

Theology Proper

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity



Institutes of
Theology

SEMESTER 4

2026

Augustine of Hippo

“I will be attempting to say things that cannot altogether be said as they are thought by a man—or at least as they are thought by me. In any case, when we think about God the Trinity we are aware that our thoughts are quite inadequate to their object, and incapable of grasping [God] as he is.”



Augustine of Hippo

“...we cannot keep [silent] on a matter so central to faith.”



REVISED AND EXPANDED

THE HOLY TRINITY

IN SCRIPTURE,
HISTORY, THEOLOGY,
AND WORSHIP

ROBERT LETHAM

FOREWORD BY SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity

- A. The Bible records God using plural pronouns to refer to His Triune self.
- B. The Bible attributes the divine perfections to all three persons of the Trinity.
- C. The Bible attributes divine works to all three persons of the Trinity.
- D. The Bible explicitly states that all three persons of the Trinity are God.
- E. The Bible records God's own testimony of His Triunity.
- F. The Bible depicts the worship of all three persons of the Trinity.



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

- I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity
- II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity
 - A. Divine Simplicity—There is one God



Stephen Holmes

Attributes of God

“From Gregory of Nyssa ... to Francis Turretin ... there was an assumption on all sides that to believe in divine simplicity was to be an orthodox trinitarian, and to deny simplicity was to attack the doctrine of the Trinity.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

A. Divine Simplicity—There is one God

B. Divine Processions—There is one God who exists in three Persons (*opera ad intra*; internal works of God)

i. The Father: The Unbegotten One

ii. The Son: The Begotten One



Gregory of Nyssa

“The Father is God: The Son is God: and yet by the same proclamation God is One, because no difference either of nature or of expiration is contemplated in the Godhead.”



Wilhelmus Brakel

The Christian's Reasonable Service

“We must therefore remove any notion of human generation from our minds as we ascend to divine generation, [for we are] conveying spiritual matters by using vocabulary relating to aspects of human existence.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

A. Divine Simplicity—There is one God

B. Divine Processions—There is one God who exists in three Persons (*opera ad intra*; internal works of God)

i. The Father: The Unbegotten One

ii. The Son: The Begotten One

iii. The Holy Spirit: The Spirated One



John MacArthur

Biblical Doctrine

“The Bible gives no clear and complete explanation of what those expressions mean.”



Athanasian Creed (4th Century)

“The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.”



Glenn Butner Jr.
Trinitarian Dogmatics

“The Father, Son, and Spirit share the same simple primary substance without any hierarchy of divinity, and neither eternal generation nor eternal spiration in any way divides this essence or allows a merely partial transmission of God’s nature through a procession.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

A. Divine Simplicity—There is one God

B. Divine Processions—There is one God who exists in three Persons (*opera ad intra*; internal works of God)

C. Divine Missions—There is one God who exists in three Persons who savingly acts in creation (*opera ad extra*; the external works of God)



Glenn Butner Jr., *Trinitarian Dogmatics*

“A voluntary extension of the divine processions into creation [space and time] ... Divine missions involve divine hypostases [persons] already in existence becoming manifest and active in creation in new ways ... In the divine missions the fullness of the infinite, eternal, immutable, and simple God is manifest in the persons of the Son and Spirit within the finite, temporal, mutable, and composite created world.”



Matthew Emerson

Beholding the Triune God

“The divine missions are revelations and extensions of the divine processions, the manifestation of divine persons in creation.”



John MacArthur

Biblical Doctrine

“The external works of the Trinity in the economy of redemption therefore reflect the order established by the internal works of eternal generation and procession within the divine life. The Father sends the Son in the economy of redemption because he begets the Son eternally. The Spirit is sent by the Father and Son *ad extra* because he eternally proceeds from them *ad intra*.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

- A. Divine Simplicity—There is one God
- B. Divine Processions—There is one God who exists in three Persons (*opera ad intra*; internal works of God)
- C. Divine Missions—There is one God who exists in three Persons who savingly acts in creation (*opera ad extra*; the external works of God)
- D. Inseparable Operations—There is one God who exists in three Persons whose acts are undivided



Matthew Barrett

Simply Trinity

“Since the persons of the Trinity are indivisible in essence, they are also indivisible in their external operations [God working in creation and providence]. Having the one, simple will in common, they perform a singular act in any external operation.”



Vern Poythress

The Mystery of the Trinity

“All three persons [of the Trinity] are involved in all three phases of divine action [planning, accomplishment, application] because they indwell one another.”



Matthew Barrett

Simply Trinity

“When we say God acts as one, we assume he is one. Since his very nature or essence is one, he acts as one, not merely cooperating but performing a single act that accords with the triune God’s single will. Yes, there are three persons, but since it is the same divine essence subsisting in each, these three persons always perform the same act.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

- D. Inseparable Operations—There is one God who exists in three Persons whose acts are undivided
 - i. Creation



Matthew Barrett

Simply Trinity

“There is one will in the Trinity, and yet, when we travel through the land of the economy with divine appropriations as our guide, there is a ‘threefold execution’ of that one will that matches each person’s eternal relation of origin.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

- D. Inseparable Operations—There is one God who exists in three persons whose acts are undivided
 - i. Creation
 - ii. Salvation
 - iii. Christ's Resurrection



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity

- D. Inseparable Operations—There is one God who exists in three Persons whose acts are undivided
- E. Perichoresis—There is one God who exists in three Persons who mutually indwell each other



Gregory of Nyssa

[Perichoresis] is the “revolving circle of the glory moving around [*periphero*] from like to like [person].”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

- I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity
- II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity
- III. The Historical Vocabulary of the Trinity



Thomas Oden

“This Scriptures conspicuously affirm the deity and unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit so thoroughly that we must conclude that the Nicene exegetes were right to develop the triune teaching in the way they did in their historical context.”



Vern Poythress

The Mystery of the Trinity

1. Technical terms help summarize a larger body of doctrine or knowledge.
2. Technical terms connect us with church history and theological thinking.
3. Technical terms help us understand sound doctrine and refute that which contradicts.



Vern Poythress

The Mystery of the Trinity

“Many of the technical terms in technology have been crafted in the process of resisting and refuting heresies.”

“Technical terms are there to summarize what is already there in the Bible.”

“The doctrine of the Trinity comes from a synthesis of a larger number of verses and even whole paragraphs and books of the Bible. When we consider all the verse together, we see that, together, they tell us that God is one God in three persons.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

- I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity
- II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity
- III. The Historical Vocabulary of the Trinity
 - A. The Progressive Growth of Trinitarian Language
 - i. Trinity (*trinitas*)



Tertullian, 2nd Century

“All are of one, by unity...of **substance**; while the mystery of the economy is still guarded, which distributes the unity into a **Trinity**, placing in their order the three **persons**—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, put in appearance. Yet they are of one substance and of one condition and of one power, inasmuch as he is one God.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

- I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity
- II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity
- III. The Historical Vocabulary of the Trinity
 - A. The Progressive Growth of Trinitarian Language
 - i. Trinity (*trinitas*)
 - ii. Substance (*substantia*)
 - iii. Person (*persona*)



Council of Nicaea in 325 AD

“We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the **substance** of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of **one substance** with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth.”

Substance (Greek; *ousia*) – consubstantial
(*Ousia trans. Latin – esse / essentia*) – essence



Cappadocian Fathers, 4th Century

- Basil the Great (330–379)
- Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395)
- Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389)



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

- I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity
- II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity
- III. The Historical Vocabulary of the Trinity
 - A. The Progressive Growth of Trinitarian Language
 - B. The Consistent Articulation of Trinitarian Concepts



Ignatius of Antioch

“... in faith and love; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit.”



Polycarp's Prayer

"I glorify thee, through eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Servant, through whom be glory to thee with him and the Holy Spirit both now and unto the ages."



Tertullian

“Thus, the connection of the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Paraclete [HS], produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct one from another.”



John Calvin

“The essence of the one God is simple and undivided, and that it belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

- I. A Biblical Case for the Trinity
- II. The Key Concepts of the Trinity
- III. The Historical Vocabulary of the Trinity
- IV. The Necessary Appropriation of the Trinity



Gregory of Nazianzus

“No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One.”



THEOLOGY PROPER

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity

IV. The Necessary Appropriation of the Trinity

- A. Your understanding of the Trinity must inform and drive your worship.
- B. Your understanding of the Trinity must shape your view of salvation and sanctification.
- C. Your understanding of the Trinity must fuel your desire to be holy—for He is holy.





SIMPLY TRINITY

THE **UNMANIPULATED**
FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT

MATTHEW BARRETT

Foreword by Scott R. Swain



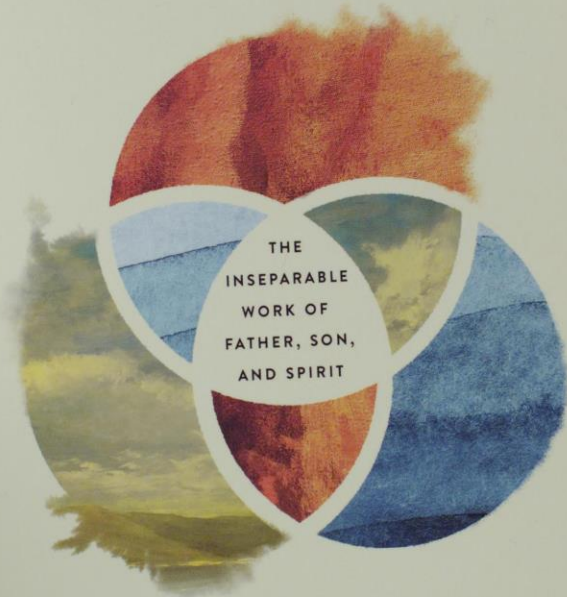
MATTHEW BARRETT,
RONNI KURTZ,
SAMUEL G. PARKISON
and JOSEPH LANIER

PROCLAIMING
the
**TRIUNE
GOD**

*The Doctrine of the Trinity
in the Life of the Church*



BEHOLDING *the*
TRIUNE GOD



MATTHEW Y. EMERSON
and BRANDON D. SMITH



The
MYSTERY
of the
TRINITY

*A Trinitarian Approach
to the Attributes of God*

VERN S. POYTHRESS



REVISED AND EXPANDED

THE HOLY TRINITY

IN SCRIPTURE,
HISTORY, THEOLOGY,
AND WORSHIP

ROBERT LETHAM

FOREWORD BY SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON



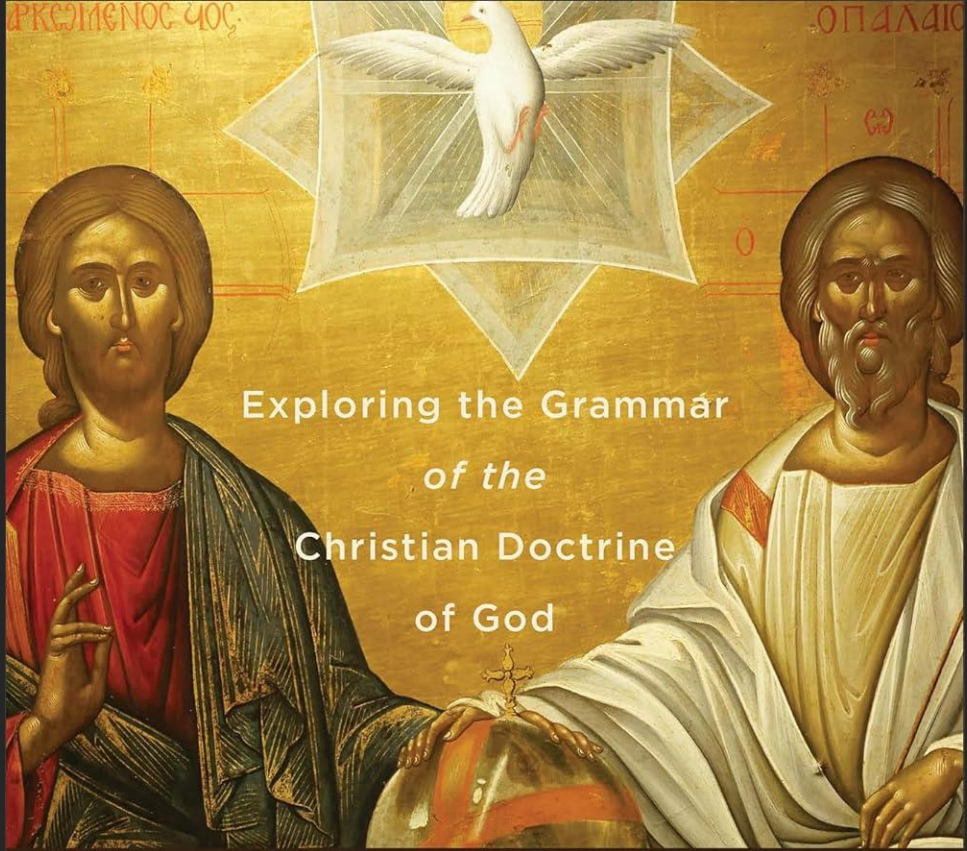
ON CLASSICAL
TRINITARIANISM



RETRIEVING THE NICENE
DOCTRINE OF THE TRIUNE GOD

FOREWORD BY J. TODD BILLINGS
MATTHEW BARRETT, ED.





Exploring the Grammar
of the
Christian Doctrine
of God

TRINITARIAN DOGMATICS



D. Glenn Butner Jr.



Theology Proper

Exploring the Depths of the Trinity



Institutes of
Theology

SEMESTER 4

2026