

**AFFINITY
THEOLOGICAL
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GREAT GOD *of* WONDERS

THE GOD WHO IS AND THE GOD WHO ACTS

2025 Papers

affinity
gospel churches in partnership



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Published in 2025 specifically for the Affinity Theological Study Conference held in March 2025 by

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PO Box 905,
Haywards Heath, RH16 9TJ
affinity.org.uk

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Introduction

PAUL YEULETT

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At the time of writing, “uncertainty” is too weak a word to describe the state of the world around us. In Washington, D.C., a Presidential Inauguration has taken place, promising revolutionary change. The announcement of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas is inherently fragile. The meat-grinding war in Ukraine rumbles on toward its third anniversary, and the spectre of an imminent Chinese invasion of Taiwan looms menacingly.

Here in the UK, the situation can appear bleak and unpredictable. Without delving into politics, economics, race relations, and all the other headline-grabbing issues, we know that the Church of England is in turmoil following the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury due to circumstances that should cause each of us to grieve deeply. Moreover, we witness a fragmented and bewildered nation caught in an identity crisis, with many individuals of all ages suffering from poor mental health.

What a time, then, for an Affinity Theological Study Conference which explores the Doctrine of God!

This topic was suggested by more than one regular attendee of the Study Conference, going back four or even six years, and it appealed to several of us very quickly. Moreover, the year 2025 marks the 1,700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, an occasion of monumental significance in the history of the church and indeed of the development of Christian doctrine. There is a sense in which all subsequent creeds, confessions and catechisms look back to Nicaea and the victory of (small c) catholic Trinitarianism over Arian heresy. That makes the theme of our Study Conference especially apposite.

In the past few years some of us have become acquainted with the rediscovery and reappraisal of what might variously be termed Classical Theism, Reformed Thomism or, in some circles, the Great Tradition. The line-up for this year’s Study Conference reflects these developments; we have largely gone for scholar-pastors, you might say, rather than pastor-scholars. The name of Thomas Aquinas comes up in these Papers rather more frequently, I suggest, than in any previous Study Conference. In drilling down into these deeper and older wells, we are doing something which the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, and indeed the most robust Puritans of the seventeenth, would have applauded. The shoulders we stand on must be more ancient than the bowed and rugged shoulders of Luther, banging his ninety-five theses into that church door in Wittenberg – if indeed he ever did!

We must affirm with a full-throated cry that there is, and has ever been, “one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all’ (Eph 4:4-6 emphasis added). The God of the Early Church Fathers is the God of the Medieval Schoolmen; he is the God of the Reformers and the Puritans; he is the God of the Evangelical Awakening and of the Modern Missionary Movement; he is the God of this present, dizzyingly overwhelming twenty-first century.

Theology Proper, as the Doctrine of God is sometimes called, explores the very nature, essence and character of God himself. It covers such themes as his unity, immutability, impassibility, and his attributes both communicable and incommunicable. It delves into the intra-trinitarian relations between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It utilises philosophical and metaphysical terms, which are unavoidable if we want to do the subject justice. Whoever reads these Papers will have their minds stretched. But at the same time, the authors of these Papers were under clear instructions to minister to the church, not to the academy, and I believe that they have fulfilled these directions.

Devotees of the life and ministry of C. H. Spurgeon will be familiar with some words he spoke in January 1855; J. I. Packer’s phenomenally best-selling *Knowing God* opens with them. Spurgeon was a mere slip of a lad, twenty years old, when he began to preach from Malachi 3:6: “I am the Lord; I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”. The paragraph I cite is weighty, but it demands to be quoted in full:

It has been said by someone that “the proper study of mankind is man.” I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God’s elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, “Behold I am wise.” But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn

away with the thought, that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.

If this Conference achieves this end, "to humble the mind" in the presence of our Great God of Wonders, then it will have served its purpose. The best theology leads to doxology, and the best doxology results in worshippers gazing up into heaven with wide-open eyes and wide-open mouths, crying from the depths of their souls, as did the apostle Paul:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

*For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counsellor?
Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?*

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)

Amen and Amen!

The Power and Personhood of God

MOSTYN ROBERTS

To continue reading, register for the
2025 Affinity Theological Study Conference,
taking place in Northampton from 5 to 7 March 2025.

Find out more and book your place today at:
www.affinity.org.uk/studyconference



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