

## The Trinity

In a number of recent General Conference addresses there have been references to the Nicene Creed and the doctrine of the Trinity<sup>1</sup>. Of course I have always been aware that our belief in the Godhead sets us apart from all other Christian churches, and I know that this is one of the main reasons why some consider us not to be Christian. But after the last Conference a new question occurred to me - why does the doctrine of the Trinity exist at all?

We know that there are aspects of God that we do not comprehend, but why formulate a description of God which defies logic and understanding? There had to be a compelling reason, as people do not create beliefs capriciously, even if they are not clear to others. So I decided to study this question more in depth.

My first idea was to turn to the New Testament, since it seems that the basis of most Christian beliefs should be found there. I kept a spreadsheet on which passages in the New Testament supported the Trinity, and which ones clearly taught against it. I have read the New Testament a number of times before, but never with the thought of looking for the compelling reason for believing in the Trinity.

I read all of the gospels in one day in this effort. The first thing that struck me is the towering picture of Christ which arises from reading all of the gospels together in rapid succession. A testimony of him and his mission was strongly renewed through that experience, and I was grateful for it. However, the compelling case for believing in the Trinity was not evident. As it turned out, the count of scriptures on my spreadsheet was irrelevant<sup>2</sup>. I never did finish the exercise for the whole New Testament, although I made it as far as Philippians. There are a number of verses which, having the concept of the Trinity in mind, might be viewed as supportive of it. However, there was nothing that said "This is the defining belief of Christianity." In fact, those verses which most strongly suggest the Trinity (John 1:1, John 10:30) if read in context most strongly teach the true doctrine of the Godhead. I concluded that I was incapable of finding the root of the Trinity in the New Testament.

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1 Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Things of Which I Know", April 2006; Gary J. Coleman, "Mom, Are We Christians?", April 2006; Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Only True God and Jesus Christ Whom He Hath Sent", October 2006, Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Stone Cut Out of the Mountain", October 2006

2 Alright if you must know, 30 for the Trinity, 96 for the Godhead.

I next turned to a search of the Internet. There are a number of web sites dedicated to the doctrine of the Trinity, but reading them was reminiscent of my search in the New Testament. The scriptures they cited were not the strong examples I expected. In fact, all the web sites seemed to be based on the presupposition of the Trinity, then discussing things which might support that belief. I can understand why one would wish to support a belief already held. But where was the origin of that belief?

Finally, a thought that had occurred to me early on returned to the front of my mind, and I have decided that it is, in fact, the origin of the belief in the Trinity. The source is not in the New Testament, but in the Old<sup>3</sup>:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

And it is as simple as that. The early Christians were concerned with the doctrine of Christ being interpreted as polytheism, and so they needed some way to explain the revelation of Christ as the Son of God without violating the Old Testament declarations of the One God.

One of the keys to this confusion is the lack of understanding that Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Passages such as Matthew 12:8 and John 8:58 emphasize this truth. The revelation that Christ brought was not his own existence, but the existence of the Father. However, if you understand the Father to be the Jehovah of the Old Testament then the difficulty becomes apparent, and some doctrine such as the Trinity becomes necessary.

I think that the clearest understanding of the true nature of the Godhead along with the repeated declarations of the One God of the Old Testament is reached by considering the context of the Old Testament. Israel dwelt among nations that had perverted<sup>4</sup> the concept of God into local and national deities. Israel was not to follow after them, nor was Israel to think that they had another national deity. They were worshipers of the only true God, and so were held to a different standard than those who knew not God.

But the true nature of God was not clearly revealed to the people. Moses knew God, and attempted to reveal him, but the hosts of Israel were not ready for the full knowledge, hence the veil over Moses'

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3 Deuteronomy 6:4

4 1 Nephi 17:35

face. Christ came to complete that revelation, but by and large the people were no more ready in his day than they had been in the day of Moses. So the enemy of righteousness has capitalized on that lack by forming a false doctrine (the Trinity) to keep people from the truth.

Why is it so important to know the true nature of God? Christ himself declared:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.<sup>5</sup>

Our mission here on earth is to learn to be like God. We are his children, and his plan is for us to progress to where he is. Without a true understanding of his nature such progress becomes essentially impossible.

I believe that the final word on the nature of God must be the words of Christ. He had no problem proclaiming both himself and his father, consequently neither should we. I know that Christ lived as an embodied being. He taught the word of God, not as a wise teacher, but as God himself. He took our sins upon him, gave his life for us, and was resurrected on the third day. Christ is not a fable, a great man, nor any of the other false descriptions which have been given. He is the Son of God, our Savior and Redeemer, and the only way back to God.

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<sup>5</sup> John 17:3