

The Trinity - Inextricable Confusion (A Unitarian Perspective)

Such, then, in conclusion, is the position in which we find the Church dogma of the Trinity ;— a doctrine made up of inferences and obscurity ; established, by an uncertain and fluctuating majority, in the midst of controversy, doubt, and bitter feuds ; resting on so scanty and fragmentary evidence ; held differently and defended on different grounds from age to age, from place to place, from church to church ; constantly liable to the hazard of fatal misinterpretation on either hand ; trembling (as it were) always, in its best estate, in that position of unstable equilibrium between two contending heresies, each of which has the merit of being distinct and logical, while it is doubtful whether this has any signification at all that can be expressed in words. I appeal to your good sense and candor, I will not say to pronounce the doctrine false, — believe and think as you will in regard to it, — but to say whether my assent is to be so sharply demanded, whether we are to be exiled and accused of irreverence, and denied the Christian name, because we refuse it.

Its evidence we regard as insufficient and unsound. Its meaning its best friends are not agreed upon. Its statement involves inextricable confusion, and an alternative between two virtual denials of it. Can such a perplexing mystery as that be a test of faith? My reasoning may not show it to be untrue ; but so much uncertainty, at least, is shown to rest upon it, that dogmatism is utterly out of place. Sharing, we trust, in the Christian consciousness of believers, we do not deny the religious significance which its terms perhaps imply, — God is our Father. Christ is our Teacher and Saviour. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter. But not in that vague, mysterious, unintelligible sense in which we are told that these three, as separate, coeternal, infinite beings, combined to make a Triune God. “To us,” in the words of Paul, “there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we and him ; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”

(Ten Discourses on Orthodoxy by Joseph Henry Allen, Pastor of the Unitarian Church, Washington, Boston: Wm. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1849, 63-64)