

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity

W. Gary Crampton

In the Introduction to his book on the Trinity, Gordon Clark comments that "over a period of thirty years the present writer has attended services in many places between Philadelphia and San Diego. . . . In the churches, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and independent, I never heard a sermon on the Trinity."¹ If this is any indication of the theological laxity of our age, it is a serious matter. Why? Because the doctrine of the Trinity is a cardinal doctrine; it is fundamental to the Christian faith and must be preached. According to A. A. Hodge:

By what considerations may it be shown that the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental element of the gospel? . . . It is not claimed that the refinements of theological speculations upon this subject are essential points of the faith, but simply that it is essential to salvation to believe in the three persons in one Godhead, as they are revealed to us in the Scriptures.²

What Hodge is saying is that a person cannot be saved apart from a knowledge of the Trinity. It is an essential element of the Gospel. By this he does not mean that one needs to have an exhaustive knowledge of the Trinity to have a saving

knowledge of God. But the God of Scripture is Triune and to know God is to know him as Triune.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (2:3) synthesizes the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity³ as follows: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son." In this statement we have three major teachings: there is one living and true God who exists eternally in three persons; all three persons are equally divine; each of the three equal persons has distinguishing properties.

Christianity is both monotheistic and Trinitarian. Monotheism is the doctrine, as expressed by the *Shorter Catechism* (Q 5), that "there is but one only, the living and true God." In *Deuteronomy* 6:4 we read: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (*1 Timothy* 2:5). And in *1 Corinthians* 8:4 we read: "there is no other God but one." There is unity

³ Although the term "Trinity" itself is not found in the Bible, the doctrine, as we will see, is taught throughout the Scriptures. "Trinity," which comes from the Latin *trinitas* ("threeness"), was first coined by Tertullian (c. A.D. 155-220) in his description of the three persons of the Godhead.

¹ Gordon H. Clark, *The Trinity* (Trinity Foundation, 1985), 1.

² A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Zondervan, 1972 [1879]), 198.

within the Godhead. But there is also plurality: threeness. This does not mean that God is one and three in the same sense; that would be contradictory. God is one in one sense: essence, and three in another sense: persons. This is unique to Christianity. Both Judaism and Islam are monotheistic, but neither is Trinitarian. In the Christian doctrine, the unity and plurality of God are both essential.⁴ As the *Catechism* (Q 6) states: "There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." And each of the persons, as the *Catechism* (Q 6) goes on to say, is one hundred percent divine: "and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." That is, each member of the Trinity "is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (Q 4). (The body and soul of the incarnate second person of the Godhead, of course, are not parts of the Trinity.)

Each person of the Godhead, then, is fully divine. But each person has properties which distinguish him from the other persons. The differences between the three are not differences in essence; they are distinctions within the Trinity. Only the Father can say, "I am the Father"; only the Son can say, "I am the Son"; and only the Holy Spirit can say, "I am the Holy Spirit." In referring to the other members of the Trinity, the Father can say, "He is the Son and he is the Spirit," but he cannot say, "I am the Son" or "I am the Spirit." In the same manner, the Son can say, "He is the Father and he is the Spirit," but he cannot say, "I am the Father" or "I am the Spirit." And the Spirit can say, "He is the Father and he is the Son," but he cannot say, "I am the Father" or "I am the Son." Simply stated, that which distinguishes the three members of the Godhead are the eternal paternity of the Father, the eternal Sonship of the Son, and the fact that the Spirit is eternally the Spirit. The Westminster divines speak of the distinguishing properties within the Godhead as follows: "The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally

begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."

John Calvin declared the uniqueness of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity:

There are in God three hypostases [persons] . . . the Father and Son and Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but . . . they are differentiated by a peculiar quality. . . . [W]here simple and indefinite mention is made of God, this name pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But as soon as the Father is compared with the Son, the character of each distinguishes the one from the other. . . . [W]hatever is proper to each individually, I maintain to be incommunicable because whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to, the Son.⁵

The plurality of God and the divine status of each member is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew word *elohim* ("God") itself, a plural noun which is found over 2,500 times in the Old Testament, suggests some form of plurality within the Godhead, albeit it does not specify three persons. Divine plurality is further supported in *Genesis* 1:26; 3:22; and 11:7, where the plural pronoun "Us" is used of the one true God. Too, the Old Testament ascribes creation and providence (both of which are divine actions) to the Father (*Genesis* 1:1; *Job* 34:12-15), the Word (*Genesis* 1:3; *Psalms* 33:6, 9), and the Spirit (*Genesis* 1:2; *Psalms* 33:6; 104:30). The "threeness" of Jehovah (God's covenant name; compare *Exodus* 3:10-15) is at least strongly implied in the Aaronic benediction of *Numbers* 6:24-26: "Jehovah bless you and keep you; Jehovah make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; Jehovah lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." The Trinitarian nature of the Godhead is also taught in *Isaiah* 48:16; 61:1; and 63:9, 10. (The Angel of

⁴ There are, of course, some Egyptian, Hindu, and Greek religions which are tri-theistic (i.e., three gods), but they are not Trinitarian in the sense of the Christian doctrine. Christianity does not teach tri-theism.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vols. I & II, Library of the Christian Classics, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster, 1960), I:13:2, 5, 6.

the Lord—the pre-incarnate Second Person of the Godhead—is given divine status in *Genesis* 16:7-13; 18:1-21; and 19:1-22.)

The New Testament witness is clearer still. The Trinity is revealed at both the birth (*Luke* 1:35) and baptism of Jesus (*Matthew* 3:16, 17). Creation and providence are ascribed to the Father (*Matthew* 7:11; *Acts* 17:28), the Son (*John* 1:3; *Colossians* 1:15-17; *Hebrews* 1:3), and the Holy Spirit (*Matthew* 1:18; 4:1; *Romans* 1:4). *1 Corinthians* 12:4-6; *2 Corinthians* 13:14; and *1 Peter* 1:2 also speak of the three persons of the Trinity. *Matthew* 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," is especially strong, in that it teaches both the unity and plurality of God. In this verse the three persons of the Trinity are emphatically distinguished by the use of the definite article "the" in each case; yet there is one singular "name."

That the New Testament teaches the deity of the Father is beyond cavil. The passages speaking to his divine nature are numerous, *John* 6:27 and *1 Peter* 1:2 being just two examples. Regarding the Son, in *John* 1:1-3, 14, we read that he is the eternal *Logos*: the Word of God. In *John* 8:58 and 13:19 Jesus claims that he is the eternal "I AM" (the Old Testament Jehovah). And there are at least eight places in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ is called God (*theos*): *John* 1:1; 1:18 (*NASV*); 20:28; *Romans* 9:5; *1 Timothy* 3:16 (*NKJV*); *Titus* 2:13; *2 Peter* 1:1; *Hebrews* 1:8; and *1 John* 5:20.

In *Acts* 5:3, 4 the Holy Spirit is called God (*theos*), and in *Hebrews* 9:14 he is said to be eternal. The fact that blasphemy of the Spirit is an unforgivable sin also speaks to his divine nature (*Matthew* 12:32). And in *1 Corinthians* 2:10, 11 we read that the Holy Spirit is able to search the mind of God. (Some modern day liberals have averred that the Holy Spirit is merely "the power of God," not a divine person. But in *Luke* 1:35, *Acts* 10:38, and *1 Corinthians* 2:4, the Spirit is distinguished from his power.) Passages such as these, from both the Old and New Testaments, which teach the unity and plurality of the three divine members of the Godhead, could be multiplied many times. But I

hope these will suffice to show that even though the word *Trinity* is not used in the Bible, the doctrine, as expressed by the Westminster divines, is clearly taught.

The history of the church has witnessed two major heresies regarding the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity: modalism (or Sabellianism ⁶) and subordinationism. Modalism teaches that God is one in essence and one in person; there are not three persons, there are merely three ways of referring to the one person. Sometimes the Bible calls this person Father (e.g., when it speaks of creation), sometimes he is called Son (e.g., when it speaks of redemption), and sometimes he is called Holy Spirit (e.g., when it speaks of regeneration and sanctification). The Son and the Spirit are called "modes" of God; hence the name modalism. In modalism the unity of God is secured, but at the expense of the divine triunity of the persons.

Subordinationism teaches that there is one God: the Father. The Son and the Spirit are lesser deities, if divine at all. The Son and the Spirit, say the subordinationists, are not eternal beings; thus, they are subordinated to the Father. Modern unitarianism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and related theologies have developed from the subordinationism taught in the early years of Christianity.

This is not to say that the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity does not recognize an order of economy, or administration, within the Godhead. Here there is a form of subordination. There are Biblical passages which state that the Father sent the Son into the world to accomplish his redemptive work (*Mark* 9:37; *John* 17:3). And there are passages which teach that the Father and the Son sent the Spirit (*John* 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). Likewise, Jesus said: "My Father is greater than I" (*John* 14:28). But these verses do not teach a subordination within the Trinity, i.e., they say nothing with regard to the divine nature of the members of the Godhead. Rather, these verses teach that within the (economic) Trinity, each member has functions to perform in redemptive history. Simply stated, the

⁶ Sabellianism is named for Sabellius (3rd century), who taught a form of modalism.

concept of the economic Trinity has to do with the works of the Triune Godhead outside of himself.

In the work of redemption, for example, the Father is the one who elects (*Ephesians* 1:3, 4; *1 Peter* 1:2), the Son is the one who becomes incarnate and accomplishes redemption for the elect (*Ephesians* 1:7; *1 Peter* 1:2), and the Spirit is the one who regenerates the elect (*John* 3:3-8; *Titus* 3:5, 6), and progressively sanctifies them (*2 Corinthians* 3:17, 18; *2 Thessalonians* 2:13), *i.e.*, he applies redemption. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (8:1, 5, 8) says it this way:

It pleased God in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the mediator between God and man . . . unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of Heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them; and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

In this sense, and in this sense only, God the Father is greater than the Son, and the Father and the Son are greater than the Spirit; not in their essence, but in their administrative order, or economy.

Finally, it is to be noted that there is perfect harmony in the work of the Trinity. This is necessarily true because orthodox Christianity teaches that the three persons of the Trinity have only one will. Apart from this, there would be confusion and chaos within the Godhead. But "God," writes the apostle Paul, "is not the author of confusion" (*1 Corinthians* 14:33). And in *Malachi* 3:6 we read: "I am the Lord, I do not change."

The perfect harmony that exists within the Trinity is found in Scripture in various ways. We have already seen that each member of the Trinity is involved in creation (*Genesis* 1:1-3; *Psalms* 33:6; *John* 1:3), and that each is active in salvation (*1 Peter* 1:2). In *1 Corinthians* 12:4-6 Paul teaches us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in communion with the church. And in the Great Commission of *Matthew* 28:18-20 we read that all three persons are active in the evangelization of the world. Further, all three persons are involved in the redemptive work of Christ: his incarnation (*Luke* 1:35); his baptism (*Matthew* 3:16, 17); his crucifixion (*Hebrews* 9:14); his resurrection (*Acts* 2:32; *John* 10:17; *Romans* 1:4); and his ascension (*Acts* 2:33). In fact, the perfect harmony that exists in the work of the Trinity is one of the strongest arguments for "limited atonement." Since the Father has chosen only some to be saved (*Ephesians* 1:4), and the Spirit regenerates and seals a certain number (*Titus* 3:5, 6; *Ephesians* 1:13, 14), then the Son's atonement could not have been unlimited, *i.e.*, for the whole. The fact is that Christ died to save only those whom the Father has chosen and those who will be regenerated by the Spirit: the elect (*Ephesians* 1:7; 5:25). "You shall call his name Jesus," writes Matthew (1:21), "for he will save *his people* from their sins."

We live in a day when many seminaries and would-be theologians are praising the virtues of "practice," and playing down the need to study doctrine. This is a sad commentary on the church at the end of the twentieth century. To de-emphasize doctrine is to de-emphasize Christianity, for Christianity is doctrine. Christianity is the teaching of the sixty-six books of the Bible. Practice or behavior is the result of the doctrine. But the behavior itself is not Christianity. What is needed is a return to the study

of systematic theology. And a study of the Trinity is a good place to start. After all, belief in the Trinity is essential to a saving knowledge of God.

Robert Reymond says:

The Biblical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, I would submit . . . runs deep and cuts a wide swath. . . . [H]e who would advocate a truly Trinitarian faith will necessarily endorse the full, unabridged deity and personal subsistence of the Son and the full, unabridged deity and personal subsistence of the Holy Spirit. It was the realization of these twin facts that lay behind the statement of Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-c. 389): "I cannot think of the One, but I am immediately surrounded with the glory of the Three; nor can I clearly discover the Three, but I am suddenly carried back to the One."⁷

⁷ Robert L. Reymond, *God and Man in Holy Scripture* (unpublished manuscript, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1990), 107.

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The Intellectual Triunity of God

Joel Parkinson

The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to the orthodox Christian faith. Trinitarian thought pervades the New Testament and is presupposed in the central doctrines of the Incarnation (*Luke* 1:35), Atonement (*Hebrews* 9:14), Resurrection (*Romans* 8:11), and Salvation (*1 Peter* 1:2) as well as in the practices of water baptism (*Matthew* 28:19) and prayer (*Ephesians* 2:18). Consequently, there can be no doubt that failure to accept the Trinity will lead to fatal errors in the rest of one's theology. However, the Trinity is often viewed as a difficult if not self-contradictory concept. Is the Trinity really incoherent? The present article seeks to respond to this question with an emphatic "No."

The Doctrine of the Trinity

In essence, the doctrine of the Trinity may be outlined by the following three propositions:

1. There is only one God who is immutably and eternally indivisible and simple (*Deuteronomy* 6:4; *John* 17:3; *1 Corinthians* 8:6).
2. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each fully and co-equally God (*John* 20:17; *John* 1:1; *Acts* 5:3-5).
3. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct and not one and the same (*Mark* 1:10-11; *John* 15:26; *Hebrews* 9:14).

Now each of these affirmations is essential to the doctrine of God. To deny (1) is to fall into the error of tritheism. To repudiate (2) is to embrace subordinationism. To reject (3) is to settle for modalism. The reader may note that the personality of the Three is not explicitly stated. This is because the word "person" is not a Biblical term but one of convenience in theology. Nonetheless the *intent* behind the word "person" is wrapped up in these three truths. Call them what you will – persons, consciousness, or selves – whatever the Father is, the Son and the Holy Spirit are as well.

The Alternatives before Us

The only problem is that these three propositions appear to be self-contradictory or at least very puzzling. How can God be three and yet one? Or how can one God be three without being schizophrenic? It would seem that we have three alternatives before us:

1) We could deny one or more of the three propositions. But as we have already observed, to repudiate any of these affirmations leads to the heresies of tritheism, subordinationism or modalism, respectively. Hence we cannot deny any of these truths without committing theological suicide.

2) We could accept all three propositions as necessarily paradoxical. That is, we could maintain that they are each individually true and yet

collectively contradictory at the same time. But this not only defies the rules of logic, it is also unscriptural. The doctrine of Biblical inerrancy precludes the possibility of a real contradiction in Scripture, and the Biblical property of perspicuity or clarity thwarts the prospect of insurmountable difficulties in the Word of God. (See W. Gary Crampton's article, "Does the Bible Contain Paradox?" *The Trinity Review* Number 76.) Therefore it must be possible to reconcile these three Trinitarian truths.

3) We could humbly acknowledge our present lack of understanding and seek to find a resolution allowing us to consistently maintain all three truths. This is the only acceptable approach and is the one we shall pursue. So while it is true that the Trinity's actuality is a matter of faith, its coherence is open to rational examination.

Finding an Answer

Now the simplistic answer to those who assert it is a contradiction to say God is both three and one is to respond that he is three in a different sense than he is one. However, if we desire to be convincing, we should also try to define the senses in which God is three and one and do so in a way that preserves all three Trinitarian affirmations. For instance, one could say that God is three Persons with one divine nature. But though this is true, if it is left unqualified it implies tritheism. Three men clearly share a common human nature but are not indivisible. One man could be killed without necessarily endangering the existence and identities of the other two. So there must be something unique to the divine nature precluding such divisibility.

Perhaps the best solution offered to date to the problem of the Trinity is that proposed by the late Gordon H. Clark. He defined a person as a set of thoughts. That is, "a man is what he thinks" (*The Incarnation*, 1985, 54 and 64; *The Trinity*, 1985, 105 and 106). There are a number of clear advantages to this definition. Positively, a thinking entity exists personally ("I think, therefore I am"). He can have personal relationships. He has a will. Negatively, a non-thinking entity is not a person. We do not address a corpse as the person but as the

person's body. The personality survives physical death and is then separated from the body (*James* 2:26). So clearly the personality is connected with the mind and not the body.

Now I would modify Dr. Clark's definition slightly to say that a person is distinguished by *how* he thinks rather than *what* he thinks. This is simply because the content of human thoughts changes day to day without destroying the personality. I do not cease to be Joel Parkinson when I learn something new nor do I become someone else when my memory fails me. Yet concerning God, such a subtlety is irrelevant. His thoughts are all encompassing and immutable. Therefore *how* God thinks and *what* he thinks are one and the same. Accordingly, we shall adopt Gordon Clark's definition for the purposes of this proposal.

Clark goes on to show that the three divine Persons are distinct due to their differing thoughts. "Since also the three Persons do not have precisely the same set of thoughts, they are not one Person, but three" (*The Trinity*, 106-107). Such a distinction may on the surface seem peculiar since each of the divine Persons knows all truths (*1 John* 3:20; *Matthew* 11:27; *1 Corinthians* 2:11). One might then be inclined to conclude that the three Persons have the *same* thoughts. But what Dr. Clark is referring to is what I call the "subjective knowledge" of the Persons while their omniscience concerns "objective knowledge."

Now "subjective knowledge" consists of facts concerning one's personal experience while "objective knowledge" is truth regardless of one's experience. To say, "I am writing this article," is a subjective proposition; only I can say it. On the other hand, the statement, "Joel Parkinson wrote this article," is objective because it can be known and said by anyone. (Of course, God does not know anything *because* of his experience, since his knowledge is timeless and immutable. But this does not mean that he does not know his Earthly works. The terminology used here is simply intended to concisely distinguish between first person and third person propositions.)

Thus the subjective thoughts of the three divine Persons and their objective knowledge are not one and the same even though they are both all-encompassing. The Father does not think, "I will or have died on a cross," nor does he think, "I will or do indwell Christians." Only the Son can think the former and the latter is unique to the Holy Spirit. But all three know "the Son will die or has died on a cross," and "the Holy Spirit will or does indwell Christians." So the subjective thoughts distinguish the Persons even though their objective knowledge is shared and complete.

Experience

Applying this definition of "person" to the Trinity leads us to the notion of the "intellectual triunity" of God. This asserts that God has three subjective thoughts and one objective knowledge. Such a view of God sustains the personal distinctions within the Godhead, precluding the error of modalism. It also avoids subordinationism since each of the three remains equally omniscient. Moreover, shared and identical objective knowledge possessed by the three maintains a unity that is unique within the Godhead and negates tritheism.

There are, however, those who disagree with this assessment. Cyril Richardson charged that, "If there are three centers of consciousness in God, there are three gods; and no matter in what way we try to state their unity...they are still three" (*The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 94). More recently, John O'Donnell alleged that if there are three consciousness in God this is "obviously the same as tritheism" (*The Mystery of the Triune God*, 103). But these assertions are wrong. Tritheism requires three *separable* gods. That is, it must be possible to eliminate one while leaving the remaining two intact, or it must be possible to conceive of one independent of the others. But three omniscient Persons cannot be divided or separated.

The indivisibility of three *omniscient* Persons can be demonstrated as follows:

1. Omniscience means knowledge of all truths, without exception, whether past, present or future. This is true by definition.

2. God has such universal knowledge and is omniscient (*Isaiah* 46:10; *Hebrews* 4:13; *1 John* 3:20). There are some who attempt to limit God's knowledge to all past and present truths, but not all future truths, in defense of human free will (for example, see Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*, 39, 54). But such attempts fail in the face of Scriptures which affirm that God foreknows the words (*Psalms* 139:4) and even the sins (*Deuteronomy* 31:21; *Jeremiah* 18:12) of men. Therefore if we accept the Bible as truth, we are forced to concede God's total omniscience.
3. God is also immutable (*Psalms* 102:27; *Malachi* 3:6; *James* 1:17; *Hebrews* 13:8). This again is the inescapable testimony of the Bible.
4. For God to be immutable and omniscient, he must also be immutably omniscient. This necessarily follows from Premises 2 and 3. Otherwise, he could learn something new in violation of his immutability and would not have previously known all things contradicting his omniscience.
5. One omniscient Person knowing all truths also entails comprehensive knowledge of the thoughts of other omniscient Persons. If, for instance, the Son did not know the Father's thoughts in entirety, he would not know all things.
6. Such penetrating inter-personal knowledge does exist within the Godhead. This is necessarily true since the three Persons are God and God is omniscient. But it is also the explicit teaching of Scripture. "No man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (*Matthew* 11:27). Here the Son's knowledge of the Father is placed on a level with the Father's knowledge of the Son. This parity of knowledge is demonstrated by the antithesis between the Father knowing the Son and the Son knowing the Father, by

that fact that neither attain this knowledge by revelation (as men do) but simply know it on their own, and by the fact that each "knows" (Greek: "epignoski" meaning "fully knows") the other. Similarly, the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of the Father. "For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God" (*1 Corinthians* 2:11). Again, this knowledge is intrinsic to the Holy Spirit since it is independent of any revelation (*1 Corinthians* 2:10). Hence, each of the three omniscient Persons eternally and immutably knows the thought of the other two completely.

7. For this to be the case, separability among the three is absolutely impossible. If there were to be a rift within the Godhead, then each of the Persons could no longer immediately know the thoughts of the others. But this could only occur if these thoughts were never known (denying that they were *ever* omniscient) or if they were to forget something (denying their *immutable* omniscience). So we see that the unique case of divine omniscience is only possible for the three Persons if they are utterly inseparable. Or, to put it another way, the fact of divine omniscience makes divisibility among the three thinking Persons metaphysically impossible.

Objection!

At this point someone might ask why or how the three divine Persons are omniscient. But a Christian is not at all obliged to explain why or how God exists as he does. He is only obliged to demonstrate the internal consistency of what is revealed about God in the Bible. God's nature is simply an eternal reality without a prior cause. We cannot point to some reason why he is as he is because to do so would imply something beyond God and empty him of his sovereign self-existence.

Someone might also object that they still cannot imagine how there can be three Persons in one God.

It all seems too involved and complicated to grasp. In response we simply need to recall that it was the intention of this article to demonstrate the logical coherence of God's intellectual triunity, not to imagine this triunity. It can be shown mathematically that one million times one million is equal to one trillion. But who can *imagine* a million, much less a trillion? God is unimaginable. That is why images of God are forbidden by the Second Commandment. We can demonstrate, however, that the Trinity is a rational doctrine by a step-by-step examination of the Scriptures.

Objection Overruled

We therefore conclude that the concept of the intellectual triunity of God helps to show the coherence of the Trinity. On the one hand, there are three subjective thoughts in the Godhead which cannot be reduced to one personality. On the other hand, there is one common objective body of knowledge to the three Persons. The omniscient content of this shared knowledge uniquely renders the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit indivisible. If they are indivisible, then they are one God. Yet we have not confounded the Persons.

Joel Parkinson is an elder on the staff of Alliance Christian Center in Alliance, Ohio where he teaches and serves as an administrator.

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The Trinity

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In the New Testament the three Persons are clearly portrayed, and the people of God in this age must face the problem of how the three can be one and the one three. The Old Testament is by no means abrogated. We are not polytheists or tri-theists, but monotheists; and Gregory of Nazianzen well said, "I cannot think of the *one*, but I am immediately surrounded with the splendor of the *three*; nor can I clearly discover the *three* but I am suddenly carried back to the *one*." Christians are monotheists and Trinitarians. As Calvin (*Institutes*, I, xiii, 2) said, "While he declares himself to be but One, he proposes himself to be distinctly considered in Three Persons, without apprehending which, we have only a bare empty name of God floating in our brains, without any idea of the true God."

For this very reason it seems that Calvin overdoes his warnings against vain curiosity. No doubt some people waste time in idle curiosity; but they must be few in number, for the general populace spends very little time considering the Trinity or any other part of Christianity. Of course, it is also true that all of us make mistakes in our theology. No one is in errant. Therefore, as Calvin says, we should be prudent, careful, and reverent. We must consider every doctrine, not the Trinity only, from every angle. We must ask: Is our exegesis correct? Are our summaries as complete as required? Are our inferences valid? But with all due caution, it still seems that modern man should be urged to be more curious about the faith, rather than less.

If there be any influence of Greek philosophy on the doctrine of the Trinity, it would be in the relationship of the three Persons to the one essence. This is very complicated. It involves the general philosophic problem of unity in multiplicity. Parmenides and Plato were strong on unity; but the former got nowhere with multiplicity, and many think that Plato did not quite succeed. On the other hand, Locke, Berkeley, and William James were strong on multiplicity, but unity eluded them. This problem is not an artificial problem invented by secular philosophy, which Christians automatically escape. Nor is the Trinity the only point in Christianity where it appears. The solution of the puzzle also bears on the doctrine of creation, the origin of the souls of Adam's posterity, and the doctrine of original sin. Therefore, much as a beginning student would like to avoid philosophy, sooner or later he must face these difficulties or resign theology in despair.

The solution the following pages defend is the philosophy of Realism, often called Platonism. Strictly, it is not Platonism, but rather the theory of ideas as transformed by Philo. The term *Realism*, as opposed to empirical and nominalistic epistemology, denotes any theory insisting that we know the real object, and not merely a sensory image or representation of it. Plato called these real objects *Ideas*. The argument is this: Suppose we have a lot of dice of various sizes. They all have the same shape. Now, this shape is something real.

Even though the shape comes in different sizes, it is the same identical shape. If sensory objects alone were real, there could be no idea of similarity or identity, for none of the individual dice is itself similarity. Nor is any one of the dice *cube*. If one of the dice were the cube, and if only sense objects are real, then no other die could be cube. Hence, there is a real object of knowledge, the cube. It is not a sense object, not only for the preceding reason, but also because this cube exists in many places at once, as no sense object can. Similarly, Plato united all men under the Idea Man, all horses under the Horse, and all beautiful things under real Beauty. With other arguments also Plato asserted the reality of knowable intellectual objects.

The other part of Platonic theory that no Christian can accept, and Philo's transformation of it, will be discussed in the next chapter. But without this part of the theory, *viz.*, the assertion of non-sensory intellectual objects, it is hard to see how an understanding of the Bible would be possible. To begin with, God himself is a non-sensory object. So is the idea of justification by faith—as well as man and animal and cube. Empiricism would require all nouns to be proper names of individual sense objects; it can never account for the unity in this multiplicity, and therefore renders both communication and thought impossible.

Now, when we face the subject of the Trinity—the common unity in the three Persons—may we not say that the three Persons share or communicate the common characteristics of omnipotence, omniscience, and so forth, and so constitute one essence? The Platonic point of view makes this essence a reality, as truly as Man and Beauty are real. Were the essence not a reality, and the Persons therefore the only realities, we should have tritheism instead of monotheism.

But if anyone assert that it is completely wrong to begin with realistic epistemology, it is enough to recall that nominalism provides no basis for the imputation of righteousness and justification by faith. Or even for talking about the human race. For any doctrine, it is necessary that the cube be a real object of knowledge.

A more substantial objection is that unity in the Godhead cannot be the unity of a species or a genus. The three Persons are one in a stricter, deeper, more inexplicable sense than the sense in which three or thirty men are one. Whether this objection is plausibly true or not depends on the sense in which men are one and the sense in which the Trinity is one. Those who make this objection should define the two senses (if indeed they are two) and point out the distinction. Unless we know how the Persons are one and how men are one, we cannot tell whether the unity is the same or different. But the objectors hardly define specific unity and disclaim ability to define divine unity. Their wording, however, suggests that they are using Aristotelian terminology and have misunderstood Plato.

Hodge wrote (*Systematic Theology*, II, 59), "the whole nature of essence is in the divine person [each one], but the human person [each one] is only a part of the common human nature" [Hodge is quoting W. G. T. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, II, 120. —Ed.] This is a confusing sentence. To fit the argument, it ought to read, "the whole nature or essence is in the divine person, but only a part of the common human nature is in the human person." If the sentence is not so interpreted, the antithesis Hodge wants to assert—the antithesis between the unity in God and the unity in men—vanishes. Yet this interpretation, the only one that preserves the antithesis, makes the second half of the sentence false; for if a part of human nature were lacking in an object, if the definition of that object did not include every part of the definition of man, if the man did not participate in the whole Idea, that object would not be an individual man. A man is a man only because the entire definition fits.

The arguments of the eminent American theologian fail completely to show that epistemological realism, and especially the assertion that there are eternal Ideas in the mind of God, are inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. But it must be made likewise clear, in the interest of sound logic, that the failure of Hodge's arguments do not prove the identity of the type of unity among men with the type of unity among the three Persons of the Trinity. It remains an unrefuted plausible option. It seems to

be the best solution ever proposed. But it still may be and undoubtedly is inadequate.

One of the purposes of this discussion is to warn the student that the theory of Ideas is not inconsistent with the incarnation of Christ, as Hodge claims; nor does it deny that the sin of Adam was the sin of an individual man, as Hodge also claims; nor does it conflict with but rather is essential to the doctrines of justification, regeneration, and other doctrines. Nor is it true to say, as Hodge does, that "as a historical fact, the consistent and thoroughgoing advocates of this doctrine teach an entirely different method of salvation." This may be true of some nineteenth-century Hegelians, but note that it was Augustine who defended grace against Pelagius' works. Note too that Anselm had a better understanding of the Atonement than anyone before him (except the apostles), and note also that in later Catholicism it was the Jansenists and Augustinians who preserved more of the Gospel than their opponents. Hodge says, "individuals alone exist" (62). But if so, there is no *real* unity in the Godhead, and we have only the three individuals.

Another more recent theologian also has difficulty with unity and multiplicity, with the three and the one. If one stresses logic and notes that something can be three in one respect and one in a different respect, the problem of the Trinity vanishes so far as this supposedly logical contradiction is concerned. It is not hard to find examples of a combination of three and one. A corporation may consist of three officers and be one corporation. Whether this is "adequate" for the Trinity is irrelevant. It shows that three-ness and unity can coexist; and if in this case, and in this manner, then no doubt in other cases and other manners. Hence the alleged logical impossibility of the Trinity is disposed of. The Trinity is one in one sense and three in a different sense. That is all that is needed to avoid contradiction.

Strange to say, a recent theologian has renewed the logical difficulty or perhaps has invented a new one. Cornelius Van Til asserts unity and plurality of the Trinity in exactly the same sense. He rejects the Athanasian doctrine of one substance and three Persons, or one reality and three *hypostases*. His

words are, "We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person" (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 229). The mimeographed syllabus on its title page says that it is for classroom purposes only and is not to be regarded as a published book. What this means is unclear. The author teaches it in class and so makes it public. There is no reason for not regarding it as his own view).

In the context, Van Til denies that the "paradox" of the three and the one can be resolved by the formula, "one in essence and three in person."

This departure from the faith of the universal Christian church is indeed a paradox, but it is one of Van Til's own making. That there are paradoxes in Scripture is undoubtedly true. One reader is puzzled at one point and another exegete is puzzled at another. But when a line of argument results in a recognizable contradiction, such as an object is both three and one in exactly the same sense, it should be a warning that the argument is unsound. The piety that accepts contradictions is not piety, but something else.

Furthermore, when a theologian asserts that a given paradox cannot be solved in this life by any human being, he is making an assertion that requires omniscience. That a scholar has failed to find in Scripture the solution of a difficulty does not prove that none is there. Before such a conclusion could be reasonably drawn, it would be necessary to trace out all the inferences derivable from Scripture. When all are set down, only then could one reasonably assert that the solution is not there.

Until then it is better, more reasonable, and more pious to continue with the *Westminster Confession*: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons of one substance...." Where is the creed that says that there are three *ousiai*? Or, one Person?