



Faithful and Effective God-Talk: Trinitarian Theology for the People of God

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I.

DOES WHAT WE SAY ABOUT GOD MATTER? THAT QUESTION MAY BE ESPECIALLY vexing for first-year (or fourth-year) divinity students, but an affirmative response cannot be taken for granted even among pastors and academic theologians. We have been assured by many inhaling the rarefied air of higher academia that words do not refer to anything “out there,” that realism—even in its critical forms—lies dead. And, of course, in the world of most sensible folk, talk is judged (often with good reason) to be cheap, and high-sounding claims a matter of “mere rhetoric.” All this skepticism does not make life easier for those of us who make our living by talking or writing about God.

When this skepticism arises in relation to talk about the doctrine of the Trin-

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The doctrine of the Trinity is not mere impious and impractical speculation; it arises out of thinking faithfully on the gospel story, and it holds practical implications for Christian worship and talk of God.

ity, it predictably hardens into two closely related—indeed intertwined—lines of resistance or arguments. The first line runs as follows: the good news about Jesus is a simple affair. This talk about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—how they are one God, how they are related, who does what, etc.—has little to do with the actual gospel story. Believing in Jesus is what the gospel calls us to do—to love him and faithfully follow his example. Complicated theological questions will lead us out of the gospel and threaten Christian piety; such questions count for little importance in terms of truly understanding the faith. Ideas and words are not important—or not all *that* important—intentions and depth of sincerity are what really matter.¹ Reciting the creed may be all right, but let us leave off prying into matters too high for us, matters which cool the ardor of Christian devotion. On this score, too much thought is inimical to faith. We might call this first line of resistance the Argument from Piety.

Usually, the skeptical piety mentioned above is wedded to a matter-of-fact Christianity that is concerned not so much for the putative simplicity of the gospel story as the relevance of Christianity to people's lives—more Christian living and less Christian theology. Dorothy Sayers's classic description of the average believer's take on the doctrine runs as follows: "'The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the whole thing incomprehensible.' Something put in by theologians to make it more difficult—nothing to do with daily life or ethics."² Even if what theologians are saying might be true, what possible difference can this impossibly abstract truth make in day-to-day living? We must be able to *apply* what we know to everyday Christian experience, and the doctrine of the Trinity remains eminently a piece of theorizing. Let us leave off wasting our valuable time on trinitarian speculation that detracts from applied Christianity. On this score, too much thought is inimical to action. We could call this the Argument from Practicality.

My concern is to respond to both of these objections. In what follows, I demonstrate how the doctrine of the Trinity arises out of thinking faithfully on the gospel story, and generates a grammar that holds important and practical implications for Christian worship and God-talk.

II.

Many contemporary theologians have come to emphasize that the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen especially in the way it both arises from, and enables us to make sense of, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, we must not miss the hermeneutical relationship that exists between the doctrine of the Trinity and God's self-revelation in the story of Jesus; this doc-

¹Thus comes about the strange spectacle of well-intentioned pietists climbing into bed with the more romantic liberals, both decrying orthodox statements of the Christian faith, the former on the basis of an alleged disjunction between piety and intellectual rigor, the latter on the grounds that orthodoxy is irrelevant to the modern/postmodern age.

²Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Dogma is the Drama," in *Creed or Chaos? and Other Essays in Popular Theology* (London: Methuen & Co., 1947) 22.

trine is, as Eberhard Jüngel has put it (commenting on Barth), the interpretation of God's self-interpretation.³ We can test this by carefully examining the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on the basis of the gospel story. There are, as you might expect, a number of ways in which this relationship has been articulated. I will mention two of the most important attempts in our time.

Wolfhart Pannenberg attempts to develop the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of Jesus' relation to the Father, as this relation came to expression in the former's message of divine rule.⁴ The Father's lordship is breaking upon us now; Jesus' whole message is aimed at calling us to hallow God's name by acknowledging his lordship. In proclaiming the lordship of the Father, however, Jesus had to clearly distinguish himself from God. If Jesus had claimed an independent authority for himself, he would have been at cross-purposes with his own proclamation. So paradoxically, Pannenberg says, Jesus' self-distinction from the Father is the basis of his unity with the Father.

But we also must consider in this relationship the self-distinction on the part of the Father, given that Jesus is the mediator of the kingdom. Jesus' self-distinction was so complete that in announcing God's rule he is not merely its representative, rather he "executes" it.⁵ God the Father thus has made his kingdom, namely, his lordship, dependent upon Jesus. The theological implications that result from this dependency are tremendous if, as Pannenberg argues, God's lordship is not external to God's deity ("lordship goes hand in hand with the deity of God")—it means that God's deity is at stake in Jesus, and disputed on the cross.⁶ In the resurrection, God the Father through the Holy Spirit refutes that challenge and confirms Jesus' claims, so we may speak also of a self-distinction on the part of the Spirit, active in Jesus' destiny in glorifying the Father as he had been in Jesus' ministry.⁷ I am not going to examine the process by which Pannenberg infers the eternal, intratrinitarian relations from what we see in the story of the historical relations, or how we are taken into the fellowship of the divine persons; my point has been to demonstrate how Pannenberg articulates the reciprocal trinitarian relations on the basis of Jesus' ministry and fate.

If Pannenberg usually is classified as developing his christology and trinitarian theology "from below," then Eberhard Jüngel (partly because of Barth's influence) usually would be thought of as proceeding "from above."⁸ There are profound differences between these two theologians, both with respect to the nature of revelation and truth, and also in terms of how the divine persons are conceived in relation to the unity of God. And yet, while there is undeniable truth to

³Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 17.

⁴Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 300-327.

⁵*Ibid.*, 312.

⁶*Ibid.*, 313-314.

⁷*Ibid.*, 314-317.

⁸See Pannenberg's discussion of the terminology "from below" versus "from above" in his *Jesus—God and Man*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 33-37.

the “below/above” characterization, in Jüngel the matter becomes a bit more complicated when one considers the relationship of Jesus’ proclamation to the question of his identity that emerges in the context of the trinitarian differentiation by way of the cross. As Jüngel says, “talk about God which is oriented to the crucified Jesus must understand God’s deity on the basis of his humanity revealed in Jesus.”⁹ In Jüngel’s treatment, as in Pannenberg’s, much initial work is devoted to the message or proclamation of Jesus. For years now, Jüngel has gone to great lengths to show how especially in Jesus’ parables, the kingdom of God comes to, and through, *language*, in such a way that it breaks in upon its hearers. Jesus’ parables “ignite” in the hearer, interrupting our attempts to preserve ourselves intact, and through this interruption God comes to us in a new, transformative nearness.¹⁰ But we must notice how Jesus’ parables act as what Jüngel calls a “hermeneutical preparation” for understanding Jesus himself as the “parable of God,” in which we come to understand that God has so identified himself in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection that the story of this man must be seen as God’s own story under, and interrupting, the conditions of historical reality.¹¹ The resurrection reveals that God’s identification with Jesus went all the way through Jesus’ experience of God-forsakenness and death. In Jesus’ passion and death, then, we are compelled to recognize that God’s identification with this man is a differentiated identification. In the death of Jesus, Jüngel says, God has borne the “annihilating power of nothingness, even the negation of death,” without being destroyed by it, so that death itself is taken up into God’s own life.¹² Thus, although we are used to thinking of being dead as the opposite of an event, Jüngel says that in Jesus’ death “God himself was the event which happened,” defining himself in this act of identification.¹³ Jüngel describes what happens in this event as follows: God the loving Father gives up his beloved Son, in the event of which he turns to all of us marked by death. In the midst of this separation, God is Spirit, who enables the Father and Son to be one yet differentiated in the death of Jesus, establishing the unity in such a way that we are drawn into the relationship, and who in the resurrection proves this unity of life and death to be for the sake of life.¹⁴ In other words, God’s identification with the Crucified is the work of all three persons.¹⁵ Harkening back to Jüngel’s language of interruption and his description of Jesus as the parable of God, we then recognize in the crucified and risen Christ a “two-fold interruption” in which God interrupts the continuity of our lives as our sin and death interrupt his, while in the Holy Spirit this “two-fold interruption” is given concrete form as

⁹Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 14.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 293ff.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 288ff., 293, 298.

¹²*Ibid.*, 219.

¹³*Ibid.*, 363.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 328, 368. See also the introduction to Jüngel’s “Trinitarian Prayers for Christian Worship” in this issue (*Word & World* 18/3 [1998] 244-246).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 329.

the enhancement of the life that is being interrupted.¹⁶ Whether one is persuaded by either of these positions is really secondary to the basic point I am trying to make, which is that these theologians and others are trying to demonstrate that the more one penetrates into the gospel story and dares to think theologically along with the evangelists' accounts, the more one will be drawn into trinitarian considerations. That dare may not be taken up by those espousing the Argument from Piety, but in response to this argument let us be clear: *We are concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity precisely because we are concerned with the gospel story.*¹⁷ Far from being a mystery of impious mathematics, this doctrine, as many have pointed out, articulates and reflects upon the mystery of our salvation; it is, as Jüngel says, "the dogma of soteriology in an absolute sense."¹⁸

III.

Now to return to the other line of resistance: piety must be practical. Yet as Alister McGrath reminds us, every movement that has ever competed for the practical or lived loyalty of human beings has done so on the basis of a set of beliefs or a basic doctrine. If we are unwilling to accept the possibility that we have based our lives upon an illusion or blatant lie, the most fundamental question we must put to that doctrine is, "Is it true?"¹⁹ The doctrine of the Trinity matters because of the specific truth-claims it enables us to make about God. One would think that if we should be able to speak the truth about God on the basis of thinking faithfully and rigorously along with the biblical drama, then that should be "practical" enough. We might even revise Bernard Lonergan's oft-quoted maxim about intelligence

¹⁶Eberhard Jüngel, "The Truth of Life: Observations on Truth as the Interruption of the Continuity of Life," in *Creation, Christ and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*, ed. R. W. A. MacKinney (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976) 236.

¹⁷By way of a systematic aside, it might be possible to keep the doctrine of the Trinity, even given these insights by Pannenberg and Jüngel, in the category of special information about God—a "doctrine of God"—but, more and more, theologians are coming to stress the organic relation between this doctrine and the sweep of Christian doctrine. If we were to explore this particular doctrine in connection with the larger biblical drama, instead of just the gospel story, that organic relation would be clearer. We might even venture to speak of the doctrine of the Trinity as the superstructure on which Christian doctrine as a whole is constructed and from which it receives its distinctive character and vitality, because finally it is none other than the triune God who stands in relation to our theological concerns; and that triune character must be honored, if in our theological studies—as well as in our worship and living out the faith—we are to remain faithful to God's self-revelation. Basil of Caesarea, in his treatise *On the Spirit*, laid down the basic trinitarian structure he believed must be discerned in any activity of God, and it is still a good rule of thumb. Every act of God, Basil says, is initiated by the Father, effected by the Son, and perfected by the Spirit (16.38). References in this paper are to the translation found in volume 8 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, ed. H. Wace and P. Schaff, 2d series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian, 1887-1900). It simply will not do to have a highly developed doctrine of the trinitarian relations and then go off and talk about creation, redemption, or sanctification in very untrinitarian ways. Talk of such things is really an abstraction from the works of the Trinity, in which Father, Son, and Spirit work together, and we should be reminded that the doctrine of appropriation is abused if we take cover under it in refusing the rigorous task of thinking in a genuinely Christian, i.e., trinitarian, manner, thereby dishonoring the richness of the relations in the outward works.

¹⁸Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 344.

¹⁹Alister E. McGrath, "Doctrine and Ethics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34/2 (1991) 150.

and practicality to read that, when speaking theologically, “to speak truthfully is to do the practical thing.” No doubt for many slogging along in the postmodern intellectual morass, for whom the very idea of truth has died the death of a thousand different social locations, these claims will not matter much—but of course the problem here lies not with the doctrine of the Trinity *per se* but with a deeper, underlying intellectual and moral malady. In what follows, I hope to show how, in helping us speak truthfully, the doctrine of the Trinity furnishes us with a basic theological grammar—a linguistic intelligence—that guides pious practicality in the area of worship.

I claimed earlier that the doctrine of the Trinity is effective God-talk in the lives of Christians, but this language of “effectiveness” has to be nuanced carefully, since it easily slips into the language of valuation, whereby the human subject assumes the place of judgment and allots a value according to a desired result produced.²⁰ In an age in which action is valued over truth, to say that Trinity talk is effective might be taken to mean that it provides the doctrinal justification for an ideological agenda (e.g., constructing a model for human community). The point of this language, however, is quite the reverse. The more we become entangled in the story of the triune God, the more the ego is unsettled—with the result that we can witness to a truth that is not of our own devising and not subject to our attempts at valuation.²¹ Some pastors, scampering to answer the question, “So now what shall we do?” often take the route of trying to tie this doctrine more closely to the life of the church, often using traditional Christian symbols, some of which are associated with the church calendar. One might attempt to explain the three-rayed nimbus surrounding the head of the *Agnus Dei* on the Easter banner, or the traditional shield of the Trinity, or even St. Patrick’s shamrock. Many, if not most, people have taken to calling themselves “visual” learners, and there is some value in using symbols in explaining difficult doctrines. But it is too easy to be seduced by the idea that by explaining a doctrine by using homely symbols we have thereby made it more practical in the life of believers. To the contrary, we need to exercise a degree of care in uncritically relying upon visual imagery in this case; such imagery usually tends to focus on the math, and worse, actually tends to reinforce the prejudice that this doctrine is an esoteric bit of knowledge that can be kept at arms’ length and perhaps manipulated at will. As a student once asked me, “Aren’t we finished learning about the Trinity yet?”

T. F. Torrance warns us that models of knowing based on visualization and spatialization are not really appropriate to the subject matter of a Christian theology based on the word of God.²² The reformation, Torrance says, can be understood as a great protest against the dominance of visual or optical notions of form and thought; it insisted that these be corrected by notions that are modelled upon

²⁰See Jüngel, “Value-Free Truth: The Christian Experience of Truth in the Struggle Against the Tyranny of Values,” in *Theological Essays II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) 191-215.

²¹For the “entanglement” metaphor, see Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 299-314, esp. 303-304.

²²T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 74-80.

audition.²³ The concepts with which theology has to deal, derived as they are from hearing the word of God, are what Torrance calls “audits” as opposed to “percepts.”²⁴ While certainly our most important objective is confronting people with the saving reality of the triune God and not with a doctrine or description of this God, the doctrine of the Trinity, when kept in touch with the gospel, provides for the people of God a theological grammar—heard and spoken—which enables us to worship and speak about God in a manner consistent with God’s own self-revelation. McGrath says that the doctrine of the Trinity “is to the Christian experience of God what grammar is to poetry—it establishes a structure, a framework, which allows us to make sense of something which far surpasses it.”²⁵ One of the most difficult things for people to grasp when struggling with this doctrine is that learning about it and the practical outworking of it in the life of the church is not a matter of completing a lesson on the Trinity by means of a neat image that illustrates a theory; it is more a matter of carefully learning to think through and tell the salvation story and then learning to revitalize the deep patterns of our everyday speech about God in a way that is true to this story. We cannot be finished with learning and talking about the Trinity because we cannot go on holiday from learning and talking about God in a manner consistent with God’s self-revelation.

If one hopes to develop the rudiments of this grammar in a congregation, then, at the risk of sounding trite, the foundational task is simply to help people immerse themselves in, and thoroughly study, the Holy Scriptures. In an age in which the pastor as administrator and counselor has overshadowed the pastor as preacher and teacher, I do not doubt for a moment that for many pastors teaching the Bible is not high on the agenda. But teaching the doctrine of the Trinity merely as part of what the church teaches (unthinkingly reciting the creed?), or worse, as a logical puzzle about God, seems to many parishioners to be an unnecessary and abstract affair that does nothing to help them become engaged by the stories out of which this doctrine arose. It is vitally important that we develop in our congregations an imaginative reservoir of biblical stories out of which we can, with a little theological reflection, help the people of God discern the identity of the triune God and the trinitarian pattern of activity, and show how a consistent and responsible way of speaking about God is suggested for us on account of this identity and pattern.

IV.

“Grammar” sounds dry enough, “theological grammar” doubly so. But by grammar I mean a basic set of principles that enables us to converse intelligently and responsibly about God. For an example of what part of this grammar might look like, and what it might help us do, consider Basil’s treatise *On the Spirit*. As Basil opens this treatise, he is exercised—overly exercised, it would seem—over

²³T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University, 1969) 22.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 147.

the proper use of basis prepositions such as with (*syn*), through (*dia*), and in (*en*) when referring to the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But Basil is aware of the implications that simple words may have and the thoroughgoing theological agendas that may be attached to the ways that seemingly innocuous prepositions or “syllables,” as he calls them, are used. “What term in theology is so small but that the effect of its weight in the scales according as it be rightly or wrongly used is not great?” (1.2). Basil was writing against the *Pneumatichoi*, those who had their roots in the *homoiousian* party but with a pronounced antipathy towards the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Some of these people had attacked Basil for his use of the doxology to God the Father in two forms: both “with (*meta*) the Son together with (*syn*) the Holy Spirit” and “through (*dia*) the Son and in (*en*) the Holy Spirit” (2.3). The former form, they insisted, was innovation; only the latter is warranted by scripture. But Basil understood that if this precision they demanded was not a matter of “petty exactitude,” neither was it a matter of faithfulness to the scripture. Rather, it masked a “deep and covert design against true religion,” based as it was upon distinctions borrowed from heathen philosophy according to which the “the variation of language indicates the variation of nature” (2.4). So, in speaking of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, “by the term ‘of whom’ they wish to indicate the Creator; by the term ‘through whom’ the subordinate agent or instrument; by the term ‘in whom’ or ‘in which’ they mean to shew the time or place” (2.4). Thus, Basil says, God the Word is belittled, regarded no higher than an instrument, and the Holy Spirit set at naught, adding nothing more than the contribution derived from time or place.

How Basil responds to this teaching is a fascinating little study in theological grammar, and one which still has much to offer us today. Basil says, first of all, that there is a remarkable freedom in the way the terms under discussion are used by scripture writers, that the Spirit who inspired the scripture is in no bondage to the “pettiness of Paganism” (4.6). However, there are core expressions that paganism would destroy and that we must defend. These expressions bear upon the equality of the divine persons and upon the relation of the triune God to us. So we might characterize the way of speaking Basil suggests as a liberative grammar: a grammar that frees us from human impiety and pettiness and enables us to both honor the mystery of the triune relations and to acknowledge how God and humanity are related in the economy of salvation. It is not innovation at all to glorify the Son with the Father, Basil insists, for this practice of the devout is covered with the “dignity of antiquity.” The church recognizes both “with” and “through”; only those “cunning experts in logomachy” who honor the “new-fangled novelty” of the new philosophy refuse to worship and glorify the Son (7.16). Basil distinguishes the different functions of the two ways of speaking as follows:

Whenever we are contemplating the majesty of the nature of the Only Begotten, and the excellence of His dignity, we bear witness that his glory is *with* the Father; while on the other hand, whenever we bethink us of His bestowal on us of good gifts, and of our access to, and admission into, the household of God, we confess that this grace is effected for us *through* Him and *by* Him....It follows that the one phrase “*with whom*” is the proper one to be used in the ascription of

glory, while the other, “*through whom*,” is especially appropriate in giving of thanks. (7.16)

There is thus no detraction of the Son’s glory in using the term “*through*.” The economy “*through the Son*” is no “*compulsory and subordinate ministration resulting from the low estate of a slave, but rather the voluntary solicitude working effectually for His own creation in goodness and pity, according to the will of God the Father*” (7.18). Indeed, Basil asks, does not the “*recital of his benefits*” conferred upon us provide in itself a proper argument for glorifying the Son?²⁶ Note carefully: the relations, when considered under different questions, place us under certain linguistic constraints and call for particular formulations. This is what I mean by saying that the doctrine of the Trinity *generates* a grammar. In the above argument Basil has demonstrated that the implicit confession of an antecedent cause (the Father) in the expression “*through whom*” must in no way be interpreted as indicating a different nature than, or denigrating, the efficient cause (the Son), and that both forms of the doxology he uses have necessary and important functions in the life of the church (8.21). Basil uses a similar strategy in defending his way of speaking about the Spirit. It is first of all incontrovertible that “*the Lord has delivered to us as a necessary and saving doctrine that the Holy Spirit is to be ranked with the Father*” (10.25). The Spirit is “*inseparable and wholly incapable of being parted from the Father and the Son*” (16.37); he has “*the same relation to God which the spirit in us has to each of us*” (16.40). The terms “*with*” and “*in*” in reference to the Spirit must be understood along similar lines to the functions of “*with*” and “*through*” in reference to the Son. “*Whenever we have in mind the Spirit’s proper rank, we contemplate Him as being with the Father and Son, but when we think of the grace that flows from Him operating on those who participate in it, we say that the Spirit is in us*” (26.63). When we offer worship “*in the Spirit*,” we are not, Basil insists, stating rank, as though we were referring to merely a “*ministering spirit*.” In a backhanded way, we are acknowledging our own weakness, recognizing our insufficiency to worship God and confessing that we are able to give thanks for the benefits we have received only as we are enabled by the Spirit. It is entirely appropriate that we glorify “*Him who is in His nature divine*” and who is also good “*in the blessings He confers*” (23.54).²⁷ Clearly, then, the different expressions are not “*opposed in mutual antagonism, but...each contributes its own meaning to true religion*.” For “*in*” states the truth rather relatively to ourselves, while “*with*” proclaims the fellowship of the Spirit with

²⁶By way of this “*recital*,” Basil says that “*through*” Christ, “*comes every succour to our souls*” (8.18). “*He raises [those that have lapsed into sin] from their fall....Effectually working by the touch of His power and the will of His goodness He does all things. He shepherds; He enlightens; He nourishes; He heals; He guides; He raises up; He calls into being things that were not; He upholds what has been created*” (8.19).

²⁷Among those blessings: “*Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption as sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all ‘fullness of blessing,’ both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise whereof, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment*” (16.36).

God” —by “with” we express “the dignity of the Spirit”; by “in” we announce “the grace that is with us” (27.68).

Basil thus has set forth a prepositional grammar, generated by a proper understanding of the triune relations, that helps us distinguish God, when God is understood as Trinity, from humanity, while also enabling us to set this distinction in relation to a people redeemed by the same triune God, to a people who respond in gratitude. Praise and thanksgiving — what could be more “practical” (or better, *appropriate*) in the life of Christians? This is not, of course, the only way in which the Argument from Practicality could be answered, but beginning with the “ascription of glory” and the “giving of thanks” is a good place to start.

V.

Sometimes it is difficult to discern the various spirits arrayed against the Christian faith and its basic doctrines. We probably should know better, but the assumption of well-intentioned criticisms dies hard. Pietists, I hope, are concerned genuinely with fidelity to the gospel and about the deleterious effect of needless speculation on Christian devotion. Similarly, I hope that “practically-minded” Christians are interested truly in hearing that theology has something to say to Christian worship and life. I have suggested that articulating the doctrine of the Trinity as *thinking faithfully* on the gospel would help answer the pietists’ legitimate concerns, and that demonstrating how the Christian doctrine of the Trinity generates a grammar for worship and praise might help the practically-minded yet doxologically-challenged.

We do live in an age in which the hermeneutics of suspicion has gone to seed. Yet often it is difficult not to suspect in a protest against thinking faithfully both a pietist prejudice against thinking and a liberal animus against faithfulness. Against a Christian trinitarian intelligence expressed in a grammar of praise and worship, one often encounters a calculative way of thinking for which practicality means reducing the faith to an object or commodity that can be manipulated, marketed, and evaluated according to results. Gratitude, of course, cannot be so handled. Can anything be done? Pulling the masks off of one’s opponents can be a nasty business, even if it has a long and venerable history. But my hunch is that engaging honestly in one’s proper labors as a preacher and theologian is still the best defense. ⊕