
The Trinity

Trinitarian belief is the “mean” between Sabellianism and Arianism

Let us then bid farewell to all contentious shiftings and balancings of the truth on either side, neither, like the Sabellians, assailing the Trinity in the interest of the Unity, and so destroying the distinction by a wicked confusion; nor, like the Arians, assailing the Unity in the interest of the Trinity, and by an impious distinction overthrowing the Oneness...

But we, walking along the royal road which lies between the two extremes, which is the seat of the virtues, as the authorities say, believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, of one Substance and glory.¹

Trinitarian belief is the “mean” between Judaism and heathenism

When I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. For Godhead is neither diffused beyond these, so as to bring in a mob of gods; nor yet is it bounded by a smaller compass than these, so as to condemn us for a poverty-stricken conception of Deity; either Judaizing² to save the Monarchia,³ or failing into heathenism by the multitude of our gods.⁴

The unity & equality of the Trinity

This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same;

Just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because Consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia.

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One.⁵

¹ Or. 42.16 (NPNF², Vol.7, p.390b-391a)

² i.e. becoming “Jewish” by affirming only the divinity of the Father (and not the Son and Spirit)

³ “Monarchia” = sole rule

⁴ Or. 38.8 (NPNF², Vol.7, p.347a)

⁵ Or. 40.41 (NPNF², Vol.7, p.375a-b)

The delicate balance required when preaching the Trinity

It is necessary neither to be so devoted to the Father, as to rob Him of His Fatherhood, for whose Father would He be, if the Son were separated and estranged from Him, by being ranked with the creation, (for an alien being, or one which is combined and confounded with his father, and, for the sense is the same, throws him into confusion, is not a son);

Nor to be so devoted to Christ, as to neglect to preserve both His Sonship, (for whose son would He be, if His origin were not referred to the Father?) and the rank of the Father as origin, inasmuch as He is the Father and Generator; for He would be the origin of petty and unworthy beings, or rather the term would be used in a petty and unworthy sense, if He were not the origin of Godhead and goodness, which are contemplated in the Son and the Spirit: the former being the Son and the Word, the latter the proceeding and indissoluble Spirit.

For both the Unity of the Godhead must be preserved, and the Trinity of Persons confessed, each with His own property.⁶

The gradual revelation of the Trinity

In this way, the old covenant made clear proclamation of the Father, a less definite one of the Son. The new covenant made the Son manifest and gave us a glimpse of the Spirit's Godhead. At the present time, the Spirit resides amongst us, giving us a clearer manifestation of himself than before.

It was dangerous for the Son to be preached openly when the Godhead of the Father was still unacknowledged. It was dangerous, too, for the Holy Spirit to be made (and here I use a rather rash expression) an extra burden, when the Son had not been received. It could mean men jeopardizing what did lie within their powers, as happens to those encumbered with a diet too strong for them or who gaze at sunlight with eyes as yet too feeble for it.⁷

⁶ Or. 2.38, (NPNF², Vol.7, pp.212b-213a)

⁷ Or. 31.26 (*On God and Christ*, p.137)