

# Theology and Church History

## With special emphasis on the Development of the Understanding of a Triune God

Theology is not a word we should be afraid of neither should we ignore the theology of the Church universal over the ages.

Theology is God gradually revealing more of Himself to human beings at a pace that our limited minds can accommodate.

Church history is the laboratory of theology.

**Omnipotence** – sovereign, all powerful

**Omnipresence** – present everywhere

**Omniscience** – all knowing

We all understand that they refer to the divine God.

But you will **not** find any of these words in scripture.

These are theological terms. That is a term which best expresses what we believe The Bible teaches.

Quotation:-

*“Theology commonly refers to the ordered, systematic study of interpretation of the Christian faith and experience of God based on God’s divine self-revelation.*

*Theology also seeks to apply these truths to the full breadth of human experience and thought.*

*When we study theology it is like stepping into a conversation that has been going on for two thousand years.”*

Another theological term we do **not** find in scripture is “*trinity*”.

Some people feel that because it is not mentioned explicitly in The Bible, that is sufficient reason to reject both the term and what it means.

Should we then reject the book of Esther because the name of God is not found in that God-centred book?

The word “*only*” or “*alone*” is not used by Paul when he quotes **Habakkuk 2:4** [NIV] in **Romans 1:17** [NIV] and **Galatians 3:11** [NIV].

Luther saw that faith alone is what it meant.

Luther was correct, although Paul did not add the word “*alone*” or “*only*” it was implied!

Justification by faith alone is what gave Luther the theological breakthrough he needed for that wonderful teaching.

**We must not necessarily be suspicious of a word or of a phrase that is used to make a teaching clearer just because it is not found in The Bible.**

What does the theological term “*trinity*” explain about God?

One God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- a) Though there are three persons they do **not** compete with each other. In fact we see in many scriptures that each gives honour to the others.
- b) They are three modes or forms in which the one divine being manifests Himself to us.

The three persons are self-distinctive in the One true God.

- a) The divine essence [being – or entity] is wholly in each person.
- b) This means the Father is wholly God, the Son is wholly God and the Holy Spirit is wholly God.
- c) Each person of the triune God is distinct from the other in a relationship with us.

We may ask “*Is the Trinity the teaching of The Bible or is it the teaching of the Church?*”

In other words, is this a carefully expounded teaching in The Bible or is it merely the Church’s way of explaining God?

The term “*trinitas*” [Latin] was first used by Tertullian [200 AD] who also coined the term “*persona*” [Latin] to describe the manifestation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Those who say it is merely the teaching of the church point out that:-

- a) The term is not in The Bible.
- b) As far as we can tell the apostles were not bothered about the issue.
- c) The term emerged over 150 years after Pentecost.

So is the teaching of the trinity is “*retrospective*” truth?

- a) Did the church use the term merely to explain what is obviously there in scripture to be taught?
- b) Was it therefore true from the beginning?

Truth however that had not been necessary to grasp at first?

But nonetheless truth that must be grasped now?

If the trinity is merely the teaching of the church, do we have to believe it?

It could be argued by some that the church did not always articulate it as we do now.

Why then must we believe it just because the term became orthodox [accepted not heretical] in the eyes of the church?

**Church history is the laboratory of theology.**

We must remember that the early church in particular, but right up to the last 300 years communication was very slow, there was no printing presses for mass communication and travel was also very prolonged.

Most people did not travel more than 20 miles from their home.

Just as there are very few great thinkers with a very high IQ today, so it was in the past, clarification of recorded scripture takes time.

Once a new term has been injected into the picture by church history we must either accept it or give a good reason for rejecting it.

**John 16:12-14** [NIV] *“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”*

The Holy Spirit was to come to add to what Jesus Christ had given to the disciples when He was on earth.

**Just as God does not reveal all truth to us individually all at one time, the same is with the Church as a whole.**

**Isaiah 55:9** [NIV] *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Our mind is so puny compared to that of God that He has to introduce His truth in small digestible pieces.