

### **III. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY**

## **A DIFFERENT LOOK AT THE TRINITY**

**HANS SCHWARZ\***

**ABSTRACT.** The doctrine of the Trinity seems difficult to understand today. In the New Testament, there is a unity of revelation and action between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, although a unity of essence is not clearly expressed. We can discern the Old Testament roots of the implied divinity of Jesus and also of the divinity of the Spirit. Yet, from these manifestations of the one God it is difficult to arrive at a doctrine of the Trinity. While the metaphysical terminology of the early church leads to such a doctrine, the biblical witness could only arrive at a doctrine of the Trinity in a mediated way. It suffices that there is a unity of action of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, without the need to fathom the mysteries of the Trinity with regard to their exact mutual relations and their status over against each other. As the New Testament affirms, decisively is that God was and is in Christ for our salvation and that God is present through his Holy Spirit so that there is life.

**Keywords:** Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Christianity, Person, Substance, Bible, Jewish monotheism

For most Christians the doctrine of the Trinity is accepted as a matter of fact. Especially in systematic theology the Trinity is frequently used as the starting point for theological deliberations. Yet when we ask a Christian lay person what this doctrine means we usually do not get an answer. Does this mean that theologians have not really communicated the meaning of this doctrine to the Christian community or have they delved into something that is totally incomprehensible?

The eminent Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1904-84), himself an advocate of Trinitarian theology, often asked: "How do we know?" concerning some of the conclusions drawn from Trinitarian reflections. Indeed

---

\* Professor, University of Regensburg, Germany. E-mail: [hans.schwarz@theologie.uni-regensburg.de](mailto:hans.schwarz@theologie.uni-regensburg.de).

it would be wholesome to ascertain the biblical roots of the Trinity, since its important advocates, the famous Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, hail from the fourth century. But even at this late date this doctrine was highly debated.<sup>1</sup>

## I. A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE TRINITY?

When we consult Scripture which ought to be normative for the Christian faith, we can perceive the unity of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit. Especially in the farewell discourses in the gospel of John the “Helper” and “Advocate” (John 14:16) which Jesus promises that the Father will send and who is generally equated with the Holy Spirit, bears decidedly personal features. But neither in that gospel nor in the Apostles’ Creed do we find an actual Trinitarian doctrine of one God in three persons. We only encounter triadic assertions concerning Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We could even venture to say that Christians by themselves did not arrive at a doctrine of the Trinity. It was only under the cloud of Emperor Theodosius the Great (347-395) that such a doctrine was affirmed in 381. And such a decision arrived at under political considerations should make us doubly apprehensive about calling the Trinity the foundational dogma of the Christian faith.

### 1. Trinitarian Fascination

From the very beginning of the Christian faith all important was Jesus as the Christ, but not the Trinity. As Paul affirms: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). Jesus as Lord is set in parallel with his resurrection from the dead. As the British New Testament scholar N.T. Wright (\* 1948) says: “Paul then explains this with a remarkable statement, one of the clearest in all his writings, of what precisely Christian faith consists of. It is not, for him, a vague religious awareness, a general sense of the presence of a benevolent deity. It is the confession of Jesus as Lord and the belief that God raised him from the dead.”<sup>2</sup> The resurrection as God’s decisive act was the turning point in history and the foundation of hope for each person. From then on it was also evident that Jesus was indeed the one who he said he was, the Christ, God’s human face, the actual Messiah. But what about the Trinity?

---

<sup>1</sup> For further details to the whole issue of the Trinity cf. Hans Schwarz, *The Trinity. The Central Mystery of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *Commentary on Romans*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, to this passage.

In religion and mythology the number three (3) is understood as a divine and holy number. It symbolizes completeness, since it contains in itself beginning, middle, and end. In many cultures the cycles of the year and of life are seen in three steps: growth, fertility, and decay; or childhood, adulthood, and senescence. There are the three elements which make up the world, earth, water, and air, and in ancient anthropology one often distinguishes between body, spirit, and soul (1 Thess 5:23). In many religions there exists also a trinity of gods. In Hinduism, for example, we have Brahma as the creator god, Shiva as the god of fertility, but also of death and destruction, and as the third main god Vishnu as the sustainer of life. In ancient Egypt we also encounter trinities. In a hymn to God Amon we read: "All gods are three: Amon, Re and Ptah, and there is no second to them. 'Hidden' (ʾimn) is his name as Amon, he is Re in face, and his body is Ptah."<sup>3</sup> In Greek mythology the trinity of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades share the rule over humans and gods. Kerberos, the awe-inspiring dog with three heads, guards the entrance to Hades, the nether world, that nobody can escape from there. At the oracle of Delphi in ancient Greece the priestess Pythia was sitting on a three-legged chair.

Even in Christianity the number three is of significance. Next to the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we have the holy family of Mary, Joseph, and the Christ child. Then we encounter the three kings, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, often also referred to as the three wise men. Before Jesus began his ministry he was tempted three times by the devil (Mt 4:1-11) and Peter denied his Lord Jesus three times (Mt 26:69-75). We could also adduce the resurrection on the third day, which actually was only two days in today's counting, to show the popularity of the number three even in Christianity. With the evolvement of the concept of the Trinity we may find an analogy to the evolvement of seven sacraments. The number seven consists of the number three, the divine completeness and the number four symbolizing the material world which consists of the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air. Therefore seven sacraments can be interpreted to stand for the union of the divine and the material and also for completeness. Initially the number of the sacraments was much more fluid depending on what one understood a sacrament to be. Only in opposition to the Reformation movement, the Council of Trent stipulated the number as seven and also listed these sacraments. A similar move seems to have occurred much earlier with the Trinity. In the post-New-Testament disputes over whether Jesus Christ is indeed equal with God and even one with him, the equality of Father and Son was not only affirmed but also their

---

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E. Kemp (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984), 144. See also the whole section "Unity in plurality; Egyptian trinities", *ibid.*, 142-146.

relationship to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who undeniably is closely associated with Father and Son, was incorporated into a Trinity to emphasize the completeness of the divine. But at what price?

As the Roman Catholic church historian Norbert Brox (1935-2006) affirms, the faithful perceived the Hellenistic speculations on the Trinity largely as a threat to the faith in the one God speculations which also jeopardized the unity of the church. They vehemently resisted the Trinity claiming that with it a doctrine of two or even three gods was promulgated. "The beginnings of a theology of the Trinity by the church were understood as polytheism and rejected as heresy in the name of the biblical God."<sup>4</sup> Still today the three persons of the Trinity are often understood as the subjects who have their own consciousness, an understanding which leads to some kind of tritheism. This is reinforced in Eastern iconography if the Trinity is depicted in the form of three angels as in the famous icon by the 15th century Russian painter Andrei Rublev. The icon, painted in the early 15th century, depicts the three angels who visited Abraham at Mamre (Gen 18:1-8). The painting is full of symbolism and is interpreted as an icon of the Trinity. In the 15th century the Trinity was considered the embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love and humility. Yet today most people would hardly interpret it as symbolizing the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It reinforces the idea of three gods. The notion of one God who successively appears in three modes as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as in modalism, is not satisfactory either. It is difficult to explain how, according to the biblical account, the Son can dialogue with his Father, if Father and Son are just different modes of the same God.

## 2. Following the Biblical Mode

In the New Testament there is a unity of revelation and action between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see this most graphic in Jesus baptism: after Jesus is baptized by John, "he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'" (Mk 1:10-11). The Spirit of God descends upon Jesus and the voice, none other than God's voice, affirms the relationship to Jesus as God's Son. As the New Testament scholar PHEME PERKINS (\* 1945) explains this passage: "Elements of apocalyptic symbolism—the open heavens (Isa 63:19), the descent of the Spirit, and the divine voice—also call attention to the fact that Jesus is the agent of God's salvation."<sup>5</sup> Central focus is on Christology, who Jesus is, and not on the Trinity. Yet the passage leaves no doubt that the Spirit of God, Jesus, and God's own self belong together.

---

<sup>4</sup> Norbert Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*, 5th ed. (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2008 [1983]), 172.

<sup>5</sup> PHEME PERKINS, *The Gospel of Mark, The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8, to this passage.

Another example of the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is given in Stephen's speech to the Council just prior to him being stoned to death. We read about Stephen that "filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). The phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" designates Stephen as one who is enabled by the Spirit to give bold and powerful witness to the risen Messiah. The Spirit also elevates Stephen's prophetic consciousness to envision "the glory of God" and "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (v. 56). The Spirit who filled Stephen is the connecting link between him, Jesus, and God. Since God is invisible, only "the glory of God", in Hebrew *kabod*, can be discerned by Stephen. This is his power symbolized by the radiance issuing from God's own self which remains hidden. But Jesus becomes visible as the Son of God standing at God's right hand which signifies that he is of equal power and glory with God. He has been raised from death and received into God's eternal glory as God's Son and his representative for us. At the same time Jesus represents us before God. The Holy Spirit is in Stephen. Evidently it is the invisible power and might issuing from God who fills Stephen and allows him to perceive the glory of God. This means that the Spirit is the one who allows humans to perceive and understand God and Jesus the Christ. Each of the three, God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are intimately connected but have very different functions.

Coming from the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity has the task of appropriately describing these functions and also of showing the proper relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the continuous battles during the first four centuries show with excommunications being carried out by one side and then the other, one might question whether the Hellenistic solution of the *homousios* (of the same being) or the Latin phrase of *tres personae et una substantia* (three persons and one substance) have really caught the meaning of the biblical correlation between God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One should also remember that the decisive issue in the early church was not concerned with the Holy Spirit, but with whether Jesus was indeed equal to God and therefore superior to all the Hellenistic divinities and demigods who could not lastingly solve the human predicament.

The British New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn (\*1939) says with regard to Christology the issue is whether we encounter here an unfolding or and evolution.<sup>6</sup> An unfolding would mean the outworking of what was always there in principle or in nuce. The Christological formulations of the later

---

<sup>6</sup> For the following cf. his perceptive essay "The Making of Christology – Evolution or Unfolding?", in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 437-452.

centuries could then be traced back to Jesus and the apostles. According to Dunn, this is in fact that classic view of Christological development. “The alternative view is that early as Christology developed by a creation, that is, in crude terms, by adding on new ideas and claims which were not implicit in or native to the earliest response to Jesus. This can be characterized more carefully as the model of ‘evolution’.”<sup>7</sup> Dunn then concludes that the process of the development of Christology in the first centuries cannot simply be described as evolution. Yet he also contends that whether it can be described simply as unfolding is less clear. Nevertheless he states that there was an inner dynamic involved “and that it was understood by the participants as an unfolding of the truth of Christ.”<sup>8</sup> We certainly must agree with his conclusion. Jesus has always acted as if he stood in God’s place. The development of Christology is therefore a retroactive recognition of this fact.

Yet we wonder whether the same distinction that Dunn applied to Christology should not also be used for the development of Trinitarian reflections. As far as we can see it would be nearly impossible simply to talk about an unfolding of that which is present in the biblical corpus. Yet should we call this development simply an evolution by which new ideas and claims were added in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity? To agree with this latter position would certainly be an exaggeration. In some way or other the post-biblical claims concerning the Trinity are not totally foreign to the biblical sources. Yet they are not their recti-linear conclusions either. But concerning the development of Christology the scales tilt much more closely to the “unfolding” while with regard to the Trinity they are closer to the mark of “evolution”. Is the doctrine of the Trinity then just a result of a post-biblical development that has some roots in the Bible but is steered by other interests?

### 3. The Doctrine of the Trinity in Peril?

The issue concerning the Trinity does not get easier then we consult the confessional documents of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. In the opening sentence of Article 1, concerning God, we read in the Lutheran Augsburg Confession: “The churches among us teach with complete unanimity that the decree of the Council of Nicea concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three persons is true and is to be believed without any doubt.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Dunn, “The Making of Christology,” 438.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>9</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 37.

In the Heidelberg Catechism we read in Article 53: The Holy Spirit “is, together with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God.” And in Article 25 we read that “these three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.” Should we simply say that this is no longer true since most people, whether Christians or non-Christians, will understand this doctrine as speaking of three gods instead of the one triune God. On the one hand we realize that this affirmation of the triune God is indeed the one doctrine which ties almost all of Christendom together regardless of any other differences. But we must also acknowledge in the same breath that the interpretation of the Trinity has often been shrouded in mystery and caused serious questions. We may only think here of the Spanish medical doctor, lawyer, and Renaissance humanist Michael Servetus (1509/11-1553) who called the doctrine of one God in three persons a monster with three heads, a congregate of four phantoms which one neither could nor should accept.<sup>10</sup> He not only rejected the personal Godhead of the Holy Spirit but also that of Jesus Christ. The Father alone was essentially God while Son and Spirit only participated in the Godhead and were different and subordinated appearances of the one God. Since the doctrine of the Trinity was affirmed by all the Reformers, it is no surprise that at that time Servetus could hardly challenge the traditional doctrine of the Trinity.

As we have noticed, however, in the 16th century anti-trinitarian confessions and churches were formed in Transylvania, present-day Romania, and in Poland. They still exist today, and of course there are Unitarian denominations in the USA. More important is that most Christian lay persons do not understand the traditional doctrine of the Trinity and simply brush it aside as unintelligible. This means more and more an ugly broad ditch has opened up between faithful Christians and professional theologians in their understanding of the Trinity.

We must also remember Schleiermacher’s dictum concerning the Trinity: “We have the less reason to regard this doctrine as finally settled since it did not receive any fresh treatment when the Evangelical (Protestant) Church was set up; and so there must still be in store for it at transformation which will go back to its very beginnings.”<sup>11</sup> The influential Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) observes here that the Reformation has simply accepted the ancient doctrine without any further consideration. He also claims that this doctrine therefore is not finally settled and any transformation of the doctrine has to go back to its biblical roots. Implied here is the charge that in

---

<sup>10</sup> So Nicolas de la Fontaine in his theses 8 and 9 against Servetus in *CR: Calvini Opera* 8:728 (Plainte portée par Nicolas de la Fontaine contre Servet).

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 747 (§ 172).

its development this doctrine has veered off from its biblical foundation. Schleiermacher also contends that many people refute the Trinitarian faith simply because it is unintelligible to them. Therefore he calls “for a thoroughgoing criticism of the doctrine in its older form.”<sup>12</sup> He also refutes the idea that the acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity is the necessary precondition for faith in redemption. Such ideas only leave the door wide open “to the influx of speculative elements.”

Then Schleiermacher gives some indications of the task before us. The first and foremost difficulty he sees in the relation to the unity of the Essence to the Trinity of the Persons. He questions the original and eternal existence of distinctions within the Divine Essence. Is this idea really so clearly and definitely present in the New Testament? Schleiermacher then seems to opt for an alternative between the Athanasian hypothesis that indeed from the very beginning there is a distinction in the Divine Essence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Sabellian idea of three different and perhaps successive modes within the one Godhead. The next issue which Schleiermacher raises is the equality of the three Persons if the first person is designated as Father and the second as the Son of God. Here he notes that by “Son of God” Scripture always and exclusively means the whole Christ and recognizes no difference between “God” as the Supreme Being and “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He implies here that in Scripture the distinctions in the one God are not that clearly and definitely present as the doctrine of the Trinity leads us believe. Yet beyond of this perceptive critique in which he also asks for “new solutions” Schleiermacher does not provide any.

#### **4. Jewish Monotheism and the Trinity**

The issues which Schleiermacher raised are indeed noteworthy. Are there really distinctions in the Godhead from the very beginning so that we can talk of the triune God? As we have seen, there has always been the distinction between Yahweh and his spirit. Yet this ruah Yahweh, this spirit of God, is always second to Yahweh which most likely implies a subordination. Concerning the divine Sonship we cannot go back further than to the expectation connected with the lineage of David. Yet to contrast Jewish monotheism with Christian Trinitarian thinking does not agree with historical reality. The best example for this is the so-called prologue in the gospel of John. The prominence here of the logos, the Word, is thoroughly rooted in the Old Testament Jewish tradition. Especially wisdom theology comes to the fore. But

---

<sup>12</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 749-50, for this and the following quote.

the logos also figures prominently in early Stoicism as the term for the rational principle of the universe. Stoicism taught that the world is held together by an order which can be detected through reasonable insight and recognition. This means that all order has its transcendent origin in God whose word is the power through which everything came into being and is kept alive. “God said” ... “and it was so” (Gen 1:3), is the key insight in understanding the relationship between God and the world. “It is likely, however, that the Fourth Evangelist’s reading of logos was more influenced by Jewish and early Christian interpretations of Stoicism than by Stoic philosophy directly.”<sup>13</sup>

The best place to look for the background of logos is within Judaism. The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BC – ca. 50 AD) is an excellent example of a Jewish contemporary of the Fourth Evangelist who melded Greek philosophy, particularly Stoicism and Platonism, with Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament. In Philo, the logos figures prominently as a way of speaking about the creative plan of God that governs the world. Yet the Fourth Evangelist’s use of logos does not seem to be directly a derivative from Philo, but is a Christocentric reading of the meaning of the word in Judaism by someone steeped in the same Hellenistic culture.

The role of the Word in creation and in human history in the opening verse of the Gospel of John thus draws on the Word of God in the Old Testament. God’s spoken word makes the difference between being and nothingness not just in the creation accounts; God also spoke through the law at Mt. Sinai and then again through the prophets. The Word encompasses both word and deed. The Word also brings with it associations from Jewish wisdom tradition. In wisdom theology the creative and almighty word of God and wisdom creating order come together. Wisdom can even become a preacher who beckons humanity: “Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice? ... I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion” (Prov 8:1.12). Wisdom was God’s companion “before the beginning of the earth” (Prov 8:23), working alongside God to accomplish God’s plans. This might even infer wisdom’s pre-existence. In later Judaism wisdom becomes a personal being, standing next to God, and “in the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth” (Sir 24:2). While wisdom is decidedly feminine, John refers to the logos as masculine in order to introduce the incarnation of Jesus as “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). – We notice that at least in the inter-testamental period that there are figures who share in God’s Godhead. Especially prominent is the divine Wisdom and also the

---

<sup>13</sup> So Gail R. O’Day, *The Gospel of John, The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 9, in her comments on the prologue.

personified Word of God. While with regard to Wisdom and logos we could always say that their status is only metaphorical, they are no entities in their own right. But the story is different when Philo calls Moses mediator and reconciler.<sup>14</sup> And in *The Testament of Moses* we hear Moses say: “But he did design and devise me, who (was) prepared from the beginning of the world, to be the mediator of his covenant” (*Test Mos* 1:14). Though in the next verse we read that Moses is going to sleep with his fathers, i.e., he is going to die, this verse seems to imply his pre-existence. This is not too unusual, since Philo can identify Moses and Aaron with the holy logos of God and can even call figures within the divine sphere “God” or “second God”.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Testament of Dan* we read of “the angel who intercedes for you, because he is the mediator between God and men” (6:2). In Exodus 23:21 we hear that Yahweh will send to the Israelites an angel with the admonition: “Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him.” Yahweh’s name, meaning Yahweh himself, is in that angel. Again the identification of God with that angel is very close and moreover we are reminded here of the hymn in Philippians 2 where the crucified Christ is given by God “the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9). Both in Israel and in Judaism God is not the solitary monolithic figure but there are others around him who share in his divinity and execute his work. This becomes also evident from Psalm 110 where we read: “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps 110:1). This verse was frequently used in the New Testament as a reference to Jesus’ exaltation to the right hand of God (Mk 12:36; Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13). When the question is raised as to who is allowed to sit next to God on the throne, we read: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). We gather from Genesis 14:18 that “he was a priest of God Most High.” There was one who sits at the right hand of God executing a priestly function something that *The Letter to the Hebrews* prominently attributes to Jesus.

When we look at the New Testament we realize that there is no interest there in a specific Word of God, or a specific Wisdom, or a specific Messiah, or in what way they shared in God’s divinity. Decisive for the New Testament was that all these figures and metaphors became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth who died on the cross and was resurrected to new and eternal life against all expectations. Such a suffering, dying, and rising Messiah was unique in the Jewish concept of the divine mediator. Therefore, it proved to be a

---

<sup>14</sup> According to Christoph Marksches, „Jüdische Mittlergestalten und die christliche Trinitätstheologie,“ in Michael Welker and Miroslav Volf, eds., *Der lebendige Gott als Trinität: Jürgen Moltmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, 205.

<sup>15</sup> So Marksches, „Jüdische Mittlergestalten und die christliche Trinitätstheologie,“ 205-06.

stumbling block for most Jews. For example Justin Martyr (100-165) in his dialogue with the Jew Trypho quotes this Jew saying: "Let him be recognized as Lord and Christ and God, as the Scriptures declare, by you of the Gentiles, who have from His name been all called Christians; but we who are servants of God that made this same [Christ], do not require to confess or worship Him."<sup>16</sup> This means that the Jew Trypho could agree to call Jesus Christ and God as long as he would not be required to confess him as his Lord. Jews could attribute to Jesus divine qualities but not that he is their Lord.

The historian of early Christianity Larry Hurtado (\*1943) emphasizes two characteristics of ancient Jewish religion:

- a) "A remarkable ability to combine a genuine concern for God's uniqueness with an interest in other figures with transcendent attributes which are described in the most exalted terms and which we may call 'principal agent' figures who are even likened to God in some cases; and
- b) an exhibition of monotheistic scruples, particularly and most distinctively in public cultic/ liturgical behavior."<sup>17</sup>

For the Jewish faithful there was only one principal deity who was distinguished from all the divine and heavenly beings but as some kind of high God or monarchical God quite often accompanied by them. There was the characteristic reservation of worship to this one God only, even at the expense of one's life.

Justin Martyr explains: "God begat before all creatures that Beginning [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos."<sup>18</sup> We note that there is a wide variety of divine mediators in Judaism on which Christian theology could draw to explain the significance of Jesus. Since the Jews, however, were reluctant to offer public, corporate worship to such a principal agent next to the one God, this made the early Christian pattern of worshiping God the Father and the Son genuinely innovative and striking. As Hurtado states: "God's uniqueness was characteristically manifested and protected in religious practice, by directing prayer (especially in the cultic/liturgical setting) and worship to God alone, withholding such devotion from any other heavenly being, including God's closest ministers and agents."<sup>19</sup> Therefore the Christian

---

<sup>16</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (64), in ANF 1:229.

<sup>17</sup> Larry H. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 111.

<sup>18</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (61), in ANF 1:227.

<sup>19</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* 131.

reverence for Jesus was considered heretical by pious Jews. It must have taken powerful experiences such as the appearance of the resurrected One to the disciples or to Paul on his way to Damascus for the cultic veneration of the glorified Jesus to emerge among his first Jewish followers in such relatively close proximity to his life on earth. Jesus was not just recognized as the Christ but also as the one to whom prayers could be offered. We might refer here again to Stephen who in his vision saw in heaven the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. Having recognized Jesus' privilege and divinely approved status as God's plenipotentiary, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Praying to the heavenly Jesus is the sort of specific early cultic devotion otherwise reserved for God in Jewish tradition. It comes as no surprise that the Jews including Saul before his conversion to Paul, approved of their killing Stephen because of this obvious blasphemy which contradicted Jewish monotheism. Here we encounter the roots of considering Jesus Christ being equal with God. But this is still a far cry from any Trinitarian affirmations.

## II. RECONSIDERING THE TRINITY

Karl Rahner muses "that already before Christ there was in one way or other faith in the Trinity."<sup>20</sup> He discerns this faith in the Word which God establishes and in the Spirit who takes hold of the prophets and of the charismatics. Word and Spirit take the place of God in Israel though they are distinguished from him and nevertheless belong to him. In this, Rahner perceives "a true secret prehistory of the revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament."<sup>21</sup> If it is indeed a secret prehistory then it is open to all kinds of speculation. But exactly this kind of speculation we must avoid in order to be credible to our own intellect and to other people. There has been so much talk about "the mystery of the Trinity" that most people whether faithful or unbelievers have renounced any interest in the Trinity. Yet most still care about Jesus, the central figure of the Christian faith.

Jesus and his relation to God came to the fore in the Israelite and Jewish context and therefore should be best understood in that context. For instance, when Jesus entered Jerusalem and the crowds were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mt 21:9 and Ps 118:26) the crowd does not just legitimize Jesus as messenger of God. According to Matthew this greeting implies that

---

<sup>20</sup> Karl Rahner, „Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte“, in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, 22/1b:561.

<sup>21</sup> Rahner, „Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte“, 22/1b:563.

Jesus brings with him the name of Yahweh; that is, God is entering the holy city. This mode of presence is prefigured in the Old Testament. There is a differentiation between God whom “even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain” (1 Kings 8:27) and his name and the form of his presence in the temple and in Jerusalem. Since God is hidden there are worldly figures to represent him such as the Word, Wisdom, or the messengers of Yahweh who talk to humans in the name of God.

According to the systematic theologian Christian Link (\* 1938) “we encounter here the Old Testament root of the doctrine of the Trinity: the self-representation of God in Jesus of Nazareth and his effective presence in the Spirit of sanctification are revelational images of the name of Yahweh.”<sup>22</sup> Link then concludes that a corresponding Trinitarian theology need no longer contradict the monotheistic confession of Israel. Such a doctrine could do without the metaphysical frame of the early church expressed by “substance, nature, and person.” As we have seen Judaism does not deny the different historical figures in which the divine name becomes present. But by refusing cultic devotion to these figures Judaism wants to make sure that they are just manifestations of the one God and of his coming. They are not considered as a second or third mode of the divine being. There is only one divine being, namely the one God. But exactly here we see the limit of drawing a connection between the Old Testament and later Judaism and the Christian faith. Though the Christian faith vehemently affirmed the unity of the one God by insisting on the homoousios, it also insisted on the cultic devotion to Jesus by offering prayers to him.

A faith in the Trinity prior to Christ as Karl Rahner suggested it or to perceive Old Testament roots for the doctrine of the Trinity as Christian Link proposed, is difficult to detect. We can discern the Old Testament roots of the implied divinity of Jesus and also of the divinity of the Spirit. But from these manifestations of the one God it is difficult to arrive at a doctrine of the Trinity. While the metaphysical terminology of the early church leads to such a doctrine, the biblical witness could only arrive at a doctrine of the Trinity in a mediated way. Should we then abandon this doctrine as Unitarians and Jehovah’s Witnesses have done? Even if we wanted to do this we would not abandon the Christian tradition altogether. We would simply follow at minority position which existed throughout the history of the Christian faith. But by doing this we would endanger our faith in Jesus as the Savior. As Jesus himself affirmed and as theologians of the early church tenaciously held onto there is a oneness of Father and Son.

---

<sup>22</sup> Christian Link, „Trinität im israeltheologischen Horizont“, in Michael Welker and Miroslav Volf, eds., *Der lebendige Gott als Trinität*, 227.

## 1. The Presence of God in Jesus the Christ

From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry the decisive question was whether Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah. When John the Baptist was imprisoned he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask him, "are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Mt 11:3). Jesus referred them to his words and actions. "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them" (Mt 11:3-4). With this response Jesus claimed implicitly that in him the Old Testament promises connected with the time of salvation (Isa 35:5-6) were being fulfilled. The claim that he was the bringer of salvation at the end time is frequently attested. For instance, Jesus told his disciples: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it" (Mt 13:16-17). His disciples were experiencing what had been promised for the end time: The Messiah had arrived.

While Jesus acts as if he stood in the place of God, as we previously noted, and while he also allows for the proskynesis – usually reserved for a divine figure or for the emperor – Jesus is still the representative of God and not God's self. Otherwise his intimate interaction with God whom he calls his Father would not be possible. The confession of Jesus as Lord, as the *kyrios*, emerges from the Christian faith in Jesus as the Christ. The divine Lordship of Christ as expressed in the gospel cannot be recognized prior to or apart from Christ. To think that the Lordship of Christ can be discerned in the Old Testament or in the writings of later Judaism is to be mistaken. – We should also be careful applying here the notion of preexistence. It expresses the conviction that the Son participates fully in the deity of the Father. As the New Testament scholar Udo Schnelle (\*1952) perceptively notes: "The preexistence statements underscore the claim of the human being Jesus, showing that his words are at the same time the words of God, his works are at the same time that works of God, that as a human being he is at the same time 'from above'."<sup>23</sup> – There is no equal to Jesus as the human face of God either in ancient Israel or in Judaism. Yet both provide the contextual background for that Lordship, since after all Jesus was a Jew. In a unique way, Jesus connects the one God with humanity, being one with God as his representative and at the same time fully human from birth to death. In an unexpected way, however,

---

<sup>23</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 670.

his humanity becomes supplemented or rather re-created to new life in the resurrection and exaltation to God's own being (cf. Phil 2:9-11). This then allowed for and even necessitated cultic devotion to Jesus as the Lord. When we apply to Jesus as the Lord the criterion of being homoousios with God then we encounter a both/and. Jesus is of the same being as God and yet he is different. In him transcendence and immanence meet, the invisible God becomes visible. Jesus therefore is the human face of God, of the God who is invisible and unapproachable.

## **2. The Presence of God in the Spirit**

In order to arrive at the Trinity we must also consider the Spirit. As we noted, in the Old Testament, the Spirit is so to speak that tool through which God works in humans and in the world in general. The ruah Yahweh, the Spirit of God is always closely associated with Yahweh, but can also be imparted to humans. It enables humans to live, to be skillful, intelligent, discerning, and to follow God's ways. As the divine power it also makes the difference between life and death not just for humans but for all living beings.

There is a strong continuity between the Old Testament understanding of God's spirit and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Right at the beginning of Jesus ministry we read that Jesus "saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him" (Mk 1:10). Having been endowed with God's spirit Jesus could drive out the unclean spirits. The people noticed the power and authority by which Jesus performed his deeds (cf. Lk 4:36). As the mediator between God and humans Jesus promises his followers a paraclete or comforter who will continue his activities once Jesus is no longer physically among them. Indeed at the day of Pentecost when they were all together in one place the Spirit of God descended upon them and "all of them are filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4).

It was a matter of fact for the first Christians that their ministry in word and deed was conducted in the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Addressing the crowd at Pentecost, Peter emphasized that the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Yahweh to Joel had come true: "In those days I will pour out my spirit" (Acts 2:18; Joel 2:28). Peter explained that God had promised to Jesus the Holy Spirit which he had poured out on his followers. This means the Spirit was given by God through Jesus Christ. Of course, this Spirit as God's life-giving power, was also involved in Christ's resurrection as Paul shows: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). Jesus was

raised from the dead by God through the Spirit and this same spirit will also give life to our mortal bodies since it already dwells in us.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Paul states to the Christians in Rome that if they are led by the Spirit of God that they are children of God, and if children of God and led by the Spirit they should live as such (cf. Rom 8:13-14). It is characteristic of the Christian understanding of the one God that he is not considered distant but through Christ and the Spirit God is active in those who follow him. This leads again back to the Old Testament understanding that God's Spirit can be imparted to humans. The Holy Spirit therefore can be considered as the connecting link between the unapproachable God and those who try to follow God's commandments. Yet different from Jesus the Christ there is no enfleshment of the Spirit. He is only active as God's divine agent in that the Word became flesh (Cf. Lk 1:35). So where does this leave the Trinity?

### 3. The Trinitarian Conclusion

We have seen that in the New Testament we encounter no doctrine of the Trinity or Trinitarian formulations. At the most we have triadic formulations as in the famous commission to the disciples when the resurrected Christ said to them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). The impetus for transforming such a triadic formulation into a Trinitarian formula arose once Christianity had left Palestine and entered a new religious and philosophical context. This is also true of the so-called Comma Johanneum of 1 John 5:7-8, a "Trinitarian" insertion into the original New Testament text dating back to the 3rd or 4th century and not contained in the Greek text.

As aforementioned there were triads of gods in many different religions. Often there was one supreme god with whom two other gods were associated, such as in Egypt, Babylonia, and in Rome with Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. In these other religions there is often the genealogical triad of father, mother, and son. Generally, triads were patterned after the nuclear family, a union of the male and female principles, and a son as the result of that union. The head of that family was often a creator god. We should not forget that in early Christianity some also talked about God the Father, the divine Sophia, and Jesus

---

<sup>24</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul's Letter to the Romans, The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 10, on Rom. 1:3-4, where he mentions the resurrection of Jesus by the Spirit.

Christ as the Son of God. The preference for triads is also found in the number three, since this means a totality with beginning, middle, and end. It also denotes the human being consisting of body, soul, and spirit, as well as the world with heaven, earth, and the surrounding waters. Yet Christianity went at decisive step further beyond genealogy and numerical considerations. It developed at Trinitarian doctrine attempting to show the intrinsic and extrinsic relations between the three members of the triad, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The development of this doctrine was done at great cost. As with most new doctrinal affirmations, there are always some who oppose them and therefore dissensions and divisions in the unity becomes almost unavoidable. This has also been the case with Christianity. Some segments of Christianity left the mainstream church and established their own churches, such as the Arians, Nestorians, and Monophysites, just to mention a few. And finally there came the split over the Trinity between the Western church under Rome and the Orthodox Church in the East. But most lamentable today is that most average Christians lack even the basic understanding of that doctrine. Moreover, the frequent argument of Muslims, Jews, and even of Christians that the doctrine of the Trinity amounts to worshipping three gods, shows how easy it is to misunderstand this doctrine. Should we then simply give up this doctrine admitting that we have overextended ourselves in the attempt to fathom intellectually the unapproachable and supreme God upon whom we depend in this life and in the hereafter?

The answer must be a flat NO. At the same time, however, we must refrain from undue speculation and practice intellectual modesty. If God is in heaven and we are on earth as the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) so forcefully claimed we can only know about God that which he has disclosed to us in his human face, Jesus Christ. Only through the human being Jesus can we approach God, because "the humanity is that holy ladder of ours, mentioned in Gen. 28:12, by which we ascend to the knowledge of God."<sup>25</sup> It is only through the impression and impact made by the life and destiny of Jesus that we realize that God loves us. Only through Jesus do we obtain the appropriate understanding of God and God's activities. This means that Jesus is not important because he was such an effective preacher or because of the miracles he performed or the saintly life he lived. Jesus is decisive for us, because he is the mediator of God's salvific activity, shown most importantly in the resurrection. With this emphasis on the salvific activity of God in Christ all the other ways by which medieval Christians proposed to approach God and to understand God's will or to dispose him favorably to them, collapse. Christ alone was Luther's decisive insight.

---

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews* (1517/18), in *LW* 29:111, in his comments on Heb. 1:2.

The reason for “Christ alone” was founded in God's decision to disclose God's self only in Jesus. Yet the Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) realized that this divine self-disclosure hinged on the unique relationship between God and Christ. In order to mediate God completely, Christ could not be just a saint or an Avatar. He had to be completely and totally God. Otherwise he could not have mediated God. At the same time, Christ also had to be completely and totally a human being. Otherwise he could not have reached us and identified himself with us. In being one being with the Father, a point which Luther affirmed with the Council of Nicaea, Christ could mediate God. – How Jesus can be one being with the Father and yet still be different from him belongs to the mysteries of God, as Luther might say, which must be adored and not explored. Ontological categories do not suffice in matters of existential significance. This was the shortcoming of the homoousios.

What Jesus Christ mediated to us was God's love. Yet how God is in himself as intrinsic Trinitarian theology wants to unearth is no business of ours. It is simply undue speculation. To talk about the one God who from the very beginning was triune overextends the biblical warrant. An extrinsic economic Trinitarian theology suffices showing how the one God, the Father of us all, has acted and is still acting for our benefit by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through his Son Jesus Christ. At this point we differ from the Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus (1888-1966) who claims:

“Yet the step to the immanent, i.e., the eternal and essential Trinity of God is indispensable. It is founded in Christology and pneumatology. The recognition of Christ and the recognition of the Holy Spirit lead in principle to the Trinitarian dogma.”<sup>26</sup>

Faith in Jesus, according to Althaus, includes the certainty, that the communion with the Father is eternal. Yet such eternal communion between Father and Son cannot be established in the Old Testament tradition. It is based solely on a few assertions from the New Testament. Whether it has to be taken literally or metaphorically seems debatable. The Swiss New Testament scholar Eduard Schweizer (1913-2006) rightly claims:

“Pre-existence is not in the strict sense content of the faith but describes the dimension of salvation brought by Christ. ... Its theological import lies in the fact to characterize the one who has died for us, was exalted and is present in baptism, Lord's Supper, and the proclamation of the Word as the one in whom all the wisdom of God which has been effective since the creation for salvation has found its final realization.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, 5th ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1959), 692.

<sup>27</sup> Eduard Schweizer, “Jesus Christus. I: Neues Testament,” in *TRE* 16:681.

Pre-existence not in a strictly temporal sense, but much more in a metaphorical and nevertheless existential sense shows the significance of Jesus. It does not necessitate a doctrine of the Trinity in terms of an intrinsic Trinity. An economic Trinity still suffices. But how is it with the Holy Spirit? Does it necessitate an intrinsic Trinity?

The presence and the working of the Holy Spirit is the presence and the working of the one God through Christ or the presence and the working of the living Christ. This is what the New Testament accounts would imply. One and the same event can be attributed to God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Yet then we encounter the paraclete in Scripture as distinguished from Jesus. When Paul talks about the varieties of gifts that Christians enjoy he mentions first the Holy Spirit as the giver of these the different gifts (1 Cor 12:11). Yet this does not contradict the conviction that God is the ultimate originator and giver of all gifts who works in our world through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. God is present and active in the world through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. On account of his incarnation a personification of Jesus of Nazareth is clearly given. But this seems to be different with the Holy Spirit. He is more the extended arm of God and/or of Christ than a personified figure of the Trinity. This again would lead in the direction of an economic Trinity. Through the Holy Spirit God is active in the world in general, and in Christians in particular. As Paul emphasizes Christians enjoy the gifts of the Spirit and are expected to walk in the Spirit, meaning according to God's precepts. Contrary to the assertion of Althaus it is not "the confession of the eternal intrinsic Trinity" that secures the borders to any kind of pantheism, but it is the confession of Jesus the Christ, God's human face.<sup>28</sup> As Luther adamantly asserted though God is everywhere he is not to be sought there but only where he has shown himself, in Jesus Christ. The attempt to trace God prior to his salvation historical self-disclosure to arrive at some kind of primordial Trinity has no existential relevance and must be termed pure speculation. We should also remember Christian Link's insight that the doctrine of the Trinity could do without the metaphysical frame of the early church which was expressed with the words "substance, nature, and person." This would also go for the distinction between an intrinsic and an economic Trinity. The emphasis on the economic Trinity renders the charge of tritheism untenable. We can only know God concretely in an existential and not just a philosophical way because Jesus Christ, the Son, has disclosed God as our Father. And we can ascertain the ongoing activity of God in the world, the church, and in the faithful, since Jesus has promised the Holy Spirit as God's enlivening, discerning, and redemptive Spirit.

---

<sup>28</sup> Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, 694.

In the interreligious dialogue the debate with Islam and Buddhism will not be one over the triune identity but whether Jesus, Mohammed, or Buddha can show us the way to the Father. But by starting with the Trinity we set out on the wrong foot because it obscures more than it explains. It puts the cart before the horse since it begins with that which may serve as a tenable conclusion. The Christian faith, however, started the other way around. It entered the scene proclaiming that salvation is in Christ alone. This proclamation is as valid today as it was at the beginning of the Christian story.

We dare not forget that the doctrine of the Trinity evolved only as an offspring of Christological reflection. From the beginning almost to the very end, the discussion during the first centuries was dominated by the quest for Christology: Who is the one whom we call Christ? Once it was clarified that he is indeed God, then the question had to be addressed of how the divine and the human "aspects" are related in him. Again we could assume that this was basically a speculative question. Yet salvation was at stake here too because the conviction soon emerged that if God had not really come down to us in Jesus Christ we could never ascend to him. Others, however, were more afraid that the divine might be too much dragged down into our sphere and thereby lose its salvific power, so they objected to the homoousios of Christ with God.

The unresolved Christological problems similar to those regarding the Trinity go right back to the New Testament, since the New Testament had neither a conceptually and intellectually developed Christology nor an actual doctrine of the Trinity. It was clear for the New Testament sources that Jesus Christ had been an actual human figure in whom God had been truly present. For reasons of adhering to a strict monotheism, Jesus is seldom referred to as God. Yet the early church had always considered Jesus to be God. Paul set the tone for the dominant strain of subsequent Christological reflection when he asserted that Jesus Christ "was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:3f.). Contained therein is an understanding of Christ's twofold status, both human and divine.

Christ being truly human and truly divine was then finally accepted as doctrine at the Council of Chalcedon (451) at which then also the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed resurfaced. It was concluded at Chalcedon that Christ is not a composite being but is of two natures, the human and the divine. After stating that Jesus is truly God and truly a human being, the council did not actually state what this new being was like, but decided to establish parameters or boundaries outside of which the unity could no longer be affirmed. Four negatives were set forth: "unconfused" (*asynchytos*) and "unaltered" (*atreptos*), which were safeguards against Appollinarian thought

that Christ is a human/ divine mixture; and "undivided" (*adiharetos*) and "unseparated" (*achoristos*), which were safeguards against Antiochian tendencies that the divine just dwelt in the human person of Christ. These four negatives plus the Western affirmation of truly God and truly a human being may have looked like a compromise.<sup>29</sup> It was indeed a compromise. The church finally admitted that while it must affirm that Jesus Christ was truly divine and truly human, it cannot positively assert how he could be such. It could only state, and so it did, how one should not talk about that unity.

With regard to the Trinity, that theological restraint did not take place. In speculative fashion one wanted to fathom the mystery of the Trinity. The result was that the biblical warrant was far exceeded and conclusions were reached which were never really satisfying to inquisitive minds. Perhaps in our present situation in which the Christian faith is challenged by a secular mindset and by the reawakening of the major world religions as hardly ever before, it would be good to show more restraint in Trinitarian reflections. Would it not be sufficient to state that we believe in one God, the creator and sustainer of everything that is, who showed his heart to us in Jesus the Christ, his human embodiment? Through Jesus' life and destiny God indicated that there is eternal life beyond this present one. This God is present in us and the world around us through his enlivening and sustaining Spirit which he mediates to us through his Son Jesus Christ.

It suffices that there is a unity of action of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, without the need to fathom the mysteries of the Trinity with regard to their exact mutual relations and their status over against each other. As the New Testament affirms, decisive is that God was and is in Christ for our salvation and that God is present through his Holy Spirit so that there is life.

## REFERENCES

- Althaus. Paul. *Die christliche Wahrheit*, 5th ed. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1959.  
Brox, Norbert. *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*, 5th ed. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2008 [1983].

---

<sup>29</sup> See the reservations by Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988) 285, where he called the formulation "problematic," since it does not take the concrete unity of the historical human being Jesus as its point of departure, but rather the difference between the human and divine creaturely being.

- Dunn, James D. G. "The Making of Christology – Evolution or Unfolding?" In *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, edited by Joel B. Green and Max Turner. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994.
- Justin Martyr. *Dialogue with Trypho*. In ANF 1.
- Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- Larry H. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005.
- Link, Christian. "Trinität im israeltheologischen Horizont." In *Der lebendige Gott als Trinität*, edited by Michael Welker and Miroslav Volf.
- Luther, Martin. *Lectures on Hebrews (1517/18)*. In LW 29.
- Markschies, Christoph. "Jüdische Mittlergestalten und die christliche Trinitätstheologie." In *Der lebendige Gott als Trinität: Jürgen Moltmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, edited by Michael Welker and Miroslav Volf. Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006.
- Morenz, Siegfried. *Egyptian Religion*. Translated by Ann E. Kemp. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984.
- O'Day, Gail R. *The Gospel of John*. In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus – God and Man*. Translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988.
- Perkins, Pheme. *The Gospel of Mark*. In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Rahner, Karl. "Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte." In Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, 22.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*. Edited by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart. London: T&T Clark, 1999.
- Schnelle, Udo. *Theology of the New Testament*. Translated by M. Eugene Boring. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Schwarz, Hans. *The Trinity. The Central Mystery of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.
- Schweizer, Eduard. "Jesus Christus. I: Neues Testament." In TRE 16.
- Wright, N.T. *Commentary on Romans*. In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.