

TRINITY
AND
REALITY
AN INTRODUCTION TO
THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Ralph A. Smith

CANON PRESS  *Moscow, Idaho*

Ralph A. Smith, *Trinity and Reality: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*

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Published by Canon Press, P.O. Box 874I, Moscow, ID 83843

800-488-2034 / www.canonpress.org

04 05 06 07 08 09 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover design by Paige Atwood.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Smith, Ralph Allan.

Trinity and reality : an introduction to the Christian faith /

Ralph Smith.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN I-59128-024-9 (pbk.)

I. Trinity. I. Title.

BT111.3.S67 2004

231'.044—dc22

2004011978

This book is dedicated to
my beloved daughter, Emeth Hesed.

חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת אֶל-יַעֲזֹבֶךָ
קִשְׁרָם עַל-גִּרְוֹתֶיךָ
כְּתָבָם עַל-לִיחַ לְבָבְךָ

Proverbs 3:3

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Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many friends for their help. This book began as a series of four lectures that I gave to the Korean Christian group DEW (Disciples with Evangelical Worldview) at a summer camp in August of 1997. My wife and I will never forget our visit to Korea for the kindness and generosity of our hosts and the enthusiasm of the Korean students. In particular, I am grateful to the Reverend Sun-Jae Moon, Professor Kun Chang Lee, and Professor Jong-Beom Lee.

In February of 2002, Peter Leithart kindly introduced the essays based on these lectures to Doug Jones of Canon Press and apparently recommended them. Doug expressed interest but suggested that they be revised and expanded into a book. Since then, I have been working on it as my time has allowed. It has been a hectic period, and the project took much more time than I thought it would, but Doug's encouragement along the way helped me to complete the work.

I tried to keep footnotes to a minimum since the book is intended for a broad audience, but I should make it clear that nothing in this book is original with me. I was awakened to the comprehensive importance of trinitarian theology when I began to read the works of Cornelius Van Til in 1981. I could not have understood Van Til, however, without the help provided by books and lectures by John Frame and Greg Bahnsen.

Van Til challenged my thinking and opened new vistas for contemplating the doctrine of the Trinity. He showed me that it must be central to Christian

thought and many of his followers have further expounded the implications of his trinitarianism. I have read and profited from many in the Van Tillian school of thinkers, but none more than James Jordan. Jordan's biblical theology is thoroughly trinitarian. It was he who called my attention to the importance of the Trinity in the traditional Reformed doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption. Jordan revised and expanded the traditional view. He demonstrated the link between the Trinity and the covenant and showed how the doctrine of God structures biblical truth. His newsletters *Biblical Horizons* and *Rite Reasons* and his taped lectures on various subjects overflow with trinitarian insights.¹

The e-mail list associated with the Biblical Horizons ministry allowed me to meet men like Peter Leithart and Jeff Meyers who, along with James Jordan, provided interaction and help on too many issues to name.

The Biblical Horizons e-mail list also allowed me to meet Joel Garver and John Barach, both of whom read the entire text of the book and offered numerous comments and suggestions. Joel saved me from some elementary mistakes in my theology and helped me to grow in my understanding of the Trinity. John challenged me to improve the content of the book in various areas and corrected many minor mistakes. The pressures of my schedule and other duties have prevented me from incorporating all their suggestions, but the book is much better for their help.

My younger sister Kathy and her son David *hinted* that my writing style needed improving, so I enlisted the help of a close friend of forty years, David R. Thomas. Dave took time from a busy schedule to read the entire text, offering detailed corrections and suggested revisions on virtually every paragraph of the book. The final product reads much more smoothly due to him. I trust my sister won't complain.

I am also indebted to my family for their cooperation and patience with my busy schedule. My son Berek read most of the book and offered his comments. My wife did not specifically contribute to this book, but she has been my constant consultant. She is also my most helpful critic when it comes to the everyday realities of trinitarian theology, challenging me to live according to what I believe.

¹ See <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com>.

Introduction

And the Catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. 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.¹

IT IS THIS trinitarian confession that distinguishes the Christian religion from all pagan religions and philosophies and every cultic distortion of the Bible. No doctrine of the Christian faith is more important or more profound. Contrary, however, to what is sometimes asserted, this most sublime and incomprehensible doctrine finds its roots in neither philosophical speculation nor mystical vision. It comes to us, rather, through biblical revelation and is assimilated into the everyday experience of the humblest Christian. We all begin the Christian life when, like the Apostle Thomas, we see the nail prints in Christ's hands and the wound in His side, and we fall down before Him exclaiming, "My Lord and My God!" Having believed in Jesus, we pray, as He taught us to pray—and as He Himself prayed in the Garden—"Abba, Father." When we realize that we have been transformed and that God has created us anew, we learn from His Word that His saving Spirit has been poured out upon us and dwells within us as Savior.

¹ "The Athanasian Creed," articles 3-6, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 [1877]), 66.

No teaching of the Christian faith transcends our experience and understanding like the doctrine of the Trinity. At the same time, no doctrine is so essential to our Christian thought and everyday Christian life. Even the immature or uneducated Christian who cannot express the trinitarian theology, or has never heard the creeds and knows nothing of the traditional formulas—even such a Christian walks in the trinitarian light. For, if he follows the Scripture, he will naturally lift up his prayers to the Father in the power of the Spirit and in the name of the Son.

In spite of its centrality to our faith, however, the doctrine of the Trinity tends to be neglected in our pulpits and absent from our expositions of the Christian worldview. As Carl F. H. Henry rightly protested, “The doctrine of the Trinity is seldom preached in evangelical churches; even its practical values are neglected. . . .”² It is not that the essential points are unknown—though perhaps in some churches even that may be a problem—it is more that pastors and their congregations have not really considered the implications of the doctrine. Once the doctrine is proved from Scripture, little more is taught about it. This is a tragedy since the doctrine of the Trinity is the crux of the Christian understanding of the world.

Obviously, an adequate statement of the Christian worldview must find its center in the Trinity, for the Christian God Himself is the heart of the Christian’s understanding of the world. But popular statements of the Christian worldview barely mention the Trinity, let alone make it central.³ Why neglect the Trinity? Perhaps because many people think the doctrine of the Trinity is difficult. Or perhaps many have decided that the doctrine of the Trinity is theology and the notion of worldview is a sort of pre-theological introduction. In any case, without the Trinity, there is no Christianity and no Christian worldview.

² *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 5: *God Who Stands and Stays, Part 1* (Waco: Word Publishers, 1982), 212.

³ In James W. Sire’s very helpful book, *The Universe Next Door*, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity is given only one paragraph in his exposition of the Christian faith and is not even included in the index. In Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkin, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views*, the Trinity is mentioned, but it occupies no important place in the exposition of the theistic worldview. The same must be said of Ronald H. Nash’s *Worldviews in Conflict*. See Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976); Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

Trinitarianism, moreover, has specific and wide-ranging implications for a Christian discussion of worldview. The neglected but nevertheless profound fact is that all truth finds its source in the truth of the triune God. In this book we will explore the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian worldview, aiming at an exposition of the Christian understanding of the world that is both biblical and God-centered, and also (be forewarned!) clear and practical, with strong implications for the Christian life. A trinitarian view of the Christian worldview is more theological and biblical than typical worldview presentations, but it could not be otherwise and remain faithful to the real meaning of “Christian” in the expression “Christian worldview.” For non-Christians, philosophical categories or abstract ideas may suffice as the framework for a discussion of worldview, but for Christians nothing but God Himself can be the basis—not God as an idea or a vague and general benevolent power, but the God of the Bible as Father, Son, and Spirit.

This brings up a special problem. Though the word *worldview* is used in this book, the nature of Christian truth is such that the word *worldview* limits the horizon of the discussion more than is appropriate. The Bible does teach us how to view the world, but the Bible also communicates much more. Its commandments lay out a way of life. Its history is not only the story of the world; it is also our story. Biblical poetry guides our aesthetics as well as our religious sensibility. More than all of this, in the Bible we confront the triune God Himself, who has invested His word with power. The Christian faith, then, is not simply a “view” on the world, and the Trinity is more than just a doctrine.

The advantage of the word *worldview* is that it is so often used to communicate religious ideas in a broad, comparative context. Keeping in mind its limitations, I am using it here in a pregnant sense, including meanings of “story of the world,” “ethical standard,” and “attitude on life.” The Christian worldview defines the world in which Christians live. Since, however, we are still learning about that world, and our understanding of it matures over time, calling it a “view” is not altogether inappropriate in spite of the limitations of the optical metaphor.

Finally, I should state from the beginning that my remarks about non-Christian religions in this book are for the purpose of illustration, in order to help us think about the Trinity more clearly. I realize that these remarks

are general and that Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are too complex to deal with in passing. I hope, however, that even superficially contrasting the biblical worldview with other worldviews will be helpful in clarifying Christian thinking about the triune God.

I. Basic Trinitarianism

FOR THE Christian, the Trinity is a basic truth—one of the first truths that we learn, even if we do not learn it as a theological statement. How is that so? Like Christians since the age of the apostles, we begin our Christian walk confessing that Jesus—and He alone—can save us from our sins: “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). At the same time, since the earliest days of the Church, it has been clearly understood that only God can save. Two propositions: *Jesus is my Savior* and *Only God can save*. The inescapable conclusion was reflected in the faith of the first Christians: Jesus is Lord (I Cor. 12:3). The apostle Paul, therefore, quoted from the following passage in Isaiah when he spoke of the Lord Jesus.

Assemble yourselves and come;
Draw near together,
You who have escaped from the nations.
They have no knowledge,
Who carry the wood of their carved image,
And pray to a god that cannot save.
Tell and bring forth your case;
Yes, let them take counsel together.
Who has declared this from ancient time?
Who has told it from that time?
Have not I, the LORD?

And there is no other God besides Me,
A just God and a Savior;
There is none besides Me.
Look to Me, and be saved,
All you ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
I have sworn by Myself;
The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,
And shall not return,
That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall take an oath. (Is. 45:20–23)

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11)

We may say that confessing faith in the truth of the Trinity is a fuller and more theologically sophisticated way of confessing faith in Jesus as Savior. To deny the Trinity, therefore, is to deny Jesus.

Biblical Basis of Trinity

Not a few who claim to be Christians deny the Trinity because, they say, the Trinity is not biblical. Sometimes these are confused young Christians who are troubled by the fact that the word *Trinity* is not found in the Bible. More often these are people like modernist Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mormons who are ensnared in false ideologies fundamentally contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Given the confusion that exists about the doctrine of the Trinity, it is important to preface our discussion of its implications by briefly setting forth the basis for our belief in the Trinity.

Most Christians are familiar with one or more of the ancient creeds. These statements of trinitarian doctrine are carefully worded formulations, theologically dense and complex. To appreciate any one of them fully would require extensive exposition, but the essence of what they express can be stated simply. The ancient creeds are all based upon clear biblical teaching that can be summed up in a short series of propositions. All Christians

agree on each of the basic propositions that form the foundation for trinitarianism, though Christians sometimes disagree on (1) how to explain the relationships between these basic statements and (2) what other biblical teachings might be added to the basic list to fill out the doctrine of the Trinity. This implies that all branches of the Church are unified in their basic confession of the Trinity so that whatever variations exist do not undermine the confession of trinitarian faith. It means that Christians are united in their view of who God is. The Church is one. It also means that whoever does not agree with these basic biblical foundations for the trinitarian faith is, by definition, not a Christian.

The word *Trinity*, though it is not found in the Bible, is used as “theological shorthand.”

Before stating these basic propositions, it is important to say a few words about the often-noted fact that the word *Trinity* is not found in the Bible. Christians ask or are asked why, if the word is not in the Bible, do they use it? The answer is simple and has nothing to do with some conspiracy to add something to the Bible that really is not there. The word *Trinity* is used for theological and practical convenience—it is “theological shorthand,” a single word that sums up a series of biblical teachings. Instead of repeating the whole series every time we speak of God, we substitute a single word that summarizes the truth.

What, then, are these basic biblical propositions? The basic truth, which all Christians agree upon, can be expressed in five propositions.

1. There is one God.
2. The Father is God.
3. The Son is God.
4. The Spirit is God.
5. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguishable persons in relationship with one another. They are not merely different names for the one God.

By way of introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, it is appropriate to demonstrate briefly that these five propositions are truly biblical. The following is certainly not a comprehensive demonstration, for the biblical evidence for the truth of the Trinity is far too copious to be set forth in any short essay, or even in a short book. To illustrate the abundance of the evidence, one theologian offered this analogy: Crystals of salt that appear

on the beach after the tide has receded may be the most apparent proof that the sea is saltwater, but every bucket of water drawn from the ocean testifies clearly to the fact.¹ A full exposition of the Trinity would require volumes; here are a few crystals.

1. There is one God (Deut. 6:4; I Sam. 2:2; 2 Kgs. 19:15; Is. 37:16; 44:8; Mk. 12:28–34; I Cor. 8:4–6; I Tim. 2:5; Jas. 2:19). That the Bible teaches this proposition is not disputed.
2. The Father is God (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; 8:6; 15:24; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 4:6; Phil. 4:20). Again, this proposition is seldom disputed.
3. The Son is God. Because this proposition is frequently denied, I give a fuller statement of the evidence, but it still only scratches the surface.
 - a. The Son is called God (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8).
 - b. The Son is given divine names (Jn. 1:1, 18; Acts 5:31; I Cor. 2:8; Jas. 2:1; Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).
 - c. The Son has divine attributes.
 - i. Eternity (Jn. 1:2; 8:58; 17:5; Rev. 1:8, 17; 22:13).
 - ii. Immutability (Heb. 1:11, 12; 13:8).
 - iii. Omnipresence (Jn. 3:13; Mt. 18:20; 28:20).
 - iv. Omniscience (Mt. 11:27; Jn. 2:23–25; 21:17; Rev. 2:23).
 - v. Omnipotence (Jn. 5:17; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:8; 11:17).
 - d. The Son does divine works.
 - i. Creation (Jn. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16–17).
 - ii. Salvation (Acts 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 5:9).
 - iii. Judgment (Jn. 5:22; 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:31–32).
 - e. The Son is worshipped as God (Jn. 5:22–23; 20:28; I Cor. 1:2; Phil. 2:9–10; Heb. 1:6).
4. The Spirit is God. Those who accept the biblical evidence for the deity of the Son seldom have trouble understanding the evidence for the deity of the Spirit.
 - a. The Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 3:17).
 - b. The Spirit is given divine names (Mt. 12:28).
 - c. The Spirit has divine attributes (I Cor. 2:13–14; Gal. 5:22; I Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; 9:14; I Jn. 5:6–7).

¹Benjamin B. Warfield refers to a “remark” of Dr. Dale in “The Deity of Christ,” *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. I (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 153.

- d. The Spirit does divine works (Jn. 6:33; 14:17, 26; 16:13; Acts 1:8; 2:17–18; 16:6; Rom. 8:26; 15:19; 1 Cor. 12:7–11).
 - e. The Spirit is worshipped as God (Mt. 12:32).
5. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguishable persons in relationship with one another. They are not merely different names for the one God.
- a. The Son prays to the Father (Jn. 11:41–42; 17; Mt. 26:39 ff.).
 - b. The Father speaks to the Son (Jn. 12:27–28).
 - c. The Father, Son, and Spirit—all three—appear together, but are clearly distinct from one another (Mt. 3:16–17).
 - d. The Father sends the Son and the Spirit, and the Son sends the Spirit (Jn. 3:17; 4:34; 5:30; 6:39; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).
 - e. The Father and Son love one another (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:31; 15:9–10; 17:24).

This small fraction of the larger biblical basis for believing in the Trinity is clear enough and should suffice as a starting point for anyone who is willing to learn. Now that the biblical basis for believing these five propositions has been set forth, we may restate them as two: (1) God is one, and (2) God is also three persons in relationship as Father, Son, and Spirit. This is the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity. In various branches of the Church, slightly different language has been used to express this truth, but the doctrine is the same. There is one and only one God, and the one true God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity and Logic

Though it is clearly the teaching of the Bible, cultic groups and atheists often complain that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a contradiction. How can there be one God and at the same time three who are called God? Christians seem to be saying that $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. This is simply bad arithmetic, we are told, not profound theology. The fact is, however, that the doctrine of the Trinity neither involves nor implies a contradiction. How, then, does a Christian explain that God is both one and three at the same time? The answer, in part, is that He is not one in precisely the same way that He is three. Trinitarianism would be a contradiction if it affirmed that God is one and three in precisely the same sense, but no one in the history of the Church has ever taught such a view. All the same, this is only a partial answer.

The deeper problem with every Christian attempt to define the Trinity is the brute reality that God is very hard to describe, especially if we try to reduce our definition to philosophically precise terms. We can say that God is three x and one y , but trying to develop full and precise definitions for x and y becomes exceptionally complicated. However, to conclude contradiction from complexity is rash folly. There is a very great difference between something being a demonstrated contradiction and something being incomprehensible. The doctrine of the Trinity could be demonstrated to be a contradiction if one could show that Christians are claiming something like “ p and not- p ” at one and the same time and in precisely the same sense—which is not the Christian idea at all.

There is a very great difference between something being a demonstrated contradiction and something being incomprehensible.

Mystery

The Trinity is a mystery, a truth beyond our comprehension. But some object that words like “incomprehensible” are just a nice way of saying “contradiction.” What is the difference between a mystery and a contradiction? We have defined a contradiction as the assertion of p and not- p at the same time and in the same relationship. A mystery may be defined as a paradox, something that looks like it might be a contradiction but for which we have good grounds to believe to be true. The doctrine of the Trinity appears to us to be a contradiction because in the human world, a personal being is mono-personal.² We would not believe that God is three persons in one being unless we had reasons. What are our grounds for believing the Trinity to be true? The fact that the Bible teaches us the five truths cited above is the foundational evidence of the truth of the Trinity. Unless a person believes that the Bible is revelation from God Himself—inscripturated truth—there could be no compelling reasons for believing in a mystery so sublime.

The notion of the Bible as truth, however, is not what is ultimately persuasive. A theological truth would hardly satisfy us if we did not know Jesus Himself. As He put it, His sheep hear His voice because they know

²This is true even of those with a so-called “multiple personality disorder.”

Him (Jn. 10:4, 14). To know Jesus is to know Him to be God the Son. Because we believe in Him, we receive His testimony about the Father and the Spirit. Our knowledge of God is also dependent on the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Rom. 8:16). God the Father, the Creator and Lord, manifests Himself in the world around us and in our very souls so that we cannot escape knowing Him (Rom. 1:18–20; Ps. 19). Thus, our knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity and our confession of its truth depend in the final analysis on the fact that we have a personal knowledge of the triune God Himself. David said, “In Thy light we see light” (Ps. 36:9). So also, because we know God Himself, we are able to learn the Scriptures and receive their testimony.

For some, it is offensive to think that the Christian faith has at its very center a mystery, an incomprehensible truth. To them, Christians seem to be calling for a sacrifice of the intellect on the altar of religious confession. In reality, trinitarian faith demands something quite different. It is not a sacrifice of the intellect, but the sacrifice of *the pretense of intellectual autonomy*: the notion that the mind or reason of man is the ultimate judge of truth. The truth of the Trinity requires us to accept what we cannot fully comprehend. Why should that be thought so extraordinary? There is no branch of knowledge, be it physics or biology or history or literature, that does not confront us with paradox in some form or other. Why should the Christian doctrine of God the triune Creator be any less difficult to state and comprehend than truths of physical science or postulations of secular philosophy?

Physics, for example, may be science, but it also has its mysterious side, and not just for the uninitiated. Consider a few illustrations from this epitome of hard science and rational explanation. Steven Weinberg, Nobel prize-winning physicist, claims that “we think we are beginning to catch glimpses of the outlines of a final theory,”³ which would mean, among other things, “*quantitative* understanding of phenomena.”⁴ This means a theory in which *everything* is explained in numbers and formulas in accordance with the principles of rational science. To be *final*, the theory must be *total*. However, Weinberg also writes, “The most extreme hope for science is that we will be able to trace the explanations of all natural phenomena to final laws *and*

³ Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory: The Search for the Fundamental Laws of Nature* (London: Vintage, 1993), ix.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

historical accidents.”⁵ Given the sheer quantity of historical factuality, this “most extreme hope” threatens to set the limits of explanation far short of totality. Having already radically qualified the hope of a final theory, Weinberg further adds, “Not only is it possible that what we now regard as arbitrary initial conditions may ultimately be deduced from universal laws—it is also conversely possible that principles that we *now* regard as universal laws will eventually turn out to represent historical accidents.”⁶

Where does this leave us? Not only can we never, even in our most extreme hope, imagine that we will get beyond the brute fact of “accident,” which in the nature of the case is beyond explanation, we also cannot be certain that some of what we now regard as *universal principles* of science will not turn out to be the haphazard play of historical flux! When all is said and done, Weinberg is telling us that we cannot avoid mystery—the inexplicable, the accidental.

Though Weinberg may not be altogether straightforward about admitting the reality of mystery in our “total theory,” he is very frank in admitting his problems with at least one aspect of quantum mechanics, Heisenberg’s work: “If the reader is mystified at what Heisenberg was doing, he or she is not alone. I have tried several times to read the paper that Heisenberg wrote on returning from Helgoland, and, although I think I understand quantum mechanics, I have never understood Heisenberg’s motivations for the mathematical steps in his paper.”⁷ Weinberg, in a very important sense, cannot follow Heisenberg’s math. It’s a mystery.

We need to reflect very briefly on a broader point, the importance of Heisenberg for modern physics, which is clearly stated by one of the twentieth century’s foremost physicists, Richard Feynman.

The uncertainty principle “protects” quantum mechanics. Heisenberg recognized that if it were possible to measure the momentum and the position simultaneously with a greater accuracy, the quantum mechanics would collapse. So he proposed that it must be impossible. Then people sat down and

⁵ Ibid., 28. Emphasis in the original.

⁶ Ibid., 29. Emphasis in the original.

⁷ Ibid., 53. Note that Weinberg is not speaking of the whole notion of the uncertainty principle, but of the mathematics of the 1925 paper, which he refers to as “pure magic.” More is involved than just the motivations behind the steps; Heisenberg and physicists like him “do not seem to be reasoning at all.”

tried to figure out ways of doing it, and nobody could figure out a way to measure the position and the momentum of anything—a screen, an electron, a billiard ball, anything—with any greater accuracy. Quantum mechanics maintains its perilous but accurate existence.⁸

Does it sound like good old rationality to say that the certainty of uncertainty *protects* quantum mechanics? At this point, we have seen that notions like uncertainty and accident are essential to the most essential science, physics. But there is more. We have to add Bell's theorem to the picture.

What is Bell's theorem? Contrary to what physicists normally think about the way gravity and other forces work in the world, John Stewart Bell proposed that reality is *non-local*. Local forces, such as the electromagnetic force and gravity, become weaker as distance increases—the farther away one is from the earth, the less he is influenced by earth's gravity. That is part of what we mean when we say a force is "local." Bell claims, however, that underlying what we regard as everyday local reality is a web of non-local forces and causes. What his theorem means has been stated like this: "our phenomenally local world is in actuality supported by an invisible reality which is unmediated, unmitigated, and faster than light."⁹ What does this mean? "A non-local interaction jumps from body A to body B without touching anything in between." Even light travels through space in a local fashion, "touching" things, and its speed can be measured. How, then, might we illustrate a non-local interaction? We are told, "Voodoo injury is an example of a non-local interaction."¹⁰

Bell's theorem may sound like a sideshow in physics, but it is "based on the same EPR experiment used by Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen to demonstrate the existence of hidden 'elements of reality' which quantum theory neglects to describe."¹¹ Physicists have not been able to refute the argument of the EPR experiment or explain the "elements of reality," so we have what is called the "EPR paradox." Without going into the details of how Bell started from the EPR paradox and concluded that reality is

⁸ Richard P. Feynman, *Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics Explained by Its Most Brilliant Teacher* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 138.

⁹ Nick Herbert, *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics: An Excursion into Metaphysics and the Meaning of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 227.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

non-local, the sum of the matter, according to Nick Herbert, is that “Bell’s result does not depend on the truth of quantum theory. . . . When quantum theory joins the ranks of phlogiston, caloric, and the luminiferous ether in the physics junkyard, Bell’s theorem will still be valid. Because it is based on facts, Bell’s theorem is here to stay.”¹² Thus, in modern physics, one of the most solid and certain theorems posits a non-local universe—a world which superficially appears to be controlled by local forces, but is actually characterized by forces that work in a manner similar to “voodoo injury.”

One could illustrate *ad infinitum* the fact that all disciplines of knowledge confront paradox. As we have seen, even physics, the heart of modern rationalistic science, proposes as one of its most indubitable theses a belief in the inexplicable on the basis of what we think we know, with the provision that what many now regard as universal laws may turn out to be historical happenstance. If John Bell can believe in something akin to voodoo and Steven Weinberg can confess that what he now believes to be a universal law of physics may turn out to have been a spastic convulsion of the cosmos, I cannot imagine any reason in the world why I, as a Christian, should feel the least bit embarrassed about the fact that I believe in the revealed mystery of the Trinity!

Faith

Even more fundamental than the fact that everyone faces mystery is that all men, no matter how rational they believe themselves or their science to be, cannot overcome the fact that *they live by faith*. Contrary to the hopes of rationalists of past days, Descartes’ highly respected method of doubt does not lead to rational foundations for thought. Modern philosophy generally recognizes the points made by Ludwig Wittgenstein when he asserted, “If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either.” And, “If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.”¹³

¹² *Ibid.*, 227.

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 17e–18e.

Wittgenstein is not speaking of a certainty that is based upon rational proof of the foundations of our beliefs. Rather, Wittgenstein believes that we all have what he calls a “world-picture” that we have learned from childhood. It is not acquired through a process of doubt and proof but through faith in what our parents and others taught us and the confirmation of our beliefs by experience—a circular and uncertain process. Philosophical justification must come to an end in belief. According to Wittgenstein, “The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.”¹⁴

Wittgenstein’s point may be illustrated from a fundamental assumption called “the principle of induction.” Bertrand Russell explains what it means:

It is obvious that if we are asked why we believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, we shall naturally answer, “Because it always has risen every day.” We have a firm belief that it will rise in the future, because it has risen in the past. If we are challenged as to why we believe that it will continue to rise as heretofore, we may appeal to the laws of motion: the earth, we shall say, is a freely rotating body, and such bodies do not cease to rotate unless something interferes from outside, and there is nothing outside to interfere with the earth between now and to-morrow. Of course it might be doubted whether we are quite certain that there is nothing outside to interfere, but this is not the interesting doubt. The interesting doubt is as to whether the laws of motion will remain in operation until to-morrow. If this doubt is raised, we find ourselves in the same position as when the doubt about the sunrise was first raised.¹⁵

To this problem, Russell answers, “The only reason for believing that the laws of motion will remain in operation is that they have operated hitherto, so far as our knowledge of the past enables us to judge.” But then, our knowledge of the past has no empirical authority for the future. And it will not work to say that in our past experience the future has always turned out to be like the past, for our past experience of what was then future cannot tell us anything about our future experience of the future. This is not to say that philosophy recommends that we should not believe in the principle of

¹⁴ Ibid., 24e. Believing is “groundless” in the sense that philosophers cannot build the kind of “foundation” that the rationalist seeks. For the Christian, of course, God Himself is the ground of our faith. But a revealed mystery that can be known only in a living personal relationship is not the kind of “foundation” a rationalist admits.

¹⁵ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1959), 61.

induction. On the contrary, what Russell recommends is *faith*.

Starting with the common beliefs of daily life, we can be driven back from point to point, until we come to some general principle, or some instance of a general principle, which seems luminously evident, and is not itself capable of being deduced from anything more evident. . . . But beyond that [the inductive principle], there seems to be no further regress. The principle itself is constantly used in our reasoning, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously; but there is no reasoning which, starting from some simpler self-evident principle, leads to the principle of induction as its conclusion. And the same holds for other logical principles.¹⁶

In other words, we will have to accept a great deal on faith in order to be able to think philosophically at all. Not just the law of induction is based upon faith—all other logical laws are too. We cannot prove the laws of logic without presupposing them. We must first believe them even to discuss them. All of this illustrates the point: faith is not the enemy of reason; it is the prerequisite.

This relates to the issue of paradox, too. It should be abundantly apparent by now that although we do not have to accept every paradox that the experts proclaim, if we attempt to reject all that appears paradoxical, our perspective will be so grotesquely narrow we will not find room to stand. Even the non-Christian must admit the inexplicable and paradoxical into his worldview. The more basic and important issue is the non-Christian, no less than the Christian, is forced to live by faith, however much he wishes it otherwise. At some point, there must be an end to the question “How do you know?” And there are always questions that cannot be answered—some “not yet” and others “maybe never.” The non-Christian ends the quest for ultimate answers in various ways, but in each case, he cannot avoid saying, essentially, “This is as far as I can go; beyond this point, there is no choice but faith.”

For the Christian, however, faith does not mean “groundlessness.” The end of the Christian quest is not simply acquiescence, as if to say, “Well, we have to stop the questions somewhere, and it might as well be here.” For

¹⁶ Ibid., III–12.

the Christian, mystery is never ultimate. The non-Christian may think he is imposing rational order on a world that is ultimately mysterious, but the Christian knows the God who is not a mystery to Himself. The problem of the “One and the Many,”¹⁷ which leaves us befuddled, is not equally a conundrum to God. He perfectly knows Himself and the world. When we know Him, therefore, we are living in the light of His knowledge and truth. The world is ultimately rational and meaningful, for the Christian confesses with the certainty of faith, “I know the One who is the Truth, or, rather, He has made Himself known to me.”

Is this a less satisfying answer than the non-Christian’s? If astronomy and nuclear physics amaze us with mysteries and dumbfound us with the unfathomable aspects of the physical universe, should it seem so odd that the Christian doctrine of the universe’s Creator contains paradoxes? Why should Christians alone be required to render the inscrutable scrutable?

A Basic Implication of Trinitarianism

The truth that defines a Christian as a Christian, our faith in the triune God, is *revealed* truth. It cannot be discovered by scientific or empirical methods, though science may offer interesting illustrations. The only way for the doctrine of the Trinity to be known is for God Himself to tell us. And since God is a person, that makes good sense. After all, we can only know a person to the degree that he opens up to us and tells us about himself—what he really thinks, what his purposes and desires are.¹⁸ If our common experience shows that we cannot know a man unless he is willing to show us who he is, why should anyone find it strange that we cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us?

Furthermore, if the central truth of the Christian religion can be known only by submitting one’s mind to a message from God, we should not be surprised to discover that the less important truths of the Christian world-view also must be known through faith in Him. In the same way that we know persons largely through their self-revelation to us, we also know their works through their words. Apart from a man’s explanation of why he is

¹⁷ For an explanation of the problem of the “One and the Many,” see the next chapter.

¹⁸ Of course, we can accurately guess a great deal about a person from the way he looks, dresses, etc. People do accidentally reveal things about themselves they didn’t intend to tell.

doing what he is doing, what he seeks, what his fundamental motivation is, and what he regards to be the ultimate meaning of his work, I may not be able to guess (though it is true that in the case of a man, I have other less direct means at my disposal). When we are speaking of the infinite God, who transcends our knowledge and understanding, it is far more clearly the case that He must reveal the meaning of his works for us to know them. Christianity, therefore, is a religion of revelation.

This does not mean—as it has too often been thought and taught to mean—that only the truth about God Himself and the way of salvation must be revealed, as if we could find out the rest for ourselves. It is not that simple. All truth must be grounded in God's self-revelation and checked against the standard of His Word. Thus, the Apostle Paul says that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). How could it be otherwise, when we know that "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:16–17)? Jesus is the secret of the world, the hidden yet revealed truth that underlies, fills, and surrounds all other truth. And the Father is sharing that secret with us all in His Word.

Scripture is the key that unlocks every treasure chest—not just the treasures of theology, but also those of biology, history, literature, and child psychology. This does not mean that the Bible teaches us all we need to know about all of these subjects, nor does it mean that research and study of sources other than the Bible is illegitimate or unimportant. It means that God's revelation in His Word is our ultimate standard for judging all that we know and learn, while it presupposes that God is revealing Himself in every thing that He created and in the process of history as well.

A trinitarian worldview is a revealed worldview, a perspective that comes to us as personal knowledge, which is granted to us by grace. Just as the Father loved Jesus and therefore showed Him all things (Jn. 5:20), the Father loves us and shows us all that we need to know to live our lives in happiness and joy (Jn. 14:21–23). To know the truth, we must seek it first in God's Word and then also in the world that He has created. God is not stingy. He does not withhold His Word, but manifests Himself everywhere.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
Its rising is from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat. (Ps. 19:1–6)

Review Questions

1. How do Christians first come to know the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. Outline the biblical basis for believing in the Trinity.
3. Outline the reasons for believing in the deity of Christ.
4. Outline the evidence that the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons.
5. Why do some people claim that the Trinity is a contradiction?
6. What is the difference between a mystery and a contradiction?
7. What is the contradiction implied in Weinberg's "most extreme hope"?
8. What is Bell's theorem?
9. Explain why all men must live by faith.
10. What does it mean to say that Christianity is a revealed worldview?