

# Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics

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quite possible. It is, however, conceivable that the idea developed under the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which possesses the notable triads of Buddha, Dhyaṇi-buddha, and Dhyaṇi-bodhisattva on the one hand, and of the Dharma-, Nirmāna-, and Sambhoga-kāyas of a Buddha on the other. The Buddhist art of Gandhāra, followed by that of Tibet, China, and Japan, is prone to depict groups of three deities, Buddhas, or *bodhisattvas*, and it is to this influence that we may assign the existence of such sculptures as that from the cave of Elephanta, Bombay, which presents the three gods in one statue, and affords the inspiration for the *ekā mūrtiḥ trayo devāḥ* of the *Matsya Purāna*,<sup>1</sup> a passage often wrongly interpreted to mean 'One God and three persons.'

LITERATURE.—J. Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, iv. 3, London, 1878; A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (= *GIAP* iii. 1), Strassburg, 1897; A. Barth, *The Religions of India*, Eng. tr., London, 1892; E. W. Hopkins, *Religions of India*, do. 1896; A. B. Keith, *Indian Mythology* (= *Mythology of All Races*, vi.), Boston, 1917; A. Grünwedel, *Buddhist Art in India*, Eng. tr., London, 1901; L. de la Vallée Poussin, *JRAS*, 1903, pp. 943-977; N. Söderblom, in *Transactions of the Third Internat. Cong. for the History of Religions*, II. (Oxford, 1908) 391-410.

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TRINITARIANISM.—See TRINITY, RELIGIOUS ORDERS (Christian).

TRINITY.—1. The term and concept.—(a) The term 'Trinity' (from Lat. *trinitas*) appears to have been first used by Tertullian,<sup>2</sup> while the corresponding Greek term 'Triad' (τριάς) appears to have been first used by Theophilus the Christian apologist,<sup>3</sup> an older contemporary of Tertullian. In Tertullian, as in the subsequent usage, the term designates the Christian doctrine of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

(b) Although the notion of a divine Triad or Trinity is characteristic of the Christian religion, it is by no means peculiar to it. In Indian religion, e.g., we meet with the trinitarian group of Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu; and in Egyptian religion with the trinitarian group of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, constituting a divine family, like the Father, Mother, and Son in mediæval Christian pictures. Nor is it only in historical religions that we find God viewed as a Trinity. One recalls in particular the Neo-Platonic view of the Supreme or Ultimate Reality, which was suggested by Plato in the *Timæus*; e.g., in the philosophy of Plotinus the primary or original Realities (ἀρχικαὶ ὑποστάσεις)<sup>4</sup> are triadically represented as the Good or (in numerical symbol) the One, the Intelligence or the One-Many, and the World-Soul or the One and Many. The religious Trinity associated, if somewhat loosely, with Comte's philosophy might also be cited here: the cultus of humanity as the Great Being, of space as the Great Medium, and of the earth as the Great Fetish.

(c) What lends a special character to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is its close association with the distinctive Christian view of divine incarnation. In other religions and religious philosophies we meet with the idea of divine incarnation, but it may be claimed that nowhere is the union of God and man so concrete and definite, and so universal in its import, as in the Christian religion. As Augustine said,<sup>5</sup> if in the books of the Platonists it was to be found that 'in the beginning was

the Word,'<sup>1</sup> it was not found there that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'<sup>2</sup> It is the very central truth of Christianity that God was historically manifest in Christ, and that He is still revealed in the world as the indwelling Spirit of the Church or community of Christ's founding. This Christian faith in the incarnation of the divine Word (λόγος, *sermo, ratio*) in the man Christ Jesus, with whom the believer is united through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the distinctive basis of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

2. The development of the doctrine.—The limits of this article preclude any attempt to trace in detail the development of the Trinitarian idea from its beginnings in the Bible to its final formulation in the orthodox creeds. In various articles of this Encyclopedia this ground is traversed, such as the comprehensive art. GOD; the art. on particular developments of ancient Christian thought like the Alexandrian, Antiochene, and Cappadocian Theologies; the art. on individual Christian theologians like Athanasius and Augustine; the art. on heretical phases of Christological and Trinitarian belief like Arianism, Monophysitism, Nestorianism. It will be convenient, however, to take here a general conspectus of the development in question.

(a) The *Old Testament* could hardly be expected to furnish the doctrine of the Trinity, if belief in the Trinity is grounded (as stated above) upon belief in the incarnation of God in Christ and upon the experience of spiritual redemption and renewal through Christ. It is exegesis of a mischievous, if pious, sort that would discover the doctrine in the plural form, 'Elohim,' of the Deity's name, in the recorded appearance of three angels to Abraham, or even in the *ter sanctus* of the prophecies of Isaiah. It may be allowed, however, that the OT ideas of the Word of God and the Wisdom of God are adumbrations of the doctrine, as recognizing the truth of a various self-revealing activity in the one God.

(b) In the *New Testament* we do not find the doctrine of the Trinity in anything like its developed form, not even in the Pauline and Johannine theology, although ample witness is borne to the religious experience from which the doctrine springs. None the less Christ is acknowledged as the eternal Son of God and the supreme revelation of the Father, and the quickening Spirit of life is acknowledged to be derived 'from on high.'<sup>3</sup> And so, when the early Christians would describe their conception of God, all the three elements—God, Christ, and the Spirit—enter into the description, and the one God is found to be revealed in a threefold way. This is seen in the baptismal formula,<sup>4</sup> 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' which at least reflects the usage of the apostolic Church, and in which the members of the Trinity are already all three associated together. It is also to be seen in the familiar words of St. Paul,<sup>5</sup> 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.' This last has been called, and justly so, the great Trinitarian text of the NT, as being one of the few NT passages, and the earliest of them, in which the three elements of the Trinity are set alongside of each other in a single sentence. If the passage contains no formulated expression of the Trinity, it is yet of great significance as showing that, less than thirty years after the death of Christ, His name and the name of the Holy Spirit could be employed in conjunction with the name of God Himself. Truly, if the doctrine of the Trinity appeared

<sup>1</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *Religious Literature of India*, Oxford, 1920, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> 'Custodiatur *okrovomias* sacramentum, quae unitatem in trinitatem disponit' (*adv. Praxean*, 2).

<sup>3</sup> τῆς τριάδος, τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς σοφίας αὐτοῦ (II. 15). But perhaps the earliest appearance of the term is in Clem. *Excerpt. ex Theod.* § 80; cf. A. Harnack, *Hist. of Dogma*, Eng. tr., 7 vols., London, 1894-99, II. 209 n.

<sup>4</sup> *Evng.* v. 1, cited by C. C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (*Gifford Lectures*), London, 1918, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Conf.* vii. 9; cf. C. C. J. Webb, *Problems in the Relations of God and Man*, London, 1911, p. 286.

<sup>1</sup> Jn 11.

<sup>2</sup> Mt 28:19.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 1:14.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Co 13:14.

<sup>5</sup> Lk 24:49.

man, could not really exist if it did not thus involve an internal manifold.<sup>1</sup> For the elaboration of these positions reference must be made to the book itself. The discussion is cited here only as illustrating a recent tendency in the application, in Trinitarian speculations, of the principle of analogy.

5. Economic and essential trinity.—(a) The transition from the Trinity of experience to the Trinity of dogma is describable in other terms as the transition from the economic or dispensational Trinity (*τρόπος ἀποκαλύψεως*) to the essential, immanent, or ontological Trinity (*τρόπος υπάρξεως*). At first the Christian faith was not Trinitarian in the strictly ontological reference. It was not so in the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages, as reflected in the NT and other early Christian writings. Nor was it so even in the age of the Christian apologists. And even Tertullian, who founded the nomenclature of the orthodox doctrine, knew as little of an ontological Trinity as did the apologists; his is still the economic or relative conception of the Johannine and Pauline theology. So Harnack holds,<sup>2</sup> and he says further<sup>3</sup> that the whole history of Christological and Trinitarian dogma from Athanasius to Augustine is the history of the displacement of the Logos-conception by that of the Son, of the substitution of the immanent and absolute Trinity for the economic and relative. In any case the orthodox doctrine in its developed form is a Trinity of essence rather than of manifestation, as having to do in the first instance with the subjective rather than the objective Being of God. And, just because these two meanings of the Trinity—the theoretical and the practical, as they might also be described—are being sharply distinguished in modern Christian thought, it might be well if the term 'Trinity' were employed to designate the Trinity of revelation (or the doctrine of the threefold self-manifestation of God), and the term 'Triunity' (cf. Germ. *Dreieinigkeit*) adopted as the designation of the essential Trinity (or the doctrine of the tri-personal nature of God).<sup>4</sup>

(b) It should be observed that there is no real cleavage or antithesis between the doctrines of the economic and the essential Trinity, and naturally so. The Triunity represents the effort to think out the Trinity, and so to afford it a reasonable basis. The first Christians had with St. Paul a saving experience of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the love of God, and of the communion of the Holy Ghost;<sup>5</sup> and the theologians of the ancient Church sought to set forth the Christian experience in logical terms of reason. In the effort they were led, inevitably, to effect an alliance between the gospel of their salvation and the speculative philosophy, and more especially the Platonism, in which they had been trained, while, in making room for the Christian gospel within the world—not altogether hospitable—of the Greek philosophy, they found themselves translating their empirical knowledge of God—the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ—into a doctrine of diversity or multiplicity, as distinguished from merely abstract unity, within the divine Nature itself. In other words, in thinking out the Trinity they arrived at the Triunity. None the less the greatest and most influential of the Christian Fathers, Origen, Athanasius, Basil and the Gregories, Augustine, all acknowledged that, for all the light thrown upon it in the Biblical revelation, the divine Nature remained for them a mystery transcending reason.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McDowall, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. of Dogma*, II. 209, 260.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* III. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. N. Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, Edinburgh, 1898, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 2 Co 13:14.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. B. Illingworth, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, London, 1907, ch. vi.

(c) It is claimed, however, especially by Catholic thinkers, that, logical mystery as the Trinity undoubtedly is, it not only conserves the spiritual values of the Gospel, but may be said to enshrine or encasket them. The Athanasian Creed, e.g., is declared to be in effect a sublime and magnificent hymn of the Christian faith, having a power all its own to stir and uplift the souls of believers with the greatness and mystery of the divine redemption in Jesus Christ. That being so, it may be allowed that there is justice in the contention that acceptance of the Triunity does not commit one to the adoption of obsolete modes of thought, but only to acceptance of the authoritative Christian tradition which the terms of the Greek philosophy served to symbolize, and with whose continued vitality they have become invested.<sup>1</sup>

(d) But in consequence of a wide-spread failure, especially within the Protestant Church, to appreciate the symbolism in which the traditional Christian convictions are embodied, and to recognize in the doctrine of the Three in One any more than a sacred mysterious formula, modern Christian theology is thrown back more and more upon the historical revelation in Jesus Christ and the inward experience of Christian believers as the practical ground and basis of Trinitarian doctrine, being less concerned with what God is in Himself than with what He has shown Himself to be—less concerned with the Trinity of essence than with the Trinity of manifestation. It is part of the modern empirical movement in theology, chiefly associated with the names of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. When thus employed practically, as interpretative of Christian experience, rather than theoretically, as a doctrine of reality beyond and even apart from experience, the Trinity may be regarded as summarizing the different ways in which the knowledge of God may be held. (1) He may be thought of as the self-disclosed God and, as such, known to men as the ultimate and absolute Being, whose ways are past finding out. (2) He may be thought of as the self-disclosing God and, as such, known to men in nature and history and, above all, in the character and purposes of Jesus Christ. (3) He may be thought of as the self-imparting or self-communicating God and, as such, known to men as indwelling power. God revealed, God revealing, God abiding—in these three ways God makes Himself known, and they correspond to the elements of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian formula. If then, theoretically, the Trinity is 'the affirmation of a full rich life in God as distinct from all abstract and barren conceptions of his Being,' it is, practically, 'the affirmation that the true nature of God must be learned from his historic revelation in Christ, and from the experience which Christ creates.'<sup>2</sup>

(e) Doubtless such a statement is liable to the charge of Sabellianism (modalistic Monarchianism), but it may readily be defended against such a charge. In Sabellianism the divine nature is an abstract undifferentiated unity known only in three successive modes or manifestations, none of which is complete or permanent; they are but names,<sup>3</sup> and may not be translated into fundamental factors in the divine experience. Here the elements of the Trinity are acknowledged to be rooted eternally in unseen reality, so that God is always the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, although known through the threefold self-manifestation or not known at all.

(f) In the system of Christian theology the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Illingworth, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> Adams Brown, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Epiphanius, *Hæc.* lxi. : *ὡς εἶπαι ἐν μὲν ἑσθέρῳ τρεῖς θεομοῖαι*; cf. J. Tixeront, *Hist. des dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne*, 3 vols., Paris, 1900-12, I. 849, 483 f.