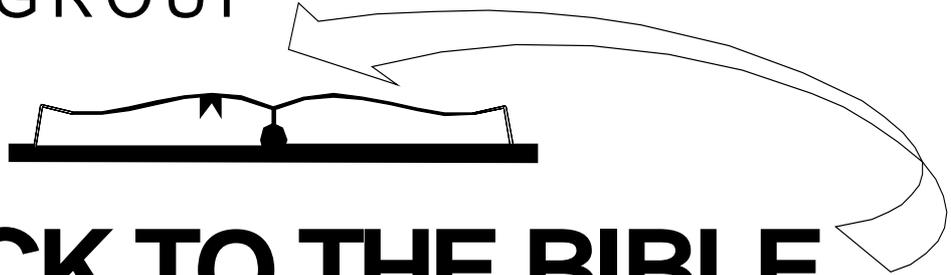


WORKGROUP



BACK TO THE BIBLE

Translation Dutch letter no 29, Kampen spring 2006

Dear brothers, sisters, pastors and elders,

The previous subject, the Warrenism, has caused a lot of reactions, most of them positive. A number of people was not happy about the conclusions of the workgroup. We do understand that, most of them had already gone a long way in introducing the methods of Rick Warren in their churches. To handle opposition, founded on the Bible, is in that situation not an easy thing to do. In papers like *Uitdaging* and *Vision* (a Dutch television weekly) much attention has been given to the subject. The George Whitefield Foundation organised on 26 November 2005 a lecture about the Warrenism. This lecture has been placed on our website. For more information see www.whitefield.nl

In the reactions to the workgroup a striking feature was: mostly one or two persons at the time were victimised by the introduction of Warrenism in the churches. Some long standing members were forced to choose between: either follow Warrenism or leave the church, without much pastoral counselling. This has caused much grief. In the same way, members of sects, who disagreed with their leaders, were treated.

Before starting the subject of this letter, we give you some reactions on the last letter.

Reactions on letter no 28 with subject the Warrenism.

----"I read the book *The Purpose Driven Life* and was blessed by it. In a women's meeting we are studying the book and I was able to give a lecture on the subject. I was shocked by your article. Had I passed on wrong things or brought a welfare gospel? Certainly not!!...The Lord Jesus told us to watch the fruit on the tree. The fruits of the ministry of Rick Warren (also in our country!!) are: people getting saved, spiritual growth, in depth and in width. To put it shortly: God is at work. I do not often give a reaction, but this time I just had to. Friendly greetings, your sister in the Lord "

----"Thank you for your autumn letter, where you write clearly about the two books and the effects of Warrenism. I read all of your article and will share it with others. Also in my church, where I go regularly, *The Willow Creek* idea has been put into practice. Several people are troubled about it, so I ask you to send me another four letters. ...Greetings..."

----"We had planned to start the *Purpose Driven Life* with the whole church, young and old, to achieve more spiritual growth, by means of the preaching of a guest speaker and the reading of your publication we stopped the preparations and decided not to carry out the plans. We see this as a serious warning from God to first test everything thoroughly and to see if it is in accordance with the Word of God. Yours in Him."

----"Dear brothers,

I have been receiving your letters of "Back to the Bible" for a few years now and up till now I did so with reasonable agreement. But this time I really take offence at your letter of autumn

2005. Your letter is completely devoted to the blessed book of Rick Warren that has been a blessing to me and many others. You speak about the "Warrenism", even the word is objectionable to me. Although I have not yet read the whole letter, I at once wanted to write to you and ask you to remove me from your mailing list. Let me make it very clear: from now on I will never again receive anything at all from you, even though the word brothers is used at the beginning of the letter! Would it not be better to spend your time in a more constructive way? Yours truly...."

----"Circumstances made me visit a new evangelical church. They had just started the 40 days Purpose Driven weeks.....After one year and a half of something I sometimes thought was psycho- analysis that the people did not know how to handle. After I was called a "hard" person several times and the leaders told me they did not agree with me, I left the study group....I felt sure I had to do this, but somehow felt guilty, till after a few weeks ,your letter arrived!! I am going to copy it and give it to the elders. Thank you for making the effort to sort these things out and write about it. God's blessing, Mrs..."

----"I received your letter concerning the book the Purpose Driven Life... In our church the 40 purpose driven days are followed, I am sorry about this.... I had read the book by Rick Warren and I told them my objections....The leaders tried to win me over several times....I am so sorry about it. But I cannot do anything about it....I do not know how this situation will work out in our church....God bless you. Brother....Belgium."

----"Read your article about Rick Warren, we were just studying this book in a bible study group. We were warned against it by our pastor. We had only just started and there were questions about several things. Your article made clear much of them and we stopped the study....God bless you. Brother...."

----"I am glad you too wrote a critical article about the book by Rick Warren. Personally I am not very happy about it, because I expect a hardening in our church. Already, a pastoral person, only attending our church a few years, said to a man, who for special reasons did not want to sign the statement of membership, as Rick Warren put it down, that such people should be expelled from the church. When I open my mouth, I am called negative and critical. But I have been a faithful member of the church, for 25 years, am I not allowed to judge?....Is it possible to organise a study day to study these matters from the Word of God?". (yes, a study day was organised by the George Whitefield Foundation, d.d. 26th of November 2005 and another one the first of April 2006).

----"Dear workgroup Back to the Bible. Here also are brothers and sisters, who did not agree with the teaching of Rick Warren, and have been expelled from the church. It was not possible to have a conversation about it. We send you a copy of the way we have been treated. We could write long letters, many things have happened. The pastor now goes for the third time to Warren. Also the elders and the board have been to America. Perhaps he goes for new idea's....warm greetings fam...." Enclosed reaction of the board: "Dear brother/sister, We regret your choice and seriously insist you will choose to go the way of reconciliation with us. Your not going with us in this process means, it will be very difficult, even impossible, to walk the way together. On behalf of the board of...."

P.S. My wife and I have been members for 48 years".

----"Dear Rien and Dicky,

Thank you for the extensive research....When renewal of the church is thought necessary, this always leads to methodical approach. Will it bring succes? Unfortunately: often one wave is still at work, when a new one already appears. Will Rick Warren's vision and approach bring true renewal or disappointment? We will have to wait and see. Sometimes a crooked stick also has quite a lot of straight pieces!....Warm greetings...."

Wise words of an experienced pastor, a friend. We will leave the subject of Warrenism now and direct ourselves to a new and totally different subject:

The divine Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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1. Introduction

To-day not many Christians dwell on this subject. There are several liturgical moments during the service, when God's triune name is mentioned, but nobody gets up and says: " I do not agree with this appellation, because God is one and not three persons or three gods." Or another one protesting: "because Jesus is not God, but a force, he is only the highest creation of God". Again another one wagging his head, " because the Holy Spirit is not a person, but a force." Probably we do not have a problem with a God who is triune. From our early days on we grew up with the truth of the doctrine, the dogma of the Trinity. Perhaps, after we were saved, we joined a meeting or a church where people believed in this dogma and we were baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the name of the triune God. Now, if this is so obvious and there are no problems, why write about? The answer is threefold:

1.1----From letters, discussions, magazines and testimonies, we found there is a lot of ignorance concerning this subject. Hardly ever one is taught about it in the services of the Evangelical churches, neither during the bible studies of these churches. The same goes for the Pentecostal churches. They preach and give bible studies about baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But the teaching about the divine Trinity is not a popular subject in the Pentecostal churches.

1.2----Many a serious Christian is of opinion that the doctrine of the divine Trinity is a product of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic church. This is a wrong idea. It has come about when the discussion and decision making about the doctrine happened on the conferences of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381).

1.3----The bible versed and faithful Christians of the mentioned churches, follow the wrong track, because they come to the conclusion that the Trinity does not occur in the Bible. They are absolutely right, at least if they mean that the term Trinity does not occur in the Bible. They may not be aware of the fact, that the whole Bible, from the beginning till the end, proclaims the trinity of God. From many different angles the Word glorifies the threefold being of our God. We will try to bring this over to you in the following study. It will turn out not to be "light" food, but we pray it will be "nourishing" food.

2. Abridged previous history

While studying the New Testament we find that part of it consists of defence against false teachings. Most writers pass on serious warnings, especially when they see the end of their life coming near.

Paul writes:

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20: 28-30

After Jesus' ascension the disciples had to go on all by themselves. But they were not on their own and were not dependent on their own strength. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on them and they received divine power and wisdom. They preached the message and started to write it down on papyrus. Especially after the salvation of Paul (who was a scribe by origin) people started to write more. The newly founded churches had to be encouraged and corrected. Other disciples had special revelations they wrote down on papyrus and then the other believers could benefit. Others had insight in important matters, like the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. These writings together now form the contents of the New testament. During their lives, but more so after their deaths, these originally written pieces circulated in the diverse churches. There they were read aloud and the elders explained the faith matters to the church members. But by the ravages of time the original papyrus writings disappeared and the people had to do with copies that were written by hand. Beside the writings, that later would form the New Testament, there were also other important religious writings on papyrus. Much correspondence between the spiritual leaders is known from the first period of the Christian church. Also in this case the original material has been ravaged by time and we must be content with hand written copies or parts of copies.

From this situation we start our study about the trinity of God.

3. Serious false teachings

In the first ages of the church there were several burning issues, that needed to be solved. The apostolic fathers and church fathers, the leaders after the departure of the apostles, came across heretic teachings, especially about the essence of God.

3.1---Sabellius from Libië, who lived at about 200 in Rome, taught that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were three separate aspects of the same God. (Sabellianism, also called Modalism) He was suspended from his function by the local church of Rome.

3.2---Arius, who lived from 250 till 336, claimed with fervour, that the Son of God was not eternal, but created by God. So he taught that Jesus Christ was not God. (Arianism) In our days the Jehovah Witnesses have the same teaching.

3.3---Macedonianism, a vision of a bishop in Constantinople in 362, emphasised that the Holy Spirit did not equalise to God and the Son, that He was created and that He was not God.

Of course, these different points of view caused much upheaval among the Christian churches. The leaders reacted fiercely in their correspondence. To achieve a clear point of view they came together several times in so called councils. One of the well known councils is the one of Nicea, a place at the coast in the north west of Asia Minor, south of Constantinople. Here in 325 were Arius and Athanasius at daggers drawn against each other. Athanasius (275-373) was a deacon of the church in Alexandrië in Egypt. For years he had been resisting the teaching of Arius, that Jesus was created and not God. More than 300 church leaders took part at this council and at the end the teaching of Arius was rejected. Constantin the Great, the Emperor, who in the period before had changed from paganism to Christianity, was leading the council. Although Arius had lost from Adrianus and was

forbidden to continue his teaching, he still had a big influence in a number of churches.

After a while, this got out of hand in such a way, that the successor of Constantin the Great, the emperor of that time, called the people together for a new council, this time in Constantinople. In 381 the decisions of the Council of Nicea were confirmed here. Since that time, the problems caused by Arius, had mostly disappeared.

4. The early use of the word Trinity

In the literature of the early church, Theophilus, leader of the church in Antioch, in Asia Minor, uses the Greek word Trias, to refer to the Godhead. At about the same time, Tertullianus (160-225) uses the Latin word Trinitatis in an article in defence to heretic teaching.

It is one thing to disapprove of a teaching, but quite another matter to explain the truth. Thank to Athanasius they came to a joint point of view, that was written down on paper. In the following century a further explanation of the teaching of Athanasius proved to be necessary. Augustinus (354-430), head of the church of Hippo, in North Africa, has been engaged in this subject. He wrote the Trinitate Dei, the Trinity of God. In France, in Arles, the creed is mentioned for the first time in the correspondence of Caesarius (470-542). The oldest manuscripts date from the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century. In 1897 the latin text is translated in German and in 1965 in Dutch. The Dutch Reformed Church, the Christian Reformed Churches and the reformed Church in the Netherlands, use this creed in their liturgy. Also the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic churches and the Anglican churches use the creed named after Athanasius. Following is the complete manuscript.

P.S. Before you start reading it, we will draw your attention to the use of the concept Catholic Faith. This does not correspond to our concept of the Catholic Faith. Catholic in this creed means the universal Christian church, to distinguish them from the local church. The tone is straightforward, without reserve about either the eternal refuge or the eternal doom. The language is rather old fashioned, it is the translation of a very old manuscript.

5. The creed after Athanasius

1. Whoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith.
2. Which Faith, except everyone do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish ever lastingly.
3. And the Catholick Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons: nor dividing Substance.
5. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.
8. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.
10. The father eternal, the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternal: but one eternal.
- 12 As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated: but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.
- 13 So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty.
14. And yet there are not three Almighties: but one Almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God.

16. And yet they are not three Gods: But one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord: and the Holy Ghost is Lord.
18. And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord.
20. So we are forbidden by the Catholick Religion to say: There be three Gods or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created, but begotten.
23. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.
25. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another: none is greater, or less than another;
26. But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal.
27. So that in all things, as is aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved: must thus think of the Trinity
29. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, is God and Man;
31. God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the world: and Man, of the substance of his Mother, born in the world;
32. Perfect God, and perfect Man; of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting;
33. Equal to the Father, as touching to his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching to his Manhood.
34. Who although he be God and Man: yet he is not two, but one Christ;
35. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by the taking of the Manhood into God;
36. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance: but by unity of Person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man in one Christ;
38. Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.
39. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty: from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
40. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies: and shall give an account for their own works.
41. and they that have done good shall go into life everlasting: and they that have done evil into everlasting fire,
- 42 This is the Catholick Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

6. Objections against the concept of the Trinity

As we wrote before, some serious Christians are rather reserved about the concept of the Trinity. We gave you an historical survey about the way this concept came into being. Now we will take a look at some of the objections.

6.1---The Trinity is a Roman Catholic and/or an Eastern Orthodox invention. This is not true, because these churches or denominations did not yet exist at the time when the creed after

Athanasius was written. There were many churches in the area around the Mediterranean Sea. All of them were independent. Among them the local church of Rome and the local church of Constantinople.

During the councils every church had the right to vote. There is no evidence of dominance of either the church of Rome or the church of Constantinople. For example: Athanasius came from Alexandria. At the Council of Nicea (325) there were 300 representatives of different churches. 215 names of churches are known. Geographically they were divided as follows: Spain 40 churches, Italy 2 churches, Greece 10 churches, Asia-Minor 100 churches, Palestine and Syria 45 churches, Egypt 13 churches and Cyrene 5 churches. After the fall of the Roman Empire the local Church of Rome started to manifest itself as a power over a number of western churches. (about 600)

6.2---The word Trinity does not occur anywhere in the Bible. That is right, but does that mean, that the Trinity is not true? We use other theological concepts, that do not occur in the Bible. Nobody objects, when we use the word Bible, even so this word does not occur in the Bible. Also we cannot find the word theology, but without any hesitation we use it while studying the things of God. And what about the word revival (not ascension)? Not to be found in the Bible, but it belongs to the life of a serious Christian.

6.3---This matter is too difficult to understand for a Christian. It is a mystery, we cannot grasp it. That is right, it is surpassing our understanding. Should that be a reason to reject the Trinity? Think about how Jesus was begotten in Mary. Now, that is a great mystery. (read Luke 1:34-38) But we believe this and praise God for it, because with Him everything is possible. In the same way it is possible to believe in the Trinity of God. It is a wonderful miracle that God has been revealed to us as unity and also as trinity. Therefore now we go to the Bible, to see if all this is true.

7. Limited revelation of the essence of God in the Old Testament

7.1---In the 26th verse of the Bible God announces his intention to create man on his newly formed earth. He says: *"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea..... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* It attracts the attention, that linguistically the words us (2x), our, his, He (2x) all point to God. At school the teacher would immediately correct it and use the red pencil. But, from the beginning until now no text critic has used the red marks. This is the first indication that God is not a singular being.

In the first and second verse of the Bible is written: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.....and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."* Here the veil is lifted up just a little bit, God is not alone while creating, his Spirit is there too. That explains the use of the possessive adjectives us and our in verse 26. It points to the fact, that the essence of God is plural.

7.2---After the Fall in the Garden and the handing out of the punishment to Adam and Eve and the serpent, God says the following: *"And the Lord God said: The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever."* Genesis 3:22 Here also God speaks about himself as a plural person. The same we find in the story about the Tower of Babel. God speaks, after He has looked at the plans of the people: *"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."* Genesis 11:7

7.3---In the Eastern Orthodox churches the people worship many icons. They have made beautiful paintings of biblical figures like the apostles, Joseph and Mary, Simeon, etc. A well known icon is made of God's visit to Abraham, under the great trees of Mamre, as told in Genesis 18:1-15. According to the Eastern Church these three men are the Divine Trinity who visit Abraham. In the following verses about this story in the Bible, the two men who go to

Sodom and Gomorra, are called angels. Therefore not everybody is convinced. But it happens more often in the Old Testament that God and the Angel of the Lord are interchangeable, so the assumption, that the three men are the Divine Trinity, is not just a fantasy. We give three examples, but many more do occur in the Bible.

7.4----When Hagar, the slave girl of Sarai, flees to the desert, she meets with the Angel of the Lord. He advises her to go back to the tent of Abraham. The Angel of the Lord gives her a beautiful promise about the future of her yet unborn son Ishmael. Then, when she goes back, she is very thankful and says: "*She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: You are the God who sees me, for she said : I have now seen the One who sees me.*" Genesis 16:7-14

7.5----Four hundred years later, also in the desert, Moses is curious, when he sees a burning bush and he walks towards it, but the voice of God keeps him from going further: "*Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.*" Going back now to verse two of this chapter, we read: "*There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.*" Exodus 3:3-6 (see also Acts 7:30)

7.6----During the night, before the Israelites cross the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud and fire moved from in front and stood behind them. We read: "*Then the angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them,.....During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.*" Exodus 14:19-25 In all three examples God and the Angel of the Lord are mentioned like equal persons. This could be indications of the fact that God is more than one person.

7.7----Yet another indication we find in the book of Isaiah. The prophet writes about his own calling and cleansing: "*Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And I said: Here I am, send me!*" Isaiah 6:8 As mentioned before in Genesis, God here uses the plural while the pronouns I and Us speak about the same person. Some people point to verse three of the same chapter of Isaiah, where it says: "*And they (the seraphs) were calling to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*" They wonder, does the repeating of the word holy perhaps refer to the pronoun Us.

7.8----Also in Proverbs 30:4 we find a possible indication to more persons of God. "*Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name and the name of his son?*" While studying the context of this verse, it is clear that the who-person can only be God. In that case God has a son.

7.9----In Isaiah 61:3 we find different persons of the Godhead mentioned at the same time: "*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion-to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*" If for the pronoun me we write Jesus Christ and that clearly is permitted (seen in retrospect), then we see here the three persons of the Godhead together.

After having studied in the Old Testament the indicators of the plural essence of God, it is time to pass over to the New Testament. The Old Testament leaves us with expectations about the subject, now we will see if these expectations will be met.

8. Complete revelation of the essence of God in the New Testament

8.1----Jesus, after his baptism in the river Jordan, is led into the desert to be tested by satan. He weathers this test splendidly and goes then to where He lives, in Nazareth. On the sabbath's day He is in the synagogue, as is his habit. There He stands up and reads to the people a part of the book Isaiah. What does Jesus read on this sabbath's day? Very surprisingly Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-3. This part you find in 7.9, in the indications to the Trinity in the Old Testament. Everyone in the synagogue is paying full attention, what will Jesus say about these verses? *"and he began by saying to them: Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. Isn't this Joseph's son? they asked."* Luke4:21,22 While preaching He makes it clear to them that this part of Isaiah is speaking about himself. This enrages them terribly and they almost murder Jesus outside of the city. This event is important for our study, because it points clearly to the divine Trinity, now in the period of the New Testament. Jesus speaks freely and points to himself, He is the person mentioned above in Isaiah61:1-3.

8.2----Before Jesus is led into the desert by the Holy Spirit, to be tested by satan, He is baptised in the river Jordan. At this baptism, performed by John the Baptist, all three persons of the Godhead, take part actively. *"When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."* Luke3:21-22 Studies about other baptisms in the New Testament, tell us that nearly every time the Father as well as the Son as well as the Holy Spirit are mentioned and sometimes take part actively at different baptisms.

For that matter the trial in the desert also is an example of the mentioning of the three divine Persons. Luke 4:1-13 Jesus is led into the desert by the Holy Spirit. Answering the devil He says: *"It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only"*.

8.3----The incarnation of Jesus is a great mystery to us. Not many sermons are preached about this subject. We will examine his birth, rather his coming to earth, more closely to help us in our study. Evangelist/doctor Luke gives us in Luke1:26-38 elaborate prescription and information, for us to get more insight. God the Father sends the angel Gabriel to Mary, engaged to be married to Joseph and tells her, she will give birth to his Son. Mary is protesting a little as she is still a virgin. But then she says: *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."* The physical explanation to Mary is: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* In this one text, but also in the surrounding ones we find the three persons of the divine Trinity actively present at the incarnation of Jesus. In Hebrews 10:1-18 the writer goes back to the incarnation of Jesus. *"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said: Here I am- it is written about me in the scroll-I have come to do your will, o God.....And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* God the Father is actively involved in the making of the human body of his Son and God the Son clearly agrees with it.

8.4----Jesus, after his death on the cross and his resurrection, appears to his disciples for forty days and gives them much instruction. At the end of this period He gives his disciples the well-known great commission: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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."* Matthew28:18-20 Here Jesus mentions without hesitation in one breath the three names of the persons of the Godhead. The evangelist Matthew puts this statement at the end of his gospel, as if wanting to

say that no contradiction is possible. So, when we are baptising people, it is necessary to do so in the name of the triune God. Also, when teaching, we may base ourselves on this our triune God. In church history no text criticism is known of this bible section.

8.5---During his life on earth Jesus never pleaded for or against the divine Trinity. When preaching He spoke freely about God the Father and about the Holy Spirit. Without losing his way by asking himself: Is God the Father God, is the Holy Spirit God and is the Son God? It seemed natural to Him to mention these three persons as divine persons.

8.6----*"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know, for he lives with you and will be in you."* John 14:15-18 Jesus' departure is coming near, death on the cross is awaiting Him and He is occupied with the future of his disciples. *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."* John 14:18-20 Jesus continues with his vision of the future. *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him."* John 14:23 Jesus finishes his speech to his disciples with the comforting words: *All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you".* John 14:25-27 Jesus has not a shadow of a doubt about the fate of his disciples. Physically they will not see Him any more, but they will experience God spiritually, because and the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit will come and live in them. Jesus announces here that the triune God comes to live in the believers. A mighty and consoling thought.

8.7----At Pentecost all this comes into being. When God founds his church, He pours out the Holy Spirit on the believers who are present. Then Peter addresses the crowd of unbelievers and many started to repent, got saved and wanted to be baptised. The start of the Christian church is a stormy one, literally as well as figuratively, literally because of the sound of the violent wind and figuratively because of the three thousand converts who were baptised immediately. Again the three persons of the divine Trinity are actively engaged. Peter says in his sermon in Acts 2:32-36: *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said: The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

8.8----When Peter writes his first letter to the strangers scattered in the world, he starts as follows: *"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."* 1 Peter 1:1,2 He deems it necessary to mention the whole divine Trinity in his introduction. At the end of the second Corinthians, Paul writes: *"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All saints send their greetings. 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 Corinthians 13:12,13 Paul mentions, when he finishes his second letter, the complete divine Trinity.

8.9----Actually, we could continue like this. While studying the New Testament, we find nearly all letters are filled with direct indications to the fact, that God is a plural being, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you could make notes of the many times we come across this phenomenon, during your private bible-reading. Now we will give our attention to questions about the persons of the Trinity.

9. Three Persons are one Being, one Being is three Persons

9.1---As Christians we prefer to walk with our two feet on the earth. However, what is written here, is beyond us. Around us, there is nothing to hold on to, not in creation, nor in the religious world, nor in our limited philosophical ways of thinking. How to handle this in our modern time, in this educated society? The answer to this question is so simple. It is sufficient to believe, that our Creator is many times more wonderful, than we can think or imagine. He is not just a god, a kind of superbeing, we can look up to. No, our God is a Triune God, a Father, a Son and a Holy Spirit, who in spite of the variety, is one Being. In that way, the Lord God has revealed himself to his creatures, from Genesis up to the last book of the Bible, the Revelation. This causes an enormous sense of respect and awe for this our God. David says in Psalm 99:9: *"Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy."* With him, many persons in the Bible and many writers of the Bible, praise this wonderful God, this Triune God. It is also great, that because of the Trinity, in spite of the mystery thereof, God receives even more honour from his creatures. Because now we can praise God as Father, when we pray: Our Father, which art in heaven; now we can praise God as Son, when we are converted to God. We can thank God as Holy Spirit, when He teaches us once again new things about God and shows them to us. So we are able to praise God three times as much, three times more than a singular God.

9.2---Is the Holy Spirit a person and not a special power? This question is often asked and certainly the last assumption is believed often in our time. Especially in New Age circles the holy Spirit is seen as a magical power, a kind of influence God uses in certain situations. The Bible teaches us differently. Just imagine, you receive, when converted and born again, a special, a magical power instead of a person. You would then be filled with the same power as for example a mesmerist. You could then use this power for your own benefit. You could pride yourself on the fact that you are powerful because you are possessing this magical power. In Acts 8:4-25, in Samaria, Simon the sorcerer gets converted by the preaching of Philip. He notices that by laying on of hands by the apostles, the converts receive the Holy Spirit. He offers them money and says: *"Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."* Simon the sorcerer thinks he can take advantage of this gift, but Peter says to him: *"May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money."* Peter rejects the question for power resolutely and exhorts him to repent and ask forgiveness for his sins. When the Bible speaks about the Holy Spirit, He has all the characteristics of a person, not of a power. We find personal pronouns, not neutral ones, every time the Holy Spirit is mentioned. A well known and clear example is the passage where Jesus, just before his suffering, promises his disciples a substitute, a comforter. *"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement:"* John 16:7-8 In an earlier passage about his departure and his substitute, Jesus says: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you....."*

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." John 14:15-18,23 Actually, this is the most beautiful text in the New Testament concerning the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are mentioned in one breath. Not a power, but a person is functioning here as the Holy Spirit. When Jesus promises a comforter to replace Him on earth, He does not promise a

magical power or might, but a loving person, a comforter, the Comforter. A last remark: In the Bible, when it concerns the action of the Holy Spirit, we continually find expressions, belonging to a person, not to a power. For example: He searches (1Corinthians 2:10) ; He knows (1Corinthians 2:11); He is in the possession of love (Romans15-30); He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30); He can be lied to (Acts 5:4-4); He comforts (see above).

9.3----Is the Holy Spirit God? Or is He a very special creature of God? No, the Holy Spirit is a divine person. He is as much God as Jesus the Son is God. At the creation He is mentioned first. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."* Genesis1:1-3 The indication Spirit of God tells us He is God. When at night Nicodemus comes to Jesus with questions, Jesus explains to him, that everybody has to be born again, before he can see and enter the Kingdom of God. And this birth can only take place by water and the Holy Spirit. *"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone borne of the Spirit."* John3:8 This is a divine work in the converts and can only be done by a divine person, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is deeply involved in the spiritual growth of the churches. In the beginning of Revelation the situation of the churches is told and every part ends up with: *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* Revelation 2:7, 11,17, 29; 3;5,12, 22 The churches form the body of Christ, He is the head. Cooperation between Christ the head and the Holy Spirit the teacher, is only possible, if the Holy Spirit is also God. Only then is it possible to explain the presence and the working of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. He bears different names: The Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the good Spirit (Nehemiah9:20); the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord (Isaiah:1); the Spirit of grace and supplication (Zechariah12:10); the Spirit of your Father (Matthew10-20); the Spirit of truth (John14:17); the Spirit of Jesus (Acts16:7); the Spirit of Christ (Romans8:9); the Spirit of his Son (Galatians4:6); the Holy Spirit. Especially the name Holy Spirit speaks of God. Leviticus11:45 says: *"I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy."* The more we study about the Holy Spirit, the more our respect for Him is growing. He is God and together with the Father and the Son, He requires our highest praise.

9.4----Is there a divine order of rank between the persons of the Trinity? For example, is the Son lower than the Father and is then the Holy Spirit lower than the Son? In the past much is said and written about this subject. For our study we think it of less relevance to explore the diverse points of view. The point of view of the work group is as written in the Creed after Athanasius.

5....*For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost.*

6....*But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.*

17....*So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord: and the Holy Ghost is Lord.*

18.... *And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.*

24....*So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.*

We do not find difference in hierarchy, not in the Old Testament, nor in the New Testament. When Jesus gives his disciples the great commission, He does not make any divine difference between the Persons of the Trinity. Also in the last book of the Bible, in Revelation, we do not find difference in order of rank. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."* Revelation 1:8 In Revelation 22:12-17 *"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.....I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright Morning Star. The Spirit*

and the Bride say: Come!" In the first part of the text the Lord God calls himself the Alpha and the Omega. In the second part Jesus calls himself the Alpha and the Omega. There is no difference in order of rank. In closing the Holy Spirit says: Come! He can only say that, if they are on the same level.

10. Last Remarks

Maybe you have not often studied the theology of the divine Trinity. For some of you this may be the first time. We hope your spiritual life has been enriched by the study and we hope this knowledge offers new inspiration to praise and honour the Lord God in your personal and church life. A few years ago, *het Nederlands Dagblad* (a daily paper) dedicated a whole inner page to the Trinity. The editor, Mieke Brink, has written down 95 statements about the subject. They were chosen, because the day before, they celebrated the day of the Reformation. On this day Luther nailed 95 propositions on the chapel door in Wittenberg and by doing so, heralded the Reformation. This is of no consequence for our subject, but it explains why Mieke Brink had the idea of 95 statements, and now about the Trinity. We will now finish our study and mention some of her statements:

"nr.3 A person who says that God can't possibly be three and one at the same time, thinks more highly of mathematics than of God.

Nr.5 You cannot deny the Trinity and at the same time maintain the authority of the Scriptures.

Nr.7 A person who has problems with the greatness of God, is also having problems with God's Trinity.

Nr.10 A person who is filled with the Spirit, can't stop thinking about the Father and the Son.

Nr.12 Christ is more than your Brother and more than your Friend: He is your God.

Nr.92 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Nr.95 Honour to the Father, honour to the Son, honour to the Holy Spirit, to Him who was and who is and who is to come."

11. Sources

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--Participating in God, a pastoral doctrine of the Trinity, 2000 Paul S. Fiddes ISBN 0-232-52378-9 England.

--Study The Blessed Three-in-One, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity Proven from Scripture. Alan Morrison via internet www.diakrisis.org

--The Dutch Creeds, 1998 ISBN 90-239-00421

--www.naturaltheology.net/Supplementary/ChurchDocuments/creedAthanasius.html

Future

--Our next article will be published D.V. in the autumn of this year (2006). The planning is to discuss the subject: the Bible and psychology, how do the two relate?

--Possibly our website address will change in the coming half year. We applied to get the nl changed for eu. It will then be easier for English speaking Europeans to find us on the internet. In the future, to find us on the web, the address will be: www.backtothebible.eu For the time being the address will be: www.backtothebible.nl

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