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Why is the Trinity so Difficult and so Important?

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BEING A FULLY trinitarian Christian is very uncommon because it is very difficult—it is also very important. There are several reasons for this situation. The Trinity is more than a few words on our church doctrinal statement, though that is a valuable start. The Trinity is a matter of knowing God in his complexity, totally different from us in our singularity yet radically similar in having personality in his image, then letting this knowledge of God become the pattern of a renewed Christian mind that replaces control beliefs from unbelieving sources that constantly distort our lives.

History and personal experience show that getting to know God as Trinity is always a difficult and dynamic process in tension with our sinful tendencies and the residue of pre-Christian belief systems. It is important

because it means getting to know God. It is also important in order to make the faith attractive to our children and neighbours, overcoming the distortions that drive people from the faith. It is worth serious effort.

I Distortions of the Faith

We have in Christian history many distortions that damage our knowledge of God and our witness to the world. As a teenager I listened to people claim that if we 'walk in the Spirit' we will levitate from place to place without using our 'flesh' (meaning our feet), because this was the way Jesus travelled. The proper interest in real spirituality was pursued in a manner that separated the work of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, failing to recognise that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son to mediate our knowledge of the Father and the Son. The total picture of the faith was remarkably similar to some of the early heresies. I observed how this distortion both

made people miserable, lacking the joy of salvation, and drove some from the faith.¹

Since the Enlightenment we have faced various types of liberal theology. Demythologized Christianity rejected the supposed myths in the Bible as unnecessary to faith; Jesus was reinterpreted within the worldview of Existentialism. Marxist Christianity claimed a life of faith would promote a proletarian revolution; the biblical message was appropriated inside the worldview of Karl Marx. National Socialist Christianity thought Christians should support Adolf Hitler as the representative of God's work in the world, reinterpreting the biblical message inside Hitler's worldview. In each example a worldview of a non-biblical origin functioned as a basis for accepting some biblical beliefs which also filtered out acceptance of other biblical teachings.²

What unites misguided zeal and liberal theologies is the way whole themes of the faith are missing. In distorted zeal, faith is not guided by a balanced Christian teaching because basic theology is not present. In place of standard

Christian teaching, other expectations about authentic spirituality function as control beliefs. In the examples of liberal theology, the biblical faith is misinterpreted because a secular worldview functions as a control belief and filters out parts of the biblical message; much of basic Christian teaching is lacking because it is replaced by parts of a secular worldview.

The problems of liberal theology and misguided zeal are similar, though they look different. When coming to faith people do not instantly give up their previous belief systems. The human mind is never truly empty; certain questions about life and the world cannot be avoided. If people do not have biblical answers, they almost necessarily hold other answers. These old beliefs can continue to function as control beliefs which have authority over what we think we are allowed to believe.

Everyone has control beliefs, fundamental conceptions arising from one's culture or religious background that guide, perhaps unconsciously, what we are allowed to believe. Control beliefs then form a structure of the mind that organizes everything else we believe.

Control beliefs of a non-biblical origin can prevent people from accepting Christ. When people come to faith, old control beliefs may continue in authority; believers may be prevented from accepting parts of the total truth, while old beliefs organize selected themes of the new faith into something alien to Christianity. This is true of both misguided zeal and liberal theology. Major parts of Christian belief are lacking because a previous belief filters out or distorts a theme of the faith.

These recent distortions of the faith

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¹ These observations are inspired by Francis Schaeffer, *The Church before the Watching World*, which is included in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: a Christian Worldview*, Vol. 4, *A Christian View of the Church* (Crossway Books, 1982).

² This analysis comes from Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, Vol. 1, *Prolegomena: The Relation of Theology to Modern Thought Forms*, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). Believers whose faith and life are distorted in this manner are usually 'of the world', in terms of the evangelical dictum that we should be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'.

bear a crucial similarity to the early heresies faced by the church. The classical heresies of Marcionism, Gnosticism, and Arianism each interpreted and applied the biblical message in light of control beliefs coming from different religious and cultural roots in the ancient world (varieties of Hellenism). Each distortion was a reduction of the content and practice of the Christian faith, making the total Christian faith and life much less holistic.³

This being the case, we must ask a series of important questions about control beliefs. What are proper Christian control beliefs to renew the Christian mind, to overcome ancient heresies, liberal theology and distorted spirituality and to organize our faith into a proper whole? What is the right framework for pastoral diagnosis? What control beliefs should we use in our interaction with secular learning? This is why the early church invested such effort into the dogma of the Trinity; knowing the Trinity became the first Christian consciously structured control belief to both overcome distorted zeal and provide a proper filter to replace the secular worldviews.

The articulation of the theory about the Trinity was not only the development of truths in the Bible; it was the attempt to clarify biblical control beliefs which were also tools for pastoral-theological diagnosis to overcome distorted lives by means of pastoral care and teaching. The ancient heresies, modern distorted zeal, and liberal theology destroy the lives of people and institutions. It is important, therefore, to

observe that the doctrine of the Trinity was articulated to teach the full counsel of God, address distortions in the faith of believers, to thereby overcome the power of non-biblical control beliefs. The doctrine of the Trinity simultaneously provided a key control belief and a theological tool to diagnose serious distortions of the faith. That is why I love the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

It is a mistake to see the Trinity as archaic metaphysical trivia. The Trinity involves knowing God as One and Three. This precise description of God is not speculation; it provides the framework for holistic faith. The New Testament believers knew God in three ways: They knew the Father as the Creator, Sustainer, and Law-Giver; they knew Jesus as the one who taught them, washed their feet, died on the cross and rose again; they knew the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, who changed them within; and they knew this was one God.

This basic knowledge of God was articulated into theoretical language in the creeds to overcome serious distortions, each of which arose because the biblical message was accepted in light of inappropriate control beliefs. This process must be continued today.

II Developing Trinitarianism Today

Acts 19 describes a remarkable distortion. Paul wondered if believers in Ephesus had heard there was a Holy Spirit. A group of convictions and experiences was lacking because they knew only the Father and the Son. Taking our cue from this problem, it is worth describing the work of each Person.

In an important way, all of God's acts are the acts of all three Persons. Though we customarily see creation as primarily the work of the Father, both the Son and the Spirit participate in creation. 'All things were made through him', through Christ (Jn. 1:3). 'The Spirit was hovering over the waters' (Gen. 1:2). Though we usually think of redemption as the work of the Son, we often hear good, biblical sermons on the work of each of the three Persons in redemption. Nevertheless, the Bible describes the three Persons as having different roles, and these different roles are summarized in the great creeds.

It is proper to talk about themes contained in first-article faith in 'God the Father, Almighty'. It is also proper to talk about themes contained in faith in second article-faith about Jesus, as well as in the third article about the Holy Spirit. A consciously Trinitarian approach has the advantage of not only being complete; it is also clearly rooted in the most fundamental Christian belief structure about the very nature of God, connecting living faith to proper control beliefs.

In the twenty-first century we can develop a balanced and complete Christian life by seeing the Christian life as knowing the Three-in-One. In this way the doctrine of the Trinity can become the blueprint or outline of the renewed Christian life.⁴ We should con-

sider how the Christian life and mind can be structured by the doctrine of the Trinity, so our complete lives can become a conscious response to each Person of God.

When I teach a basic introduction to Christian theology and ethics, I often organize the themes around the relation of each theme to a Person of the Trinity. The following is abbreviated from a course outline. Each paragraph can be expanded as a long study. I learned this method of organizing a course of study from George W. Forell, my doctoral advisor at the University of Iowa, who organized the study of the history of Christian ethics around the way different Christian movements and thinkers emphasized each Person of the Trinity.

1 First Article faith

A strange question clarifies our thoughts. 'How would life be different if we believed in the second and third articles of the Creed but did not believe in the Father?' That would be strange, perhaps similar to Marcionism and Gnosticism. In reaction we should clarify the first article. When we say we believe in creation, we are saying that God is the only source of all that exists, including matter, energy, time, space, causality, and beauty.

The first article answers the deepest question: What is the ultimate Ground

³ On this see Thomas K. Johnson, *What Difference Does The Trinity Make? A Complete Faith and Worldview* (Bonn: VKW, 2009), 16-21.

⁴ So far in Christian history we have had three good attempts to articulate balanced control beliefs that are complementary to each other. The first is the doctrine of the Trinity. The second is the relation between law and gospel. The third is clarifying the relation of creation to the fall, to redemption and ultimate

reconciliation. Each can be used to present a summary of the Christian faith in a way that shows that the biblical message has an internal structure which leads to a holistic, balanced, and authentic faith and life. They show that the biblical message is an entire worldview or philosophy.

of Being, the self-existent cause and goal of everything? The question answered by belief in the Creator is so fundamental that if people do not believe in the Father, they ascribe his divine attributes to some part of creation.

When we believe in creation we are saying God gave his creation a specific structure, part of which he built into human nature. The doctrine of creation says much about our world, ourselves and how we should live, about knowledge, and about society. Some biblical themes contribute to a robust first-article faith:

a) The goodness of creation

God made the world good. In Genesis we are told several times that the world God made is good. And 'it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). This theme is emphasized, as if people forget that the earth and the heavens were made by God and are therefore both real and good. Of course this has happened. As noted, the various types of Hellenism doubted the goodness of the physical world. In some types of Hinduism people doubt the reality of the physical world, seeing it as '*Maya*' or illusion. These ways of thinking reappear even among Christians.

b) The creation of humankind

'Let us make man in our image' (Gen. 1:26). Belief that God is our Creator answers the deep question in the human heart: 'Who and what are we?' God created us for a relationship with himself; therefore our human reason, will, and emotions are a created reflection of his uncreated reason, will, and emotions. What a magnificent destiny! How awe-

some it is to daily interact with other creatures with the same eternal destiny! This is the source of human dignity and meaning, part of first article faith.

c) The cultural mandate

'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground' (Gen. 1:28). Everywhere people are busy. They develop careers and families, businesses and schools, cultural institutions and communities. Seldom do we ask, 'Why?' Our activity is not only a human necessity but also a response to the unrecognized demand of God to work in his world. First-article faith recognizes that this demand comes from God, and if we are active in his world, we should be active for his glory.

d) Creation care

'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Gen. 2:15). Taking care of God's world and the people who live in God's world is an unavoidable part of our responsibility. As part of first-article faith we recognize that this demand comes from God and should be embraced with joy. As part of the plan coming from our Creator, we expect that a good response from us will contribute to human well-being.

e) General revelation

God continues to speak through his world. 'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse' (Rom. 1:20). God's

speech through his creation forms the basis for human accountability to God as it also provides an essential condition for human life and culture. God's general revelation contains much of his moral law, so people often know more than they want to know about the standard they disobey but need (Rom. 1:28-32).

f) Common grace

As part of God's continuing care for his creation, he continues to give humans what is needed for life and civilization. To contrast this gift with the special grace of salvation we often call it 'common grace'. This gift should lead people to repentance and faith. 'Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?' (Rom. 2:4).

It is my speculation that fully knowing God as the Almighty Creator frequently falls from our minds because it emphasizes our radical accountability to God. Even believers sometimes dislike being called to account unconditionally. This makes it important to always talk about the first article.

2 Second-Article faith

Another strange question: how would our lives be different if we did not believe in the second article? How would life be different if we believed only in the Father and the Spirit? Though difficult to imagine, this has happened repeatedly. When people stop believing that Jesus is God in the flesh, God is usually viewed as disconnected from history and uninterested in human needs.

In addition to Arianism mentioned

above, one should mention Deism, common during the western Enlightenment of the eighteenth century; God was described as a watchmaker who has finished his work. Deism, like Arianism, was not only a historical movement; it is a recurring tendency among people on the fringe of the gospel.

We should list a few biblical themes that contribute to a robust second-article faith. A life in light of the second article of the Christian creed is a life that fully accepts God's gift in the Cross and simultaneously accepts God's call to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

a) Forgiveness

On the Cross Jesus died for our sins so that we may be forgiven. 'He was delivered over to death for our sins' (Rom. 4:25). Therefore, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness means release from guilt because Jesus was punished in our place on the cross. The debt was paid by him; since the debt has been paid, it would be unjust if God wanted us to pay again. At its very centre, a true and authentic Christian faith means trust that Jesus paid the price for my sins by his death on the cross. By faith we are freed from guilt before God.

b) Justification by faith

Connected to forgiveness is justification. To make matters more explicit, evangelicals often emphasize that justification is by faith alone, not faith plus something. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:16, 'We . . . have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the

law.' Justification is a legal term; it refers to the act of a judge in a courtroom declaring a person to be 'not guilty'. It means that the ultimate Judge already gives the eschatological verdict of 'not guilty'.

When God justifies a believer God is not setting aside his own justice. He is declaring that justice has been done and the price of our sins has been paid; Jesus is our substitute in taking the wrath and punishment of God. Faith is the means by which God's gift of justification comes to us.

c) Adoption

'To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God' (John 1:12). What a tremendous gift we receive by faith in the Son: adoption as children of God! Adoption is similar to our justification; it gives us a legal standing in relation to God, but the gift of adoption goes beyond what God gives us in justification. As the Judge, he could have justified but kept us at a distance from himself. God did not do this.

By so clearly explaining our adoption as God's children, the Bible teaches us that God wants us to have the closest possible intimate personal access to the Father. Our Heavenly Father wants us to call out to him, *Abba*, which means something like 'Papa'.

d) The call to discipleship

'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it' (Mt. 16:24-25). Faith in the second article of the creed means we have to

accept the cost of discipleship and be willing to lose much of what the unbelieving world regards as 'life'. This cost seems small in light of the gifts described in the second article.

e) Jesus as judge

In the Apostles' Creed we confess, 'he shall come as Judge of the living and the dead'. Of course, our Judge is also the one who gave his life for our justification, so we face him without undue fear, knowing his eschatological verdict in advance. It is part of second-article faith to confess that the Son is the Person who both entered into history for salvation and will enter into history for its conclusion.

It is my speculation that even evangelical Christians sometimes neglect the second article of the creed, falling into moralistic deism. We might not like having to admit to ourselves and to God how much we need forgiveness in Jesus.

3 Third-Article faith

Again the strange question: how would our lives be different if we did not know the third Person, the Holy Spirit? What did Paul observe in Acts 19?

How many times the church falls into lifelessness! There is no courage, no love, no authentic care for the needy, no joy in salvation, no desire to glorify God, no pain for those without Christ. The church becomes either a well-ordered machine or the bearer of cultural traditions. Even if our doctrine is orthodox, the light is dim. The criticism of Karl Marx, that religion is the 'opiate of the people', may become true! This damages the witness of the body of Christ in the eyes of a watching

world that is looking for authenticity. Do we know the Spirit properly?

'No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3). Faith is impossible without the Spirit, but our need for the Spirit is continuous. The direct command of the apostle Paul, 'be filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18), may have been written to the same people who had aroused his concern years before in Acts 19. Believers need to be repeatedly filled, regardless of the previous work of the Spirit.

What is the Spirit's work? The Holy Spirit works inside of people, mediating the work of the Father and of the Son as the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.⁵ The Spirit changes human consciousness. For example, 'you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father". The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rom. 8:15-16).

In this example the Spirit testifies about our relationship with the Father made possible by the Son, yet the Spirit's work is distinct from that of the Father and the Son. This work of God is deeply internal without being subjective or arbitrary, for the Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son. Some of the activities of the Spirit are more closely associated with the Father and others more closely related to the Son. A short listing can assist us.

a) The Common work

In Isaiah 45:1-5, we read:

⁵ It was a procedural mistake for the western church to add the *filioque* clause into the Nicene Creed without consulting the eastern church, but it is valuable to know that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut. . . . I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me.

Cyrus was a pagan king who did not acknowledge God. Yet he was anointed by the Spirit for a history-changing task, and the word 'anointed' is the same terminology used to describe the anointing of Old Testament priests and kings. Christians call this the 'common' work of the Spirit, mediating the work of the Father in creation, whereas the 'special' work of the Spirit is related to salvation. It is part of how God rules the affairs of peoples and nations.

We should give thanks to God for the common work of his Spirit which has enabled men and women to be leaders in many ways that serve human well-being. Discoveries in medicine, science, and technology which have contributed to the overall human good were not merely human discoveries; the Spirit of God which anointed Cyrus anointed is still at work.

b) The Spirit and art

See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to

make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. . . . Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you (Ex. 31:1-6).

The Spirit equipped men with gifts of art. The Spirit, who is the unchanging God, can be expected to give similar gifts today. Art, music, and architecture have often flourished among believers, for the glory of God and the comfort and enjoyment of many.

c) The Spirit and life

'The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being' (Gen. 2:7). The Hebrew words 'breath', 'wind,' and 'spirit' are the same word group. Human life is a distinct gift of the Spirit as the Spirit proceeds out from the Father and breathes life into humans in his image. Sin wrought destruction, bringing a living death; we are born alienated from God, each other, and ourselves.

However, the Holy Spirit has not stopped his life-giving work. He also proceeds from the Son to breathe new life into believers. 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. . . . "You must be born again"' (John 3:3-7). The Spirit who gives life in the image of God also gives new life in the image of Christ.

d) The fruit of the Spirit

'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-con-

trol. Against such things there is no law' (Gal. 5:22-23). Of course we are commanded to do all these things, to practice love, be peaceful, and show kindness. Within ourselves we sense that God created us to image his character in love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness.

The list reminds us that we are commanded by God, created by God, and redeemed by God to be people of the Spirit. However, it is the Spirit of creation, redemption, and the written word who makes the command possible in practice, so we can become fruitful.

Believers often resort to contradictory language to describe life in the Spirit. We use terms like 'the impossible possibility' or 'active passivity' to explain what we experience. Born in sin, it is impossible to live a life marked by this fruit, but the Spirit working in redemption makes possible the purpose for which he breathed life to us in our mother's wombs.

e) The gifts of the Spirit

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

The Spirit uses spiritual gifts to build the church and society. Unfortunately, controversy about a few gifts easily distracts from the important matter of the faithful reception and use of the wide range of gifts mentioned in the Bible. A few general principles may help.

All believers receive spiritual gifts,

which are particular abilities which we all should use for building up the body of Christ. Each spiritual gift is truly an undeserved gift of God's grace to be received with thanks, but each gift also becomes an area of responsibility.

The use of spiritual gifts is similar to producing the fruit of the Spirit: it requires that we actively strive with all our abilities while we simultaneously look to the Holy Spirit to work through us. We should not make a stark contrast between spiritual gifts and natural abilities, for the Spirit who breathed life into us also breathed new life into us; the same Spirit who created us with natural abilities also gives us spiritual gifts.

f) The Spirit and the Word

'You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The image of being 'carried along' was familiar to Peter the fisherman; it was how he saw the sails of his boat filled with the wind. Peter knew how the Scriptures frequently describe the Holy Spirit as the 'wind' or 'breath' of God.

This image implies that men were filled by the wind of the Spirit to write the Bible. They were not turned into mere scribes or word processors, nor were they in some way working on their own, so that their writings were merely their own prophetic interpretation of the will of God. The Holy Spirit filled their sails, meaning their minds and hearts, so that they really were the human writers while the content really was what the Spirit of God desired. If

we are interested in the Spirit, we will be interested in the Word.

It is my speculation that even believers may resist fully acknowledging the Holy Spirit because we might not like to admit to ourselves that we need the Spirit's work in us, mediating the work of the Father and the Son to our consciousness. Sin makes us prefer an imagined independence.

III Towards a Trinitarian Life

Responding to each of the Persons of God requires thoughtfulness from us, and this is completely understandable and appropriate. Jesus taught us to love God with our minds, as well as with our heart, soul, and strength. Paul taught us to be renewed by the transforming of our minds.

This thoughtful response will be multifaceted. An important part will be trust: trust in the Father's providential care; trust in the Son's forgiving, justifying work; and trust in the Spirit's comfort and witness to the truth of the Word. Another part will be obedience: serving the Father in the realm of work and culture; imitating the Son in discipleship; and obeying the Spirit's call to use our gifts to build the church by extending the gospel.

Furthermore, a certain part of responding to all three Persons of God is simply a worshipful understanding, impossible without a fully Trinitarian worldview.

We need to ask some questions to develop this thoughtfulness:

1 Is There an Undeveloped Article in Our Creed?

Most readers will affirm the Apostles'

Creed, yet one of the articles of our own creed may be undeveloped. The Christian church is made up of many traditions, each with its strengths and weaknesses. Each Christian family (and even each individual) has its own distinct character or personality which may lead it to neglect a theme of Christian belief.

Some weaknesses result from neglecting a divine Person. A step toward completeness is to assess one's particular faith and part of the Christian tradition; a good way to do this is to ask if an article of the creed is lacking or not well understood. The doctrine of the Trinity is a diagnostic tool.

2 Is There a Disconnected Article in our Creed?

Other distortions result when one of the articles of the creed is disconnected from the other articles. In my youth I disconnected the Spirit's work from the Father and the Son. I saw the Holy Spirit as the source of power and excitement, but my expectations were arbitrary, since I did not know the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son to mediate their work to us.

Sometimes we disconnect the work of the Son from the work of the Father and the Spirit, rendering the faith limited in application. In this slightly distorted mode, believers gladly sing, 'Jesus loves me, this I know', but they do not have much more to say. This is a valuable starting point for faith, but the full counsel of God is reduced.

Faith in the Son must be completed by loving the Father and the Spirit. Then the believer recognizes that Jesus calls us to serve and glorify the Father by working in his creation, using

all the power and conviction provided by the Spirit. Then we move toward a complete faith.

Some believers are serious about serving God in creation. They are enthusiastic about God's call to glorify him by working for him in society, business, government, family, and education. They talk about the cultural mandate; they love to pursue natural science for the glory of God; and they overflow with gratitude for God's common grace.

Yet they may say little about the joy of justification, there is no enthusiasm for missions, or they let other people talk about the gifts of the Spirit. One wonders if they fully know the Son and the Spirit; deep faith in the Father needs to be completed by a developed response to the Son and the Spirit.

An important step toward maturity begins when we act as if we believe in all three Persons. We should ask if one article of our creed is undeveloped or if we and our churches tend to over-emphasize one article of the creed in a way that is largely disconnected from the other two Persons. This process can lead toward completeness and reality in our faith.

3 Practical Steps

Readers should want some specific steps toward a more complete Trinitarian faith. This issue of our journal with its special focus on the topic may be a good step! The next obvious step was already suggested, to use the doctrine of the Trinity as a diagnostic tool to evaluate ourselves and our part of the body of Christ, as Paul did in Acts 19, remembering always that believers are justified before God by faith and must

be treated as God's beloved children.

Other steps can include making use of the classical creeds in public worship, trying to give worshippers enough information so they can participate in a well-informed manner. We can use the Apostles' Creed and/or the Nicene Creed in our personal meditation. This will lead us to worship the whole Trinity as we consider the work of each Person.

Finally, we should begin to pray to all three Persons of the Trinity. We may be inclined to pray to the Father or to Jesus, but it is also proper to pray to the Holy Spirit. I have used the doctrine of the Trinity as an outline for theology courses to help students to connect their various convictions and experiences into a coherent whole.

4 The unity and complexity of faith and life

A consciously Trinitarian approach to life and faith will not divide our lives into three. The three Persons are one God, the same in substance, while each Person has distinct functions. So also there should be different dimensions and aspects to our lives, responding to each Person of God, while there is

also tremendous unity to our lives, responding to the same God in all our thoughts, feelings, actions and relationships.

We may have a mistaken blueprint in our minds which guides our thoughts and actions; this blueprint from a religious or cultural movement may act like a control belief which filters out central parts of the biblical belief system. Our fallen minds gravitate in this direction. The Christian mind should accept God's revelation as our filter, so that all other knowledge is judged by and must pass through the filter of God's truth.

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to this process, as good dogma replaces mistaken control beliefs. However, we should notice that being Trinitarian is a dynamic process, never a completed step, as individuals and as the church. It means constantly learning to trust in the Three-in-One.

Let's try being consciously Trinitarian, for the glory of God as well as for our own joy and satisfaction. I think this will also make our faith and life balanced and authentic, therefore more attractive to our children and our neighbours who need the Lord.