

The knowledge of God is the only dogma, the sole content of the entire field of Dogmatics. All the doctrines treated in Dogmatics-- whether in regard to the universe, man, Christ, etc.-- are but the explication of the central dogma of the knowledge of God. Everything is treated with God as center and starting-point. Under him all things are subsumed. To him all things are traced back. It is the knowledge of HIM, of Him ALONE, which it must display and show forth. Herman Bavinck, The Doctrine of God

What should we expect in terms of our understanding of God? E.g. Notice the “incommunicable” language of our Confession.

who is infinite in being and perfection, ... invisible, ... immense, eternal, incomprehensible

Mystery is the vital element of Dogmatics. It is true that the term "mystery" in Scripture does not indicate abstract-supernatural truth...nevertheless, the idea that the believer would be able to understand and comprehend intellectually the revealed mysteries is equally unscriptural... In that sense Dogmatics is concerned with nothing but mystery, for it does not deal with finite creatures, but from beginning to end raises itself above every creature to the Eternal and Endless One Himself. Herman Bavinck

- *E.g. To know him is not to fully comprehend him! (Rom.11:33-36, Job 11:7-9, 26:14, Psalms 145:1-3)*

What can we know of God and how would we know it? E.g. What makes the doctrine of God “communicable?”

Ex. 7:17 *Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD.” See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood.*

Is. 52:6 *Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.*

Ezekiel—64 x’s—the so called “recognition formula-- “*that they might know that I am the Lord God...*” (as especially applied to the meaning/purpose of redemption)

Notice the “perfection” language of the section 1. What then do you think are the implications of this?

- *Infinite in being and perfection...*
- *Most...*
- *Immutable...*

How does section 2 apply section 1?

- Notice especially how divine “sovereignty” throughout section 2 is the necessary consequence of who God is!
 - *God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself*
 - *is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient*
 - *not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made*
 - *nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.*
 - *He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth.*

What does it mean to say that God is “sovereign” according to section 2?

- Why, if God is “God” as described here—would it be wrong to reduce the doctrine of God in relation to what happens as “foreknowledge” only? E.g. To deny his absolute “sovereignty”
- Why, if God is “God” as described here—would it be wrong to reduce the doctrine of God to make room for human freedom of the will *absolutely*? E.g. How is God’s freedom different than our freedom? (*Hodge p. 52*)
- Why, according to who God is, does the confession say “so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain?”

As then related to the immutability/sovereignty of God, the confession asserts “without passions?” (The so called doctrine of divine “impassibility”). What, especially in this context, does this mean do you think?

- For example, did God “suffer” when Christ suffered? (Note forensic justification—did God suffer and therefore not God making another, innocent suffer?)
- Is God “grieved” with the Holy Spirit is “grieved”?

How then to preserve God’s immutability without compromise to God’s empathy? Can human passions pass on to God without God himself changing?

The Bible describes God as a “jealous” God? Why, at first glance, might this bother us? So what does this have to

do with God's attributes?

How can we reconcile section 1's statements concerning God's "*most loving...forgiving iniquity*" and God's "*most just and terrible judgments... by no means clear the guilty*"? E.g. What is the significance of the cross on this point?

The cross is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that his holiness and his love are equally infinite...it consists in the combination of inflexible righteousness, with its penalties, and transcendent love.
Emil Brunner, The Mediator

What then is the ultimate response to the doctrine of God according to our confession?

*To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature,
whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.*

The Trinity WCF 2:3

Luke 8:22-25 (note, Use of both Mark "fear" and MT "marvel")

I. An Apostolic Doctrine

The Trinitarianism of the New Testament is rarely explicit; but the frequency with which the triadic schema recurs suggests that this pattern was implicit in Christian theology from the start. The impression inevitably conveyed is that the conception of the threefold manifestation of the Godhead was embedded deeply in Christian thinking from the start, and provided a ready-to-hand mold in which the ideas of the apostolic writers took shape. J.N.D. Kelly,
Early Christian Creeds

(c.f. Trinity formula at the end of 2 Corinthians, and the baptismal formula at the end of Matthew.
Also 1Cor. 6,11; 1 Cor. 12,4f.; 2 Cor. 1, 21f., 1 Thess. 5, 18f....1 Pet. 1, 2.)

A. The idea of the Trinity:

1. Peculiar to Bible. No other religion has an analogy to the Trinity doctrine.
2. Is taught in Bible in its relation to salvation. Not as a speculative science.
3. The Trinity in Scripture is that point where all other Biblical ideas unite, the beginning and end of all insight into Christianity. Illus. Eph 1 and missional theology, salvation theology, theology proper...
4. Progressive nature of Biblical revelation such that the doctrine of Trinity moves from vague to specific and clear from Genesis to Revelation.

There is a development of doctrine within the Bible itself.

- a. Christ's claims that the OT speaks of him. (Luke 4:14-21; 24:25-27)
- b. Other Examples: Gen.3:14-15, Isa.53:1-12; Micah 5:2 (Mt.2:4ff); Zech.13:7 (Mt.26:55-56)

B. The form of the Doctrine in Scripture:

1. Not Polytheism, but monotheism. (Deut. 6:4 Christ endorsed Monotheism of OT: Mk.12:29)
of one substance, power, and eternity
2. Not tri-theism, but Tri-unity. Mt.28:19 where Christ bracketed the F,S,HS together as "one" (singular) name...
(Also Jn.14:23)
There be three persons...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost
3. The Son, not born of, but *eternally begotten of*... the Holy Spirit *proceeding from*...

C. A Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture

1. That God is One is well-established biblically.

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! (c.f. 1 Cor. 8:6)

2. That this One God is yet three in Persons is established by the following:

- a) Explicit references of divinity applied to each three "person" of the Trinity:
 - 1) The Father: (John 6:27 John 20:17 Rom. 1:7 1 Cor. 1:3)
 - 2) The Son: (John 1:1,14,18, John 5:18, Rom. 9:5)
 - 3) The Holy Spirit (Is. 6:8-9 Acts 28:25)

b) OT language for God applied to Jesus in NT:

Example: Rom.10:9-13 (cf. vs. 13 quotes Joel 3:5, “Yahweh” and applies to Jesus, see also Acts 2:20-21)

c) Jesus was understood and condemned for his self-awareness concerning his own divinity. (Jn 10:31ff, Jn. 20:17f)

d) The divine communion of God the Father and God the Son. (Jn.5:22, 14:13, 17:1, 5:26, Col1:15, Heb.1:2)

e) The “another” language applied to Holy Spirit in relation to Christ. (Jn 14:16-18...26 “I will come to you”)

D. What does the doctrine of the Trinity (section 3) have to do with sections 1-2? E.g. what about God makes the Trinity, if not comprehensible, more believable?

E. The 3 of 1 issue—“distinct but never separated”... How then will this principle play out with other issues do you think vis-vis- the role of Holy Spirit today?

- “partakers of Divine nature”? (2 Peter 1:4)
- “body of Christ... Christ fills all in all,” Holy temple in the Lord... dwelling place?? (Eph. 1:22-23, 2:21-22, 4:10)

E. Note Ephesians 1—Trinitarian doxology, or Christocentric doxology?

Albeit affirming the “one God, three persons” idea of the Trinity, why would it be important to affirm a Christo-centric idea as even to understand the Trinity and Mission of God?

Illustration: Excerpt from *Lesslie Newbigin Explored... Missional Ecclesiology*

The theological context for the so called “ecumenical amnesia” of the WCC movement in 1968 was according to Newbigin related to a profound “paradigm shift” from “Christo-centric universalism” to the “Trinitarian model.” Notwithstanding his general endorsement that a “full Trinitarian theology was needed for an adequate missiology” (c.f. his *Trinitarian Faith for Today’s Mission, 1963*), Newbigin however sought to qualify the Trinitarian model in that “the Trinitarian perspective can be only an enlargement and development of a Christo-centric one, and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history.”¹ In other words, the “literally crucial matter” concerning the missionary nature of the church according to Newbigin was “the centrality of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross, that work by which he has won lordship over the church and the world.”²

Newbigin often bemoaned how the Christo-centric basis of missional ecumenism had been supplanted wherein the “task of the church [was] no longer to Christianize the world but to change it.” The post-Uppsala reinterpretation of Christian mission is further explained by Michael Goheen as a “new view of mission” that featured a “shift in focus from God’s work through Christ in the church to His providential and salvific work by His Spirit in the world. The goal of mission was the humanization or shalom of society through the efforts of the laity in co-operation with other social institutions that aimed at the transformation of oppressive political, social, and economic structures.”³ Accordingly, the Geneva Conference on Church and Society (1966) stated for instance:

We start with the basic assumption that the triune God is the Lord of his world and at work within it, and that the Church’s task is to point to his acts, to respond to his demands, and to call mankind to this faith and obedience. . . . In this document, ‘mission’ and ‘missionary’ are used as shorthand for the responsibilities of the Church in the world.”⁴

¹ Amnesia, p.26.

² Amnesia. P. 28.

³ Goheen, p. 350.

⁴ Quoted in Goheen, p. 350. *World Conference on Church and Society: Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time*. Geneva, July 12-16, 1966. The Official Report with a Description of the Conference by M. M. Thomas and Paul Albrecht. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), 179f.