The Trinity

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Matthew 28:18-20 is the Great Commission, Sovereign Jesus giving a solemn declaration and an order: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. As you go, make disciples in all ethnic nations: baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; . . . "

Our Lord defines the Trinity here. According to Greek grammar the use of 'and' plus the definite article with items in a series makes clear that the items are distinct entities. So "the Father" is different from "the Son" is different from "the Holy Spirit". So we have three persons. But He also said, "into the name", singular, not 'names'. So we have only one name. God is one 'name' or essence subsisting in three persons.

This baptism is to be administered into the name of the Trinity, which represents a new revelation about the nature of God. It also represents a new 'religion', being different from what was known up to that time. In the OT there are veiled references and looking back we can associate them with the Trinity, but here we have the first clear statement of it. (It is also a far better statement than the one in 1 John 5:7, TR.)

It is a mystery, but if we are to take the whole Bible seriously, we are obliged to believe in the Trinity, the Triune God. That is why since the 3rd century the Trinity has been the orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church. The concept of three in one is difficult for us to understand, and a variety of illustrations, or analogies, have been attempted. The best one that I have seen comes from language. Consider the sentence, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". I can describe the entire sentence in terms of its phonology, or sound structure. I can escribe the entire sentence in terms of its morphology, or grammatical structure. I can describe the entire sentence in terms of its semology, or semantic structure. It is just one sentence, but it has three distinct structures. And I need all three to give a complete description of the sentence. Similarly, we need all three Persons to give a 'complete' description of the Triune God.

The Sabellian or Modalist (who believes that the Father and the Son are identical) must maintain that Jesus made a mistake when he gave the Great Commission, or that Matthew recorded it wrongly. If Jesus made a mistake, he is not God; if Matthew made a mistake, he was not inspired. If someone denies

the divinity of Jesus, or the inspiration of Matthew, he cannot be a true Christian.

See also John 8:17-18 – the Lord Jesus, after observing that the Law requires two witnesses, declares that He Himself is one and the Father is another. Now, if the Father and the Son were identical (as Sabellians claim) then Christ would be deliberately deceiving His listeners. However, in verse 19 He states that to know Him is to know the Father. Again, only the doctrine of the Trinity can do justice to all the texts.

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the cardinal or fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith; it is one of the doctrines that defines that Faith. For example, the Orthodox Jew is a monotheist, he believes in the God of the Old Testament, but he is definitely not a Christian. Anyone who does not believe in the Trinity should not present himself as a Christian, because he is denying the Lord's own description of it. It is a question of consistency.

But what does it mean to be baptized into the name of the Trinity? A person's name represents that person. To do something 'in the name of the king' means that the king gave the order; whoever said it represents the king (or claims that he does). So what does it mean to be baptized into the Trinity? Well, if you are within the Trinity, you are protected by them, since to reach you, an attack must pass through them. That is tremendous! So then, the true meaning of this baptism should be this: it is a public declaration, taking a formal stand, whereby the candidate is formally renouncing Satan, and the world he controls, and is placing himself under the protection of the Triune God. It is to change sides, to change kingdoms. (Kind reader, do you know of any local church, anywhere, that teaches this meaning for this baptism? Alas!) For a fuller discussion, please see my article, "Baptisms in the Bible".