

# The Scandal of Mystery: Faith, Reason, and the Triune God

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## Sin and the Darkening of the Human Intellect

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness *suppress the truth*. <sup>19</sup> For *what can be known about God is plain to them*, because God has shown it to them.

<sup>20</sup> Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; <sup>21</sup> *for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him*, but they became futile in *their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened*. <sup>22</sup> *Claiming to be wise, they became fools*, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

<sup>24</sup> *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity*, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women *exchanged natural relations for unnatural*, <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise *gave up natural relations* with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

<sup>28</sup> *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct*. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup> Though they know God's decree that *those who do such things deserve to die*, they not only do them but *approve those who practice them*. (Romans 1:18–32)

## The Revelation of the Mystery

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of *the mysteries of God* (1 Cor 4:1).

<sup>6</sup> Yet among the mature *we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age* or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him* [Isa 64:4]," <sup>10</sup> God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:6–10)

"Far from repudiating Christianity or regarding it with suspicious eyes because of its mysteries, we ought to recognize its divine grandeur in these very mysteries. So essential to Christianity are its mysteries that in its character of truth revealed by the Son of God and the Holy Spirit it would stand convicted of intrinsic contradiction if it brought forward no mysteries. Its Author would carry with Him a poor recommendation for His divinity if he taught us only such truths as in the last analysis we could have learned from a mere man, or could have perceived and adequately grasped by our own unaided powers."—Matthias Joseph Scheeben<sup>1</sup>

## The Reason for Divine Revelation

1. Made necessary because sin obscures truths we *should* know
2. Makes known truths we *couldn't* know

## The Mystery of the Trinity

1. Supernatural Mystery: Not knowable by reason
2. Not *contrary* to reason but beyond it
3. Theology: "faith seeking understanding" (not empirical or logical "proof")

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<sup>1</sup> *Mysteries of Christianity* (trans. C. Vollert; St. Louis: B. Herder Book, Co., 1946 [1865/1888]), 4.

The *mystery* of the Most Holy Trinity is the *central mystery of Christian faith and life*. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore *the source of all the other mysteries of faith*, the light that enlightens them. It is the *most fundamental and essential teaching* in the ‘hierarchy of the truths of faith’... (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 234)

### Key Texts

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is *one LORD*...” (Deut 6:4)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *in the name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt 28:19).

### Jesus’ Divinity in the Gospel according to John

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God;<sup>3</sup> *all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made*...<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:1–3, 14).

I am the Lord who made all things, *who stretched out the heavens alone*. Who was with me? (Isa 44:24).

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “*I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god*.” (Isa 44:6).

<sup>18</sup>This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also *called God his Father, making himself equal with God*. (John 5:17–18).

<sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “*My Lord and my God!*” (John 20:28).

### The Divinity of the Holy Spirit in Scripture

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you *another Counselor* [*paraklētos*], to be with you for ever,<sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. (John 14:16–17).

“we have an *advocate* [*paraklētos*] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

	<i>Christ</i>	<i>The Paraclete</i> <sup>2</sup>
Given by the Father	3:16	14:16
With, in, by the disciples	3:22; 13:33; 14:20	14:16–17
Not received by the world	1:11; 5:43 (12:48)	14:17
Not known by the world	16:3; 8:19; 10:14	14:17
Not seen by the world (only believers)	14:19; 16:16–17	14:17
Sent by the Father	3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23–24; etc.	14:26
Teaches	7:14–15; 8:20; 18:19	14:26
He comes (from the Father into the world)	5:43; 16:28; 18:37	15:26; 16:7, 13
Gives testimony	5:31ff.; 8:13ff.; 7:7	15:26
Convicts the world	(3:19–20; 9:41; 15:22)	16:8
Speaks not from self but from what is heard	7:17; 8:26ff.; 14:10	16:13
Glorifies his sender	12:28; 17:1, 4	16:14
Reveals, discloses, proclaims	4:25; (16:25)	16:13ff.
Leads into the fullness of truth	18:37; 14:6;	16:13
Is Spirit of truth / is truth	14:6	15:26; 14:17; 16:13

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Craig Keener, *Gospel of John* (2 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:965.

### Three “Persons”, One “Nature”

1. Nature: Answers the question of “*What?*”
2. Person: Answers the question of “*Who?*”

### Three Persons, One God

1. One God: one divine nature (one way of existing that is all-powerful, all-knowing, etc.)
2. Trinity: Three Persons share *the one same divine nature*
  - a. *Not* like three men share human nature
  - b. Larry, Moe and Curly each have their *own* intellect—do not think with *same* intellect
  - c. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share the *one* divine intellect & will
3. Three distinct *persons* not *modalities* (CCC 254)
  - a. Not one Person wearing different masks
  - b. Not one Person who acts as Father, Son and Holy Spirit at different times
4. Each Person is *fully* God (e.g., the Son is not *part* of God—He is God the Son)
5. Only way to distinguish the three persons is in their *relationships* (CCC 252)

*The divine persons are relative to one another. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another...* (CCC 255).

### The Procession of the Son (Word)

1. If God is Father, God is also Son
2. But procession in God cannot be *material*—faculties of the soul as a model for understanding
3. Example of immaterial procession: *thought* (something “conceived” by the mind, i.e., *concept*)
4. The “Word” (*logos*)
5. God’s “Image”
  - a. “He is the image of the invisible God.” (Col 1:15).
  - b. Son: Image of the Father
  - c. “Conception”: *concept*—Sonship & Idea

### The Procession of the Spirit

1. How can there be a procession in God that is NOT divine sonship?
2. Procession of the Spirit corresponds to the will (different from way “thought” is produced by intellect)
3. The Spirit as the “Lovingness” of the Father and Son
  - a. The Father produces a Person (the Son)
  - b. The Son images the Father
  - c. A Person must proceed from/through the Son or else the Son is not the Image of the Father!
4. Holy Spirit as Bond of Love

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* be with you all.” (2 Cor 13:14).

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and *the communion of the Holy Spirit* be with you all.”