

## Living in the Triune God

God's nature as triune has become a mere theoretical idea for many—an unnecessary burden of belief. This may relate to the way the doctrine developed in the Western Church (as distinct from Orthodox).

We have been influenced by Augustine rather than by the Cappadocian Fathers: by unitary and mechanical considerations rather than by interpersonal ones.

We have been inclined to see Jesus as an aspect of a unitary deity (God in a skin), or not God at all, and to have oscillated between a consciousness of Jesus as an ambiguous 'Lord' or a Sunday School hero. We have also had a proof-text approach or overly philosophical approach to 'trinity' making 'it' unconvincing. (God became a 'problem' to solve rather than the Creator-Redeemer.)

To let this situation remain is dangerous for faith and worship and for our proclamation in the world. Either kind of Jesus and either kind of God will become increasingly irrelevant and obscure. It may already be true that because God seems unreal, our attentions have been turned largely to the study of and the pleasing of ourselves and the working out of tangible and expedient solutions to problems.

Our study is also conditioned by the kind of society we have experienced (including church). The world has experimented and vacillated between emphasis on the importance of the one and the many (after Plato). In the West, the emphasis has been on the many (individuals) rather than on the one (society). But both systems have been found wanting. The gospel is the radical orienting of us to God who is one and 'many' and who alone can provide an understanding of who we are personally and socially.

We need to affirm that God cannot be known 'from the outside'. It is by him being God to us—his continuing to be the context for our living though we are sinful, and by his taking us to be his people, that we know the mystery of God.

God being Trinity, relational in himself, could only truly represent himself to others by relating to them—causing us to be his people, even though sinners.

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### God being God—through making covenant

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The story of God being God to this world is the story of his making covenant with some, on behalf of all. God does not primarily explain himself; rather, he relates to us. He assumes his Creator relation to us and comes to us in terms that set before us our relation to him—not as defined by us in our sinfulness but as defined by him in his grace.

#### **A covenant with Abraham**

The God of glory appeared to Abraham and showed him the way of blessing for himself, his family and the world (Gen. 12:1-3). God promised an inheritance to all who believed in him.

#### **A covenant with all Israel**

To this end, God gave them his word so they would know how to approach him and to live before him in receipt of his constant attention and blessing. He appeared to Moses and showed Israel the way to walk before God. Through the hearing of these words from God and doing of them, Israel would live in God. In his law and the sacrificial worship, God revealed his nature.

Covenant is not a provisional way of living in God. It has opened up to us what is essentially so. God is the covenant making and keeping and consummating God, and this is the way we come to know his nature and being and our own place in him.

Israel's whole national and personal life arose from their God. The Lord their God was one Lord and they were to love the Lord their God with all their heart (Deut. 6:4). The Lord was their Shepherd (Psa. 78:52) and Father (Isa. 63:16). They were to cling to God—like a loincloth to the legs of a man (Jer. 13:11).

### **A covenant with David**

God spoke to David and other prophets, promising Israel a King who would fulfil all God's purpose (Psa. 89:19-37; Isa. 9:6-7). In this king, God himself would be with them (Ezek. 37:24-28; cf. Rev. 21:3). This hope would be fulfilled even in the presence of Israel's infidelity towards God and impotence in the world. He would make a new covenant with them (Jer. 31:31-34). The King would be God's covenant with them (Isa. 49:8).

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## **Revelation not speculation**

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This covenant relation could not have been postulated or anticipated through our sinful consciousness or experience. Any religion or philosophy which presumes to do so must be speculative and legalistic, and, become bogged in our inability to make it convincing. In contrast to this, God's covenant accounts for but is not inhibited by our assumption of autonomy. It declares that there will be a relation between God and man, defined by God, fulfilled by God and pleasing to God.

*What* is God? Religions speculate. Is he everything (Hinduism and New Age teaching), or solitarily over against everything (Islam)? God has revealed himself—in relation to us—to Abraham and Moses and David and to Israel's prophets, and they confessed: 'The Lord our Lord is one Lord' (Deut. 6:4-5). He was not everything including them, but neither was he distant from them.

The message of the Old Testament is this covenant relation of God with man, secured by God, but calling the human partner to faithfulness. Persistently, this faithfulness was not forthcoming and so the question arose as to how there could be a real relation of God with man, in covenant, or man in God.

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## **One God, revealed to a fractured world**

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Israel's confession that their God was one Lord (Deut. 6:4) was the focal point for Israel's existence throughout her history.

Christ's apostles teach us the same: 'For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist' (I Cor. 8:6).

But this confession of Israel and the Church is made in the midst of idolaters whose idols sometimes seem more able to account for life than the Lord.

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## **Can a pantheon of gods account for our situations?**

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Is there one God who can account for life as we experience it and secure us in it, or do we, like the Greeks and Romans, need to widen out the pantheon of gods to account for the diversity of experience—its delights and discoveries, its very being at all, but also its contests, its sufferings and its responsibilities? It is fashionable to plead for the variousness of things (e.g. multiculturalism), but the true God is the God over all.

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## **The attempt to live outside of God**

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We have set up a 'platform' from which to view God and assess him and bargain or negotiate with him—as distinct from live in him.

But we have not succeeded in creating another world than God's to live in. The platform could not exist apart from the prodigality of God. It is still true, even for rebels, that we live and move and have our being in God (Acts 17:28).

In fact, the world has been given up to futility so that its meaning cannot be discerned within its own system (cf. Eccles. 3:11).

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## **God's revelation of his One-ness**

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It is in this situation—and it is crass to fictionalise about any other situation—that God has revealed himself in his One-ness to us—in his Son. He has not changed or diminished himself in response to what we have done or by his coming to us. Rather, he has revealed what he is eternally.

[See study 2: Jesus Christ—the Eternal Son.](#)

No other God can reveal the one-ness of the creation than the One God, and he has done this by encompassing us, in our sinfulness, through his own love. It is in this action that we have discovered not only that God encompasses all things, but that his own unity is expressed in a relation: Father, Son and Spirit.

[See study 3: God in Christ—reconciling us to himself.](#)

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## **The Son and the Spirit affirm to us the Oneness of God**

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Nothing that has happened in Jesus Christ and with the coming of the Spirit has altered Israel's confession of one God. Rather, everything has been done to confirm it, and, to confirm us in this truth forever. In fact (being wise after the event), nothing else can affirm the unity of God than the testimony of the Son and the Spirit.

[The coming of Christ and his divine identity have not so much given us a problem concerning the unity of God as confirmed it. Without the full exposure of Deity in Christ and the full visitation of Deity in the Spirit, the fractured reality of life in flesh may have made belief in one God untenable. Life's argument with death and virtue's with evil would require a dualism. Finally, the concentration of each upon themselves would require a whole pantheon of gods.](#)

[Only three religions are monotheistic and all depend on the revelation to Israel.](#)

If we believe in Jesus Christ and call him Lord, and pray to him to be saved, we have not added another god to our pantheon but worshipped the one God at the feet of his Son.

[See study 4: Being in Christ.](#)

If we receive the Holy Spirit and know that God has come to live in us, we do not have a dispersed or atomised or ethereal God, a God of private experience; rather, we have come into the presence of the Father, together with all who have trusted in the Son.

[See study 5: Being in the Spirit.](#)

In receiving their testimony, we have come to know the unity of God, the unity of ourselves as integrated beings and the unity of all things in him.

Our autonomy had separated us not only from God but from one another and from ourselves. Now we have seen that being is communion and that it is our life to give it away rather than to save it, and be centred in another rather than be 'our own person'.

[See Study 6: Persons in relation—Divine and human.](#)

God has given his character to what he has made, and to ourselves in particular. It is in knowing God that we know ourselves and our vocation. We are human and have life in that God continues to relate to us. The whole world lives and moves and has its being in God—regardless of faith in its being so. Believers in God have been delivered from idols and have come alive to who God is (I Thes. 1; I Cor. 8:5-6).

The early Church went out baptizing people into the name of Father, Son and Spirit (Matt. 28:16-20)—or the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38—cf. the name 'Yahweh' for Israel). They did not see themselves proclaiming any other God than Israel's one God. They were living in God, ie. in the interpersonal relationships of the Son with the Father by the Spirit.

Each believer is baptized into that name. The source and shape and goal of each life is Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:16-20). They together are the people with one God and one Lord (I Cor. 8:4-6). They live by the grace of Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 13:14).

The gospel has created a community which has being in that it knows the Father and his grace, and moves toward her goal by the effusion of the Spirit into each believer.

[See study 7: The Church in Father, Son and Spirit.](#)

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## **Our humanity in God**

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That human beings should live in God should not seem a strange thing. We are made in his image (Gen. 1:28) and as his sons (Luke 3:38). Every human being lives, moves and has being in God (Acts 17:25-28). To have eternal life is to know the Father and the Son (John 17:3). He is the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13; 17:13; cf. John 4:14; Rev. 21:6).

What is strange is that we should have abandoned our home—and it is this that may make living in God seem novel or esoteric.

Jesus Christ has opened up to us the fullness of God, and the fullness of being human. He lived in God, and did so as a human being, and on our behalf. In him, we are restored to what it means to be human—to be in God.

There is no way to arrive at a true faith or living apart from the living God, proclaimed in Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need the truth of God in order to know who we are and how we are to live and how we are to understand our life together and the future before us. We need to come to this study hearing what God says about himself and in the belief that he can cause us to be an echo of his living and being.

D. Broughton Knox says: 'The doctrine of the Trinity is the glory of the Christian religion. It tells us that ultimate reality is personal relationship. God is ultimate reality, and is the ground of all other reality, and yet God is not a single monad or an impersonal absolute, but God is relationship. ... Through the revelation of the Trinity we learn that the living God, the good and true God, is a God who has relationship within Himself and that the values of relationships ultimately belong to reality in its most absolute form. In the light of this doctrine, personal relationship are seen to be ultimate, are seen to be the most real things that are' (*The Everlasting God*, p. 51-52).

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## Perspective

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This series of talks is about the Holy Trinity; that is, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is also about our coming to and growing in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The emphasis will have to be on the words and deeds of God, and then, on our presence before this God who speaks and acts. We will have to look at ourselves and our world, but only so that we can look back more expectantly to God from whom our life flows.

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## Extra

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In him, God's covenant relation to Israel is fulfilled (Luke 1:68-75), and, in him, humanity's obligation to God is fulfilled.

This point may be developed later. Eg. Rom. 8:3-4; Eph. 2:11-15.

In him, the covenant promise is opened to as many as the Lord our God calls to himself (Acts 2:39).

Most obviously, Jesus is the promised King who reigns in his Father's name, having secured the kingdom in which the people of his Father can live in peace. Most centrally, Jesus is Priest and Offering, offering his own blood as atonement for us whom he represents before the Father. Most immediately, he is Prophet (in the preaching of the Church) to whom we must give heed if we would live before God and know his blessing.

He had been spoken about as a covenant with the people (Isa. 42:6; 49:8). In him, our relation to God and our living in God are secured forever.

## Jesus Christ—the Eternal Son

The first study showed that we must come to our study of God from within God—that this is our natural habitat. God has provided for us, though sinners, to yet live in him and know him.

In particular, I have shown that the people of God are those who know that God is one, and whose understanding of themselves and of the world is conditioned by this truth that God is one.

In passing, I have said that God being revealed as Father, Son and Spirit, far from making this truth hard to maintain, has substantiated it.

For us, knowing God is knowing him through the Son and by the Spirit. So, first, I want to show that, in Jesus, we have to do with God, and that this is because he is the eternal Son of the Father.

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### The eternal Son

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While God revealed himself to Israel through the prophets, he has now revealed himself to us through a son—his own eternal Son (Heb. 1: 1-3).

Living in God had always assumed the coming of the Son of God (e.g. Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day—John 8:56), but the extent and the intimacy and the permanence and the completeness of our living in God could not have been understood apart from his actual coming. God prepared Israel as a son nation (Exod. 4:23-24; Isa. 63:16) and taught her king to call God Father (11 Sam. 7:14; Psa. 89:26) in preparation for what was to come.

When Jesus came, he was the Son of David, come to perform the mercy promised to Israel (Luke 1:32, 72; 18:39). But his Sonship was not preparatory or symbolic or representative. He was, and is, the Son—eternally. Old Testament prophets could only hint at this (Matt. 22:42-46; John 8:58). But now, the Father was fully revealed, the covenant fully operational and our living in God fully familial—God is with us (Matt. 1:23).

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### Knowledge of the Father

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Jesus spoke about his Father in ways that should have been acknowledged by Israel (e.g. Matt. 6), but also in ways that were unknown and offensive to them. Only he knew the Father and only the Father knew him. Therefore, they should come to him alone to know the Father. But in coming to him they would find rest for their souls (Matt. 11:25-30).

Jesus called God Father—so making himself equal with God (John 5:18; 10:33), This knowledge included his pre-existence (John 1:2; 8:56-58; 17:5, 24).

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## Fulfilling divine tasks

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Judgement being committed to the Son was with a view to our reverencing the Son as we would reverence the Father (John 5:22-23).

The apostles came to understand that all things were made through the Son (John 1:1-2; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-2).

He would also save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21 with Isa. 59:15-20), be the Shepherd of the sheep (John 10:14-15 with Jer. 34:11-24). These, among others, were tasks set for himself by Yahweh in the Old Testament.

Miracles or signs were not proofs of themselves, but pointers to the truth. He was doing things, again, which were attributed to Yahweh. Jesus made storms to cease (cf. Psa. 107) on two occasions, he fed his people in a desert (Matt. 15:33; cf. Psa. 78:19). The blind were made to see and poor had the gospel preached to them (Matt. 11:4; Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7).

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## John 1:1-18

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The implications of these and numerous other speeches of Jesus are summarised in the 'Prologue' of John (1: 1 -18). The Word in whom God had always expressed himself and acted is now revealed as personal, in the presence of God, himself God, the means of all creation coming to be, and, the life and light of all people, coming to grant the right of being God's children.

Who is this one? Now become flesh, he is the only Son from the Father, his glory revealed-full of grace and truth, and his fullness received by all who receive him-'grace upon grace'.

'No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten, (himself) God, who has his being in the Father's bosom, Is the one who has declared him' (John 1:18, F. F. Bruce translation in his *The Gospel of John*, P. 44).

What Jesus Christ has natively, his fullness (having the qualities of grace and truth), we have received as a gift. Nothing in the passage suggests that we, in ourselves, come to have divine being, but everything in the passage suggests that there is nothing which the Son has which we do not share. It seems to say the same as Paul (Col. 1: 15-20; 9-10): in him is the fullness of deity; in him, we have fullness of life. Peter says similarly: we become partakers of the divine nature (11 Pet. 1:4).

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## The confession of the church

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Jesus said we were to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Spirit (Matt. 28:19). This is now revealed to be the name of the one true and living God.

The apostles immediately proclaimed that Jesus was Lord (Acts 2:36)—by which they acknowledged that he was their victorious Messiah (Rom. 1:3-4), but also that he was God (John 20:28; cf. Matt. 7:21-23). For Greek speaking Jews, the term Lord was

established usage for Yahweh. It was the name above all names (Phil. 2:9-11), and Saul of Tarsus saw that this was how he should address Jesus (Acts 9:5).

It is appropriate that Jesus holds the name above all names because, in him, the Father's person has been fully revealed (if Cor. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:5-11). It is by calling on this name that we are saved (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2; cf. Isa. 45: 21-23).

If, in this confession, there had been any perceived threat to the unity of God, it would have been dealt with quickly; but there is no debate on this point. It is better to understand that the church had been caught up to God-to know the Father by the Son and the Spirit, and this experience had fixed their worship forever on the one God.

What had to happen now was not a reduction of what they knew to avoid polytheism but a growing up of their persons to live personally and communally in the **shape** of this revealed God.

## **Reconciliation by the Triune God**

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### **Review**

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Humanity is made to live in God. Even the rebel has no other place to live—albeit against his or her will. God is one, signifying that there is no call for any other god. The coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit established this all-sufficiency of the one God. The church baptizes people into God—Father, Son and Spirit. We, and each believer, live in this God—receiving the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ is the revealing of God—he alone knows God so as to make him known, and only God knows him. He shares with the Father the divine functions of judging, saving, and creating. He is the enfleshed Word, the expressing of God and so the light of man. Coming from before the Father's face, from the bosom of the Father, being himself God, he has manifested the grace and faithfulness of the Father, [its glory]. When the church confesses Christ as Lord, it acknowledges its Divine Saviour in the person of its human Victor. What amazed the early church was not the mystery of God so much as the mystery of grace that had reached them and drawn them into relationship.

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### **Trinitarian love coming to us**

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God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). The letter of 1 John has shown that to live without love is to be in death, and now shows that God is love and that this has been expressed in God loving us and giving his Son for a propitiation. It will also be expressed in all who are born of God.

Love is other person centred. This love of God is revealed to us in the New Testament as the love of the Father for the Son (Matt. 3:17; John 3:35; 5:30), the love of the Son for the Father (John 14:31), and the love of God being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; also Rom. 15:30; 11 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). Many references fill out this picture, especially John 17. The Holy Spirit takes the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11) and the things of Christ (John 16:14) and shows them to us.

The love that has come to us is the spilling over of the love of God revealed in the relation of Father, Son and Spirit. There is no distinction between the love of God (the Father) and the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35, 39). Jesus had said: 'I have made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:26).

God subsists in love and this is the dynamic of his oneness or unity. What then of the rebellion and disunion that we, his creatures, have introduced into the creation? God's love in the presence of our idolatry is expressed as jealousy. This is love's pain. But the pain is not only God's but ours because God remains centred on us—in [its] jealousy.

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## **Our disunion is assumed and atoned for-before the Father and by the Spirit**

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God himself has provided our reconciliation. In Israel's **worship, God provided the sacrifice for atonement—signifying** that the offering brought from the worshipper's flock was accepted by God because he himself had provided it, ordained it and given it its significance in the sinners' approach to God (Lev. 17:11; cf. Gen. 22:14).

When Jesus came, he was the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36)—ie. provided by God and belonging to him and set apart for his purposes.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (11 Cor. 6:19). It was the Father's pleasure that he be bruised (Isa. 53:10). He came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (Rom. 8:3), in flesh and blood to know death (Heb. 2:14).

The Father gave all things into the Son's hands, did not give the Spirit to him 'by measure', showed him all that he was doing, announced him as the beloved Son. The Son loved the Father, did all that the Father wanted done and asked to be glorified by the Father with a view to sanctifying his followers.

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## **'Why have you forsaken me?'**

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Jesus was not mistaken. On the cross and in his humanity, he was forsaken. The curse against law breakers came upon him, the wrath occasioned by jealousy was against him, all the suffering occasioned by alienation from the Father was felt by him.

He could not have ceased to be the eternal Son, but his humanity was complete humanity and in taking the place of fallen humanity he fully felt the sting of death which is sin and the power of sin which is the law (1 Cor. 15:66). He was not deprived of his Sonship by this forsakenness but took his being the Lamb into eternity (Rev. 5:12-14), from whence, of course, it had arisen (Eph. 1:4-10; cf. Rev. 13:8).

So Christ is the Son of the Father's love (Col. 1:13): the love of the Father is focussed on the Son eternally so that he alone knows the fullness of the Father's love; he alone then is the revelation of that love in its action towards humanity. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all—God so loved us that he sent him... (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

In all of this, the Spirit was present: Christ was anointed by the Spirit for his work, offered up his **body by the Spirit to the Father (Heb. 9:14)**, and was raised by the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

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## **The completeness of reconciliation**

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But although Christ suffered in the flesh, he has transformed flesh rather than flesh transforming him; he has remained 'holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners' a designation which applies to him before his death as afterwards (Heb. 7:26-28). His being united with us was not his agreement with us in our hostility but his agreement with the Father in his love for us.

But his union with us must be such that there remains no area of our racial history or personal experience that remains unvisited, or unchanged. We can be sure that

because Christ has come to stand in our place, there is nothing of our sinful humanity that has been overlooked or not taken to judgement, and, that in the resurrection, there is nothing left in redeemed humanity of which to be ashamed or by which to be thwarted. Reconciliation is not only the ending of human hostility to God but the offering up by humanity of an acceptable oblation to God.

The point in all this is that, in Christ, our reconciliation is fully human as well as fully divine. Reconciliation means that there is no remaining hostility between God and man because man in Christ has fully agreed with God concerning the judgement due to sinners and endured that judgement, and, in resurrection, been received by the Father.

When reconciliation comes to us, it is not 'negotiated' with us or initiated by us **but rather**, announced to us. It requires our compliance, but we cannot take the credit for doing that either.

## Believing in God, in Christ, and knowing the Spirit (John 14-17)

Knowing the Triune God is not a matter of mystical feeling or of mental gymnastics but of love. John 14-17 describes the dynamic actions of Father, Son and Spirit-in relation to one-another, and, at the same time, incorporating us in their action.

Most of the material comes from 14-16.

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### Live in love!

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The exhortations in John 14-16 give a point of entry into this passage: we are to be untroubled, and rather, to rejoice (14:1, 27-28; 16:33); to believe (14:1, 11); to love/obey (14:15, 21, 23); to abide in him and let his words abide in us (15:4, 7, 10); to love one another-as fruitful friends of Christ (15:12, 17); to remember (15:20; 16:4); to ask and receive (16:23-24).

These are a point of entry because the God who is revealing himself to us is calling us to know him through obedience. We have eternity in our hearts but not so that we can fathom the beginning from the end (Eccles. 3:11). We will not know God if we evaluate what we read from within the narrow compass of our self-serving relationships. He himself must show us how to live by living in our presence and incorporating us in the flow of his relationships.

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### Jesus and the Father

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Jesus himself was untroubled (cf. John 12:27); he had come from the Father (14:2; 17:5 and often in John), was going to the Father (14:12; 16:10, 17, 28) and the Father was with him even then (16:32)—and he would take us there to be there with him (14:3).

Jesus did not believe in his Father so much as knew him. He was in the Father and the Father in him (14:10, 20)—so he was the way, truth and life of the Father, and to have seen him and his works was to have seen the Father and his works. This was not an automatic process but the result of the Son obeying the Father and receiving from the Father.

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### The Spirit-from the Father and Son

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The Son himself asked for the Spirit to come to us—the other Counsellor. Clearly, Jesus knew the Spirit, and said we would know him, with, and in us (14:15-17)—that is, if we consented to his way of love. Love is the way of knowing.

Richard of St Victor (a 12th century mystic) said: 'Where love is, there is sight (Quoted in Christ in our place p. 306).

In the Spirit being sent, Jesus would come to us (14:18). In fact, in our consenting to live in love, the Father and the Son would make their home with us (14:23).

Recall that, in the presence of the Son, the Father was visible. So now, in the coming of the Spirit.

Jesus is present. Cf. 11 Cor. 3:17.

The Holy Spirit would be sent—in the name of the Son (14:26), with the things of the Son (16:26; 16:7-8, 13-14). Christ would send him (15:26; 16:8), but he would proceed from the Father (15:25-26).

This Spirit is three times called the Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13)—truth, not as mere fact, or veracity, but as revealed truth, arising from the faithfulness of God, present in Christ, and now opened up to us and to the world by the Spirit. He is also called the Holy Spirit (14:26)—as the Father also is called Holy (17:11)

For us, it is as simple as confessing that Jesus is the Christ (I John 2:23-25; 4:15).

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## Coming to know the Triune God

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Why has Jesus spoken these things? Because he wants us to know love, which is only knowable in knowing the Father, who is only knowable in his loving the Son, which is only comprehensible by the other Advocate (one who takes our part and enables our humanity) coming to be with and in us, and us knowing that he has been sent by the Son from the Father. It is an amazing thing to be confronted by a man who [says these things, lives in them and tells them to us. It is even more amazing to see him pray to his Father (John 17): six requests, all with the object that the love of the Father which he knew to be focussed on him and in him would be received by his church.

*Knox suggests that the glory being given to us is the Spirit, who is the love. Certainly, all these elements are related but not identified. He quotes John 17:5 and says: 'Christ has given us this same relationship of glory through the gift of the Spirit' (The everlasting God p. 58).*

This Father, Son and Spirit are not three gods. There is but one God, and, in each person, all of God is present to us. They are not modes of God's being-as though he could be now one thing and then another, or be seen through different filters. We encounter all of God in each because God is Father, Son and Spirit, and in particular, because each is other person centred.

To see the Son is to see the Father who loves him and gives all things into his hands. The Son is not incidentally, or accidentally, the revelation of the Father. He is so because the Father is so focussed on him that he is exposed when the Son is exposed. The Son is so content to live in the Father that he never reveals anything that is not his Father's.

One could mistake the human Jesus, but what of the Spirit who is 'not given to him by measure'-it would be a danger to grieve him who is given to the Son and then by the Son to glorify him. To have the Spirit come is to be confronted with the sending Son and Father.

Then, at last, to stand before the Father is to receive the love which is forever delighting in the Son. It is to be immersed in the Spirit who knows the deep things of God and to have them opened to us (I Cor. 2:10-12).

These brief comments are a witness to the love of God. We have to do, not only with a God who loves the world, but a God who is love. His love for the world has been and now is the exposure of his being to us.

Given that we are made in the image of God, there is no way that we could ever understand our own life or persons, or sociality, our aspirations or tragedy, apart from the revelation of this God as he is.

Concluded Studies 3 and 4.

## **Restored in God's Tri-unity**

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### **The day and days of the Spirit**

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The Spirit's coming launched the proclaiming of the gospel and established the church. The day of the Lord (Jesus) was the day of the Spirit (Acts 2:18-20). The other Advocate had come (John 14:16-17), taken the things of Christ and shown them to the believers (John 16:13-15), convicted the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7-8), given power to the church (Acts 1:8), baptized believers into Christ (I Cor. 12:13), sanctified them by his own presence (Rom. 15:16; II Thess. 2:13), directed them and filled them (Rom. 8:9-14; Acts 2:4); he gave them freedom—available only from God (I Cor. 3:17). By him, the glory of God was present in his temple.

But these days being the days of the Spirit does not make it less the days of the Father and Son. Rather, the Spirit is the sign of Christ's being Lord, and the means of the Father being known as Father.

The Church has confessed (it cannot do other) that the Holy Spirit is God. His identity as the other Advocate, his being one with the Father and Son in our salvation and the warnings against sinning against him all show that this day of the Spirit is the day of God.

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### **A special work for the Spirit**

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Clearly, each of the persons of the Triune God have their discrete way of being and working and relating. The Father purposes and sends, and ultimately, is over all things. The Son does the will of the Father, is the Word (in action) of the Father, and so, all things in creation are through and for him and all redemption is entrusted to him.

When Paul spoke the blessing of God to the Corinthians, he referred to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit (11 Cor. 13:14). This word means participation or sharing. He takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. He knows the depths of God and reveals them to us (I Cor. 2:10). This may be illustrated in the various things that are said of the Spirit.

- He is the second Advocate (John 15:26)—what Christ was on earth, he now is—but he echoes in us what Christ now proclaims at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:26, 27, 34).

- We are baptized into Christ by one Spirit (I Cor. 12:12-13) and we have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

The church was 'clothed with power from on high' when the Spirit came (Luke 24:49) but this was an action of the Father and Son as much as of the Spirit (cf. I Cor. 12:4-6).

- The 'love of the Spirit' is dynamic in a believer (Rom. 15:30), but it is the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

- We have joy in the Holy Spirit—indeed, all the fruit of the Spirit—and in this way, we participate in the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17).

He is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies, but he does so by bringing us to the sanctifying work of Christ (Rom. 15:16), and, by this, God sanctifies his people (I Thes. 5:23).

Our fellowship (communion) is with the Father and with the Son (I John 1:4), but what is unique to the Holy Spirit is that he is the means of our participation in that fellowship. This links with his being the Spirit of unity. He has brought the church into the one-ness of Father and Son (John 17:22-23; Eph. 4:3).

Can the Spirit be known? Jesus says yes (John 14:17). But given the communing role of the Spirit and his witness to the Son and the Father, he is known by his effects—as is wind (cf. John 3:8).

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### **The unity of God-in love**

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Christians now have the blessing of the 'grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (11 Cor. 13:14). To walk in the Spirit is to have, not just the unity which God creates, but the unity of God himself which is the unity of love (Eph. 4:3-6). (Love is the bond in Col. 3:14-15.)

John the elder says that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, but abiding in God is conveyed to us by the Spirit (I John 3:24; 4:13).

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### **The Importance of Tri-unity to God being God**

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The things that have been revealed to us must be the things that are so --- a there has been no revelation of God. If God is eternally as he has acted in our history and for our salvation, then salvation has brought us back to God so as to understand what it is to be created and to live fruitfully in it.

God as Father is not a mode of expression adapted to our being his creatures or his redeemed people; he is Father essentially—the Father of the Son (John 1: 14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Everything he has done is familial.

God as Son, eternally generated from the Father, ever before him, is the focus of the Father's love and the purpose for all that he is about, and this has shaped the creation the way it is.

God as Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26—this is said of the Spirit in history but is a helpful way to understand his eternal relation to the Father—ensuring that the Father is the one fountain of divinity and centre of consciousness, while still affirming that the Spirit is no less God for proceeding from the Father). He is also sent by the Son—in history—and is the Spirit of the Son.

The priority of the Father over the Son in history is clear, as for the Spirit; and the priority of the Son over the Spirit is also demonstrated in his being sent by the Son and administering the things of the Son. Yet this functional priority cannot mean that the Father is any more God than the Son or the Spirit. Rather, the Father's deity consists in his serving, honouring and giving to the Son; and so for each person.

Each Person exists in that the other exists, and, is of the same substance, nature or essence, and, each has being in that they are other person centred (ie. they love, or are love in action).

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### **Living In God's Tri-unity—as persons**

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It is because the Holy Spirit is in God and is God, and is in us, that we can be said to be in God. We borrow his relation in the Trinity (cf. I John 4:12-13).

'The Holy Spirit dwells in and flows from the Inner being and life and light of the Holy Trinity, where he shares fully in the reciprocal knowing and communing of the Father and the Son. It is as such that he comes into the midst ... of us, proceeding from the Father, receiving from the Son, revealing God to us and making us partake in him of God's knowing of himself (T. F. Torrance, summarising Epiphanius in *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 222).

None needs to bring God down (Rom. 10:6; Eph. 4:10); rather, the Son has come to share one origin with us (Heb. 2:11) so as to bring many sons to glory. And now, the Holy Spirit has come to bear witness with our spirits and intercede for us (Rom. 8:16, 26-27). We are strengthened by might in our inner persons by the Holy Spirit, and Christ dwells in our hearts by faith so that, in the end, we may be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:14-21).

God does not give us these things to know at a distance as though we were mere copiers of his persons in relation (signifying that they have the space for each to be the person that they are and yet the relation signifying that they are nothing of what they are for the other and existing in the other. God has not left us to observe this as a conundrum or an impossible ideal. Rather, he has given his Son who understands the divine relation and brings all of the Immediacy of Deity into his immediacy with us making himself in the likeness of sinful flesh and giving himself for us sinners. It is because of his bringing this into our human situation and his rising from the dead that we have been raised from the dead. Likewise with the Spirit—he brings all the divine communion into our hearts—the communion of the Holy Spirit is as necessary to us as the love of God in Christ. He cries in us Abba Father and causes the Intercession of heaven to be echoed in our hearts rising up with true prayers to the Father. By the Spirit we come to share in the divine relationships.

Given that we have been made in the image of God, it must be important for us to know God as he is. Through redemption, not only has the Godhead been made known, but we have been brought back to live in all that he is, and, as he is.

It is because Father, Son and Spirit live in personal discreteness (having their own 'space') and yet in vital union, that we can be authentically persons-in relation-being other person centred-not lost in another, but rather-in that the giving is free-found in the giving of ourselves. The love of God comes to its goal in us (I John 4:12).

## The unity of God and his Church

Paul tells us that God will be glorified in his church (Eph. 3:14-21). This will occur by no less than God himself inhabiting his church. We are equipped for this by the indwelling Spirit strengthening us and by Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith.

These phenomena are not mere influence and memory-as many references indicate.

Paul further describes the Church living by one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father who is over all, through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-6).

‘God’ generally indicates ‘Father’ in the New Testament.

But does the church experience Father, Son and Spirit separately? Clearly no (even if our awareness of one of the operations of Deity makes us more conscious of one than the other g. Acts 7:59-60) Elsewhere, for example, Paul says that the Lord is the Spirit (11 Cor. 3:17).

It would be impossible to have a separate experience of Father, Son and Spirit because they are one God. In knowing Father, Son or Spirit, we know all in each and each in all. It is this unity that the Spirit conveys to the church and which constitutes the unity of God (Eph. 4:3).

When Jesus said that he and his Father were one (John 10:30; also John 5:19-23), he affirmed, for our comfort, that:

‘So responsive is the Son to the Father that he is one in mind, one in purpose, one in action with him. Where the eternal wellbeing of true believers is concerned, the Son’s determination and pledge to guard them from harm is endorsed by the Father’s word and confirmed by the Father’ all-powerful act. ... In guarding his people, he is obedient to the Father’s **will**; what wonder, then, if they are simultaneously guarded by the Father himself?’ (FF Bruce on John).

In effect, he said that the for Son to will something is for the Father to will it, for he did not will anything other than the Father’s will.

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### Clues to the eternal unity of God

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We have no call to speculate, but every reason to wonder at the unity of God in Father, Son and Spirit. Various statements by Christ or his apostles reveal that:

The Son is the Only Begotten of the Father (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Christ’s Sonship is eternal (e.g. 1 John 4:14). He is, eternally, the only begotten Son of God.

**The Son**, then, comes to us as the one in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), face to face with him-his Word (John 1: 1 -2).

**The Spirit**, Jesus said, would proceed from the Father-that is, in history (John 15:26; so Isa. 32:15; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33). But he is the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and knows the

depths of God (I Cor. 2:10). It is appropriate to think of him as eternally proceeding from the Father.

**The Spirit** is also the Spirit of the Son, and, as such, is sent by the Son and in the Son's name (John 14:26; 15:26), and he cries out in us 'Father' (Gal. 4:6). The Spirit enabled the human Sonship of Jesus (John 10:21)—as eternally the Spirit of the Son. (Cf. our being led by the Spirit of God and now being the sons of God-Rom. 8:14.) Before he ascended, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said 'Receive the Holy Spirit!' (John 20:22). This would have been blasphemy if the Spirit was not the Spirit of Christ.

The movement of the Spirit is not just from the Father to the Son and so to us, but also in the Son the Father as also in us to Christ and to the Father.

The persons of the Trinity have perfect understanding of and perfect entering into one another's life, nothing hidden from the other. They are one Being, one Substance, having one centre of consciousness (the Father), one nature, one intellect, one will, wisdom and power. They are one in all essential attributes and virtues.

See Herman Hoeksema *Reformed Dogmatics* p. 320-323.

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## **Commands concerning the external unity of the church**

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This unity of God is not known conceptually but by the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Disunity is an indication of idolatry because worship of the one God would be apparent in the love of the Trinity flowing one to another.

Jesus prayed for his church to be one-by which he meant us being in the Father and Son as he and the Father were in each other (John 17:20-23).

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## **The importance of Tri-unity to God being God**

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The things that have been revealed to us must be the things that are so-or there has been no revelation of God. If God is eternally as he has acted in our history and for our salvation, then salvation has brought us back to God so as to understand what it is to be created and to live fruitfully in it.

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other person centred—not lost in another, but rather—in that the giving is free—found in the giving of ourselves. The love of God comes to its goal in us (I John 4:12).

Knox suggests that the glory being given to us is the Spirit, who is the love. Certainly, all these elements are related if not identified. He quotes John 17:5 and says: 'Christ has given *us* this same relationship of glory through the gift of the Spirit' (*The everlasting God* p. 58).

**This Father, Son and Spirit are not three gods. There is but one God, and, in each person, all of God is present to us.** They are riot modes of God's being—as though he could be now one thing and then another, or be seen through different filters. We encounter all of God in each because God is Father, Son and Spirit, and in particular, because each is other person centred.

To see the Son is to see the Father who loves him and gives all things into his hands. The Son is not incidentally, or accidentally, the revelation of the Father. He is so because the Father is so focussed on firm that he is exposed when the Son is exposed. The Son is so content to live in the Father that he never reveals anything that is not his Father's.

One could mistake the human Jesus, but what of the Spirit who is 'not given to him by measure'—it would be a danger to grieve him who is given to the Son and then by the Son to glorify him. To have the Spirit come is to be confronted with the sending Son and Father.

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Given that we are made in the image of God, there is no way that we could ever understand our own life or persons, or sociality, our aspirations or tragedy, apart from the revelation of this God as he is.

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### **'Why have you forsaken me?'**

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Jesus was not mistaken. On the cross and in his humanity, he was forsaken. The curse against law breakers came upon him, the wrath occasioned by jealousy was against him, all the suffering occasioned by alienation from the Father was felt by him.

He could not have ceased to be the eternal Son, but his humanity was complete humanity and in taking the place of fallen humanity he fully felt the sting of death which is sin and the power of sin which is the law (I Cor. 15:56). He was not deprived of his Sonship by this forsakenness but took his being the Lamb into eternity (Rev. 5:12-14), from whence, of course, it had arisen (Eph. 1:4-10; cf. Rev. 13:8).

So Christ is the Son of the Father's love (Col. 1:13): the love of the Father is focussed on the Son eternally so that he alone knows the fullness of the Father's love; he alone then is the revelation of that love in its action towards humanity. The Father laid on him the iniquity of us all—God so loved us that he sent him... (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

In all of this, the Spirit was present: Christ was anointed by the Spirit for his work, offered up his body by the Spirit to the Father (Heb. 9:14), and was raised by the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

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## **The completeness of reconciliation**

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But although Christ suffered in the flesh, he has transformed flesh rather than flesh transforming him; he has remained 'holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners' a designation which applies to him before his death as afterwards (Heb. 7:26-28). His being united with us was not his agreement with us in our hostility but his agreement with the Father in his love for us.

But his union with us must be such that there remains no area of our racial history or personal experience that remains unvisited, or unchanged. We can be sure that because Christ has come to stand in our place, there is nothing of our sinful humanity that has been overlooked or not taken to judgement, and, that in the resurrection, there is nothing left in redeemed humanity of which to be ashamed or by which to be thwarted. Reconciliation is not only the ending of human hostility to God but the offering up by humanity of an acceptable oblation to God.

The point in all this is that, in Christ, our reconciliation is fully human as well as fully divine. Reconciliation means that there is no remaining hostility between God and man because man in Christ has fully agreed with God concerning the judgement due to sinners and endured that judgement, and, in resurrection, been received by the Father.

When reconciliation comes to us, it is not 'negotiated' with us or initiated by us but rather, announced to us. It requires our compliance, but we cannot take the credit for doing that either.

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## **John 1:1-18**

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The implications of these and numerous other speeches of Jesus are summarised in the 'Prologue' of John (1:1-18). The Word in whom God had always expressed himself and acted is now revealed as personal, in the presence of God, himself God, the means of all creation coming to be, and, the life and light of all people, coming to grant the right of being God's children.

Who is this one? Now become flesh, he is the only Son from the Father, his glory revealed—full of grace and truth, and his fullness received by all who receive him—'grace upon grace'.

'No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten, (himself) God, who has his being in the Father's bosom, is the one who has declared him' (John 1:18, F. F. Bruce translation in his *The Gospel of John*, p. 44).

What Jesus Christ has natively, his fullness (having the qualities of grace and truth), we have received as a gift. Nothing in the passage suggests that we, in ourselves, come to have divine being, but everything in the passage suggests that there is nothing which the Son has which we do not share. It seems to say the same as Paul (Col. 1: 15-20; 9-10): in him is the fullness of deity; in him, we have fullness of life. Peter says similarly: we become partakers of the divine nature (11 Pet. 1:4).

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## **The confession of the church**

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Jesus said we were to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Spirit (Matt. 28:19). This is now revealed to be the name of the one true and living God.

The apostles immediately proclaimed that Jesus was Lord (Acts 2:36)—by which they acknowledged that he was their victorious Messiah (Rom. 1:3-4), but also that he was God (John 20:28; cf. Matt. 7:21-23). For Greek speaking Jews, the term Lord was established usage for Yahweh. It was the name above all names (Phil. 2:9-11), and Saul of Tarsus saw that this was how he should address Jesus (Acts 9:5).

It is appropriate that Jesus holds the name above all names because, in him, the Father's person has been fully revealed (11 Cor. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:5-11). It is by calling on this name that we are saved (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2; cf. Isa. 45: 21-23).

If, in this confession, there had been any perceived threat to the unity of God, it would have been dealt with quickly; but there is no debate on this point. It is better to understand that the church had been caught up to God-to know the Father by the Son and the Spirit, and this experience had fixed their worship forever on the one God.

What had to happen now was not a reduction of what they knew to avoid polytheism but a growing up of their persons to live personally and communally in the shape of this revealed God.