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The Doctrine of the Trinity in Biblical Perspective

David P. Scaer

Since our recent discussions rarely progress beyond differences on ministry and church fellowship, the topic on the Trinity evokes pleasure and surprise and brings us into a broader context where Evangelicals are caught up in the openness of God debate and some are using arguments based on the equality of the divine persons to support the ordination of women.¹ By coincidence "God the Holy Trinity" is the topic for "A Conference on Faith & Christian Life" scheduled in Oxford for October 6-8, 2003, with such luminaries as Avery Cardinal Dulles, Alister MacGrath, and J. I. Packer as presenters. Heino Kadai wondered how the Eastern Orthodox knew so much about the Trinity. One can only conjecture that he thought the biblical evidence did not support their detailed theology. Then there is the other side of the coin. Upon returning from a symposium sponsored by the Institute for Ecumenical Studies in Strasbourg in the late 1970s, Robert D. Preus reported that an Orthodox participant noted that the Augsburg Confession had little to say about this doctrine. Both assessments have merit. The place of the Trinity in Orthodox theology surfaces in their persistent rejection of the *filioque*. Lutheran efforts during the Reformation era were directed to justification, but commitment to the Trinity is seen in condemnation of the Arians and the Antitrinitarians of that day in Formula of Concord, Article 12. For all of its weaknesses, at least in Lutheran eyes, the Confutation recognized that they were not Arians, which in today's environment is an accomplishment and is a basis for ecumenical discourse.

Even after the Reformation, close agreement on the Trinity provided churches in the West with a catholic substructure. The substructure was later undermined with the rise of Enlightenment critical approaches, which posited a gulf between the New Testament and the Nicene Creed.² Historical quests may differ on the level of Jesus' divine self-consciousness, but most critical

¹Kenneth Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002). For response see Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "Kevin Giles's *The Trinity and Subordinationism: A Review Article*," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7 (Fall 2002):67-78.

²Enlightenment theologians placed the divine sonship of Jesus in His Messiahship and saw the Spirit as no more than divine efficacy in the world. Richard H. Grutzmacher, *Textbuch zur deutschen Theologie und ihrer Geschichte vom 16. bis 20 Jahrhundert*, 4th edition (Tubingen:Katzmann, 1961), 42-43.

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scholars hold that neither He nor His followers understood Him in terms of the first ecumenical councils. Trinitarianism belongs to the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, and is not simply a post-apostolic development. Later creeds were not created *ex nihilo*, but were rooted in Jesus' own description of his death and resurrection in the New Testament already took the form of creeds. Without denying the development of creeds, the boundary between the apostolic and post-apostolic eras may be more artificial than real.

The question of justification, *posse iustificari coram deo*, must be understood in relation to the Trinity. Without *coram deo* God becomes an auxiliary factor in solving the human dilemma. Its inclusion rescues justification from self-pursuit and makes all accountable to the God who justifies *propter Christum per fidem*. Pietism kept faith and Christ in the justification equation, but shifted the weight to faith and so set the course of theology in an anthropocentric direction. Awareness of one's own justification was more important than what one thought about God. By placing Christian consciousness at the beginning of his *Der christliche Glaube* and relegating the Trinity to the end, Scheiermacher solidified this view. Bultmann went further in his existential interpretation of justification without insisting on a particular understanding of Jesus.³ Since "God" can embrace Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Wicca definitions, the doctrine of the Trinity must be allowed to re-occupy the central place which it had in the early church and still deserves.⁴ Since no doctrine can be known or proven by reason or experience, doctrines are appropriately called mysteries, among which the Trinity is the most profound which even in glory is known only in Jesus. This cannot be taken to mean that the Trinity is totally ineffable or undefinable only to be silently contemplated. *Inarnatus est* and *homo factus* are the gates to the

³Bultmann's definition was the Pauline doctrine of justification gone amuck. His views found their way into the LCMS via the St. Louis seminary in the 1960s and 1970s and almost brought us to our knees. Apart from providing a biblical basis for trinitarian understanding of God, the trinitarian model has provided a convenient scaffolding for philosophical speculation already in the Age of Rationalism and more recently in the theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg. Everything has an opposite which is reconciled in a synthesis. Consider this definition by Kathryn Tanner: "The triune God is therefore being nothing other than Godself in unity with a world different from God, as that unity and differentiation find their culmination in the human being, Jesus, who is God's very own" (*Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001], 13).

⁴Justification may have been the doctrine by which the church would stand or fall in the Reformation era, but this honor in the first centuries and since the Age of Rationalism right up to the present belongs to God.

Trinity, but this mystery must be accepted in terms of the biblical revelation.⁵ It cannot be subordinated to the old, metaphysical doctrine of God's unity nor can it be relegated to second level discourse.⁶

Posing a dogmatic question to the Scriptures presupposes that the questioner is doing little more than garnering support for an answer he/she already has and so he/she is not traveling on uncharted waters. This is so, but these answers in the West and the East were not the same. Following Augustine, the West generally proceeded from God's unity to the equality of the three persons, an approach that lays down a basis for a unitarianism.⁷ The East began with the divine persons, a method that more closely reflects the New Testament approach and better preserves the place and function of each divine person. God is not a triumvirate with an annual rotating president like the Swiss Republic. Though historical reasons preclude using "subordinationism" of the relationship between the persons, interdependency is permissible. In deriving His life from the First Person, the Second Person is the Son and by this derivation the First Person is the Father. Without an eternal reciprocity, the persons become indistinguishable.

The Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday provides an annual dose of trinitarianism, but its phrase "the catholic faith" causes a greater stir than the trinitarian definition that informs the word "catholic." During seminary days, refuting evolution occupied a larger space than the Trinity or so it seemed.⁸ Why debate something so obvious? In the 1950s, trinitarian invocations at the beginning and ending of sermons identified one as a sympathizer with the St. James Society. Things have changed. Four trinitarian invocations are

⁵1 Timothy 3:16: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

⁶This point is made by Robert Jenson, "What is the Point of Trinitarian Theology?" in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essay on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwobel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 31.

⁷The great Lutheran dogmatician Friedrich Adolph Philippi began with his locus on God in which the first sub-topic was *Gott als absolute Substanz*. This was followed by the locus on the Trinity (*Kirchliche Glaubenslehre* [Stuttgart:Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1957], 2:1-216). In the second volume of *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (2 vols. [St. Louis: Concordia, 1970-1972]), Robert D. Preus dealt with the topic of God. Only after nearly 100 pages on God does Preus take up the doctrine of the Trinity in 50 pages.

⁸Breaking with the Augustinian model, Francis Pieper places his discussion of God's unity after the Trinity in the section "The Doctrine of God"; however, the first sub-topic is "The Natural Knowledge of God," followed by "The Christian Knowledge," which sets forth trinitarian definitions. Other sections deal with the Old Testament doctrine, its incomprehensibility and refutations of denials of it. No one sub-section coordinates the New Testament evidences. Of the 577 pages of the first volume, about 35 pages cover the Trinity. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951-1953).

minimal even for those not given to things liturgical. Luther's rubrics for daily prayers called for this quota and perpetuated an early church practice, namely, that to distinguish herself from the Jews with whom she shared a common Scripture, the church ended hymns and psalms with trinitarian doxologies. Even Protestants joyously break forth with "Praise God from whom all blessing flow. . . . Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Problematic is why a phrase found only once in the Bible (Matt. 28:19) occupies such a prominent place in church life, especially since the vast majority of scholars date the Gospel between 80-100. Were it not for the widespread use of Matthew in the second century, inclusion of the trinitarian formula would be a reason for pushing it into the second century. All this supports Adolph von Harnack's claim that the religion of Jesus was a loving Father unitarianism whose followers were to respond in like kind. Most scholars have not retreated from the view that the Evangelist and not Jesus originated the trinitarian formula. Let us assume the opposite scenario that Jesus is the author of the formula, which it seems is part of our confessional obligation, though this hardly closes the argument.⁹ This raises the question why the allegedly earlier New Testament writings, especially those to be judged more theological like the Pauline corpus, did not include the formula. All this raises issues about methods of interpretation and origins of the books.

Lutheran dogmatics traditionally uses the citation method by which certain biblical verses are arranged according to topics or *loci* to show their truthfulness. Allegedly clearer passages are honored as *sedes doctrinae*, and the remainder are relegated to a subsidiary role and by themselves cannot be a source of doctrine. This division of biblical sheep and goats seems arbitrary.¹⁰ Inspiration guarantees the authority of the cited passages. Canon criticism puts an equal value on the separate verses, because the biblical books were accepted as a totality. Literary criticism relates passages in a document to others passages in the same document and attempts to find a unifying theme often called a story line.¹¹ These methods pay little attention to a document's historical circumstances and its relation to other biblical and extra-biblical documents. Form criticism traces how sayings and reports of Jesus' acts passed from Him through Jewish and finally to Hellenistic communities into the Gospels. Miracles and doctrinal formulas, such as

⁹*Small Catechism*: "Our Lord Christ says in Matt. 28, ' . . . in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"

¹⁰This method is found in Graebner's *Doctrinal Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, n. d.) and the Synodical Edition of Luther's *Small Catechism*, and remains popular with clergy and people alike.

¹¹For example, Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

"Jesus is Lord," are seen as later Hellenistic developments.¹² With its attention to history and tradition, it possesses a *catholic* element, but miracles and advanced doctrinal formulas have no place in Christianity's earliest layer.¹³ Redaction criticism sees the Synoptic Evangelists as theologians in their own right, an honor reserved for John and the authors of the Epistles. This method does expand the field of play and introduces the words of Jesus in the first three Gospels into the trinitarian discussion.

Each method, even those we do not know, has its value. The citation method recognizes that because of its inspiration, the entire Bible has a trinitarian substructure and thus can be expected to offer trinitarian conclusions. Canon criticism also approaches the biblical documents as a unit and so the Old and New Testament passages can be cross-referenced in the same way the citation method does. Literary criticism takes a document on its own merits and attempts to locate the writer's theme(s). How one Evangelist presents the Trinity should be appreciated on its own merits. Form criticism recognizes that incorporated in the Gospels were confessions about Jesus that were later recognized as the heart of the trinitarian faith.¹⁴

The origin of the Gospels is also a factor in trinitarian definition. Most scholars accept a variation of the Two Document Hypothesis that "Q" and Mark were the sources of Matthew and Luke. A minority hold to the Two Gospel Hypothesis that Matthew and Luke were the primary sources for Mark. Literary and canon criticism and the citation method can avoid addressing this issue. Form criticism does not, but its conclusion that the trinitarian formula is not found in the earliest layers of tradition means that Jesus and the apostles could have hardly known it.¹⁵ Here we are faced with

¹²So Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 5th edition, trans. J. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). Since the first edition was published in 1913, this view is found throughout the twentieth century.

¹³Form criticism's line between Jewish and Hellenized communities is not above challenge. Long before the first century, Palestinian Jewish communities had been Hellenized, some even before Alexander's conquest. In spite of the cross pollination between the two communities, Jews were not Gentiles and resolving the tension between them was an issue the early church had to address. This distinction remains a factor in studying the Gospels.

¹⁴Vernon H. Neufeld locates these confessions in the New Testament. See his *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, *New Testament Tools and Studies*, vol. V (Leiden: E. J. Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

¹⁵Doubts about the historical authenticity of the trinitarian baptismal formula are raised by Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972), 26-30. Heiko Obermann claims that the Anabaptist criticism of the necessity of baptism is supported by modern research which "has recognized that Luther's central biblical passage, the baptismal commandment, was added to the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark only later. The baptismal commandment is a teaching of the

an irony that only Gospel that preserves the Father-Son-Holy Spirit formula is associated with a Jewish-Christian community. To preserve a late dating, this community is identified not as one which was coterminous with Jesus and the apostles, but one in opposition to the revived Judaism in connection with Jamnia.¹⁶ The *Didache*, a Jewish styled catechesis, adds another wrinkle. Variouslly dated in the fifty years before or after 100, it has the formula.¹⁷ Our topic requires us to set forth the parameters in which the biblical texts are examined. Aside from our disagreements, it is a given that among the biblical documents that Matthew alone has a trinitarian formula, and so it will be at the center of our attention.¹⁸

Citations in other parts of the New Testament have tripartite division: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14) and "There is one body and one Spirit, . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:4-6.) Separately or jointly, however, they do not confidently convert into the Father-Son-Holy Spirit formula, especially since "Son" is missing from both. John has trinitarian terminology and explicit discourses, but lacks the classical formula. The hypostatic Word exists face to face with God and is God (1:1-3). The Father exists in the Son who in turn exists in the Father (14:11-12). God approaches believers as three: "my Father will love him, and we will come to him . . . the Counselor, the Holy Spirit" (14:23-26). At the Gospel's conclusion Jesus breathes the Spirit on His disciples (20:22). Coming close to the classical formula is Luke 24:49, "I send the promise of my Father upon you." It contains the three persons, but it lacks such essential words as "Son," "Holy Spirit," and "name," and by itself it is not easily transposed into the trinitarian formula. Mark offers an intriguing and almost Johannine trinitarian perspective in his parallel to Luke 9:48, "Whoever receives me receives him who sent me." In Mark this becomes "whoever receives me, receives *not* me but him who sent me" (Mark 9:37). In Luke, receiving Jesus is preliminary to receiving the Father and so each person is distinct; however in Mark those who receive Jesus do not receive Him but the Father. Here

early Christian community" (*Luther Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989], 231).

¹⁶W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3 vols., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-1997), 1:133-137.

¹⁷Edouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, 3 vols., ed. Arthur J. Bellinzoni, trans. Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht (Leuven: Peeters and Macon, GA: Mercer, 1990), 1:5-6.

¹⁸Not all scholars are convinced that the formula supports the classical trinitarian faith. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3:686. "We see no developed Trinitarianism in the First Gospel. But certainly later interpreters found in the baptismal formula an implicit equality among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; so for instance Basil the Great, Hom. Spir. 10:24; 17:43."

unity exists alongside of a distinction of persons which is reminiscent of "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 14:11).

Apart from specific interpretations, the Bible by virtue of its inspiration is inherently trinitarian, which is evident in Matthew. The words of the Spirit of the Father speaking through the apostles are also the commands given by Jesus (Matt. 10:1,2 20; 28:20). A date towards the end of the first century suggests that the classical formula resulted from an evolutionary distillation of prior data, part of primitive "Protestantism" evolving into a dogmatic catholicism. A date before the Council of Jerusalem contributes to the probability that the formula can be attributed to Jesus, and so God as Trinity would belong at the front of the apostolic era and not to time when the apostles were long dead. Other New Testament references would then be interpretations of the classical formula. What is startling is that of all the Gospels' introductions, Matthew's prologue or title has the least trinitarian potential. Jesus is introduced as the son of Abraham and of David (1:1) and not as divine Word as in John (1:1-3) or the Son of God in Mark (1:1). Luke may have a reference to the Jesus as the Word in his prologue.¹⁹ Apart from how this is resolved, Luke introduces a trinitarian action in the narrative of the annunciation. "'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'" (1:35). Matthew develops his trinitarian theology more slowly. Only after Jesus' genealogy (1:1-18), does Matthew introduce Jesus' deity by the angel informing Joseph in a dream that his betrothed's unborn son will save his people from their sins (1:21). Like Joseph, Jesus is the son of David (1:1, 20), but unlike Joseph He has no human father (1:6), but is Emmanuel, a point proven by the Evangelist's citation of the LXX Isa. 7:14. By interpreting Emmanuel as "God with us," Matthew presents Jesus as God to his hearers in absolute terms not even found in John, where the Word is presented first in relation to God (1:13), or Mark, where Jesus is the Son in relation to God. Matthew then introduces the Holy Spirit into the narrative,

¹⁹Whether or not Luke begins with a high Christology depends on how "and" is taken and how "word" is interpreted in "the eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:2). If the eyewitnesses and the ministers are the same people, then this would be most likely the first or an extra-Johannine reference to the hypostatic word. Joseph F. Fitzmyer presents arguments that these were different groups, but favors one group is in view and that "word" is proclamation (*The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, Anchor Bible 28 [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981, 1985], 294-295). Arthur A. Just, Jr., is more definite: "Grammatically, [the Word] goes with both 'eyewitnesses' and 'ministers,' suggesting that for Luke the Word is living in the flesh of Jesus, . . ." (*Luke 1:1 - 9:50*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 1996], 36). He sees "the Word" as Jesus. Those who were only ministers of the preached word would have little value in establishing the authenticity of Luke's Gospel.

"that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (1:20), but only at the Gospel's end do we learn that the Spirit has a claim on the divine name equal to that of the Father and Son (28:19). For Matthew, Jesus' identity as God precedes the revelation of the Trinity.²⁰ The Evangelist does not begin with an abstract doctrine of God's unity or His trinitarian existence, as it was customary from Augustine through Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy, but with Jesus, who defines God and not the other way around. In dogmatic terms, the economic Trinity precedes, informs, and leads up to the immanent Trinity. Trinity begins with Christ.²¹

The first reference that Jesus is God's Son comes in his return from Egypt: "Out of Egypt I have called my Son" (2:15). In this way the Father is implicitly introduced. Matthew cites a passage in which God laments over Israel's persistent refusal of salvation offered first in the Exodus, but which had become systemic of her entire history: "The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols" (Hos 11:2). By heeding God's call, Jesus is the Israel of Hos. 11:1. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." As Israel, Jesus is also God's Son. Philo, in his interpretation of the theophanic angel of Exod 23:20-22, identifies God's First-born as Israel,²² and so Matthew is an idiosyncratic exegesis. Whereas in 2:15, Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is God's Son by the application of a prophetic word, in the baptismal narrative he does this by referring to God's direct intervention. After the heavens are opened, Jesus sees the Spirit of God in the form of a dove coming upon Him and hears the voice saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (3:17). For the first time, Matthew weaves all three divine persons into one tapestry. By Matthew's counting Jesus among sinners (3:6; 14) whom He has come to save (1:21), the Evangelist gradually removes the veils from the trinitarian mystery which will be complete at his conclusion. Also here *homo factus est* remains key to the trinitarian mystery. A possible exception is the transfiguration where the words of the Father from the baptism

²⁰By placing Trinity at the conclusion of his dogmatics and not the introduction, Schleiermacher may have unwittingly followed Matthew's schema but not his doctrine.

²¹It should also be noted that Matthew begins with Christ's work in explaining that the name Jesus means that He will save His people from their sins. Deity is implied since this is a work only God can do. This is fleshed out by the interpretation of Emmanuel as "God with us."

²²*Conf.* 146. "But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a son of God, let him press to take his place under's First-born, *the Word*, who holds the eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were. And many names are his for he is called: the Beginning, *the Name of God*, *Word (of God)*, the Man after His Image, and 'the One that see,' *namely Israel*" (quoted from Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57:13). This is based on his published doctoral dissertation, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden, Cologne: Brill, 1998).

announcing Jesus as His Son is repeated (17:5); however, this appears between the first and second announcements of His death and resurrection. God will be known first in the crucified Jesus whose atonement makes a full revelation of the Trinity possible.²³ As William C. Weinrich says, the “conviction that the Man, Jesus [is] the Revelation of the Father and the Bearer of the Holy Spirit, so that to speak theologically [is] to speak Christologically.”²⁴

Matthew first explicitly introduces the word “Father” in the Sermon on the Mount, where the word is used so often that it might be called a discourse on the Father. Jesus, whom God has acknowledged as “my Son,” now acknowledges God as “my Father.” Call this a trinitarian reciprocation. Jesus’ followers will become like His Father in being completely reconciled to their enemies (5:44, 45). Prayers are offered to the Father (6:9), who sees in secret (6:4) and who will reward the faithful (6:6). Jesus’ Father becomes His followers’ Father who occupies a position to Him in relation to believers. This does not diminish Jesus’ place as God. At the Sermon’s introduction, Jesus is described as “opening his mouth,” a phrase identifying Him as God: “for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isa. 1:20; 40:5; Mic. 4:4).²⁵ He hears the pleas of those who face the judgment (7:21-23) whose standard is His words (7:24-27). Jesus speaks in an absolutist style without relying on the prophets (7:28-29). John attributes Jesus’ words to the Father (14:10, 24), but in the Sermon He is the authority for His own words.²⁶

Matt. 11:25-30 takes a mammoth leap towards the Gospel’s trinitarian conclusion. At its center is what the scholars have called the Johannine thunderbolt or “the bolt out of the Johannine sky”: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father,

²³The two great confessions that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God are made in contexts of predictions of His death and the event itself (Mt 16:16; 26:63). From the texts themselves, it is obvious that Peter did not know the full import of his confession and that Caiaphas understood his own question, but refused to accept Jesus’ testimony that it applied to him. We do not know with certainty the level of understanding of others who made confessions about Jesus. What concerns us is that the Evangelist is incorporating them in his Gospel to lead his hearers to the trinitarian conclusion in the light of which all these confessions will be properly understood.

²⁴“The Face of Christ as the Hope of the World: Missiology as Making Christ Present,” in *All Theology is Christology* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215-227.

²⁵Consider also the description of Jesus giving the parables: “This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world’” (Matt. 13:35).

²⁶One should also consider that with Jesus’ reply to Satan that man shall live by every word that proceeds from God’s mouth (Matt. 4:4), that within the context of Matthew (5:2; 7:24, 26; 28:20), He is referring to His own words and not the Father’s.

and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." It is so out of step with the rest of Matthew that von Harnack saw it as a later addition. Oscar Cullmann challenged this.²⁷ Robinson, Davies, and Allison supported the section's authenticity, but saw no trinitarian reference.²⁸ Older liberals who rejected its authenticity correctly recognized it as explicitly trinitarian. Consider the following: (1) the Father and Son have an exclusive knowledge of one another, but they relate to believers through revelation; (2) in relation to one another, the Son occupies the first position, though in the traditional formula, He is listed as second; (3) both Father (v. 25) and Son (v. 27) reveal the other,²⁹ and (4) the divine persons are not known first in themselves, but in the humiliation of Jesus: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (28b-30). So even in this starkly trinitarian section, the *homo factus* remains as the necessary prelude to a fuller revelation. Christology precedes trinitarianism. In Jesus, God comes to the heavy laden, and in the Father, God reveals the things of salvation to babes (v. 25). Matthew, as the New Testament does not know of the revelation of abstract trinitarianism, confesses one which is always salvific in character.³⁰

The creeds included by the Evangelist are consistently christological, some exclusively so (8:29; 14:33; 27:54).³¹ So also Paul, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3). Peter's binitarian confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), is a step toward trinitarianism, because the Father is implicitly included in confessing Jesus. Prayers in the New Testament are offered to the Father and to the Son. Worship of the Son did not begin as an anti-Arian protest, but happened in the life of Jesus Himself.³² Still to be explained is

²⁷See John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, 2nd edition, ed. J. F. Coakley, (Oak Park, Illinois: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987) 22, n. 82; 315-316; 359-360.

²⁸See n. 16 above.

²⁹This anticipates Peter's confession, which is revealed to him by the Father through the deeds and words of Jesus: "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?' And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them'" (11:2-5).

³⁰This Father-Son interchange is found in the last discourse. In the parable of the vineyard, the Father brings judgment on those who kill the Son (21:33-43), and in the next parable, the Father gives a wedding feast for the Son (22:1-14). In the final pericope of the discourse, Jesus assumes the position of God in passing judgment on the church (25:31-46). Here (36, 44) as in the Sermon on the Mount (7:21-22), Jesus is addressed as Lord.

³¹Neufeld, *Earliest Christian Confessions*, 108-109.

³²See Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 36-40, "The Liturgical Role of Christ."

the Spirit's inclusion in God to arrive at a full trinitarian definition. A prescience of the Holy Spirit's equal claim to deity is seen in the unforgivable character of a sin committed against Him (12:32). In this, His status is higher than the Son's and, perhaps, the Father's. His being called "the Spirit of God," (Matt. 3:16; 12:28) is analogous to Jesus' being called "the Son of God" and so originate in God in a similar way. The Spirit is a factor in Jesus' conception and baptism, at which time He attaches Himself to Jesus (4:1), but, unlike Paul, Matthew does call Him the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). A clue to the full manifestation of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ and as God might be found the promise of John the Baptist that Jesus "will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:11), language of eschatological judgment.³³ Though the words include Christian baptism, they more clearly point to apocalyptic events of the crucifixion, which result from Jesus' bestowal of the Spirit (27:50): ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν κράζας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα. Here is cause and effect. The Spirit's release causes the eschatological events promised by Jesus to take place, the temple's curtain is torn, the dead are raised, and the earth quakes (27:51-53)—events more astonishing than Luke's rushing wind and tongues of fire (Acts 2:14). Now that Jesus' great work of atonement is completed, the Spirit can be given as the Spirit from Christ and God can be known for what He is in Himself: Father-Son-Holy Spirit.

Introduction of Greek philosophical ideas in the post-apostolic centuries determined the course of christological and trinitarian discussion in the post-apostolic centuries, but these were already factors in the apostolic era in formulating doctrines on the resurrection and Jesus. Since the church by the end of the first century had gone from being a chiefly Jewish community to a Gentile one, this was inevitable. Genesis knew of God's Spirit as an agent of creation and the angel or messenger of God sent by God having the characteristics of God.³⁴ This tri-personal understanding of God provided a basis for trinitarianism to which Judaism reacted by turning their monotheism into a monolithic view, not unlike the Islamic view seven centuries later. No interpersonal relationships exist within God in spite of such enigmatic passages as Gen. 1:26. While we cannot say with certainty how far a monolithic understanding developed among Jews in Matthew's time, he had to address the question of how God could be also "Father," but "Son." A late date for the Gospel would mean that the Evangelist could have hardly been unaware of the "God" issue, which still separates Jews and Christians. Such a concern was also possible at mid-century. Matthew knows of Jewish-Christian differences about the virgin birth and the

³³Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 1:316-318.

³⁴For a recent and valuable discussion of this issue, see Robert W. Jensen, "The Bible and the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 9/3: 329-339, especially 330-334. Jensen sees the multiplicity of divine persons in such words as Angel, Glory, and Name.

resurrection, so there is little reason to say that he was unaware of the God issue. Caiaphas's reaction to Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God more than suggests that the issue was at the heart of Jewish-Christian difference. How Son and Father can both be God, which is the Jewish problem, is answered by Charles A. Gieschen's thesis that God's name belongs to both persons. "The Divine Name could not be separated from the reality it represented."³⁵ This is hardly different from what many of us have learned from the synodical catechism that the name of God is God Himself. Gieschen notes that the Evangelist as a Jew writing for Jews "would certainly understand the name of the Father to be the Divine Name. The challenging part of this formula for a Jew is that singular Divine Name is also possessed by the Son and the Holy Spirit. This understanding of 'the name' in Matthew 28:19 as the Divine Name is also possessed by the Son and the Holy Spirit."³⁶

Gieschen's conclusion that the word "Name" refers to God prepares for the complete trinitarian definition at the Gospel's end. Jesus' claim to deity is introduced by the Evangelist's application of the Emmanuel name of Isa. 7:14 to Jesus. His followers proclaim the Name of God (the Trinity) in what they do Jesus (7:22; 24:5).³⁷ Because children know or bear this Name (18:5), they are to be received into the community which is constituted and recognized by the Triune God (18:20). The name of the Father in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father . . . hallowed be thy name," presupposes the Father's claim to deity, and sets the prelude for the holding that the Son and the Spirit have an equal claim on the Name which is God Himself. Jesus comes to reveal the Father's Name (21:9; 23:39) and placing these citations prior to the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection suggests that the fuller trinitarian definition (28:19) will happen in these events. Matthew advanced the Old Testament view of a tri-personal God to a complete trinitarianism, and in this he laid down the foundation for the rest of the New Testament. He did this by beginning with the infant Jesus as the God of Israel through whom we know the Father and the Spirit. Is there a theological conclusion to all this? Yes, for starters the Second Article comes first.

³⁵Gieschen, "The Divine Name," 8, 13.

³⁶Gieschen, "The Divine Name," 13.

³⁷"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'" (Matt. 7:22).