

LEAD 360
Christian Theology

Study Guide for Session II
Part I: “The Christian Belief in the Trinity”

1. Questions to prompt thought and discussion:

- (1) Why do you think Paul Young fictional novel, *The Shack*, has had such a worldwide appeal?
- (2) Is the belief in the Trinity the heart of Christian belief about God? Why or why not?
- (3) The term “Trinity” is not found in the Greek manuscripts of the N.T. Does this prove that the belief is not biblical?
- (4) How important is the study of Christian history toward a better understanding of how Christian belief in the Trinity developed?
- (5) If the belief in the Trinity is mysterious, does this mean that God does not intend for us to understand or appreciate it?
- (6) What two extremes are wise to avoid in seeking to clarify what Trinity does or does not mean? Why?
- (7) Identify several of the main heresies which developed within early Christianity during the first four centuries. How does each of them oversimplify this belief? Do these heresies committed by Christians demonstrate how heresy often gives birth to orthodox belief?
- (8) Identify the three major biblical “building blocks” evident in Scripture which were used within early Christianity in affirming Trinitarian belief and faith. Notice how important “progressive revelation” is for appreciating the Trinity as biblical.
- (9) Who were the “Cappadocian Fathers” and what were their main contributions to trinitarian understanding?
- (10) How is it possible to see the belief in the Trinity as both intelligible and mysterious?
- (11) Is it possible for someone to become a Christian if he or she denies or rejects this belief? Why or why not?
- (12) How different is the Christian perspective of God from that of Judaism and

Islam?

2. Recommended resources for further study:

(1) Basic level resources:

- Bowman, Robert M. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.
- Erickson, Millard. *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.
- Swindoll, Charles. *The Trinity: Discovering the Depth of the Nature of God*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993.
- Welch, Claude. *The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. New York: Scribner's, 1952.

(2) More advanced resources:

- George, Timothy. ed. *God and the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Grenz, Stanley. *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.
- Leupp, Roderick T. *Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Olson, Roger E. & Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity*. Guides to Theology. eds. Sally Bruyneel, et al. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Peters, Ted. *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- Toon, Peter. *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity*. Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1996.
- Torrance, T. F. *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994.

3. Personal & Group activities

- (1) Use Paul Young's *The Shack* as a discussion starter for non-Christians as you try to minister to those who think of God as unfriendly and a God *only* of judgment. Be sure and emphasize that his intent is to use a fictional story to characterize God as loving and relational. Bear in mind he did *not* write it as a theological exposition of the Trinity.
- (2) Engage Jehovah Witnesses in conversation about the Trinity. Listen carefully to their understanding of their translation of the Bible. Try to centre the dialogue on the main elements of the Christian gospel. Challenge them about their understanding of God, the Trinity, Who God is in Christ (the incarnation) and how he saves us. Be aware that their translation of the Bible (New World Living Translation) has been produced from textual evidence they believe supports their beliefs. In many ways it is a "different" Bible than yours. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in the conversation and to convict the misguided friend.