

**THE TRINITY:
A MODEL FOR PARTNERSHIP IN CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

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INTRODCUTION

It is fitting for the April 1, 2010 of the online journal www.GlobalMissiology.org, on “Partnership and Christian Missions” to provide in the “Trinitarian Study” section this paper on the Trinity.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Holy Trinity in terms of being a model for work and relationships in Christian missions today. The paper will begin with an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. From there, it will proceed to examine three aspects of the Trinity: the distinct roles of the Three-in-One, how the persons of the Godhead relate to one another, and examples of the One-in-Three working on behalf of mankind. A section on how to apply these truths in the context of Christian missions will be presented. The paper will end with a final conclusion.

SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

God is one! This is the clear cry of the Old Testament. It is found in the *Shema*, the prayer recited each morning by Jews and taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-6: “Hear, O

Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.” This was the cry for hundreds of years, and the Lord Jesus reiterated it while being challenged by a teacher of the Law. “What is the greatest commandment?” he was asked. He responded “The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’” (Mark 12:29) This has been the creed of Jews and Christianity since the beginning. Over time, God, in his sovereignty, has chosen to reveal to his creation the depth, beauty and mystery of this Oneness.

We start with the Oneness of God. The complexity of this Oneness is revealed in three basic, yet eternally profound words: God is love. Every evangelical believer knows this. Sometimes the familiar loses its depth and wonder. This simple phrase, which too often is solely interpreted in light of man’s relationship with God, is so much more. “God is love” reveals who God is. God never changes. God has always been “love”. God is love before the creation of man, before the creation of the world. Therein lies the key. How can there be “love” unless there is community? God from eternity past is love. Love exists within the Godhead. It is the One-in-Three and Three-in-One, which dwells in community, that “is love.” It is this foundational truth, which the Godhead itself has chosen to reveal to mankind, that highlights the importance of relationship.

The Catholic theologian Leonardo Boff reflects, “In the beginning is not the solitude of a One, of an eternal Being, alone and infinite. Rather, in the beginning is the communion of the three Unique Ones. Community is the deepest and most foundational reality that exists.”¹

¹ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2000), 4.

To delve into the depths of the Trinity, one quickly discovers that at the core of the Godhead is relationship. The reality of this relationship permeates all that is revealed in the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. To summarize, Darrell Johnson shares, “What does it all mean? It means that in the deepest mystery of his being God is an intimate relationship, a fellowship, a community of love.”²

The One-in-Three is displayed clearly in four triadic passages. The first is seen in the words of Jesus as he addresses the disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” To highlight the concept of the One-in-Three, “the name” is singular. It is “the name” of the three Persons.

The second is found in the words of Paul, as he gives the benediction to the Saints in Corinth, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Cor. 13:14) Thirdly, again in Paul’s writings, we read of his words to the church in Thessalonica, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess. 2:13-14) Finally, the writer to the Hebrews states, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb. 9:14)

² Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing The Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 51.

It is not the purpose of this paper to outline the proofs for the deity of the distinct Persons of the Godhead or the proof of the Oneness of the Three. Rather, it is to accept this as revealed truth and move on to explore the relationship between the persons of the Godhead, the distinct roles revealed for each, and the way the Holy Trinity works as one.

Orthodox evangelical belief states that each member of the Godhead is in essence identical and each person is distinct. Bruce Ware expounds:

It affirms that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each possesses the divine nature *equally*, so as to avoid Arianism; *eternally*, so as to avoid thinking of God's nature as created; *simultaneously*, so as to avoid modalism; and *fully*, so as to avoid any tri-partite understanding of the Trinity (e.g., like a pie divided into three equal pieces). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not each one-third God, but each is fully God, equally God, and this is true eternally and simultaneously.³

In addition to the introduction above, Robert Letham, in his book *The Holy Trinity*, lists five vital parameters concerning the discussion of the Trinity that are helpful for this study:

1. One being - three persons; three persons - one being.
2. The three persons are *homoousios*.
3. The three persons mutually indwell one another in a dynamic communion.
4. The three persons are irreducibly different from one another.
5. There is an order (*taxis*) among the persons.

Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology*, lists six:

1. There is in the divine Being but one indivisible essence (*ousia, essentia*).
2. In this one divine Being, there are three persons or individual subsistences:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

³ Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit Relationships, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), 41.

3. The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
4. The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.
5. There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.
6. The church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.

The above descriptions of the Triune God are represented well in Darrell Johnson's diagram.⁴

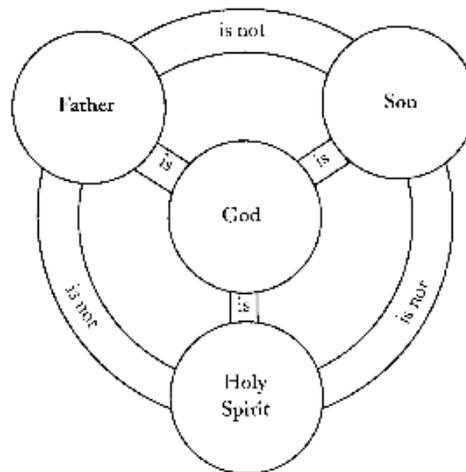


Diagram 1: The Triune God

The understanding and development of the doctrine of the Trinity took hundreds of years. As the church grew and various men began to promote their view of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, great debates and councils were held. Creeds were created to address the errant views that contradicted the Biblical revelation. “Modalism” was

⁴ Johnson, 46.

founded by Sabellius in the third century, AD. In trying to understand the relationship between the persons of the Godhead, this view held that the Father was God, the Son was God, and the Spirit was God. However, this happened successively. The one God took on different “modes” to reveal himself. God is not simultaneously Father, Son, and Spirit.

A second renowned person was a priest from Alexandria Egypt. Arius lived in the early fourth century. Arius wanted to preserve the idea that there is One God and only One God. In his zeal, he claimed that Christ, while to be honored, was merely the first and greatest creation of the One God. This belief became known as “Arianism.” He gained many followers, and eventually there was a church council held in Nicea (325 AD) where this very issue was addressed. Athanasius, Arius’ former Bishop, led the charge proclaiming that Christ was indeed God the Son and of the same nature (*homoousios*) as the Father. As a result of this council, Arius was condemned and exiled, and a creed was produced called the creed of Nicea.⁵ The result of the council was the clear statement of the deity of the Lord Jesus. To firmly establish the deity of the Holy Spirit, another council was held in Constantinople in the year 381 AD.

Here, the heroes were the Cappadocian Fathers, whose names were Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. These three courageous theologians defended the Spirit’s deity, and in the end, the council of Constantinople expanded the Nicene creed to affirm that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-Giver, proceeds from the Father and is to be worshiped with the Father and the Son.⁶

Historically, another major concern for the church on the issue of the Persons of the Trinity was the “*Filioque* clause”. This clause stated that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The dispute over this clause was one of the major reasons for the split

⁵ See Appendix 1

⁶ Ware, 39.

between the Eastern and the Western church. Letham traces the adoption of the clause in the West:

However, in Spain, due to the threat of a continued Arianism, in localized liturgies an addition crept in-a *patre filioque*- " from the Father and the Son." This addition of *filioque* spread and was adopted by local councils, particularly the Council of Toledo (589), and was accepted by the French church in the late eighth century, but was not inserted into the Creed by Rome until 1014 under Pope Benedict VIII. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 mentioned it, and the Council of Lyons in 1274 proclaimed it as dogma.⁷

In summary, God is one. God is love. The Three-in One dwells in complete harmony, distinct in persons and one in essence. There is order in the Triune Godhead and distinct personal attributes. This knowledge of the One-in-Three has been revealed to man through the Holy Scriptures by the Godhead itself and has been affirmed by the church over the centuries. Having very briefly overviewed the doctrine of the Trinity, we now move on to take a look at the distinct roles of the Three Persons of the Godhead.

THE DISTINCT ROLES WITHIN THE TRINITY

God is both One-in-Three and Three-in-One. In this section, the "Three" will be examined. The Triune God has chosen to reveal glimmers of truth in Scripture that emphasize the working and Persons of the Trinity. Bruce Ware states, "The three Persons of the Godhead exhibit distinct roles in relation to one another. Distinct tasks and activities in accomplishing their common plan characterize nearly all of the work that the true and living God undertakes."⁸

⁷ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2004), 202.

⁸ Ware, 20.

The most prominent revelation of roles revealed in Scripture is in the Father-Son role of the first two Persons of the Trinity. It is God Almighty who desires to reveal Himself with the name “Father”. It is His idea and plan. The name “Father” is used hundreds of times throughout the Bible. In the Gospel of John, chapters 14-16, “Father” appears forty-four times! In relation to God the Father, Holy Scripture also reveals Jesus as “God the Son”. He is referred to as “Son” over 40 times in the Gospel of John alone. Jesus is called the “only begotten son” or “the one and only son.” (Jn 3:16, 18: 1:14,18) Jesus is called the “Son of God”. (Jn 1:49; 3:18;11:27; 19:7; 20:31) Most revealing is that Jesus calls Himself the Son of God in John 5:25; 10:36; and 11: 4. He claims “...what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?” (John 10:36) Throughout the New Testament the Father-Son description is used. This distinction is also demonstrated in heaven after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Revelation 2:18 reads, “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” In another passage, the Son of God is described as the Lamb in connection with God the Father; the Father is seated on his throne and the Lamb on his right side. (Rev 5:6,13)

The Scriptures clearly show a distinction between the Father and the Son. In the following paragraphs, the Father, then the Son, and then the Holy Spirit will be looked at in closer detail to highlight the roles that specifically apply to them in the Godhead.

GOD THE FATHER

The designation “Father” reveals his role within the Trinity. In speaking of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Gospel of John, Köstenberger and

Swain states, “The Father enjoys personal priority in the *taxis* (order) of the triune life, not ontological superiority, for the Father and the Son hold all things in common: one divine name (17: 11), one divine power (5:19, 21-22), one divine identity (10:30).”⁹ The Father is the one who is revealed as being seated on the throne in heaven. (Ps. 93:2; 103:19; Isa. 66:1; Matt. 23:22; Rev. 5) He is the one who is supreme among the Persons of the Godhead. (Ps. 2:2; 1 Cor. 15:28) The Father is the grand architect, who oversees the fulfilling of his purposes. “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” (Eph. 1:9-10)

Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father. He is the originator and giver. (James 1:17) In this role as giver of gifts, the Father is shown as the one who gave the ultimate gift. He gave his only son for the World. (John 3:16) This is also brought to light in Romans 8:31-32, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

It is Christ who opens up the way for a reconciled relationship with the Father. (2 Cor. 5:18-19) It is Christ who told mankind to call God “Father”. (Matt. 6:9) It is to the Father that we pray and bring our requests. Finally, it is the Father who will wipe away every tear, and believers will dwell with Him. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe

⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 123.

every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21:3-4)

GOD THE SON

Jesus Christ is revealed as the Eternal Word. The prologue to the Gospel of John sets the scene for the entire Gospel, where the Father-Son picture is so prominent. In the first few verses of John, the Word is revealed as being God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” (John 1:1-2) In commenting on this verse, Köstenberger and Swain say, “According to John, the Word, while distinct from God, is at the same time intrinsic to his own identity: it existed with God ‘in the beginning.’”¹⁰

The Father has sent the Son, and the Son has a very distinct role on the earth. It is Jesus who emptied himself and became a part of the human race. This incarnation is proclaimed by Paul in his letter to the Philippians, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6-8)

Jesus became the Lamb. John the Baptist shouted, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) He remains the Lamb in heaven, where he receives praise for this role. “In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’” (Rev. 5:12)

¹⁰ Köstenberger and Swain, 43.

Jesus was the one who became human in order to destroy the work of the Devil. “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil. (Heb. 2:14) Also, it says in 1 John 3:8, “... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

Jesus’ role was to do the will of the Father and to do the Father’s works. Over and over, Jesus made it clear that he came in obedience to the Father and to do the Father’s will. (John 5:30, 36: 6:38-40; 8:16-18, 26, 49) Jesus explained his submission to the Father. His obedience was central to his role and to his relationship with his Father. Paul tells the Corinthians that the head of Christ is God in 1 Corinthians 11:3. The level of submission is seen in John 8:28-29, where Christ says that he “does nothing on his own” and that “I always do what pleases him.” In John 14:31 Jesus says that the world must learn that he does exactly what the Father says. The ultimate act of obedience and submission to the Father was his acquiescence to being beaten, scourged, and nailed to a cross.

“Submission” in today’s world is almost a four-letter word. Within the Godhead, it is cherished. In today’s world, “submission” reeks of hierarchy; it says that one part is better and higher than the other. This is NOT the case in the Godhead. Ware explains,

There is an ordering in the Godhead, a "built-in" structure of authority and submission that marks a significant respect in which the Persons of the Godhead are distinguished from one another. Surely, they are not distinct in essence, for each shares fully the identically same divine nature. Their distinction, rather, is constituted, in part, by taxis—the ordering of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Godhead. The order is not random or arbitrary; it is not Spirit first, Son second, and Father third, nor is it any way other than the one way that the early

church, reflecting Scripture itself (Matt. 28:19), insisted on: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹¹

Christ's obedience to the Father was in line with another purpose. It was to reveal the Father to the people of the world. To see Jesus and to know Jesus was to know the Father. (John 17:26) Philip wanted to know the father. He asked Jesus to show him the Father. "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?"'" (John 14:8-9)

Another role of Christ is to build the church. We see that the Father "placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Eph. 1:22-23) Jesus himself makes the claim in Mark 16:18, where he tells Peter that "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

GOD THE SPIRIT

The Third person of the Trinity, God the Spirit, has several different names revealed just within the Gospel of John. He is called the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26), the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 20:22), and the *Paraclete* (helping presence) or counselor (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). In examining the role of the Holy Spirit, Ware writes, "Not only does the Spirit reveal and inspire the *word of Christ*, and empower the proclamation of the *gospel of Christ*, and regenerate sinners to behold the *beauty of Christ*, and lead us to place our hope and *faith in Christ*, the Spirit also works mightily in

¹¹ Ware, 72.

us to conform us more and more into the *likeness of Christ*.”¹² This statement succinctly summarizes some of the major roles of the Holy Spirit. We see that the Holy Spirit is the One who inspires the authors of the Scriptures. “Above all, 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 role of the Holy Spirit is described in the work of men’s hearts in several different ways. It is the Spirit who “will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” (John 16:8) The Spirit is the one who speaks, teaches, and leads believers. (Acts 13:2, Acts 10:19-20) “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

It is the Spirit who fills and seals believers in Christ, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:30)

It is the Holy Spirit that empowers God’s people to do the work of evangelism, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

It is the Holy Spirit that imparts spiritual gifts to the Body of Christ. This role is one of the most profoundly apparent in the life of the people of God today.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the

¹² Ware, 122.

interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1Cor. 12:7-11)

The Role of the Holy Spirit was central to the life of Christ on Earth. The Spirit overcame Mary while she was yet a virgin. (Luke 1:35) The Holy Spirit filled Jesus in the Jordan at baptism and then led him into the wilderness. (Luke 4:1) The Spirit was on Jesus as he went about his public ministry. (Luke 4:18-19)

There is one last aspect of the role of the Holy Trinity to be considered here. It is the fact that the Holy Spirit never takes the spotlight. The Holy Spirit is always pointing to the Father and the Son, always giving glory and honor to the Father and the Son, and never to himself. The Spirit makes known the Son and the Father and is the “background” power for much of what the Godhead does.

In summary, the Father’s role is seen to be as the grand architect. He holds primary position in the taxis of the Trinity. He is revealed as seated on the throne in heaven and the one who is in control of history, sending the Son and the Spirit. He is the giver of every good gift from above and will be the one in heaven to wipe away every tear at the consummation. The role of the Son brings to light the plan of God in the power of the Spirit. Jesus is revealed as the living Word. He is God incarnate. He came to be the sacrificial lamb and die on the cross to redeem men to God. He lived in complete obedience and submission to the Father. He destroyed the works of the Devil, and He is the one presently building His church. The Role of the Spirit is seen to be an empowering one. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus on Earth, his disciples after him, and the church today. The Spirit inspired the authors of the Scriptures and imparts spiritual gifts to individuals. He continues to teach and guide believers and to convict the world of sin.

The Holy Spirit always points to and gives glory to the Father and the Son. Having explored the roles of the Three Persons, the next section takes a look at how the Persons are revealed in their relationships.

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY

The Eternal Godhead, One-in-Three and Three-in-One, for eternity past has been in relationship in holy communion. The love between the Persons of the Trinity is expressed in many ways throughout Scripture. Ware writes:

God's tri-Personal reality is intrinsic to his existence as the one God who alone is God. He is a socially related being within himself. In this tri-Personal relationship the three Persons love one another, support one another, assist one another, team with one another, honor one another, communicate with one another, and in everything respect and enjoy one another.¹³

Particularly in the West, this focus on the relationship between the persons of the Godhead has not received much attention. Yet, it is this glimpse into the characteristics of the Living God that should instruct all of our relationships in how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we interact together in the Body of Christ.

In his systematic theology, Shedd lists at least twelve ways in which the Holy Trinity is described as relating together:¹⁴

1. One person loves another (John 3:35)
2. Persons dwell in one another (John 14:10, 11)
3. One person suffers for another (Zach. 13:7)
4. One person knows another (Matt. 11:27)

¹³ Ware, 21.

¹⁴ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2nd Ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, reprinted 1980), 279.

5. Persons address one another (Heb. 1:8)
6. One person is the way to another (John 14:6)
7. One person speaks of another (Luke 3:22)
8. One person glorifies another (John 17:5)
9. The persons confer with one another (Gen. 1:26, 11:7)
10. The persons make plans with one another (Isa. 9:6)
11. One person sends another (Gen. 16:7, John 14:26)
12. One person rewards another (Phil. 2:5 – 11, Heb. 2:9)

In addition to the wonderful expressions of relationship listed above by Shedd, there are three others that carry weight in the Scriptures as relating to the Godhead. They are unity, joy, and peace.

UNITY

Probably the greatest passage on unity in the Scripture is found in Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17. The unity between the Father and the Son is total, and the desire to draw mankind into that unity is striking in its grace. Jesus begins in verse twenty: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." He continues in verse twenty-three: "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." This same unity is expressed in Ephesians 4:3 as being the unity of the Spirit. This characteristic of unity is not only central to the Godhead but it is vital for witness. Christ mentions twice that it is by the world seeing this unity that they will know

he comes from the Father. There is continual harmony and unity amongst the Three-in-One.

JOY

Joy is a hallmark of the Trinity and of the kingdom of the Trinity. Jesus was full of joy. (John 15:11; 17:13) Life in the Spirit is joy, as Rom 14:17 states, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Again, in John 15:13, we see the dual working of the Father and Spirit: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus, for the joy fixed before him, endured the cross. (Heb. 12:2) God rejoices over his people. (Zeph. 3:7). A characteristic of the Godhead is this gladness to be together in communion. Joy is found in being in relationship. It is found in the midst of abundant love. The Three Persons are found together expressing joy in Luke 10:21: “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” There is unrestrained pleasure and joy within the Godhead as they relate to one another and to their creation.

PEACE

God the Father is characterized by peace. (1 Cor. 14:33, Rom. 15:33) God the Son is characterized by Peace. (1 Cor. 1:3, Eph. 1:2, John 14:27, Col. 3:15) God the Spirit is characterized by peace. (Rom. 8:6, Gal. 5:22) Many letters of the New Testament begin with a greeting of peace to the readers. Peace is communicated in many benedictions, as

well. Paul tells the Thessalonians, “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.” (2Thess. 3:16) Peace is freedom from anxiety and inner turmoil. It is freedom from worry. It represents tranquility. The Godhead is characterized by peace. It is a reflection of the sovereignty and all-encompassing nature of the Three-in-One.

In Summary, Scripture discloses that the persons of the Trinity love one another, honor one another, give glory to one another, dwell in one another, confer with one another, and make plans with one another. Their relationship and essence is characterized by joy, unity and peace. Having looked at the relationship between the Three persons, we move on to examine scriptural examples of the One-in-Three working together, through their distinctives, on the behalf of mankind.

THE WORKING TOGETHER OF THE TRINITY

When the story of God in the Holy Bible is read through the glasses of the Trinity, the screen changes from black and white to color with surround sound. The interconnectedness of the Godhead is revealed in many events and divine acts on behalf of a lost world. From the very beginning, in Genesis, this divine partnership of the One-in-Three is involved in the creation story. “As St. Augustine put it, the world was made by the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Each Person stamps creation with something of its own specific property. That is why creation is so rich, because behind it and within it is hidden the wealth of each divine Person, as that Persons is, ever distinct and ever in communion.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Boff, 104.

As the Biblical story unfolds, major works of the Triune God, such as redemption and salvation, are seen to be works where the Persons of the Godhead are intricately involved together in achieving the end result. This is displayed in the salvation story, where the Father sends the Son. The Spirit fills and guides the Son. The Son embraces the cross and, through His death and resurrection, enables the reconciliation between God and man. Another example is seen in the creation of the Church. Christ is the head, appointed by the Father. The Holy Spirit imparts gifts to the Body of Christ for the work of mission for the Father. The distinct Persons of the Godhead work in their unique way to fulfill the purpose of the Triune God. This is revealed in the prayer of the Apostle Paul on behalf of the Ephesians:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:14-19)

Below is a chart that highlights different works of God and how Scripture describes the participation of the Persons in the Godhead.

Chart 1: Participation of the Persons in the Godhead

WORK	VERSE	PERSON
Creation	Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6b; Job 33:4	Spirit
	John 1:3; Col. 1:15f; Heb. 1:1-4	Jesus
	1 Cor. 8:6	Jesus & Father
	Gen. 1:1;	God
	Gen. 1:26	Trinity
Salvation	Ex. 15:2; Ps. 13:5; John 3:16-17; Acts 28:28	Father
	Heb. 9:14	Jesus & Spirit
	Acts 4:12; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:10	Jesus
Redemption	Isa. 43:1; 44:22; Luke 1:68	Father
	Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13; 4:5	Jesus
	Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30	Spirit
	1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7	Father & Jesus
Sanctification	Eph. 3:14-19	Trinity
	Rom. 15:16; 2 Thess. 2:13	Spirit
	1 Cor. 6:11	Jesus & Spirit
	John 17:19; 1 Cor. 1:2	Jesus
	1 Thess. 4:3	Father
Mission	Matt. 28:18f;	Trinity
	John 20:21	Father & Jesus
	Acts 1:8	Spirit
Indwelling	John 14:13;	Father & Son
	Rom. 8:9; John 3:6;	Spirit

In Summary, the above chart lists multiple works of God and the specific involvement of the Persons of the Trinity in each specific work. It is a beautifully intertwined tapestry of love and unity. As Ware states, “We have seen over and again that what one member of the Trinity does affects another. The interconnectedness and interdependence among the members of the Trinity is such that one is hard-pressed to think of any ‘work of God’ which does not involve various members of the Trinity working together.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Ware, 134.

PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP DERIVED FROM THE TRINITY

Today in the realm of missions, there is a growing desire and interest to work together. Some of the old barriers of denominationalism and inter-agency rivalry are being overcome. Even the secular business-world is professing the need for partnerships. They have discovered that personal relationships are important for cross-cultural success. However, within the vast majority of Christianity, there is a disconnect when it comes to what the Bible says about how Christ's body should function and how Christ's body actually functions in achieving God's purposes. Churches find it difficult to work with other churches. Mission agencies are ingrown, as if they were wearing blinders, and they approach mission as if they were the only ones working for God. They focus on their goals and their people, with little to no regard for other groups. There is an ingrained attitude of self-centeredness. There is no real sense of being a small, integrated part of a larger whole. This is in contrast to all that has been discovered above. Before true partnership and collaboration can take place there needs to be "heart transplant;" there needs to be a paradigm shift to a Trinitarian relational perspective that permeates every thought, plan, and action. The study of the Trinity reveals how the Persons of the Godhead interact and work together for the purpose of God. If this model is realized, honored, and embraced by the Universal Body of Christ, it will empower their ministries and their ability to work together for the Kingdom of God.

Seven main Trinity principles are key for partnership in missions. They represent a core shift in attitudes and beliefs. They embrace a biblical view of oneself and others. They are the starting point for ministry philosophy, strategic planning, and on-the-ground

action. These principles, in the context of the Universal Church and the *Missio Dei*, are love, diversity, unity, humility, interdependence, relationships, and peace and joy.

Love is central. It is the kind of love demonstrated by Christ on the cross. Love is not an option; it is the central piece of who God reveals himself to be. God is love! God's love is sacrificial. His kind of love is patient. His kind of love is kind. "It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Cor. 13:4-7) This kind of love is the standard to which *all* believers are called in dealing with one another.

Diversity is good. The Three-in-One and One-in-Three reveals that a difference in function does not indicate inferiority in nature. This is demonstrated in the distinctives of the Persons in the Trinity. The Body of Christ has different parts. The Holy Spirit gives gifts as he desires. Diversity is from God. In today's ministries, there does not have to be a hierarchy. Each distinct part is of value. One group or church or individual is not better or higher than another. All are equal in the kingdom of God. There is no such thing as competition. However, it is perfectly normal to have an order (*taxis*) in the way ministries are conducted and for someone to take the lead in a collaborative situation. There needs to be a celebration of diversity and the richness it represents, along with respect and honor towards the different parts of the body.

As there is a perfect unity in the Godhead, the Godhead desires that their unity should overflow into the body of Christ. As believers are adopted into the family of God, they are expected to function in the same way. There is perfect unity in the Godhead as to

their relationship and as to their purpose. The working of the Three Persons for the salvation of mankind has been demonstrated above. For the Church Universal on earth, there is one Faith and one Lord, one Master and King: the Lord Jesus. Every believer must recognize and accept his position as a member of the family of God and recognize that all those believers around him are, as well. They must treat other believers as Family and recognize their calling and gifts as from the same Lord. There is only one team, and all are on it. Christ alone is the Head. He calls for nothing less than complete unity in Him. This unity embraces the diversity. It is not about individual groups or churches stopping what they do or losing their uniqueness or identity and becoming like someone else; it is about bringing their unique gifts and calling to the table and adding it to the smorgasbord of God's feast for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom purposes.

The example of Jesus emptying himself to take the form of a servant is *the* model of humility. In addition, the Holy Spirit is seen to be taking a back seat when it comes to receiving glory. The role of the Holy Spirit is to give glory to the Father and to the Son. In the missions world today, this model must be reproduced: to minister in humility, to count other churches or agencies as better than your own, to be a servant, and to allow others to get the glory. Humility eliminates the spirit of competition and fosters the spirit of unity as we partner to fulfill God's purposes. Humility accepts one's role in God's purposes and rejoices in the victories and accomplishments of others.

The interdependence of the Godhead is shown in how the different Persons contribute to different aspects of the overall purpose of God. This was seen in the act of creation and in the salvation of mankind. Each individual Christian is seen as part of the Body of Christ. We (individuals, churches, denominations, mission agencies, etc.) need

to see ourselves as interdependent and interconnected parts of the One Body. It is not all about individual ministries but all about God, His plans, and His directions through His Holy Spirit. We are all part of the same puzzle, functioning as individual pieces as the sovereign God directs. Only God sees the entire picture. There must be a deep understanding and acknowledgement that we desperately need one another.

Relationship is core to the Trinity, and it must be core to God's people. It is not enough to just work together. It is not just about task. It is not just about results. It is about dwelling in unity, love, honor, and respect *as* the work is moving ahead. This is vital. There can be no separation in spirit between *what* is done (task) and *how* it is done (relationships). There is no division between the Persons of the Godhead and their actions; everything they do is in line with who they are. As the Body of Christ, we must do the same. There must be a focus and investment in relationships.

Peace and joy are the hallmarks of the Kingdom of God as displayed within the Godhead. We see that rejoicing in one another, taking joy in the strengths, beauty, and accomplishments of others, is a vital part of being in God's family. Joy is founded in our identity with the Triune God and the rest of the Body of Christ. Peace is founded in our submission to His Lordship and to one another in Christ.

CONCLUSION

The living God is not a solitary God. The living God is not an isolated God. From all eternity the living God has lived in relationship-indeed, has lived as relationship. At the center of the universe is relationship. From all eternity the living God has been community, family. From all eternity the living God has been infinitely pleased as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁷

God has revealed himself to us as Trinity. He has opened himself up to us, his creation. In doing that, he, with arms open wide as Eternal Father, is inviting us into his inner circle, into his loving community, into relationship with Himself and the Son and the Spirit. Within this inner circle of his family are all others whom He loves and who have come to Him. The result of this action is that God has called people to be “co-lovers” with the Trinity. There are three major ways that we are co-lovers along with the Three Persons of the Trinity. First, we love the Triune God. Second, we love the family of God. Last, we love the world. The Godhead has revealed to us how to relate to one another and how to join together with him in accomplishing his eternal purpose. Partnership in missions is founded and rooted in the Trinity. It is the practical outworking of the spiritual reality. It is the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus two thousand years ago: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:20-21)

¹⁷ Johnson, 61.

APPENDIX 1

THE CREED OF NICEA (325)

"We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, Very God from Very God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and in earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and is coming to judge the living and the dead; And in the Holy Spirit. And those who say: "There was a time when he was not", and: "Before he was begotten he was not", and: "He came into being from nothing", or those who pretend that the Son of God is "of another substance" [than the Father] or "created" or "alterable" or "mutable", the catholic and apostolic church places under a curse.

THE NICENE CREED (381)

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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