scope of this work—so dogmatic theology is not reducible to historical theology. This theology, like all dogmatic theology, is intended to serve instructional purposes. It is targeted to the seminary and to other graduate-level classrooms, though I hope and anticipate that it will also serve professional theologians. In other words, this volume seeks to convey the fundamental dogmas or doctrines that those who study theology in preparation for ministry ought to understand. Many speculative, constructive, or applied aspects of theology must

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4. This argument was most famously developed by Adolf von Harnack, though we will see similar challenges from more recent theologians to various trinitarian loci like divine simplicity and inseparable operations and to classical definitions of the divine persons. Harnack is prone to see a sharp distinction in Christian history between an earlier, more Judaic stage and a later Hellenistic stage marked by an emphasis on philosophy, particularly Platonism. While he admits that this shift made cultural sense at that time, he disallows such concepts in a modern context, considering them implausible (Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 200–209).

be neglected in dogmatics, as instruction in the fundamentals must precede the theologist’s attempt to do something with those beliefs. The polemical and instructional dimensions of this dogmatic account of the Trinity should never draw us away from the biblical dimensions of a dogmatic theology, and yet dogmatic theology considers historical-grammatical interpretations of Scripture along with theological interpretations, word studies and analyses of narratives, canonical readings, and reception histories of texts. Dogmatic theology ought to be biblical through and through, yet it often engages the Bible in a manner distinct from the commentary or biblical theology, which, in order to meet the instructional and technical needs of the biblical-studies discipline, favor the analysis of discrete books or themes. In writing a work of trinitarian dogmatics, I am intending to write a systematic account of the Trinity that is normed by Scripture and shaped by centuries of polemical debates going up to the present, my purpose being to create instruction that benefits the church. How is such a task possible?

Knowing the Triune God

With audacity do we claim to know and speak of the triune God! God “lives in unapproachable light,” so no one can see him (1 Tim. 6:16). The God who appears to Isaiah is so holy that the seraphim surrounding him have to cover their eyes. Isaiah cries out that he is ruined for having seen the perfect God while being an unclean and sinful man (6:1–5), but God provides a way of atonement so that Isaiah can speak on his behalf: a glowing coal from the altar brought to Isaiah by one of the seraphim to purify his mouth (6:6–7). This atonement that enables one to know God is a type of Christ, who alone has revealed the Father (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18) and whose death provides access to the holy of holies where God dwells (Heb. 10:19). The Holy Spirit more perfectly fulfills the role played by the coal-carrying seraph in Isaiah’s vision, bringing the benefits of the atonement to the believer in order to cleanse us from iniquity so that we may know God (1 Cor. 6:11).

Drawing on dialectical theology more than typological readings, many modern theologians, particularly those influenced by Karl Barth, have rightly argued that our knowledge of God is rooted in God’s self-revelation in Christ.

6. Here I must admit that I do not think the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine that is meant to be used for other ends, since it is a conceptual framework meant to help us understand, as best as we are able, the God whom we worship as Father, Son, and Spirit. God is not an object to be used, but is to be enjoyed, as Augustine teaches. The point still stands for other doctrines, which can be and are used for constructive purposes. (See Augustine, On Christian Teaching 1.4.)
For example, Paul Molnar insists that the Trinity is known in faith but that God makes such knowledge and faith possible through the work of the Son and Spirit.7 If our knowledge of God is not grounded in the very being and action of God himself—and consequently in his Word and Spirit—then it is in fact nothing more than our own religious or irreligious speculation grounded in our self-experience.8 The Trinity simply cannot be reduced to a threefold human experience of God, for such an understanding would leave us with more knowledge of human psychology than of God’s being.9 Any attempt to define the inner life of the triune God “from the human side” constrains God within the limits of human reason, limits that he exceeds.10

Karl Barth, who is often credited with reviving interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in the twentieth century, was well aware of the limits of human efforts to understand God. This is clearly evident in his early treatment of the subject in his commentary on Romans, where, drawing on Acts 17:23, he speaks of God as the unknown God, “the divine incognito,” the absolute other whom we cannot reach with human reason. Any God discovered through speculative reason alone is the idolatrous no-God, a false human concept and projection.11 Barth’s point, and Molnar’s like it, is well taken. Apart from the divine self-revelation found in the incarnation of Christ, God remains unknown, and apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, the self-revelation of Christ cannot be recognized. Barth takes this profound insight and uses it to develop a theology of the Trinity that emerges from God’s act of self-revelation. For Barth, the Trinity is evident in the structure of the gospel proclamation that “God reveals Himself as the Lord,” just as it is evident in the nature of this divine self-revelation, which involves a Revealer, the Revelation itself, and the Revealedness of that revelation.12 God’s self-revelation requires One who reveals himself (the Father), the revelation of the One (the Son), and the revealedness (the Spirit) that makes God’s act of self-revelation “the effective meeting between God and man.”13 Yet, there is only one self-revelation. Surely, Barth’s is one of the more insightful ways of presenting the doctrine of the Trinity.

Though I agree with the broad point that Barth and Molnar are making—namely, that we cannot know God apart from his drawing us into his own

10. Molnar, “Classical Trinity,” 74. In context, Molnar is discussing the ineffability of the divine processions.
12. Barth, Church Dogmatics I/1, 351.
13. Barth, Church Dogmatics I/1, 381.
knowledge through his self-revelation—I will not follow Barth in constructing the doctrine of the Trinity from the threefold form of God’s self-revelation in the Christ event, in part because I do not believe that Barth’s method is the only means of being faithful to his conviction. Barth is clearly seeking to develop a biblical theology, to the point that he is often accused of biblicism, yet his emphasis on the threefold nature of revelation as a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity can seem a bit arbitrary.\textsuperscript{14} As Maurice Wiles once quipped, “The whole argument sounds suspiciously like a later rationalization to support a doctrine really based on [propositional revelation] and now in search of a new foundation.”\textsuperscript{15} Wiles was quite critical of the idea of propositional revelation and therefore found Barth’s entire project uncompelling. It is better, I think, to embrace the challenge head on, considering why it is that the very words of the Bible itself may lead to the Trinity, as they did historically, eventually prompting Barth to take his own approach in explaining the Trinity. Those seeking a full theological method here will likely be disappointed; this is, after all, an introduction. Though I may not convince all readers, I hope at least to provide some sense of how I will proceed in this work.

I share the conviction of Barth and Molnar that we can know God only through the gracious gift of his revealing himself, but I am convinced that God has made himself known from the dawn of history. Though the Christian faith is grounded in the belief that Christ is the ultimate revelation of the Father, I contend that Christ’s life, ministry, and teachings are intelligible only within the framework of the history of Israel as recorded within the Old Testament. Christ himself drew on the sacred texts of Israel, and the earliest records we have of the incarnate life of the Son interpret him within this framework, sometimes by clear citation formulas—“Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (Matt. 1:22)—and sometimes through less direct allusions, as when Matthew depicts Jesus as a new Moses. This fact prompts me to hold two principles. First, what I have elsewhere called the inspiration principle requires that we see these biblical texts as exceeding merely human records.\textsuperscript{16} If these texts are necessary to understand God’s self-revelation in the Son, and if true human knowledge of God must participate in the archetypal knowledge that God has of himself,\textsuperscript{17} then Christians must take it as an article of faith that these

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Watson, “The Bible,” 59. Watson believes that these charges of conservative biblicism miss the main contours of Barth’s project.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Wiles, “Some Reflections,” 105.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Butner, “Probing the Exegetical Foundations of Consubstantiality.”
  \item \textsuperscript{17}This knowledge is archetypal in that it is the perfect original in which human theology participates \textit{ectypally} by God’s grace.
\end{itemize}
texts participate in God’s knowledge by inspiration. Second, the fact that Jesus must be interpreted within the context of these older texts prompts a canonical principle. Again, if these books are necessary in understanding Jesus, then they must be included in theological analysis and thus rendered as canon, while other texts that are not equally important in interpreting Christ within his historical context are excluded from having equal authority. Only the canon is fully normative in theology.

A dogmatic account of the Trinity thus begins with the affirmation of the Bible as Scripture—a specific canon of texts viewed as uniquely communicating God’s knowledge of God in a manner appropriate to human knowledge. Human knowledge, like the biblical canon, is varied in form, so we can expect a wide range of possible approaches to deriving the Trinity from the Bible. Sometimes, despite Wiles’s reservations, the Bible makes clear propositional claims about God. A dogmatic account of the Trinity must seek to systematize various propositions in the Bible so that we can hold them each as inspired. This act of systemizing can take the form of extensive exegetical analysis of a single verse or passage, or it can consist of surveying broad biblical patterns of speech. Yet propositions are not the only aspect of the Bible pertinent to our study. Human knowledge also consists of words, narratives, practices, and experiences, among other things. Therefore, at various points in this book I will use word studies, examine narrative components of the Bible as well as the overarching narrative of the entire canon, and consider the diverse modes of biblical interpretation deployed by Christians at various points in history. There is no single approach that could incorporate all aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity. The varied and sometimes eclectic ways of using the Bible that are necessary in order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity will become evident as this book unfolds. Yet, each approach is rooted in the same conviction: Scripture is inspired and supremely authoritative, though it is not alone in the theological task.

Tradition, too, plays a role in this quest for knowledge of the Trinity, at least if tradition is properly understood. Speaking anecdotally, I have often seen tradition treated at a lay level as dry, old, and outdated ideas from past generations, something that has limited influence on modern church life and for good reason. Such a perspective does not recognize the ways tradition has been guided by God, albeit not to the same degree as Scripture. A full account of biblical inspiration lies beyond the scope of a work on trinitarian

18. I appreciate the wording of John Webster, who argues that human authorship of Scripture must be seen as a kind of sanctification. “In briefest form, sanctification is the act of God the Holy Spirit in hallowing creaturely processes, employing them in the service of the talking form of revelation within the history of the creation” (Holy Scripture, 26).
dogmatics, but brief consideration of one model of inspiration can illustrate my point. A. A. Hodge, a noted American theologian, described biblical inspiration as a four-step process. Through *providence*, God brought the biblical authors to the right historical moment. Subsequent *spiritual illumination* provided by the Holy Spirit ensured genuine religious insight, opening the Christian to receive *revelation*, which was then accurately recorded through *inspiration*. In seeking to ground our knowledge of the Trinity in God’s self-revelation, we might be tempted to discard tradition on the grounds that it is rooted in human knowledge, not in God’s knowledge of God. Hodge’s four-stage process of inspiration shows why this would be a mistake. In the Old Princeton theology that Hodge represents, illumination was thought to belong to all Christians who have received the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., John 16:13–15). Hodge notes, “Spiritual illumination opens the organ of spiritual vision and clarifies it.” All Christians, then, having received the Spirit, have some clear sense of God as mediated in Scripture and therefore can guide one another in the interpretation of Scripture. Similarly, they can influence the way that we use philosophy to make sense of questions raised by Scripture yet not explicitly resolved therein. Tradition is not infallible in the way that Scripture is, so critiquing it is always a possibility. Still, Protestants have been wise in their use of tradition as a test of the truthfulness of a given interpretation.

Reason, too, has a role to play in dogmatics, and necessarily so. When we engage in biblical hermeneutics, we are using reason, and it is often difficult, for example, to clearly identify the boundaries between hermeneutics and philosophy. Philosophy also contributes much vocabulary that helps provide clarity when speaking of conclusions drawn from Scripture. Here we must see philosophy as Anselm of Canterbury did, as a resource for faith seeking understanding. The idea is not to impose a foreign framework on the biblical text. Rather, philosophy can help make explicit what was only implicit in the Bible. Yet, we must heed Barth’s worries about human reason. God created the world of space, time, and matter, and he therefore exceeds that world and all our experiences of it. This truth should significantly chasten our confidence in our intellectual abilities. Without attempting here to explore the

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20. Certainly, Barth did not take this approach to tradition.
23. Even those Reformers like Martin Luther who are often depicted as rejecting the scholastic use of reason in favor of a more biblical theology in fact resort to much traditional scholastic method and the scholastic genre of disputation in their treatment of the Trinity. See the discussion in Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, 53–59.
full ramifications of divine otherness or to resolve the philosophical difficulties that arise from it (such matters are more proper to other dogmatic loci), I must make note of one major dogmatic commitment that properly serves this chastening work. As endorsed at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the doctrine of analogy insists that God is different from the world that he has created but recognizes that creation bears some relation to its Creator. This similarity amid greater difference allows us to use human words and concepts of God yet requires that we always explain how their meaning differs when they are used of God rather than created realities. As Katherine Sonderegger remarks, Lateran IV’s insistence on a “movement from likeness to unlikeness” is “the scholastic expression of Divine Holiness, the Lordly Act of setting Himself apart.”

When grounded in Scripture, our use of reason does, by God’s grace, lead to knowledge, but it remains a knowledge of the God whose holiness prompted even the seraphim of Isaiah’s vision to cover their eyes. Even though our language is restricted by the principle of analogy, in our human knowledge of the holy God we see the Trinity, which early Christians glimpsed even in the recurring threefold affirmation of that holiness—“Holy, holy, holy is the L ORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa. 6:3 ESV; see also Rev. 4:8).

What, then, of human experience in a theology of the Trinity? Certainly, we cannot construct a theology of the Trinity on the foundation of human experience, for the product would be merely a description of human subjectivity. We would have no reason for believing that this description corresponded to the God who lives in unapproachable light. Yet, in a rather ironic twist, we must pay particular attention to human experience in order to avoid too subjective a theology. T. F. Torrance summarizes the matter eloquently: “The temptation of orthodoxy, and all scholasticism, . . . is to fall a prey to their own subjectivities through converting the truths of the Word of God into rationalized objects.”

The cultural-embeddedness of human language means that our propositional descriptions of God can distort the objective revelation of God, hiding the objective truth behind a system prone to manifest our own assumptions. While this leads Barth to be somewhat skeptical of propositional orthodoxy as manifest in scholasticism, I see no reason why an account of God as Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness is any less beholden to cultural influence. Any treatment of theology is necessarily bound to certain human experiences.

25. Sonderegger, Systematic Theology, 2:xxv.
27. This is especially clear to non-Western trinitarian theologians who more easily see Western culture on display in Barth: Kombo, Doctrine of God, 106–14, 119; Miyahira, Towards a Theology of the Concord of God, chap. 3.
cultures and experience, and any good theologian, like Barth, will seek to center the objectivity of God’s self-revelation. It seems to me that the best way to do this is to read widely from theologians whose cultural location, philosophical assumptions, and personal experiences are quite different from one’s own.

I write as a modern white American male theologian, and these (and other) dimensions of my experience of the world, which is always embodied and bounded by history and culture, could distort my understanding of God, resulting in a theology more beholden to culture or personal experience than to the revelation so graciously provided in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, throughout this work I will strategically refer to theological perspectives of people occupying different cultural locations, my aim being to identify cases where cultural difference may result in divergent theological assumptions or claims. I hope that such divergence will immediately prompt the reader to consider their own assumptions. Of course, this method is not intended to suggest that theological knowledge lacks objectivity. Nor do I intend to divide humanity into a series of people groups whose common physical, social, or cultural location inevitably leads to homogenous thinking in a deterministic fashion. Here Ada María Isasi-Díaz makes a helpful distinction between “shared experiences” and “common experiences.” The idea of common experiences held by all “seems to mask differences, to present that there is but one experience” for a given ethnic or cultural group. In reality, there is no universal, singular voice of Hispanic women, of African Christians, or of the poor. Yet, the voices of particular authors from a certain cultural, gender, or ethnic group may help us understand something of the illumination given to members of these categories as they have sought to understand Scripture and tradition within their own contexts, because their experiences may be more likely to be shared by others within the same group. The more particular voices we hear, the more the perspectives of the global church, or subsets of that church, can be understood. I also do not intend to reduce theological perspectives of authors in a different cultural or social location from me to curiosities that I can instrumentalize for my own purposes. Many such scholars will be cited and referenced on the merits of their own work, not merely as a cultural foil. Yet, I am convinced that attending to the possible distortions of theology that may emerge from my own experiences requires me periodically to compare my theology with that of Christians who differ from me in various ways.

29. Isasi-Díaz, En la Lucha, 63.
30. At other times I must simply admit that my questions are different than those of other authors, a fact that will certainly be reflected in my answers.
Having explored, in an admittedly cursory manner, humans’ ability to know the triune God and the evidence pertinent to this knowledge, I turn now to the way in which I will develop an account of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Structure of This Book

Many texts introducing the doctrine of the Trinity, whether at the most introductory levels or in highest academic form, proceed diachronically, exploring the way in which the doctrine of the Trinity has been developed over time. Such texts typically begin with an introduction to the biblical foundations of the Trinity; explore patristic debates that resulted in the ecumenical creed developed at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381); supplement this basic outline with a description of smaller debates in medieval Europe, the Byzantine Empire, and the Reformation; and conclude with an analysis of the ways in which modern trinitarian thought has modified these earlier categories. The historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity is certainly an important story and one worth telling, yet structuring an introductory text in this manner has certain shortcomings. Covering relevant biblical content in earlier chapters can leave later doctrinal debates unmoored from relevant exegetical discussions, giving the impression that ideas such as eternal generation, consubstantiality, or inseparable operations are the byproduct of later philosophy more than the close analysis of Scripture. For Christians who share my commitment to the principle of sola scriptura, this simply will not do. Moreover, I would distinguish between the way of discovery, which explores the manner in which biblical foundations of the Trinity unfold into increasingly sophisticated dogmatic formulations, and the way of teaching, which moves from more basic and logically prior concepts to more complex ones. The way of teaching may require that we deviate from a diachronic historical progression in order to consider concepts from various periods simultaneously. Because I intend this work, among other purposes, to serve as a tool for classrooms, I have structured it according to a progression that I believe most clearly introduces the key concepts of the doctrine of the Trinity. Each chapter will explore one dogmatic locus of the doctrine of the Trinity. The first locus will be consubstantiality, which is, in my understanding, logically the most fundamental idea to the doctrine of the Trinity, yet one that raises more questions than it answers. The required clarification will come as the

31. See, e.g., Holmes, Quest for the Trinity; O’Collins, Tripersonal God.
32. This distinction is medieval in origin but has been developed more recently in Lonergan, Triune God, 63, 67.
book moves on to increasingly complex subjects, such as the divine *processions* and divine *simplicity*. By the time I reach the question in chapter 8 of how Christians have *communion* with each member of the Trinity in a distinct way, I will assume knowledge of all content presented earlier.

Choosing to begin this work with the doctrine of consubstantiality immediately exposes me to an objection quite typical of modern theology—namely, that by beginning with the oneness of God I have already set the stage for the elimination of divine plurality. In various forms, modern theologians have argued that this allegedly typical Western approach of beginning with divine unity results in a number of problems. For example, Colin Gunton argues that the Western emphasis on the divine being reduces persons to relations within a logically prior, underlying being that is no longer identified with the interpersonal communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am unconvinced by these objections for many reasons, one of them being that the notion of distinct Eastern and Western versions of the Trinity, with the attendant accusation that the West lost the genuine distinction between and communion among the *divine persons*, is rooted in simplified historical readings. At best, this notion accurately describes reality during a brief period in the ninth century, after which the distinctions between East and West grew more complicated. Moreover, the Bible itself introduces God’s oneness first, in the Old Testament, before complicating matters with the Christology and pneumatology of the New Testament, which led Christians to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. Starting with God’s oneness cannot automatically be ruled out as problematic, and I am convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity emerged from the early Christians’ startling realization that Jesus was somehow united with the Father, a realization that eventually led to the idea of divine consubstantiality. Therefore, I have chosen to begin with a chapter on one way in which Father, Son, and Spirit are one.

At the same time, I recognize that any theologian attempting to explain the doctrine of the Trinity faces the risk of overemphasizing either the unity of the persons or their distinction, favoring oneness or threeness to the detriment of the other. I am quite aware of this risk, so under advisement from Gregory of Nazianzus, I have adopted a strategy to mitigate this danger. Gregory writes, “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One.” Therefore, chapters will alternate between emphasis on

34. I argue my case in Butner, “For and against de Régnon,” 399–412. I will treat this subject more extensively in chaps. 2 and 4.
divine unity and divine threeness. Chapter 1, which explores consubstantiality as the logically fundamental concept of unity, is followed by a chapter on the divine processions, the logically fundamental basis for differentiating the persons. Besides structuring the book in such a manner that plurality is placed to offset unity and unity plurality, within each chapter I will attempt to show the relationship between God’s oneness and threeness. Wherever an aspect of divine unity is explored, a dogmatic account of this unity must be normed by a faithful commitment to divine plurality. Only then can the Trinity be maintained against the notion of a singular divine monad. In a similar fashion, where divine plurality is discussed, divine unity must regulate this account to avoid polytheism.

With these strategies in mind, I can now turn to the work of constructing a dogmatic account of the doctrine of the Trinity. I have added a glossary to the back of the work, as the vocabulary becomes quite technical at times. Terms are in bold the first time they occur in the text. Readers may also find they want a deeper analysis of certain subjects, so at the end of each chapter an annotated bibliography proposes further reading on various disciplines and the subject of the chapter. My hope is that the readers will find what follows to be a robust, biblical, and precise dogmatic account of the one God who is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I remain convinced that this hope may be fulfilled only through the Father’s gracious gift, through the Son, of the illuminating Holy Spirit, so I pray that that gift may be found in author and reader alike.

FOR FURTHER READING

_The Trinity and the Bible_


The Birth of the Trinity introduced prosopological exegesis to English-language scholarship and to educated lay audiences, resulting in a more robust analysis of the Trinity in the Bible.


Hill’s text argues that debates over high and low Christology, which explore the extent to which the Son is considered equal to the Father, miss more important texts about relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hill ably explores such relations as a basis for the Trinity in Paul.

Pierce’s technical analysis provides great insights into the trinitarian prosopological exegesis found in Hebrews. As an added bonus, she includes a close reading of Hebrews 1, a key text in debates about eternal generation.


Though dated, Wainwright’s survey remains one of the best introductions to historical-critical debates about the Trinity in the New Testament. Wainwright argues that the New Testament creates a “trinitarian problem” that demands a systematic theological answer.

**Selected Major Treatments of the Trinity in History**


Ayres’s work on Nicaea revolutionized the way that scholars interpreted many aspects of trinitarian theology before and after the Council of Nicaea. I rely heavily on his schema of pro-Nicene, anti-Nicene, and non-Nicene theology throughout this work.


Muller’s treatment of Reformed scholastic thought is invaluable as a historical resource that introduces many untranslated theologians’ ideas.

**Selected Western Contemporary Treatments of the Trinity**


No work dominated the twentieth-century landscape of trinitarian theology in the way that the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* did, with its unique presentation of the Trinity as rooted in the doctrine of revelation.


Emery’s introduction is particularly strong in its extended theological treatment of the ecumenical creeds, which exceeds what is found in many texts of this nature.

Sonderegger’s volume, which was published so recently that I could not engage with it as much I would have liked, challenges many points of theological consensus on the Trinity and is sure to spark much discussion.

**Selected Majority World Treatments of the Trinity**


Bingemer’s text is a nuanced presentation of many common modern ideas about the Trinity, including political and feminist readings of the doctrine. It also uniquely incorporates poetry in substantive ways.


This treatment of the Trinity from the perspective of liberation theology is perhaps the most well-known Majority World treatment of the doctrine. Boff’s methodology and conclusion are innovative and contested.


Kombo illustrates that ideas of God as supreme essence, supreme subject, and divine community in unity are all shaped by culture. He then explores how a presentation of the Trinity shaped by African cultures might look.