

# CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

## BOOK III

### The Doctrine of God (Theology Proper)

Notes Compiled

By

Dr. Danny Akin

The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Wake Forest, NC

# Table of Contents

## Book III

<b><u>Topic</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
The Existence of God: Contemporary Statistics	1
“Dear God...” (children and God)	1A
<i>God Need Not Apply</i> (Peter Jones)	2
The Existence of God: Biblical Evidence	3A
<i>Can We Be Good Without God?</i> (R. Albert Mohler, Jr.)	10
The Existence of God: Charts/Classical Philosophical Arguments	11
<i>Believing in God</i>	27
Trinitarianism	41
<i>The Logic and History of Trinitarianism</i> (Phillip Cary)	51
Cornelius Van Til on the Trinity	66
<i>Should You Believe in the Trinity?</i> (Jehovah’s Witness)	68
The Attributes of God: Part I	83
The Names of God	102
The Attributes of God: Part II	104
A Response to God’s Attributes	107
<i>The Doctrines of Divine Essence</i>	109
Some Thoughts on God’s Sovereignty and Decrees	111
<i>Why God Is Not Mother</i> (Elizabeth Achtemeier)	112
Miracles	119
T.W. Hunt and Martin Luther on Prayer	130
God’s Providence	135
<i>God and Evil</i> (Bill Watkins)	138
Prayer	141

## SOME CONTEMPORARY STATISTICS ON THE QUESTION OF "DOES GOD EXIST?"

### A. Sources, Gallup Surveys for

1. Christian Broadcasting Network, 1981
2. Robert Schuller Ministries, 1981 and 1983
3. various Catholic agencies, 1985

### B. American belief in a form of God or Universal Spirit

1. 1981 = 95% as compared with
2. 1969 = 98%
3. 1952-53 = 98%
4. 1944 = 96%

### C. Western belief in a personal God (1981)

	personal God	life force	agnostic	atheist
Republic of Ireland*	73%	16%	6%	2%
Northern Ireland*	70%	18%	8%	1%
USA*	66%	26%	5%	1%
Denmark**	19%	39%	19%	17%
Sweden**	19%	39%	19%	17%

\*these 3 are uniformly high on supernaturalism

\*\*these 2 are uniformly low on supernaturalism

### D. Non-believers then basically fall into one of three classes:

1. non-committed from social contexts/background
2. radical from embittering experiences
3. searching intellectually but unsatisfied

The primary problem in unbelief is often the presence of suffering and evil in the world.

### E. Believers fall into four classes:

(some believe because of)

- 1) some form of authority: Bible, upbringing
- 2) rational explanation of life
- 3) response to personal crisis
- 4) pragmatic advantages of belief: why not, its safer

> Dear GOD,  
> In school they told us what You do.  
> Who does it when You are on vacation?  
> -Jane

> Dear GOD,  
> Are you really invisible or is that just a trick?  
> -Lucy

> Dear GOD,  
> Is it true my father won't get in Heaven if he uses his bowling  
> words in the house?  
> -Anita

> Dear GOD,  
> Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an  
> accident? -Norma

> Dear GOD,  
> Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones,  
> why don't You just keep the ones You have now?  
> -Jane

> Dear GOD,  
> Who draws the lines around the countries?  
> -Nan

> Dear GOD,  
> I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that  
> okay? -Neil

> Dear GOD,  
> What does it mean You are a Jealous God? I thought You had  
> everything. -Jane

> Dear GOD,  
> Did you really mean "do unto others as they do unto you"?  
> Because if you did, then I'm going to fix my brother!  
> -Darla

> Dear GOD,  
> Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a  
> puppy. -Joyce

> Dear GOD,  
> It rained for our whole vacation and is my father mad!  
> He said some things about You that people are not supposed to  
> say, but I hope You will not hurt him anyway. Your friend (But I  
> am not going to tell you who I am)

> Dear GOD,  
> Why is Sunday school on Sunday?  
> I thought it was supposed to be our day of rest.  
> -Tom L.

> Dear GOD,  
> Please send me a pony.  
> I never asked for anything before, You can look it up.  
> -Bruce

> Dear GOD,  
> If You give me a genie lamp like Aladin, I will give you anything  
> you want except my money or my chess set.  
> -Raphael

> Dear GOD,  
> My brother is a rat. You should give him a tail. Ha ha.  
> -Danny

> Dear GOD,  
> Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had  
> their own rooms. It works with my brother.  
> -Larry

> Dear GOD,  
> I want to be just like my Daddy when I get big but not with so  
> much hair all over. -Sam

> Dear GOD,  
> I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.  
> -Ruth M.

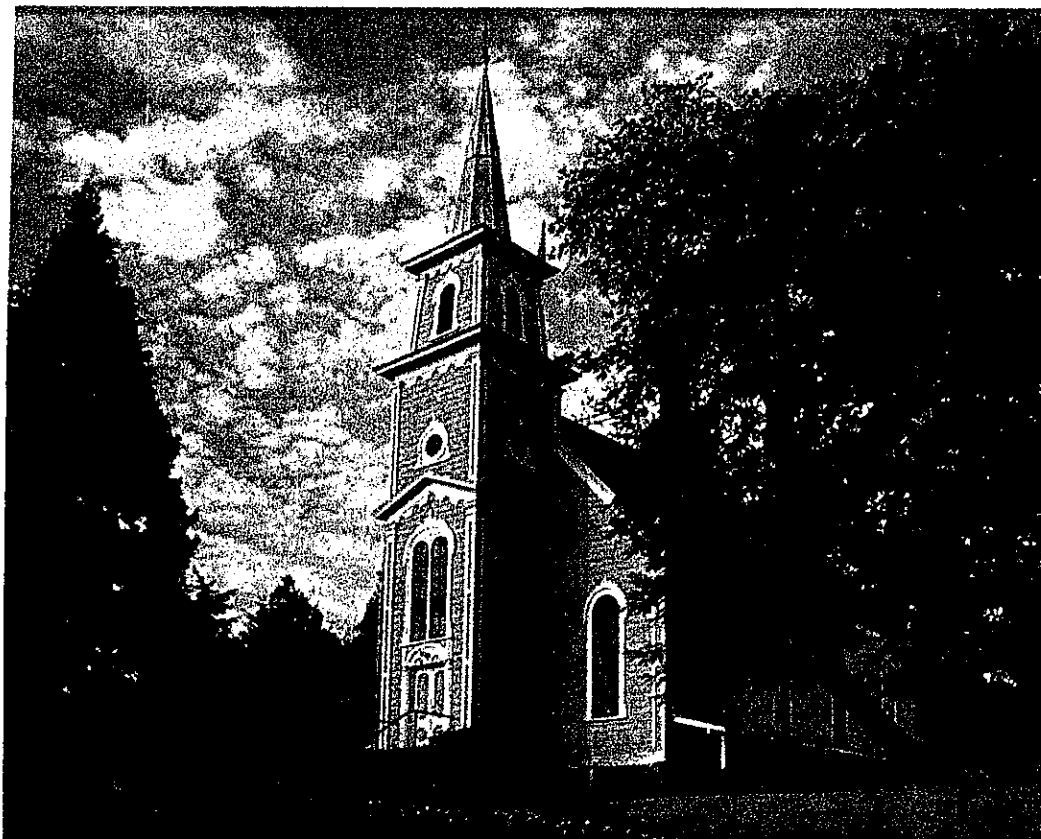
> Dear GOD,  
> I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the  
> whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can  
> never do it. -Nan

> Dear GOD,  
> If You watch me in church Sunday, I'll show You my new shoes.  
> -Mickey D.

> Dear GOD,  
> I would like to live 900 years like the guy in the Bible.  
> Love, Chris

> Dear GOD,  
> We read Thomas Edison made light. But in school they said You  
> did it. So I bet he stoled your idea.  
> Sincerely, Donna





DISPATCHES

# God need not apply

*In this group of religious teachers, there's no place for God*

BY PETER JONES

**T**he joint annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature is a mammoth meeting of the minds of North American religious academia, and it gets bigger every year. Eight thousand professors of religion, Bible scholars, and Christian theologians filled the Convention Center in downtown Philadelphia and attended 738 official meetings, seminars, and consultations of all sorts—in one weekend last November.

In such numbers, one can feel like a needle in a haystack. The most uncomfortable sensation, though, emerges from the realization that historic Christian orthodoxy is but a pimple on the face of the religious teaching profession of a country that was until very recently the bastion of the faith. The sad truth is that the vast majority of those teaching religion to the next generation of Americans are engaged in a profound undermining of biblical religion. As Mary Daly, the ex-Roman Catholic nun and now eco-feminist lesbian and professor of theology with tenure at Jesuit Boston College, said, to general applause, at this same meeting in San Francisco in 1993 to

a packed house of theologians in a professional guild called the Society of Biblical Literature: "What's all this biblical bull...?"

In Philadelphia in 1995, AAR/SBL celebrated the 50th anniversary of the finding of the Nag Hammadi library of Gnostic texts. Liberal New Testament scholars declared that the heretical Gnostic Gospel of Thomas had finally made it into their canon. James Robinson, an ex-orthodox Calvinist and director of the translation project that has made these texts widely available, declared the elevation of Thomas to the status of the canonical gospels as "the coming of age of American New Testament scholarship." How ironic. The great contribution of the sons of Christian America at the end of the 20th century is the introduction of pagan heresy into the church's Scriptures, destroying both the integrity of the canon and the theological coherence of biblical faith.

Once this wedge of paganism is joyously allowed into the founding documents of Christianity by the guardians of the tradition, and hailed as the church's new way forward to genuine dialogue with the modern world, everything falls into place. The 350-page annual meeting program book still maintains a theoretical distinction between the

members of AAR who teach any and all kinds of religious expressions in American universities, and the members of SBL who teach from the starting point of the Bible. On the left-hand page are the seminars offered by AAR; on the right, those by SBL.

**A**s tradition would have it, the left is certainly more radical than the right. Beyond seminars on Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, and American Indian animism, AAR welcomes Swedenborgianism, Theosophy (the study of the occult), pagan mysticism, and muted forms of witchcraft, as well as religious/political movements like lesbianism and gay studies. The pro-gay, lesbian, and feminist agenda is everywhere, and caressing lesbian couples, who train our youth, much in evidence. The radical nature of AAR can be captured by some of the lecture titles:

- "Fallen Angels and Fallen Women: Sex and the Single Demon in the Age of Apocalypse"
- "Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound! Southern Evangelical Religion and Gay Drag in Atlanta"

- "Radical Fairies as Excursus Religion"
- "God Raised Him Erect: Lactantius and the Male Body"

- "Sisterhood among Lesbian Woman Psychiatric Patients"

- "Teaching to Transgress," from the Lesbian-Feminist Issues in Religion Group

- "When Goddess is God: Pagans, Recovery, and Alcoholics Anonymous," from a practicing witch, Selena Fox, of the University of Wisconsin

- "Restoring the Circle: Beloved Women and the Cycle of Revitalization," from the Women and Religion Section, dealing the theme of American Indian women's spirituality

- "The Rituals of Public Sex: Coming (Together) to Our Senses," and "The Heterogendering of the Queer Male Jewish Body," from the Religion and Social Sciences Section, on the theme "Queer Bodies in Motion"

- "Toward a Godless Theology," from the Theology and Religious Reflection Section, on the theme "Theologies Without God"

This small selection indicates the radical character of AAR. But the SBL offerings on the right-hand page are not too far behind. Apparently the right hand does know what the left is doing. In the seemingly quiet backwater of biblical studies, in the midst of much technical work on linguistics and hermeneutics, semantics and semiotics, there appears an equally startling note of radical theology.

For, in addition to the massive rehabilitation of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism as an authentic version of early Christianity, radical feminism and the homosexual movement find in SBL a willing platform for the spread of their agenda. Some examples:

• The Ideological Criticism Group dealt with the theme "The Challenge of Lesbian Theory to Heterosexual Biblical Interpretation"

• The Bible and Contemporary Theologies Group discussed "The Image of God: Gender Models in Judeo-Christian Traditions"

• The Semiotics and Exegesis Section featured gay and radical feminist readings—"Biblical Interpretation as a Technology of the Self: Gay Men and the Ethics of Reading," and "Fleshing Out the Word: Reading for Other Women at John's Well."

One particular note sounded on both pages with equal force and fervor, unifying both professional societies with a moral fervor and a radical vision of reality for the egalitarian world of tomorrow. Feminism and gender reversal snake through the program from page to page, on the left and on the right, like a golden thread, creating from the bewildering diversity a coherent message.

There is nothing startling in the observation that the feminist hermeneutic has acquired general acceptance in the academy as a new, unquestioned orthodoxy and is introduced explicitly or implicitly into almost every debate. But statistical data gives objective proof of the power of this ideological locomotive. Of the 386 major academic sections, 59 were entirely devoted to feminism and 30 had major feminist components. That is, virtually a quarter of the program specifically featured the various aspects of this one agenda. From where things were 20 years ago, this is astounding.

Pointedly, the "Women's Caucus" meeting was the only event featured on both the AAR and the SBL programs! These women are taking over, and their ideology, in its pristine purity, is at the very antipodes of Christian orthodoxy.

Before a packed room of some 800 scholars, five leading feminist intellectuals discussed the question of "The Effects of Women's Studies on Biblical Studies." The scene itself embodied the answer. A large percentage of the group was female, and women scholars, as in this one, were prominent in all the major theological debates. Letty Russell, of Yale Divinity School, observing that 15 years ago women were a small minority, especially at SBL, concluded, to wild applause, that the effect of women's studies on biblical studies was "truly astounding."

But just what is the effect? Certainly modern culture, if it did not already, has come to recognize the great intellectual giftedness of women, which Christians especially need to honor in as many ways as possible. Regrettably, in many cases these gifts are being used by the leading feminist theorists, from positions of great power in America's most prestigious theological schools—Harvard, Yale,

and Princeton, to name a few—to marginalize Holy Scripture as hopelessly patriarchal, and to relativize the Christian faith as just one more human religious expression.

Roman Catholic scholar Rosemary Radford Ruether of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, whose own feminist spirituality is informed more by pre-Christian pagan goddesses than Christ and the Bible, answered the question of the effect of women's studies by describing the future. Ms. Ruether is fascinating because she pushes egalitarian theory to its logical conclusions. In her response, she called for the recognition

of the diversity of family patterns, the rediscovery of pre-Christian spiritualities, and the need of repentance on the part of Christians for rejecting native religions as pagan.

For Ms. Ruether, feminism will lead the church in "interreligious ecumenism" and the establishment of a world-wide religious all-inclusive syncretism that will at last bring peace to the world. In the all-inclusive womb of the Goddess there is a warm place for everyone—except God. ☸

*Dr. Jones is a professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in California.*

## 'DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?' THE RESPONSE CONTINUES

*We printed a response to our column "Do you believe in God?" But letters continue to come—now responding to the response. Here are excerpts:*



I was absolutely terrified when I read, "There is a God and only ONE God. If you aren't right with my God, then you will burn in Hell," which one girl said in your column. I now know how the Holocaust could happen.

I feel that the whole concept of religion began in order to encourage a moral foundation, the heart of which is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Whether you believe in one "God," 100 "Gods" or no "God," your personal beliefs should bring peace and openness in appreciating others.

—Kate Vierhus, 15, San Jose, Calif.



I was taught that God was the Almighty and was good, but the past few months have set me straight. There is no God. At least not the God everyone is talking about. If He/She was real, then there wouldn't be so much disease, death, hurt and heartbreak in the world.

In December, one of my friends lost her mother. In January, a friend was

killed on his way to school. In April, a friend of the family lost his long battle with AIDS. And in May, one of my best friends also lost her mother.

What God would do this to anyone? None that I know of or believe in.

—Tara Fritsch, 18, Riverdale, N.J.

I was 17 when I left high school, depressed and without direction. I found myself pregnant and married a man who essentially reaffirmed that I was not going to amount to much. I later divorced him and continued making monumentally lousy decisions.

Then I met someone, now my best friend. He too is a parent. He began to tell me that I was worth something. He listened as I expressed my disgust with what I had done with my life. At times, I even personally attacked him. But his patience was unbelievable. Today, I am a student in a very competitive medical program and a much better parent. I owe all my success to my best friend, who has been there every step of the way.

So what does this have to do with whether I believe in God? Who do you think my best friend is?

—Tracey St. John, 34, Herndon, Va.

### TEENAGERS: ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC ABOUT YOUR FUTURE? WHY?

Write Lynn Minton, Box 5103, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163-5103. Please include daytime phone number. Personal replies regrettably are not possible.

## **FIVE CLASSIC ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

### **COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT**

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) - rational evidentialist  
 The major paradigm historically of Roman Catholic theology  
 Unaided human reason can find God without the assistance of supernatural revelation  
 God is the "UNCAUSED CAUSE" or the "FIRST CAUSE"

#### **THE FIVE WAYS**

from MOTION to a PRIME MOVER  
 from CAUSATION to a FIRST CAUSE  
 from CONTINGENT BEINGS to a NECESSARY BEING  
 from IMPERFECTION to a PERFECT BEING  
 from evidence of a PURPOSIVE DESIGN to a DIVINE DESIGNER

### **ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT**

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) - platonic idealist/rationalist

1. Man has an idea of an infinite and perfect being
2. Existence is a necessary part of perfection

---

*Therefore, an infinite and perfect being exists, since the very concept of perfection requires existence*

### **MORAL (ANTHROPOLOGICAL) ARGUMENT**

Immanuel Kant - (also C.S. Lewis)  
 belief in God is a practical, moral necessity  
 All men possess a moral impulse or categorical (moral) imperative  
 Universal law requires a Law Giver (e.g. God)

### **EXPERIENCE ARGUMENT**

Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, Oprah, Shirley McLaine  
 weakest of all arguments  
 used by fideists and experientialists  
**It argues that only God could account for certain events  
 and I personally have experienced the divine.**

---

(super)natural events require supernatural causes  
**Therefore, God must have caused the event**

### TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Thomas Aquinas  
follows Aquinas' fifth way

*The universe shows extensive evidence of purposive design*  
*Purposive design doesn't happen by accident*  

---

*Therefore, there must be a Divine Designer*

*William Paley's version of the argument used the ANALOGY OF A WATCH found in a deserted place. Even if the watch were broken, it would obviously have been designed by an intelligent being.*

*C - cosmological*  
*O - Ontological*  
*M - Moral/Anthropological*  
*E - Experience*  
*T - Teleological*

### PASCAL'S WAGER

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a brilliant physicist, wanted to wake up some of his fellow Frenchmen from their rationalistic atheism. They enjoyed gambling, so he designed "the wager" as a shock treatment to get their attention on God.

*"Is Christianity true ? WHY TAKE THE CHANCE?"*

*If Christianity is false, you have gained little except a few sensual pleasures as a non believer, or, as a believer, you have only lost a few sensual pleasures and gained the hope and stability of the Christian lifestyle.*

*If Christianity is true, the non believer loses everything, the believer gains everything.  
What is the smart decision (wager)? Bet on God.*

## SIX BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- 1) **Genesis 1** - Creation is the basic, biblical evidence for the existence of its Creator (God). It is the bridge between universal knowledge about deity and a personal relationship with God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It embraces all of the elements of a Biblical world view.
- 2) **Psalm 8** - The heavens and humanity testify of His glory. David was perhaps meditating on Gen. 1, and breaks into spontaneous praise. The Psalm uses evidence of creation (cosmological) to praise the personal Creator.

- 3) **Psalm 19** - A central text for connecting **General revelatioin** about God with the **Special Revelation** of Scripture and its guidelines for a personal and joyful relationship with God.
- 4) **Acts 14** - Deals with the healing of a lame man, and the response of the city of Lystra, who wanted to continue their polytheistic worship, and include the apostles in their worship. The passage deals with general revelation (nature) and common grace.
- 5) **Acts 17** - Paul's sermon at Athens dealing with idolatry. The basis of His appeal was **empirically observable** religion. All persons are incurably/universally religious.
- 6) **Romans 1**- The fact of creation and the perversion of idolatry/unbelief. God has shown His existence and power in creation.

CREATION EVIDENCE as a basis for faith forms a common pattern in these creational texts of the Bible. **The universality of religions/idolatries is one of Paul's proof of humanity's knowledge about deity. Note the sins in the passage that follow from the self-centeredness of false worship.**

## SUMMARY

There are **SIX** important texts. Genesis 1, Psalms 8, Psalms 19, Romans 1, Acts 14, and Acts 17. These passages emphasize that **CREATION** is an essential foundation of faith. The prophets and apostles used Creation to provoke faith based upon a universal awareness (God is there) and a need (we have sinned; Romans 1)

Acts shows us how Paul applied the evidence of creation in ministry (Acts 14) and preaching (Acts 17)

## ***Survey finds 40 percent of U.S. scientists still believe in God***

SEATTLE (RNS)—Although a majority of scientists in the United States do not believe in God, the number who do—40 percent—is unchanged from 80 years ago, researchers reported last week.

In 1916, researcher James Leuba shocked Americans by finding only 40 percent of scientists believed in a supreme being; and he predicted that as education improved, "ungodliness" would become more common among scientists.

"To test that belief, we replicated Leuba's survey as exactly as possible," wrote Edward Larson, a historian at the University of Georgia, and Larry Witham of Seattle's Discovery Institute, in the science journal *Nature*.

The men surveyed 1,000 scientists chosen at random from the book "American Men and Women of Science."

The survey included questions about whether scientists believed in a God who answers prayers, in human immortality and in an afterlife.

They found that although 40 percent of scientists believe in a God, most scientists today "have no use for God or the afterlife."

"To the extent that both surveys are accurate readings, traditional Western theism has not lost its place among U.S. scientists, despite their intellectual preoccupation with material reality," Larson and Witham found.

According to their research, mathematicians are most inclined to believe in God—44.6 percent—while the highest rate of disbelief is found among physicists and astronomers.

# THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

## I. INTRODUCTION

"In the midst of the knowledge explosion of the past half century, it is astounding how many have forgotten that the greatest knowledge they could possess is the knowledge of God. . . The fact that we have sent men to the moon is not so amazing as sending men to heaven. The knowledge of God is certainly top priority," (Charles Ryrie).

However, "to believe that God exists is not the same as to believe in Him."

### A. Subject of this study

1. The issue of the existence of God deals with the fact of God (He is) and the character of God (Who and What He is).
2. The existence of God raises several crucial issues:
  - a. The biblical basis
  - b. Some philosophical arguments
  - c. Some contemporary responses

### B. Objectives of this study

1. to become acquainted with evidences for the existence of God and how people have responded to those evidences (knowledge)
2. to explore implications of evidences/responses for our own thinking about God as well as for our sharing of our thoughts (preaching/teaching) and faith (evangelism) with others (skills)
3. to raise questions about the extent to which faith in our Creator God affects our reverence of Him (worship); see Isa 6:1-9, "Holy, Holy, Holy; I will go first"

## II. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

"When someone says they do or do not believe in God, we have usually assumed that the God in question is some loosely defined Supreme Being gleaned from the Old and New Testaments, i.e. the Bible." Such an assumption is becoming less and less warranted, even in "Christian/religious America."

### A. GENESIS 1, THE FACT OF CREATION AS A BASIS OF FAITH

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). This is a summary statement for the chapter and an introductory statement for the rest of the Bible. God's existence is a given, a first principle, it is assumed and not proven. Does mankind have a universal innate awareness of God?!

1. This opening phrase refers to the beginning of the space-time history of the earth as we know it, and is theologically connected to 1:26-27. It will see restoration and fulfillment in

the new heavens and earth of Rev 21:1ff.

2. Implied here (but not explicitly stated) is God's infinity relative to time and space. He is before existence (self-existent as the first and ultimate cause) and sovereign over it as its Maker. Thus he is distinct from his creation (a denial of pantheism).
3. The subject = God
  - a. Elohim (Gen 1:1, note the plurality of majesty joined to a singular verb bara), the supreme divine Creator, the necessary greatest being, is the cause of the universal effect of creation (cf. cosmological, ontological arguments) and the Giver and Governor of its purpose (1:26-28, teleological and anthropological [or moral] arguments). Creation is God's handiwork (Ps 19).
  - b. Yahweh (Genesis 2 is a detailed and focused commentary of the sixth day and not a second creation account) is the self-existent, self-revealing God of the Judeo-Christian/biblical tradition (Exodus 3:14, 6:6).
  - c. "God" is thus both a descriptive title of the only living Deity with characteristic attributes (Deut 6) and the proper name of that Deity who has revealed Himself to humanity through Israel and the Church, and supremely in Christ (Heb 1:1). For the Christian, "In the beginning God created is the foundation for all meaning. It explains why there is something rather than nothing."
4. The object = existence accounted for comprehensively

Genesis 1:2-2:3 embraces all elements of a biblical worldview: the (inter-)relationships of the Creator, the universe, with focus on the earth, and humanity as the culmination (apex/climax) of creation and the object of God's immutable decree (1:26-28).

5. Creation hereafter is the basic, biblical evidence for the existence of its Creator. It is the bridge between universal knowledge about deity and a personal relationship with God by grace through faith (Heb 11:3 speaks of creation as the starting point of an informed faith from existence).

#### B. PSALM 8, THE FACT OF CREATION AND THE RESPONSE OF FAITH/WORSHIP

1. Context: David is perhaps meditating on Genesis 1 (esp. 26-28) and breaks into spontaneous praise of the Creator. The heavens (vv. 1-3) and humanity (vv. 4-9) testify of his glory.
2. The emphases of Genesis 1 continue in this psalm of praise and worship; the sovereign Creator of existence is praised (1,2,9) on the basis of the creational order in which humanity has the divine image and dominion (3-8). The psalm uses the evidence of creation (cosmological) to praise the personal Creator (name). Indeed, "dropping the hyperbole, unbiased and uncorrupted minds recognize God without difficulty from his creation" (Leupold, p. 102). When it comes to God's existence and greatness, listen to little children and not the skeptics of the age (v. 2). The latter's is the wisdom of foolishness (Ps 14:1), the former of faith in the fact of creation.
3. Atheistic evolutionary options for explaining existence are obviously alien to the Bible, which traces creation to the direct involvement and recreative providence of God rather than any "survival of the fittest" model (5-8). In fact, modern evolutionary theory of whatever variety, i.e. Darwinian, neo-Darwinian, punctuated equilibrium, has been motivated by the rebellious desire to explain existence without God (e.g., metaphysical naturalism). Claims of scientific objectivity are hardly honest in the academy.

4. Man's dignity and dominion and worth over the animal world is affirmed (vss. 6-8). Man is both part of creation but over it as God's representative on earth. Man as the image bearer of God in some sense argues for God's existence (ontological). Hence the psalm has anthropological as well as theological implications.
5. The author of Hebrews uses Psalm 8 to teach the fulfillment of God's creation-decree through Christ, the sovereign Son of Man (Hebrews 2: 6-9). Thus there are also Christological aspects of this psalm. Similarly, in the Apocalypse, the hymn of creation (Rev 4:9-11) is a prelude to the hymn of new creation through the redemption of the Son (Rev 5:8-14, John 1:1-2).

C. PSALM 19, THE FACT OF CREATION AND THE RESPONSE OF FAITH/WORSHIP

1. Context: David contemplates creation and its explanation in the Word and spontaneously praises His Creator and Redeemer. This psalm is a praise hymn to the Creator of the universe (1-6) and the Author of the Word (Torah 7-14). It is a central text for connecting general (or natural) revelation (universal knowledge) about God from the evidence of creation (1-6) with the special revelation of Scripture and its guidelines for a relationship with God (7-14).
2. The creational evidence for God is a fact which is expressed/evidenced (creation personified) continually (2, day and night), visually (rather than verbally, 3), and universally (4, [cf. Rom 10:18] even for the blind, 6) as illustrated specifically in the ordered cycles of the sun (5-6, cf. 2).
3. The eloquence of creation is inextricably linked with the enlightenment of the Word. In light of this psalm is it proper to say that doubt is an element of faith?

PSALM 19 and REVELATION	
<p><b>General</b> vss. 1-6 <b>Creation declares God's existence to all</b></p>	<p><b>Special</b> vss. 7-14 <b>The Word instructs believers</b></p>

D. ISAIAH 40. THE FACT OF CREATION AND THE PERVERSION OF IDOLATRY WITH A CALL TO FAITH

Creation (40:26, 28) is the basis for judgment and for an appeal for faith in Israel (40:1-2), which had turned from her covenant Creator to the worship/idolatry of creation (18-20).

E. ROMANS 1. THE FACT OF CREATION AND THE PERVERSION OF IDOLATRY/UNBELIEF

1. Paul appeals for an acceptance of the gospel (the righteousness of faith), which is connected with OT prophecy, 16-17 (Hab. 2:4, cf. Isa 40).

CREATION EVIDENCE AS A BASIS FOR FAITH FORMS A COMMON PATTERN IN THESE CREATIONAL TEXTS OF THE BIBLE.

2. His reason is that the wrath of God (orgē theou) is universally revealed/exercised against unrighteousness, which always arises from the suppression of truth (18). That "God gave



them over" (vss. 24, 26, 28) points to the self-imposed judgment of willful sin as a significant aspect of God's wrath against unrighteousness. He allows people to self-destruct in accordance with his creational decree of choice. In other words, there are consequences for sin and sins.

3. God's wrath is just, because there are universal evidences of God the Creator from the time of creation in the fact of creation, so that unbelievers are without excuse (19-20). This is anthropologically and soteriologically significant as well.
4. The evidences are "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature" (20). Attributes = theiotes = deity.

Sanday and Headlam, Romans (ICC), pp. 43-44, say that "Theotes means Divine Personality, Theiotes, Divine nature and properties: Theiotes is a summary term for those other attributes which constitute Divinity. . . God did not design that man should sin; but He did design that if they sinned they should be without excuse: on His part all was done to give them a sufficient knowledge of Himself."

Cranfield, Romans (ICC), pp. 1.115, ". . . the sentence as a whole is a paradoxical assertion that God's invisible attributes are actually seen in, and through, His creation...God's dunamis is referred to again and again in Scripture and power is so characteristic of God that he dunamis can be used as a periphrasis for the divine Name (Mt 26:64 = Mk 14:62). The term Theitos (divinitas, 'divinity') first appears in biblical Greek in Wisd 18:9, and occurs in the NT only here. It is a Hellenistic term (Plutarch, Lucian, Hermetic corpus, etc.) denoting the divine nature and properties; and is to be distinguished from Theotos (deitas, 'deity'), which denotes the divine personality (in the NT only Col 2:9).

5. Whatever else is said here, the invisible deity of God is evidenced in the visible powers of creation which are the bases of world religions. The concept of manipulation of powers for personal gain is the concept at the heart of world religions. The universality of religions/idolatry is Paul's proof of humanity's knowledge about deity (albeit perverted), 21-32. Note the sins that follow from the self-centeredness of false worship.

ROMANS 1 AS GENERAL REVELATION	
1.	God's power has been evident to <u>all</u> from creation, 19-20.
2.	The unrighteous however suppress (reject) this evidence rather than responding to it, 18.
3.	This is proven by world religions (idolatry).
4.	Therefore, they are without excuse.
5.	God gives them over then to what they want: utterly depraved living (vss. 24-32).
ROMANS 2 AS GENERAL REVELATION	
1.	There is universal awareness of good and evil (the conscience), 14-15.
2.	People ought to relate moral awareness with the moral consequences to the moral standard.

F. ACTS = PAUL'S MINISTERIAL APPLICATIONS OF THE ROMAN'S PRINCIPLE

1. Acts 14 (Paul's ministry at Lystra)

- a. The healing of the lame man = occasion, 8-10
- b. The response of the city, 11-13. The city wanted to worship the apostles as part of their polytheistic pantheon (including the priest of Zeus!). The reason for the idolatrous response was the evidence of (creational) life-giving, prosperity-promoting power.
- c. The rebuke of the apostles, and an appeal to faith on the basis of fact, 15-18. We preach the gospel, so that you can turn from your false worship of idols to the worship of the only living Creator God, who gives evidence of Himself in the universal general revelation/common grace of seasons and food (fertility, life, prosperity), cf Ps 146:6. This is Romans 1:18-32 illustrated.
- d. The opposition of the Jews and the expulsion of the apostles, 19-20. The problem here (as frequently) was not ignorance but rather rebellion. The issue was not that they did not know, but rather that they did not want to know.

ACTS 14:15-17 AS REVELATION		
False religion as perversion of creation		
(general revelation and common grace)	GOSPEL	
vvs, 15-17		True worship, 15

2. Acts 17 = Paul's sermon at Athens

- a. The attitude of the apostle, v. 16: He became distressed as he contemplated Athen's idolatry (cf. Rom 1:21-23). Notice that this is what the apostle noticed first about one of the most impressive cities of the ancient world rather than its economic or architectural features. Things have not changed much in almost 2000 years.
- b. The attraction of the city (to the newness/strangeness of the apostle's doctrine), vv. 17-21: They tended to think (18) rationally (reason, man-centered thinking), pantheistically (deity=nature), impersonally (about deity), and a-historically. They were somewhat interested (18-21) in Paul, but because his message was the gospel based on the resurrection they scoffed and sneered (v. 32). Some, however, did believe (v. 34).
- c. The appeal of the apostle, 22-31: The basis of his appeal was universal religion which was empirically observable (cf. Rom 1:18-20), 22-23. All religion (esp. here false religion/idolatry) is ultimately based on the Creator, 24-25. Or, man, as the image-bearer of God has an indelible awareness of his Creator regardless of how much he rebels. God has preserved creation in such a way as to provoke human worship, 26-28. THEREFORE, people ought not to worship the creature rather than

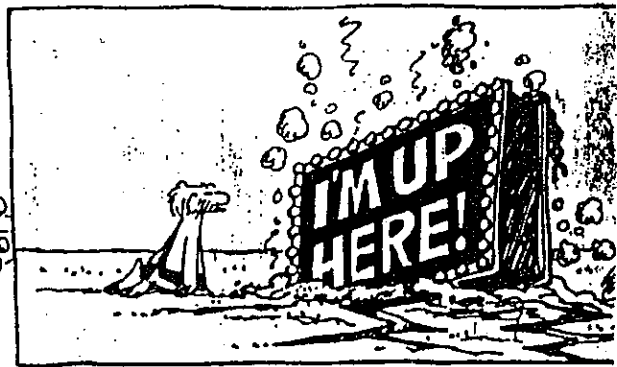
the Creator, 29 (Rom 1:25).

- d. THEREFORE, man should repent (change your mind about worshipping creatures) and exercise faith in the resurrected Christ, in order to escape the wrath of God (30-31, cf. Rom 1:18).

ACTS 17:24-31 AS REVELATION		
False religion based on perversion of creation		
vvs. 22-28	GOSPEL (30-31)	
		True worship based on resurrection of Christ

#### G. SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

1. There are six important texts: Genesis 1, Psalms 8 and 19, Romans 1, Acts 14 and 17. These passages emphasize that creation is an essential foundation of faith. The prophets and apostles used creation to provoke faith based on a universal awareness and a need (Rom 1).
2. Acts shows us how Paul applies the evidence of creation in ministry (Acts 14) and preaching (Acts 17).
3. The biblical expression of faith is worship of God (Psalms and Revelation), which may be defined as expressing glory and honor to God in all of one's life (1 Cor 10:31, Rev 4:11).



# The Index View

R. Albert Mohler Jr.  
Editor



## Can We Be Good Without God?

The great moral question hanging over America's increasingly secular culture is this: Can we be good without God? The question—though unasked—is the backdrop for most of the issues aflame in the media, the schools, and the courts.

Secularization, the process by which a society severs its ties to a religious worldview, is now pressed to the limits by ideological secularists bent on removing all vestiges of the Judeo-Christian heritage from the nation's culture.

According to the new American secular orthodoxy, no reference to God or faith—no matter how vague or distant—is allowable in public conversation, much less in governmental policy-making. The end result is a total collapse of moral conversation.

Parents in California, Louisiana, Florida, and Illinois came face to face with this collapse when programs of abstinence-based sex education were opposed by secularists on the grounds that sexual abstinence is "inherently religious." That is, the only arguments against teenage sexual promiscuity are based on religious convictions—which are forbidden grounds for public consideration.

In fact, the American Civil Liberties Union has successfully fought abstinence-based programs in several states, arguing that such programs violate their radical notion of church/state separation, and put the public schools in the position of teaching "religion."

This nonsense would be laughable if its results were not so devastating among America's young people. One parent opposed the program, stating: "I am extremely upset that this school board wants to teach my Jewish kids Christian values." Pardon me, but who dropped Judaism from the Judeo-Christian heritage? Christianity and Judaism differ on any number of central issues of faith, but we share the Ten Commandments. As rabbi Jacob Neusner recently lamented: "A country without a sense of shame or a sense of sin does not have a sense of what is right or wrong, just what is useful or what you can get away with or not get away with."

Are moral values now off limits just because they may be affirmed or shared by Christians? As columnist Mona Charen asked, "Have we reached the point in America where virtue is considered contaminated because it has been known to keep company with religion?"

If abstinence-based sex education is "inherently religious," then so is the criminal code which outlaws murder. After all, "Thou shalt not kill" was first inscribed on tablets of stone by God, not contrived by a secularist lawmaker in Washington. What about prohibitions against robbery, rape, or lying? Out with them all, for they are part of God's

moral law as well.

The sheer nonsense of this makes it difficult to take the argument seriously, but courts at the local, state, and federal levels are heeding these secularist arguments. Our ability to conduct any meaningful moral discourse is fast evaporating.

Just how far we have come is made clear by a glance at the most formative legal commentary which lies behind this nation's legal tradition, William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. English common law is, after all, the basis of our own legal doctrines. Just before the American revolution, Blackstone wrote: "Man, considered as a creature, must necessarily be subject to the laws of his Creator, for he is an entirely dependent being."

The legal tradition which gave birth to this nation, formed the background of its Constitution, and sustained our laws and their interpretation for a century and a half, is now itself ruled out of bounds. Any moral tradition which even whispers the memory of the Almighty is now ruled null and void.

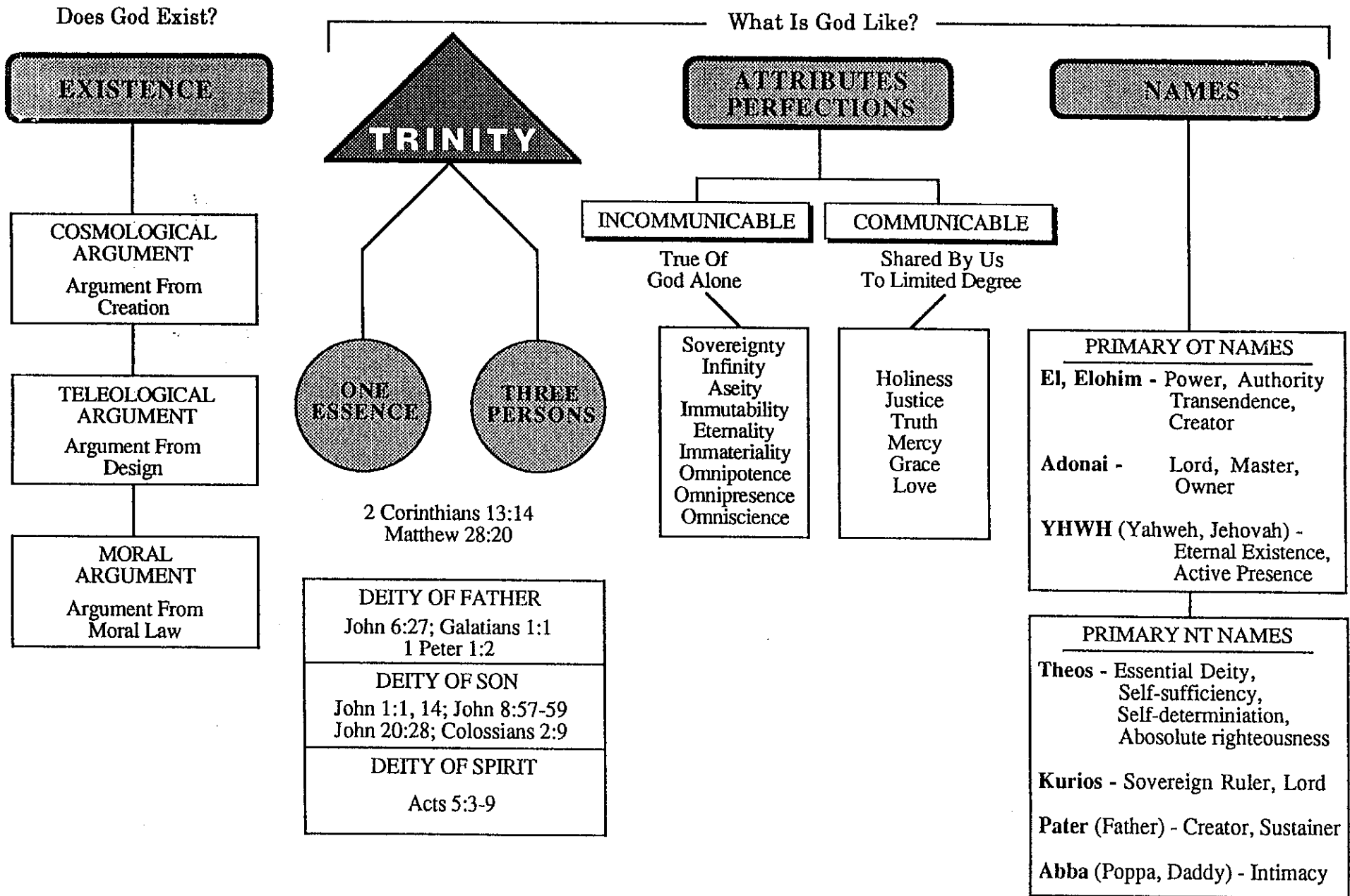
But can Americans be good without God? Can we even entertain the fiction that citizens can create a totally secular morality? Nonsense. There is no secular morality of any substance. As Friedrich Nietzsche acknowledged, "If God is dead, everything is permissible."

So, we live among the ruins of a moral value structure destroyed by the wrecking ball of a radical secularist agenda, but already weakened by compromise from within—even from within the Church.

What is left is the nation's nonsensical moral fireworks over Woody Allen's sexual relationship with his adopted daughter. Americans seem certain that what Allen did was wrong, but why? Boys at Lakewood High School in California are arrested as members of a "sexual posse" which kept score at the sport of sexual intercourse with different girls. Several of the boys' fathers said that nothing was wrong. Eric Richardson, one of the Lakewood boys, said, "They pass out condoms, teach sex education and pregnancy—this and pregnancy—that, but they don't teach us any rules."

Welcome to America in the 1990s, boys. All the rules are off, it's everyone for himself. Write your own rules, find your own way, just be sure to leave God out of it. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, warning that "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" [Romans 1:18]. God is not mocked. Welcome to Rome—America in the 1990s.

# Theology Proper



# Theology Proper

## ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

The Bible never attempts to "prove" God's existence. God's existence is assumed.  
The following "arguments" are just that, arguments. They provide us with evidence and reason to believe God exists.  
The evidence of these arguments is cumulative. Taken together they provide sufficient reason to compel belief.

### The Argument From Creation/Causality

#### COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

(Thomas Aquinas)

1. THE UNIVERSE HAD A BEGINNING.
  - Scientific Evidence: The Second Law Of Thermodynamics
  - Philosophical Reasoning: Infinite Regress Impossible
2. ANYTHING THAT HAS A BEGINNING MUST HAVE AN ADEQUATE CAUSE.
3. THEREFORE, THE UNIVERSE WAS CAUSED BY SOMETHING, AND THIS CAUSE IS GOD.

(Hebrews 3:4)

### The Argument From Moral Law

#### MORAL ARGUMENT

(C.S. Lewis)

1. ALL MEN ARE CONSCIOUS OF AN OBJECTIVE MORAL LAW.
2. MORAL LAWS IMPLY A MORAL LAWGIVER.
3. THEREFORE, THERE MUST BE A MORAL LAWGIVER.

(Romans 2:14, 15)

### The Argument From Design

#### TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

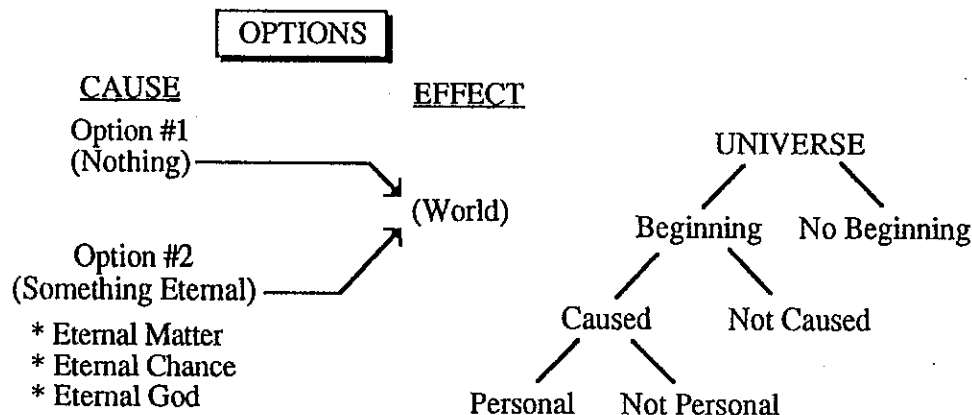
(William Paley)

1. ORDER AND USEFUL ARRANGEMENT IN A SYSTEM (FUNCTION WITH INTENTION) IMPLY INTELLIGENCE, PURPOSE AND DESIGN (A DESIGNER).
2. THE UNIVERSE IS CHARACTERIZED BY INTRICATE DESIGN.
3. THEREFORE, THE UNIVERSE HAS A DESIGNER.

(Psalm 19:1-2)



Illustration: An instrument such as a watch, which functions with organized complexity, naturally implies a watchmaker - an intelligence to both design and construct the watch. Living organisms and the universe in general function with a greater degree of organized complexity than does a watch. It is equally necessary that there be a designer and builder of the universe.



## CLASSIC ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Type of Argument	Title of Argument	Proponent of Argument	Content of Argument
a posteriori*	The Argument From Motion	Thomas Aquinas (borrowed from Aristotle)	There is motion (locomotive) in the universe. Something cannot move itself, an external agent or force is required. An infinite regress of forces is meaningless. Hence, there must be a being who is the ultimate source of all motion while not being moved itself. This being is God, the unmoved mover.
a posteriori	The Cosmological Argument (The Argument From Cause)	Thomas Aquinas	Every effect has a cause. There cannot be an infinite regress of finite causes. Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause or necessary being. This being is God.
a posteriori	The Argument From Possibility and Necessity	Thomas Aquinas	Things exist in a network of relationships to other things. They can exist only within this network. Therefore, each is a dependent thing. However, an infinite regress of dependencies is contradictory. There must, then, be a being who is absolutely independent, not contingent on anything else. This being is God.
a posteriori	The Argument From Perfection	Thomas Aquinas	It can be observed in the universe that there is a pyramid of beings (eg from insects to man), in an ever-increasing degree of perfection. There must be a final being who is absolutely perfect, the source of all perfection. This being is God.
a posteriori	The Teleological Argument (The Argument From Design)	Thomas Aquinas	There can be an observable order or design in the world that cannot be attributed to the object it-self (e.g. inanimate objects). This observable order argues for an intelligent being who established this order. This being is God.
a posteriori	The Moral (or Anthropological) Argument	Immanuel Kant	All people possess a moral impulse or <u>categorical imperative</u> . Since this morality is not always rewarded in this life, there must be some basis or reason for moral behavior that is beyond this life. This implies the existence of mortality, ultimate judgment, and a God who establishes and supports morality by rewarding good and punishing evil.
a priori +	The Argument That God is an Innate Idea	Augustine John Calvin Charles Hodge Alvin Plantinga	Every normal person is born with the idea of God implanted in his mind, though it is suppressed in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). As the child grows into adulthood, this idea becomes clearer. Critical experiences in the course of life may make this idea come alive.

\* a posteriori: statements or arguments that are logically posterior to, or dependent on, sense experience.

+ a priori: statements or argument that are logically prior to, or independent of, sense experience.

CLASSICAL ARGUMENTS  
(continued)

Type of Argument	Title of Argument	Proponent of Argument	Content of Argument
a priori	The Argument From Mysticism	Evelyn Underhill	Man is able to have a direct mystical experience with God resulting in an ecstatic experience. This union with God is so uniquely overpowering that it self-validates the existence of God.
a priori	The Argument From Truth	Augustine A.H. Strong	All people believe that something is true. If God is the God of truth and the true God, then God is Truth. This Truth (capital T) is the context for all other truths. Therefore, the existence of truth implies the existence of Truth, which implies the existence of God.
a priori	The Ontological Argument	Anselm of Canterbury	Major premise: Man has an idea of an infinite and perfect being. Minor premise: Existence is a necessary part of perfection. Conclusion: An infinite and perfect being exists, since the very concept of perfection requires existence.
a priori	The Argument From Man's Finitude	Aristotle	Man is aware of his finitude. What makes man aware of this? God is continually impressing man with God's infinitude. Therefore the sense of finitude itself is proof that an infinite being, God, exists.
a priori	The Argument From Blessedness	Augustine Thomas Aquinas	Man is restless. He has a vague longing for blessedness. This longing was given by God, for man is restless until he rests in God. The presence of this longing is an indirect proof of God's existence.
a priori	The Argument From Perception	Bishop Berkeley	Man is able to perceive (sense) things around him. This cannot be caused either by physical events (perception as a mental act) or by man himself. Therefore, the existence of perception implies God's existence as the only rational explanation for man's perceptions.
a priori	The Existential Argument	Auguste Sabatier	God proves Himself via the Kerygma, which is His declaration of love, forgiveness, and justification of man. When one decides for the Kerygma, he then knows God exists. No other evidence is needed. God is not so much proven as He is known, and this occurs existentially.



## Arguing for Belief in God

- ◆ Providing rational evidence for belief in God especially interest **RATIONAL EVIDENTIALISM** and **NATURAL THEOLOGY**. **VERIFICATIONISM** has a secondary interest. It is of less interest to **FIDEISM**, **EXPERIENTIALISM**, and **REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGISTS**.
- ◆ Arguing for belief in God is **POSITIVE APOLOGETICS**--arguing that belief in God is reasonable.
- ◆ **BURDEN OF PROOF** is important in arguing for belief in God. In positive apologetics, theists assume the burden of proof that they do not have in negative apologetics.
- ◆ The arguments for the existence of God do not provide **PROOF** for the theism, much less Christianity. They can be said however, to provide rational evidence that demonstrates that theism is not irrational.
- ◆ The arguments for the existence of God demonstrates that theism is **RATIONAL** or **REASONABLE**, that theistic beliefs have **JUSTIFICATION**, **WARRANT**, or **POSITIVE EPISTEMIC STATUS**.
- ◆ The standard for "proving" God's existence must not be set too high. We cannot prove His existence with logical **CERTAINTY**. We do believe, however, that we can prove His existence beyond a reasonable doubt to a fair-minded hearer. The model is the courtroom, not axioms of mathematics.
- ◆ Although one might design a good argument for the existence of God (true premises and valid arguments), there is a personal/psychological element in whether people "see" the argument or not. An argument can be valid without being convincing or persuasive.
- ◆ Evidence for God is more akin to **PERSONAL EXPLANATION** (describing an intentional action done by a person, like history) than it is to **SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION** (describing scientific laws, like physics).
- ◆ One should not be discouraged that significant logical problems can be found with each of the logical arguments. Atheists have problems when they assume the burden of proof to prove with certainty that God does not exist. Some of these objections can be overcome by slight alterations in the argument. Some are overcome only through faith.

# Arguments for the Existence of God

## The Ontological Argument

### The Argument

Anselm (1033-1109), a Platonic idealist/rationalist in the verificationist tradition (e.g., Augustine), needed no proof to believe in God, but to confirm with reason what he already believed by faith (faith seeking understanding). His argument went something like this:

- \* God (that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-conceived) by definition must be perfect.
- \* Perfect beings must exist, rather than being merely potential Beings.
- \* Therefore, God must exist.

### Objections

- \* The first premise seems to beg the question; it assumes God from the very beginning.
- \* The second premise makes the dubious leap from the concept to the existence of God (Does my conception of a perfect island necessitate the existence of that island?).
- \* The conclusion doesn't necessarily prove the Christian God.

### Scriptural Support

- \* Psalm 14:1 (this is the reference Anselm used).
- \* Genesis 1:1 (the Bible assumes, rather than seeks to prove, God's existence).
- \* Matthew 5:48 (God is perfect).

## The Cosmological Argument

### The Argument

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) provides the paradigmatic expression of Roman Catholic theology, particularly with its optimism that the unaided human reason can find God without the aid of supernatural revelation. Aquinas is a rational evidentialist. He provided several arguments for the existence of God, called the Five Ways. These argue in Aristotelian fashion from effects in this world to God as their Cause.

FROM	TO (a)
MOTION	PRIME MOVER
CAUSATION	FIRST CAUSE
CONTINGENT BEINGS	NECESSARY BEING
IMPERFECTION	PERFECT BEING
evidence of PURPOSIVE DESIGN	DIVINE DESIGNER

The cosmological argument can be expressed in each of the first three Ways; the moral argument is suggested by the fourth Way, and the teleological argument in the fifth Way. The second Way argues the TEMPORAL FIRST CAUSE argument:

- \* Every effect has a cause (the universal law of causation).
- \* There cannot be an infinite regression of causes.
- \* Therefore, there must be a First Cause.

Using the third Way, one can make the LOGICAL FIRST CAUSE / NECESSARY BEING argument:

- \* There is an explanation for the existence of every (contingent) thing.  
[the principle of sufficient reason]
- \* All the world is made up of contingent things.
- \* Therefore a Necessary Being must exist to account for the world's existence.

### Objections

1. Certain premises can't be proven. Both the universal law of causation and the principle of sufficient reason are assumed rather than proven, (although even their critics acknowledge that we could not function without them).
2. The Logical First Cause / Necessary Being can be challenged by other possible explanations, such as the theory of evolution, a superhuman contingent being, or several gods.
3. Certain conclusions (particularly in the Temporal First Cause Argument) appear to contradict the first premises. Actually there must be an uncaused cause.

### Scriptural Support

Job 38: 1-41; Psalm 115: 4-9; Isaiah 44: 9-20; Isaiah 46: 5-9; Jeremiah 10: 1-10

## The Teleological / Design Argument

### The Argument

Following Aquinas' fifth Way, the argument can be made in the following way:

- \* The universe (micro & macro) shows extensive evidence of purposive design.
- \* Purposive design doesn't happen by accident.
- \* Therefore, there must be a Divine Designer.

William Paley's (1743-1805) version of the argument uses the analogy of a watch found in a deserted place. Even if the watch were broken, it was obviously designed by an intelligent being.

Richard Taylor's version of the argument uses the analogy of rocks spelling out "Welcome to Wales" along a railroad embankment. Someone might have us to believe that these rocks just evolved up out of the ground, or by chance rolled into that particular formation. But even if we concede that remote possibility, would we believe we are in Wales? The chances against it would be astronomical. But atheistic naturalists would have us to believe that intelligence and language evolved by sheer chance. Even if they were right, why should we believe them? They are saying their minds evolved by sheer chance.

### Objections

1. Premise one can be challenged by pointing out disteleological elements (the problem of evil -- storms, earthquakes, etc).
2. The second premise can be challenged by alternative explanations, such as the theory of evolution.
3. The conclusion still doesn't prove the Christian God.

### Scriptural Support

Psalm 8:3; Psalm 19: 1-2; Romans 1: 20-23

## The Moral Argument

### The Argument

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) expressed the moral argument in his Critique of Practical Reason. He felt all the other arguments failed to prove God's existence, and in fact his "religion within the limits of reason" could not prove God's existence with certainty. However, he felt belief in God was a practical / moral necessity, as his form of the argument suggests:

- \* All (sane adult) people have a sense of morality.
- \* All people fall short of their own moral standard of perfection.
- \* Immortality would be required in order to achieve this inherent human desire for perfection and wholeness.
- \* Therefore, God must exist in order to provide for immortality.

Obviously, there is no logical necessity in moving beyond the second premise of Kant's version of the argument. A more convincing form of the argument might be as follows:

- \* All (sane adult) people have a moral standard.
- \* Moral standards are objective, not subjective.
- \* Therefore, there must be a Supreme Moral Lawgiver.

### Objections

1. The first premise can be challenged by arguing that human moral consciousness comes from conditional response, cultural conditioning or a developed evolutionary instinct.
2. The second premise can be challenged by asserting that moral standards are subjective (e.g., pragmatic or emotive).
3. The conclusion does not necessitate a deity.

### Scriptural Support

All Scriptural claiming a moral law, such as:

Romans 2: 14-16;  
Matthew 5:48;  
Exodus 20: 1-17

## The Argument From Experience

### The Argument

The argument from experience is used more frequently by fideists as experientialists. It argues that only God could account for certain events:

- \* An event (miracle, salvation, sign, healing) is too extraordinary to be caused by natural events.
- \* There must have been a supernatural cause.
- \* Therefore, God must have caused the event.

### Objections

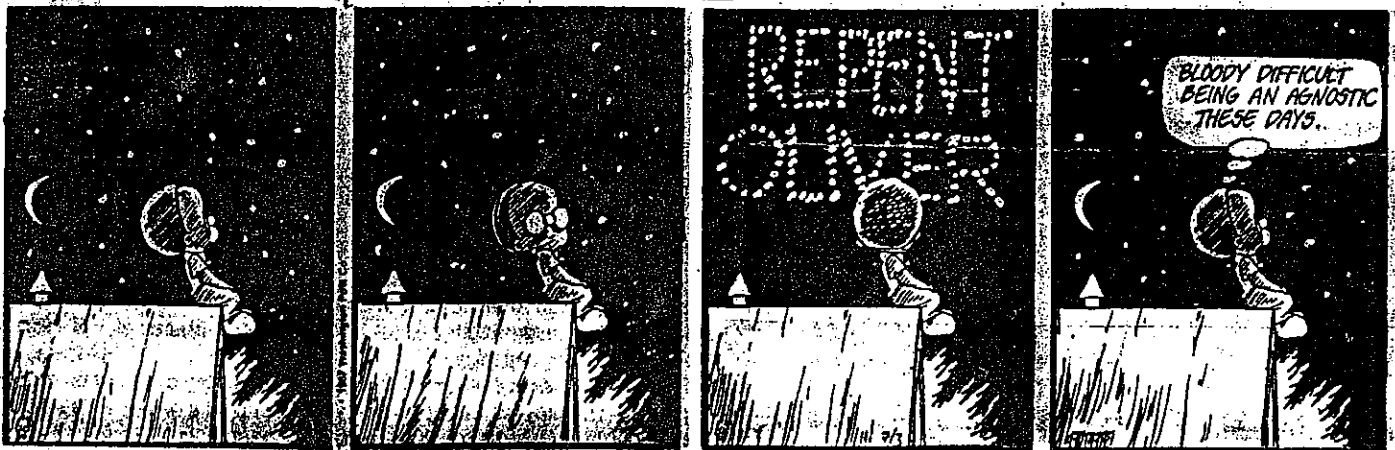
1. The first premise can be doubted, because other psychological and scientific causes can also explain the event when properly understood.
2. Other causes can be suggested for the second premise, such as natural causes that are unknown to the observer.
3. The conclusion does not prove the Christian God, because all world religions have claims of miracles, etc.

### Scriptural Support

All Scripture which make claims of supernatural events, such as:

I Kings 18  
Acts 4: 1-20  
Acts 9: 1-19

**BLOOM COUNTY**



## Pascal's Wager

### The Argument

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the brilliant physicist, wanted to wake up some of his fellow Frenchmen from their rationalistic atheism. They enjoyed gambling so he designed this "wager" (contextualized an argument) as a shock treatment to get their attention on God:

	CHRISTIANITY FALSE	CHRISTIANITY TRUE
NONBELIEVER	Gains little except a few sensual pleasures	Loses everything
BELIEVER	Loses only a few sensual pleasures, gains hope and the stability of a Christian lifestyle	Gains everything

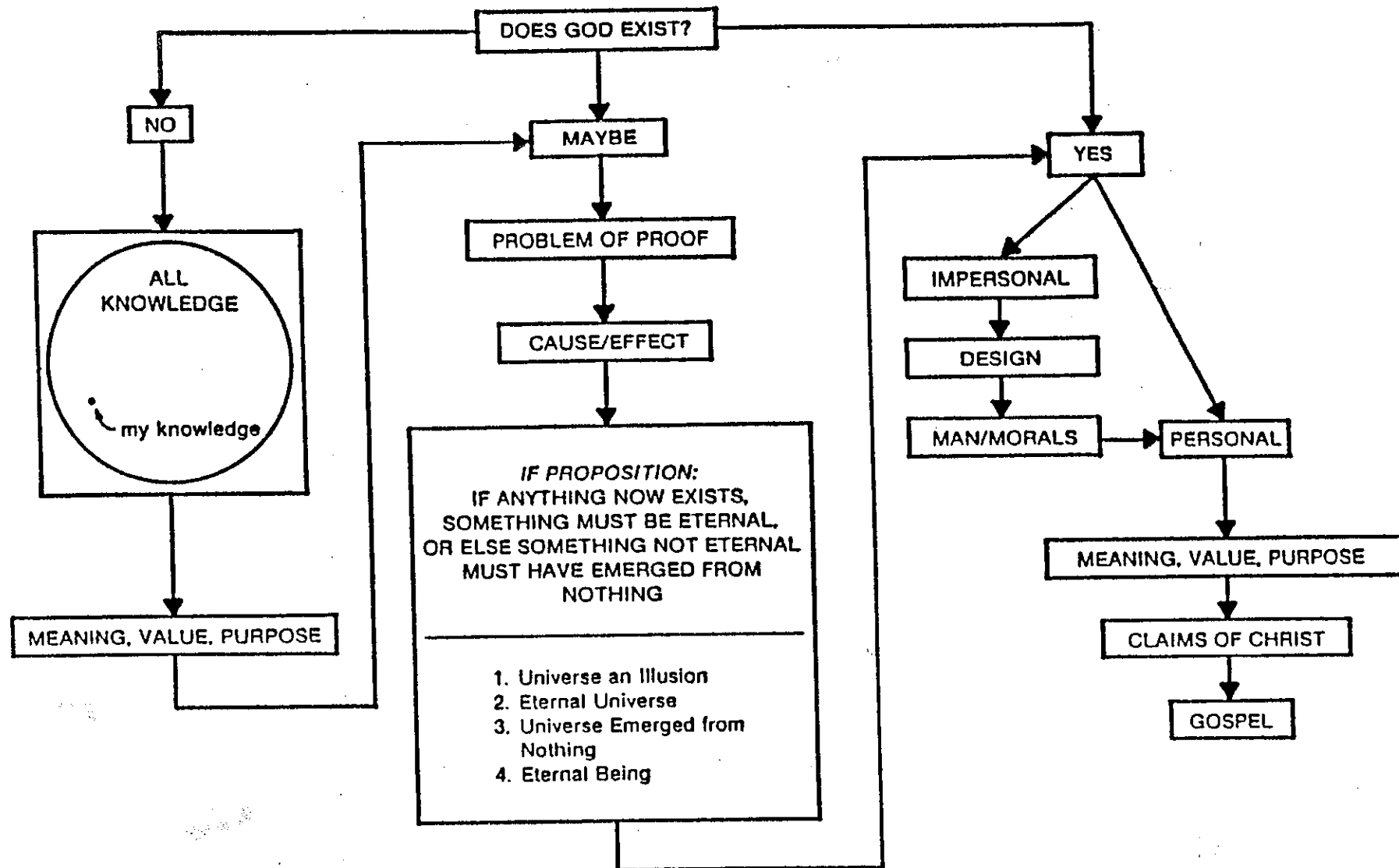
Accordingly, the Christian has everything to gain and nothing to lose by being a believer. The nonbeliever has nothing to gain and everything to lose.

### Objections

1. This argument, of course, could be used by each world religion or cult. It is not only Christianity or atheism. There are more than two options.

### Scriptural Support

Proverbs 16:25  
 Daniel 5  
 Malachi 3:10  
 Matthew 7: 24-27  
 Luke 12: 16-34  
 Luke 16: 19-30





### The Metaphysician and the Theologian

An old saying (popular among athiests/agnostics)  
goes that the difference between a metaphysician and a  
theologian is this: The metaphysician looks in a dark  
room for a black cat that isn't there. The theologian  
looks in the same place for the same thing.  
And finds it.

*It is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.*

-Immanuel Kant

*We ought not to speak about religion to the children, if we wish them to possess any.*

-Jean-Jacques Rousseau

*The question is: Why is there any being at all and not rather Nothing?*

-Martin Heidegger

"God is dead." -Nietzsche  
"Nietzsche is dead." - God  
-Graffiti

## God Is Dead

By his infamous remark that God is dead, Friedrich Nietzsche did not mean that God once existed and now no longer does. He meant that all people with an ounce of intelligence would now perceive that there is no intelligent plan to the universe or rational order in it: they would now understand that there is no reason why things happen one way and not the another and that the harmony and order we imagine to exist in the universe is merely pasted on by the human mind.

Nietzsche, however, would have regarded very few people as having this required ounce of intelligence, and he in fact had a way of denigrating everyone in sight. For the mass of people, Nietzsche thought, God certainly is not dead. But these people, in Nietzsche's opinion, are pathetic wretches governed by a world

view inculcated by religion, science, and philosophy, a world view that in Nietzsche's opinion makes them feeble losers who are motivated mainly by resentment. They view the world as a rational, law-governed place and adhere to a slave morality that praises the man who serves his fellow creatures with meekness and self-sacrifice.

In Nietzsche's opinion, the negative morality of these pitiful slaves- the mass of humankind, ordinary people - must be reevaluated and replaced by life-affirming values. The new morality will be based on the development of a new kind of human being, whom Nietzsche calls the "overman" or "superman". Such a one not only accepts life in all its facets, including all its pain, but also makes living into an art. Among the forerunners of the overman he cites Alexander the Great

and Napoleon.

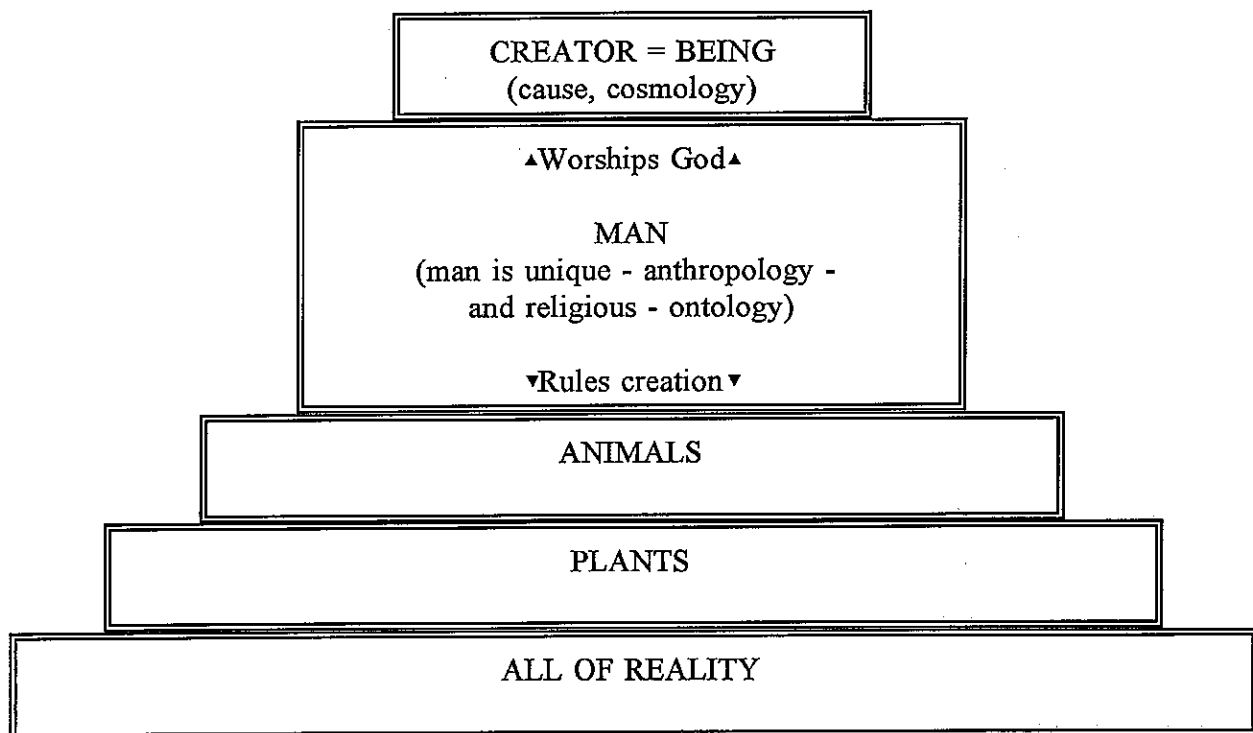
Nietzsche's thesis that there is no God and its apparent corollary that there are no absolute and necessary criteria of right and wrong were accepted by such twentieth-century existentialist philosophers as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. For these thinkers, the fundamental problem of philosophy is how to live one's life, given the absence of objectively valid standards by which to evaluate one's choices and decisions.

Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and some existentialists would have all agreed that the various rational discussion about God's existence are impotent and meaningless.

(from Dr. Lanier Burns)

Two Cosmological Origin Options

I. Divine Creator:



created essence explains existence→

OR:

## II. Divine Creation

Because THE WORLD SEEMS TO BE CHAOTICALLY SELF DESTRUCTING IN VARIOUS FORMS OF INJUSTICE as described by:

People who have experienced: war  
terminal illness  
crime  
oppression  
domestic heartbreak (family, financial)

Or people who have broad exposure to the world"

in education  
in media  
in missions  
in travel  
etc.

---

## Americans believe

*"What does America believe?" George, Dec 1996. Pages 114-117. Topic: BELIEFS, RELIGIOUS.*

Polling firm Luntz Research surveyed 800 Americans nationwide about what they believe in. They found Americans to be religious people; 86% believe in God or a Supreme Being and 48% attend a religious service at least once a week.

Eighty-six percent of Americans believe in heaven; 77% in hell; 30% in reincarnation.

Perhaps surprisingly, 60% believe the world was created in six days, while 38% believe in evolution.

Concerning one of the hot issues of our times, 70% believe life begins at conception. Despite that, the percentage of proliferers is only 49%.

Americans are fairly openminded about religion, with 67% believing that other religions are as legitimate as theirs. The least tolerant age group is the 18-to-24-year-olds. The most religiously tolerant Americans are over age 65. ☺

## Summary of Arguments For God

### 1. Cosmological Argument (Aquinas)

- a. Every event has a cause
- b. The universe had a beginning
- c. Therefore, the universe has a cause

### 2. Teleological Argument (William Paley)

- a. Design implies a designer
- b. The universe manifests design
- c. Therefore, the universe has a designer

### 3. Moral Argument (C.S. Lewis)

- a. Moral Law implies a Moral Law Giver
- b. There is a moral law
- c. Therefore, there is a Moral Law Giver

### 4. Ontological Argument (Anselm)

- a. A necessary being is by definition one that cannot not exist
- b. But what cannot not exist, must exist
- c. Therefore, a necessary being must exist

### 5. Religious Experience Argument (Trueblood)

- a. Millions of people have experienced God
- b. If even one experience is valid, then God exists
- c. It is highly unlikely that all men are being totally deceived about their experience of God
- d. Therefore, it is highly likely that God exists

### 6. Religious Need Argument

- a. Man has a deep seated need for God
- b. What men really need, really exists

(E.g., if men really need water, it is wrong to assume there is no water anywhere--even if some men die of thirst)

- c. Therefore, God really exists

### 7. Argument From Truth (Augustine)

- a. There are immutable truths
- b. The mutable cannot be the ground of the immutable
- c. Therefore, there must be Immutable Truths
- d. But truth comes from a mind
- e. Therefore, there is an Immutable Mind

### 8. Argument From Perfection (Anselm)

- a. There are more or less perfect things
- b. But more or less implies a Most
- c. Therefore, there must be a Most Perfect Being

### 9. Anthropological Argument

- a. Man is an intelligent being
- b. Only intelligence can produce the intelligent
- c. Therefore, an Intelligent Being created man

### 10. Axiological Argument (Ogden)

- a. Value Judgements are impossible without values
- b. Value implies a Value-Giver
- c. Therefore, a Value-Giver exists

### 11. Biological Argument (Hoyle)

- a. Life is a highly complex organ
- b. The chances for life arising without a creator are infinitesimal (1 in 10[to the 40,000 power])
- c. Therefore, it is highly probable that there is a Creator

*I am the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God . . .*

—Exod. 20:2–5

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

—Matt. 22:37

*I am the sacrifice! I am the Prayer! . . .  
I am the Father, Mother, Ancestor and Guard!  
The end of learning! That which purifies  
I am . . . the Way, the Lord, the Judge,  
The Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, . . .  
Death I am, and immortal life I am  
Visible Life and Life Invisible.*

—Bhagavad-Gita, 2.11–20

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe in God?  
If your answer is "yes," you are a theist (no matter what particular conception of God you believe in).  
If your answer is "no," you are an atheist.  
If you say, "I don't know," you are an agnostic.
2. What are the most prominent features of God? (This question is just as important if you are an agnostic or an atheist; it is important to know what it is you don't believe in or don't know; perhaps you don't believe in a fatherly God who looks after us but do believe in some vital force, or "prime mover," that got the universe going in the first place, for example.)  
Is God all-powerful (omnipotent)?  
Is God all-knowing (omniscient)?  
Did God create the universe?  
Does God care about human beings?  
Does God have emotions?  
If so, which ones?

love  
jealousy

anger (wrath)  
hatred  
vengeance  
mercy  
others (identify them from the Bible)

Is God distinct from the world He created?

Is God knowable to us?

Can he or has he ever taken human form?

3. Why do you believe in God? Or why *don't* you?

## BELIEVING IN GOD

In most people's philosophies, the belief or nonbelief in God is one of the most important single concepts. It is God who provides some guarantee to our conception of the meaning of life; or if we do not believe in God, the absence of those same guarantees is all-important. If we believe that life ought to be fair, for example, it is important to believe that there is some powerful being who will make things come out in some fair way—if not in this life, then in another. To believe in God allows a person to have that confidence; not to believe takes it away. Thus the French philosopher Camus believed passionately in justice but felt that, because he was also an atheist, there could be no guarantee, in fact little likelihood, that justice would ever be realized. And so he defended the "absurd," by way of protest. If there were no God, there could be no justice, and if there were no justice, then life was without a meaning.

To believe that God exists is not the same as to believe in Him. The eighteenth-century philosopher Voltaire, for example, said he believed in God as a hypothesis for physics, since there had to be some initial force to start up the universe, which Voltaire believed to be like a giant watch, ruled over by Isaac

Voltaire (1694–1778) was the leading philosopher of the French Enlightenment. He was a skilled critic and a dedicated political reformer who used his connections with the courts of Europe and the aristocracy of France and England to promote religious tolerance and other enlightened reforms. He was continuously at war with the Catholic Church in France. Although he was not an atheist but rather a deist (see p. 67), he despised Christianity as a religion and once bragged, "I am tired of hearing how only twelve men established the Christian church; I should like to show that only one can destroy it."

### The Death of God: Nietzsche

The Madman.—Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the market-place calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!"—As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why! is he lost? said one. Has he strayed away like a child? said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea-voyage? Has he emigrated?—the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. "Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him,—you and I! We are all his murderers! . . ."

—From *The Joyful Wisdom*

Newton's laws of motion. But Voltaire also said that "God is no more just or moral than he is blue or square." In other words, God played no role in his view of life and its values at all; God had nothing to do with justice or reward and punishment, nothing to do with the rules of morality, and nothing to do with the meaning of life. On the other hand, the nineteenth-century philosopher Nietzsche, who described himself as an "atheist by instinct," said that even if God existed, it would not make any difference. Such views make it quite clear that

### For the Pope: Andy Rooney

There seems to be a backlash against the Pope, even among Catholics who were originally his most ardent supporters. They don't like what he's telling them. They find him too tough. They can't live by the standards he sets for them, so instead of quitting the Catholic Church, they grumble that he's wrong.

It seems to me that the Pope has done the right thing for Catholics in almost every case. The trouble is, Catholics want their cake and religion too, and he says they can't have it. I'm for him. Either they're Catholic or they're not, and if they are they have to be willing to accept some of the discomforts of orthodoxy in exchange for the peace of mind they get from their faith. It doesn't seem right that they should have life eternal and everything they want on earth, too. Life eternal would be worth giving up a lot for, I should think, if you really believed in it.

—From *Chicago Tribune*—N.Y. News Syndicate, Inc., 1980

believing in God, as a matter of great importance to our view of life, is not just a matter of believing that God exists. It is also believing in a certain kind of God, a God that somehow matters to us, and a God to whom we in turn matter too.

### GODS AND GODDESSES

*This feeling, that the universe is not a mere It to us but a Thou, forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing that there are gods (although not to do so would be so easy both for our logic and our life) we are doing the universe the deepest service we can, seems part of the living essence of the religious hypothesis.*

—William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*

When someone says he or she does or does not believe in God, we can usually assume that the God in question is some loosely defined Supreme Being drawn from the Old and New Testaments—the Bible. According to this traditional conception, God is a spiritual being, infinitely intelligent and infinitely powerful. He knows everything (including everything that will happen at any time in the future) and He can do anything—change the course of history, make the sun stand still, bring the dead back to life, part the waters of the Red Sea, enter into the human world as a seemingly ordinary person, and so on.

To gain some perspective on our own religious beliefs, it is important to appreciate the variety of beliefs, and the variety of gods (and goddesses) that have satisfied the religious urge throughout history. There are religions—Buddhism, for example—that do not include a concept of God, in anything like our own sense. There are a great many religions that place far more emphasis on ritual and community activity than our sometimes very contemplative and faith-oriented religions. There are religions that distribute the various functions of our God among a large number of gods and goddesses—for example, the gods and goddesses of the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Teutonic peoples of northern Europe.

Greek God(dess)	Roman God(dess)	Teutonic God(dess)	Function
Zeus	Jupiter	Thor	thunder/king
Hera	Juno		queen/children.
Ares	Mars	Tyr	war
Athena	Minerva		wisdom
Aphrodite	Venus	Frija	love
Poseiden	Neptune		sea
Hermes	Mercury	Odin (chief of the gods)	science/commerce
	Janus	Heimdall	beginnings

In some ancient religions, the question "Which God do you believe in?" had a very specific meaning: it meant, Which gods or goddesses do you particularly

pray to and rely upon? This might depend, in turn, on the city you lived in, since each town or city had its own patron deity. It might depend on your family, and what you did for a living. Farmers would tend to worship the goddess of the harvest; a blacksmith would tend to worship the god of metalworking (Vulcan, in Roman mythology). In times of war, the gods and goddesses would typically choose sides; for instance, in the Trojan War, according to Homer, some chose the cause of the Greeks, others the side of the Trojans, and they often intervened in the battle itself, directing an arrow to its mark, or otherwise helping or hindering one side or the other. Whatever else it may be, religion has always been a source of righteousness.

In the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, there is only one God, not several. (This is called monotheism, as opposed to the polytheism of many other cultures.) But our conceptions of the one God have changed significantly over the past two thousand years; our ideas about how a person relates to God have changed even more significantly. To say that a person "believes in God," therefore, is not enough. We must also know which *conception* of God he or she believes in.

## OUR TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

It is essential to see our own conception(s) of God in social, historical, and cultural perspective. This does not mean that one can no longer believe that his or her God is the "true" God, but it does mean that one should not pretend that his or her conception is the only one possible. Even an eternal truth has a particular set of origins, a set of social interests, and a distinct cultural perspective.

In the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, there is but one God (although in Christianity He is sometimes defined as a "Trinity" of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"). He is distinctively a male God. And our conception of God is inevitably anthropomorphic, at least to some extent—that is, we describe God in terms of our own attributes. The Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were almost wholly anthropomorphic, in the sense that they had almost all the usual human characteristics, except that they were more powerful, they were immortal, and they could do some things that most humans wouldn't dream of doing. (Zeus used to change himself into a swan and a bull, for example; all of the gods and goddesses spent at least some of their time turning people into different kinds of plants and animals.) The Greek gods and goddesses often misbehaved—they became jealous and vengeful when their love was thwarted; they sulked and acted childish.

The God of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions still retains essential anthropomorphic features. As children, we are sometimes taught through illustrations in Sunday-school books that God is a kindly old man with a long white beard. And even as adults, we are taught to attribute some very human emotions to God—for example, in the Bible, God is sometimes said to be a

### Which Side Is God On?

*The Divine Law is against communism.*

—E. F. Landgrebe

*Fascism is God's cause.*

—Arthur Cardinal Hinsley

*God did not mean for women to vote.*

—Grover Cleveland

*God loves you. God doesn't want anyone to be hungry and oppressed. He just puts his big arms around everybody and hugs them up against himself.*

—Norman Vincent Peale

*God ordained the separation of the races.*

—Reverend Billy James Hargis

*Who says I am not under the special protection of God?*

—Adolf Hitler

*God has marked the American people as His chosen nation.*

—Senator Albert Beveridge

*There never was a lawgiver who did not resort to divine authority.*

—Machiavelli

*None of us is here by accident. Behind the diligence of our staffs, supporters, and our own individual campaign efforts, behind the votes of the people, we recognize divine appointment.*

—Reverend Richard Halverson,  
opening the predominantly Republican  
United States Senate session of 1981

### Other Religions—Other Alternatives

Hinduism does not include a conception of God as such; there is simply a conception of ultimate reality (*Brahma*) which is impersonal, having no special concern for human beings, no love. Hinduism is, by Judeo-Christian and Islamic standards, almost devoid of doctrine: rather, it consists of a variety of myths and methods, with virtually no insistence on "true belief" and therefore no concept of heresy or of orthodoxy. Hinduism is often thought to be a polytheistic religion, but in fact it stresses a singular unity to life which can take many forms. Instead of the all-important emphasis on historical revelation (to Moses, to Jesus or Saint Paul, to Mohammed), Hinduism stresses revelation and wisdom in each individual, which is the recognition and the feeling of being "at one" with the whole of the cosmos (*samadhi*).

Buddhism is a development of Hinduism (Buddha was the son of an Indian king in the fifth century B.C.) which emphasizes suffering as the universal condition of human existence, because of our continuous insistence on self and individuality. Relief from suffering (*nirvana*) becomes possible when we give up these notions. Zen Buddhism, a more recent development (seventh century A.D.), evolved first in China; it stresses the importance of meditation and direct master-student teaching to achieve *nirvana*. It has become extremely popular in the United States in the last decade or so.

"jealous God," who wreaks vengeance on those who do not believe in Him or listen to his commandments. Lot's wife, for instance, is turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying the command not to look back at the burning city, and Jonah is devoured by a "big fish" for not obeying God's order to warn an offensive city that it should change its ways. Elsewhere, He is said to be a God of infinite love, compassion, and patience. Throughout the Bible, it is made clear that though God has many human attributes, some of these differ from our own not only in degree but in kind: he feels not just a sense of love and justice but an infinite sense of love and justice, which we cannot comprehend. Indeed, one of the features of Christianity as it has developed is the strong emphasis on the mystery of God, the fact that it is impossible for us to understand Him or know Him. And yet, it is also part of our traditional conception of God that He listens to our prayers and cares about us. He is a rational being (in fact, many Christian philosophers have said that God is *reason* itself.)

### ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

Despite the fact that the central tenet of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions is the existence of *one* God, we must be fully appreciative of the rich

variety of conceptions of this one God throughout our long history. From the somewhat childish image of God as a kindly old man who is prone to jealousy and rage and has His "chosen people," we have evolved an enormous variety of complex and abstract philosophical ideas about God, including the "God is love" conception of Saint Paul; the vision of God as the ultimate idea in the medieval philosopher Saint Anselm; the image of God as primarily a continuously active creator in the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas; and the conception of God as merely the first principle of physics in Voltaire, Thomas Jefferson, and some of the eighteenth-century deists. Some people conceive of God as a distant mystery, an ideal we long after for much of our lives, but never encounter or know at all. Other people conceive of God as an immediate presence, and they feel Him in their lives virtually every waking moment. For some people, God is still a personal relationship (perhaps, for instance, through the person of Jesus); for others, God is merely an abstract force, an impersonal cosmic power, perhaps simply identical to the universe itself. To say, therefore, that one believes in God is not yet to say which conception of God.

**God as Transcendent** The traditional conception of God takes God to be transcendent—that is, *beyond* the ordinary world of human experience, outside of ourselves and distinct from the world He created. Thus, according to this view, God existed before He created the universe and still exists outside of it. The important questions, then, are how it is that we are able to know of His existence, and how we are able to relate to Him at all. Some people would not see knowing God as a problem, since they would also see God as present everywhere and all-knowing, revealing Himself to anyone who believes in Him. Others see it as a serious problem, and find the effort to reach out to God one of the monumental tasks of life. Still other people, though believing in God, would say that we cannot know Him at all, but simply must believe on faith. And some people would say that, in general, we cannot know God, but, on rare occasions, we can indeed have a more or less direct experience of Him, and those experiences—mystical experiences—are enough to sustain us, even for a lifetime.

Relating to God is another question. One view is that we cannot know God personally but that we can know Him and relate to Him through his earthly representations—the church, certain important people (the Pope for Catholics, the king in some national conceptions of religion), through the Bible or other scriptures, through the teachings of certain latter-day saints. Another view is that the knowledge of God and our relationship to Him must be direct and personal. The German churchman Martin Luther (1483–1546) initiated the Reformation in Christianity, for example, partly because he saw the church as interfering with the direct relationship between the individual and God. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, on the other hand, rejected even the influence of Luther's Reformation because, in his mind, it still interfered with what he considered to be the most crucial element in religious belief, the purely *personal* relationship between the individual and God, not based on or helped along by any church or community of believers.



**God as Immanent** Other people, however, do not believe that God is transcendent at all. They hold, rather, that He is an immanent God, a God not outside of us or distinct from the universe. This view has been formulated in many different ways, from the Christian conception of the incarnation of God as a man and the idea of a Holy Spirit that infuses us all, to the elaborate views of some philosophers, according to which God is simply identical to the cosmos as a whole. In the immanent view of God, the problem of our knowledge of God and relation to Him more or less resolves itself, since we do not have to "reach out" to God at all, but simply look in ourselves to find Him.

**Pantheism** There have been a number of conceptions of God as immanent, as within us or as identical to the universe. Perhaps the most simple and powerful of these conceptions is a view called pantheism. The most famous defender of pantheism is the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), who insisted, in a simple phrase, that God is *everything*, identical to the physical and mental universe. Spinoza's aim was to develop a conception of God which would not leave us with that terrible distance between ourselves and the Supreme Being, and which would leave room for any number of different religions and conceptions of God without insisting that any one of them

#### God in Everyday Life

*The ordinary believer does not, however, report an awareness of God as existing in isolation from all other objects of experience. His consciousness of the divine does not involve a cessation of his consciousness of a material and social environment. It is not a vision of God in solitary glory, filling the believer's entire mind and blotting out his normal field of perception. . . . The believer meets God not only in moments of worship, but also when through the urgings of conscience he feels the pressure of the divine demand upon his life; when through the gracious actions of his friends he apprehends the divine grace; when through the marvels and beauties of nature he traces the hand of the Creator; and he has increasing knowledge of the divine purpose as he responds to its behests in his own life. In short, it is not apart from the course of mundane life, but in it and through it, that the ordinary religious believer claims to experience, however imperfectly and fragmentarily the divine presence and activity.*

—John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*

*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

—John 1:18

Benedict Spinoza was born in an Orthodox Jewish community in Amsterdam in 1632. His parents had been refugees from the Spanish Inquisition, and Spinoza spent his entire life fighting for religious tolerance. He was thoroughly educated in both Jewish and medieval Christian philosophy, but his unorthodox opinions caused him to be excommunicated from his native Amsterdam, despite the fact that Holland was then the most liberal country in Europe. His books were banned and he spent most of his life as a traveling lens grinder. The lens dust made him fatally ill and he died in 1677. His whole philosophy is based on the conception that the world and God are a single unity, and all of us are part of that unity (see also Chapter 4).

was the only "true" religion. In Spinoza's view, we are God, not as individuals, of course, nor even as humanity as a whole; we are an integral part of the whole of the universe (or what Spinoza called the "One Substance") and thus an integral part of God as well. In one of his more striking images, Spinoza suggested that each of us is like a tiny worm in the blood inside the body of some great being. We see only our immediate surroundings and tend to treat that alone as reality, with some vague idea of some greater being "outside of us." But, in fact, we are *part* of that great being, and once we appreciate this, we transcend our limited perceptions and our idea of something outside of us, and, instead, come to see ourselves as part and parcel of that great being. The being, in this case, is the whole of the universe. And believing in God, for Spinoza, is actually coming to realize what we really are, not discovering the existence of something beyond our experience which we ourselves are not part of.

It is worth mentioning, however, that Spinoza's views were not well received, even in his native Holland, the most liberal and religiously tolerant nation in Europe. His insistence on religious tolerance was too extreme, and his own views too unusual. He was exiled from the orthodox religious community in which he had grown up, and his works were banned for Christians and Jews alike until well after his death. And despite his devout beliefs, he was called an "atheist" because, in his view, God could not have created the universe (since He was the universe) and praying to God—as opposed to simply believing in Him—makes no sense. But the lesson to be learned from Spinoza, more than anything else, is that intolerance has greeted virtually all changes, throughout history, in the conceptions of God, even those which are undertaken by unquestionably religious people. For most people, it is not just believing in God that counts, but believing in the "right" God—that is, having the right conception of God, even if, as Spinoza argued, it is one and the same God for all of us.

Spinoza's pantheism has its parallels in some Eastern religions—in Buddhism, for example, in which the idea of a God separate from the universe is not considered, or, to put it another way, in which it is the universe itself that is divine. In Hinduism too, although there may be a certain concentration of di-

vinity in the "Godhead." God is nevertheless everywhere, even in animals and in lower forms of life. But the religious perspective of pantheism renders somewhat confusing our usual question, "Do you believe in God?" If God is identical to the universe as a whole, then what is the difference between believing in God and believing in the existence of the universe? Thus there is some justification for the assertion that, from the pantheist viewpoint, everyone is a theist, and no one is an atheist, even if some of us who say that we do not believe may be somewhat confused about what it is that we do believe in. But then the atheist can respond, of course: "No, I only believe in the universe, and I do not see any reason for calling it 'God.'" You can see how complex this argument can get, since, in one sense, an atheist does not believe any differently from a theist. But the religious attitudes and discipline of Spinoza, the Buddhists, and Hindus show that such a view cannot be sufficient, for there is an enormous difference between an atheist who simply believes in the existence of the universe and a pantheist who believes that the universe is divine. What is this difference? One might say that it is a difference of *attitude*. What they believe in (namely, the existence of the universe) might be the same, but the way they look at it and act in it is entirely different. But this changes religious *belief in something* into a religious *attitude toward everything*, and the idea of believing in God, accordingly, changes radically.

**God as Universal Spirit** A related conception of God is the conception defended by Hegel as Spirit. But where Spinoza argued that God is identical to the universe in an eternal way, Hegel painted a much more dynamic and

### Hegel on "Spirit"

*The significance of that "absolute" commandment, Know thyself—whether we look at it in itself or under the historical circumstances of its first utterance—is not to promote mere self-knowledge in respect of the particular capacities, character, propensities and foibles of the individual self. The knowledge it commands means that of man's genuine reality—of what is essentially and ultimately true and real—of spirit as the true and essential being.*

—From *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*

*The goal, which is absolute Knowledge or Spirit knowing itself as Spirit, finds its pathway in the recollection of spiritual forms as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their spiritual kingdom.*

—From *Phenomenology of Spirit*

complex picture, in which we humans are essentially the primary *expressions* of spirit, which acts *through* us and even *uses* us for its own purposes. But spirit is, at the same time, not to be thought of as different from us. A simple example is this: think of yourself as being on the football team, or even as one of the loyal fans at the game. You are imbued and inspired by what we call "team spirit." You find yourself caught up by the enthusiasm of the game, as if something has taken hold of you, and indeed it has. What we call "spirit" is not some alien force that invades you, but rather the emotional connection you feel with everyone else in the stadium, the excitement of the game, your shared enthusiasm. Now imagine that picture enlarged to include all of humanity, and a shared "team spirit" of sorts which you share just by being human, a kind of enthusiasm for life; that is what Hegel meant by "spirit"; it is bigger than any of us, but not something distinct from us. And that, for him, is God.

**Deism** The French philosopher Voltaire defended a conception of God as a necessary hypothesis for physics. Although he considered himself an enemy of the church, Voltaire found atheism unthinkable, and he sharply criticized his intellectual friends who did not believe in God. But Voltaire's belief in God was, from most Christian points of view, extremely limited. Not only did he not believe in Christ and most of the doctrines and dogmas of Christianity; he did not even believe that God had any personal or human attributes at all. God could not be said to be just, or wise, or merciful. He could not be said to be loving, or jealous, or concerned with what happens to us. This is why it is so important not to insist, if you believe in God, that "we simply can't understand his nature," for if you do, then Voltaire can rush in and say, "See, you agree with me. God is not just, merciful, loving, etc." Perhaps you want to qualify your statements and add, "But God's justice is infinite, and we can't always understand His ways." But to say we cannot understand God at all, that our human word "justice" does not apply to him in any sense, and that "His ways" are beyond our comprehension is to raise the question of how we are to characterize our belief at all.

Voltaire's view reduced the conception of God to the minimum, and it was not long before another Frenchman, the great scientist Laplace (1749–1827) was heard to say (to the emperor Napoleon), "I have no need of any such hypothesis." For to believe in God simply as an initial creative force is to believe much less than what is required even for the most rudimentary religious belief in our sense. A God who is conceived of as a force, indifferent to the concerns of human beings, is not a God to be worshiped, not a God who gives meaning to our lives, and in most people's opinion (both theists and atheists) not worth the name "God" at all.

**God as the Unknown Object of Faith** As we noted earlier, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) rejected the idea that the Christian church (or any church) is a necessary intermediary between ourselves and God. He attacked what he sarcastically called "Christendom" and the "Christian hordes" for their hypocrisy. For them, he complained, "being a Christian" just meant that their parents

### God as the Unknown: Kierkegaard

*But what is this unknown something with which the Reason collides when inspired by its paradoxical passion, with the result of unsettling even man's knowledge of himself? It is the Unknown. It is not a human being, in so far as we know what man is; nor is it any other known thing. So let us call this unknown something: the God. It is nothing more than a name we assign to it. The idea of demonstrating that this unknown something (the God) exists, could scarcely suggest itself to the Reason. For if the God does not exist it would of course be impossible to prove it; and if he does exist it would be folly to attempt it.*

—From *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

were Christians, that they went to church occasionally, and that they nodded their unthinking assent whenever anyone asked, "Do you believe in God?" But for Kierkegaard, being a Christian, or being "religious" in general, was not *something* in your life; it had to be *everything*. Believing in God was not a matter for intellectual debate; Kierkegaard had nothing but disdain for those theologians who spent their time trying to prove that God exists. In one of his powerful aphorisms, he commented, "To stand on one leg and prove God's existence is a very different thing from going down on one's knees and thanking Him."

For Kierkegaard, being a Christian was a total commitment, or what he called a leap of faith. One could not know God. One could not know that He existed or anything about Him. But one had to act *as if* one were absolutely certain of His existence, in an intimately personal relationship (like a son and his father or even, he suggested, like two lovers). God is the great unknown, Kierkegaard said, but at the same time one had to believe that He was totally familiar and immediately present. Indeed, Kierkegaard was so vehemently against the idea of knowing God (that is, in an abstract, intellectual way) that he rejected the whole of Christian theology and its attempts to develop a rational and comprehensible conception of God. Instead, he said that any adequate conception of God is thoroughly incomprehensible and irrational. What is important, therefore, is not our conception of God but the *passion* with which we believe in Him. Again, we can raise the question, "Believe in *what*?" But Kierkegaard would say that such questions are not only irrelevant, they are contrary to religious feeling. He stated, "If anyone succeeded in making Christianity plausible, on that day Christianity would be squashed," and "When faith begins to lose its passion, proof becomes necessary in order to command respect from unbelief." In other words, trying to understand God is antithetical to believing in Him, and rationality only gets in the way of faith. Nevertheless, although Kierkegaard rejected the idea of having a conception of God, he had a distinctive conception of what it is to be religious. So despite his attacks on philosophy, he was very much a philosopher, offering us a radical conception of what it is to believe in God.

**God as a Moral Being** Of all the characteristics that have been attributed to God, one set stands out above the rest. Whether or not you believe that God created the universe, that He once entered into human form as Christ, that He once parted the Red Sea, or that He is a transcendent being or an immanent spirit, it is the *moral* features of God, His care for justice and His concern for us, that makes religion so important in our lives. This is what makes Voltaire's conception of God so unimportant and trivial; it is what makes Kierkegaard's conception so all-important and vital. In terms of the Old Testament, perhaps the single most important lesson, repeated on virtually every page, is that God is a moral being who has given us laws—the Ten Commandments in particular, but thousands of smaller commands too. In the New Testament, the most important message, again repeated on almost every page, is that God cares, that God is the Divine Judge, concerned with virtue and evil on earth, who punishes the wicked and rewards the good. Thus, in all conceptions of God, perhaps the most important questions (apart from whether you believe or not) are, What *moral* characteristics does God have? How much does He care about us? What will He do for us? Will He answer our prayers? (And which ones? Probably not our angry childhood prayer that the kid down the block be struck down by lightning. But what about our prayers for a more peaceful world, or for the strength to carry on through some ordeal, or to be cured of some terrible affliction?) What are God's laws? (He says, "Thou shalt not kill." Does that mean Never? Except in war? Except in some ("just") wars? Or except Philistines?) And, perhaps most important of all, what is God's role in controlling the amount of suffering and evil here on earth? Indeed, this problem has struck most philosophers and religious thinkers as so important that an entire field has grown up around it: it is generally known as the problem of evil.

### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The problem of evil begins with the main ingredient in most of our conceptions of God: simply stated, that God is good. But this conception seems to be at odds with one obvious fact about the world—evil and suffering flourish. Now it doesn't much matter how you understand "God is good," whether you think that means that God watches over us every minute and protects us from harm, or that God created us and so cares for us in some general way. The point of the conception is that God does care about us and therefore cares what happens to us. But if this is so, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world, even among the young and innocent children?

The argument can be filled out in the following way. First, we can summarize our conception of God in three statements:

1. God is all-powerful,
2. God is all knowing, and
3. God is good.

## A Few of God's Commandments: Old Testament and New

### OLD TESTAMENT

*Honour thy father and thy mother . . .*

*Thou shalt not kill.*

*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

*Thou shalt not steal.*

*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox . . . nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*

—From the Ten Commandments, Exod. 20:12–17

### NEW TESTAMENT

*"You have heard that it was said [to the men of old], 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak, as well."*

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. . . . You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

*"Judge not, that you be not judged."*

*"So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."*

*. . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."*

—Matt 5:38–40, 43–48; 7:1, 12; 22:37–40

But if there is evil in the world, then, so the argument goes, one of three things must be true:

1. He can't do anything about it,
2. He doesn't know about it, or
3. He doesn't care about it.

But all of these are contradictory to our conception of God, and so our problem remains unexplained.

**Denial of God** There are an enormous number of responses to this argument. One is to conclude that God does not exist, since to deserve the name "God" a Supreme Being must have all three features in the first list. But there are many ways of defending belief in God against this argument, and it is fair to say that every philosopher who has ever written, if he or she believes in God, has felt obliged to respond to the problem of evil in one way or another.

**Denial of Evil** One answer to the problem of evil is to say that, contrary to appearances, there is no evil or suffering. And there have always been people who have denied the existence of evil, who have tried to pretend that nothing is wrong. (It is always easier to do this regarding other people's troubles rather than your own, of course.) There have been people who have asserted—despite all evidence to the contrary—that the Nazis did not in fact murder millions of Jews. There have always been people who have denied that war is evil and who have insisted that *everyone* killed or injured in a war—not only soldiers but civilian adults and children—somehow *deserved* it. But this is a solution that becomes more and more implausible and insensitive the more we look at it. Many people who suffer do so because of their own errors, of course (which is, therefore, no reflection on God's goodness). But many do not, especially children who starve to death or are murdered in war. You might say, "They are being punished for their parents' sins," but this would hardly count as justice. Would you think it fair, if one of your parents or grandparents got a reckless driving citation from the police, and they took away your driver's license? Justice, whether human or divine, means punishing the person who deserves it, not someone else.

**The Least of the Evils** Some people have said that God, in His wisdom, saw all the different ways the world could be; He saw that there had to be a certain amount of evil and suffering in all of them; and He chose the world with the *least* amount of suffering, or in Leibniz's positive terms, "the best of all possible worlds." This solution requires a good deal of faith on our part, since it is easy to imagine any number of small changes in the world which might make it a better world and not in any way throw off the balance of good and evil. One way of saying this is to agree that there must be *some* evil and suffering in the world, but *why so much?*

**The Free-Will Solution** Another solution, perhaps the most powerful and controversial of all, is the so-called free will solution; the argument is that God created us with free will, the ability to do what we wanted to do. Accordingly, we have created the evil and suffering in the world ourselves, and it is no reflection on God's goodness. But the problems that have been pointed out in this solution are these: First, again, why so much evil and suffering; couldn't God have created us a little bit wiser and less reckless to begin with, still with free will but with a little more intelligence? Second, if God created us with free will, does that mean that He *cannot* interfere? If so, then that would seem to mean that He is not all-powerful. If He can interfere, then the question is why He does not (since

our suffering often far outweighs our errors), and if He does, then whether we are really free after all? Third, if God is all-knowing and knew in advance what terrible misfortunes we would bring on ourselves, then why did He give us free will? Wouldn't we all be much better off without it, preprogrammed by God to be good, kind and considerate to each other? And fourth, even if one accepts the free will solution, it still seems most unlikely that all the evil and suffering in the world is due to our own errors and abuse of our freedom. Innocent children are killed in a volcanic eruption while they sleep or even while they are praying in church. How can this be answered? How could God have allowed (or caused) this to happen?

**Justice in the Afterlife** Another solution is the appeal to some further court of justice, not in this life but later on, in which the good are rewarded and the wicked punished. But this raises problems too: even if you believe in divine reward and punishment, the question of justice re-emerges. Is it fair to punish an innocent man, even if you intend to give him an elaborate reward later on? Is it fair to reward some people who have not had a chance to prove themselves (for example, infants who are killed in a war), while other people have to spend a lifetime proving their moral worth? And if you believe that this life is in some sense a "test" for the next one, it is important to ask whether the test is entirely fair (since some people in some societies do not even know that they are being tested) and whether a truly good God would test His believers at all. Consider the story of Job, for example, which is one of the important considerations in the problem of evil. According to the biblical story, God inflicted all kinds of terrible sufferings on Job, who was a good man and believed in God wholeheartedly. God killed Job's wife and children, ruined his life, and gave him all kinds of painful diseases. Any why, just to test him, just to win a bet with the devil? Is this justice? And does it make everything all right again if God at the end of the story restores to Job all that he has lost?

**God's "Mysterious Ways"** Some people have handled the problem of evil by an appeal to God's "mysterious ways." We do not understand why God does as He does, and we should not question Him. But this answer is very much at odds with the need to know something about God in order to have reason to believe in Him at all, and furthermore, is there any just interpretation of some of the more brutal stories in the Bible (for instance, the Job story and God's destruction of whole cities, the slaughtering of innocent babies for the sins of their parents)? Sometimes we can understand what it is for a wise person to do something which we do not understand; he or she seems more in command of the situation than we are. But there are limits to how far we can stretch this sort of explanation, and when we cannot even imagine a sense in which a course of action is just, appeal to "mysterious ways" is no longer an answer to the problem, but an admission that we have no idea how to deal with it.

**Working Out an Answer** None of these responses is adequate in itself, but none of the above objections is final either. Indeed, the whole history of

religion—Judaism and Islam, Buddhism and other Eastern religions as well as Christianity—has been taken up with various attempts at answering this problem. So if your philosophy includes belief in God at all, it is essential that you determine what moral qualities you believe God has and whether these can be made compatible with the existence of evil and suffering in the world. If you do not believe in God, of course, the problem of evil will seem to you to be a final reply, a proof that there cannot be a God who is powerful and all-knowing and just and caring as well. But then you have to face the question of whether there is any reason for the evil and suffering in the world, and any way for us to deal with it besides simply accepting it at face value.

## FAITH AND REASON: WAYS OF BELIEVING

For many believers in the Middle Ages, belief in God and knowledge of Him was a matter of pure reason. This did not in any way contradict faith, but rather supported it. The twelfth-century theologian Saint Anselm, for instance, developed famous and ingenious "proof" of God's existence (which we shall discuss shortly). The philosopher Saint Thomas Aquinas also developed a number of ways of proving God's existence and nature (which we shall discuss also), and indeed much traditional theology and scholarship is dedicated to this view that knowledge of God is essentially rational, and that we can know, by thinking about Him, what God is really like. On the other hand, there are believers, as we indicated before, who have insisted that God cannot be rationally known at all. And as we have also already mentioned, there are mystics, who believe that we can know God, but not through reason or rational thinking; we can know God only through a special kind of experience, which most people might never have and in which, if only for a moment, God seems to present Himself to us directly. But how we believe we can relate to God depends, of course, on our conception of Him. If we believe in a largely anthropomorphic, personal conception of God, then relating to Him through prayers and reasonable requests makes perfectly good sense. If, on the other hand, our conception of God is of an all-embracing universal love or a great spirit who watches over the universe, then personal requests may be quite out of line.

Most of what we have said above applies primarily to those who believe in some conception of God, but everything we have said applies just as well to atheists who do not believe in God at all. Which conceptions of God do you not believe in? If you take the existence of God to be the existence of a wise old man who grants prayers and answers requests somewhat capriciously, that might well be justifiable by virtue of ordinary common sense. But suppose someone insists, rather, that the proper conception of God is of a vital force which keeps the world in existence, or perhaps the existence of the universe itself; what would it be not to believe in God so conceived? To be an atheist, in other words, presupposes a conception of God just as much as to be a believer; it is just as much a question of what one does not believe as it is a question of what it is that one does believe.

### The Cosmological Argument: Saint Thomas Aquinas

*In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.*

—From *Summa Theologica*

**The Cosmological Argument** A good example of a philosopher who believed in God as the most reasonable thing to believe is Saint Thomas Aquinas. In the thirteenth century he introduced some of the proofs, or what he called the "Five Ways," which are still standard in rational approaches to religion. (In fact, almost all of these ways had been invented long before Aquinas, some of them by Aristotle, who did not believe in God in our sense at all.) For example, it was Aquinas who defended the proof that you are probably quite familiar with; it is sometimes called the cosmological argument. It has many variations, but the simplest one is this: everything has to be caused by or created from something else. Therefore, there must have been a first cause, or what Aristotle called a "prime mover," and this is God.

**The Argument from Design** A very different argument for rationally believing in God is one which is probably also familiar to you: if we look at the world, we can see that it is intricately designed, everything with its place and its purpose. There are bugs for birds to eat, bark for bugs to eat, rain so trees can grow, clouds to produce rain, and so on. In fact, the universe is so perfectly designed, with the stars in their orbits and our brains in our skulls, that one cannot believe that this all came about by chance. So one must believe that behind the design of the universe is a designer, namely, God. The British philosopher William Paley defended this argument, which is often called the argument from design, by drawing the analogy between our finding a watch on the beach, and assuming that some person must have been there, and our seeing the intricate design of the world and concluding that some intelligent creator must have made it. Voltaire, who despised the argument from design, made fun of it in his novel *Candide*

with such quips as "Isn't it wise of our creator to give us noses; otherwise we wouldn't have any way of wearing our eyeglasses." But on a more serious note, the argument from design seems to be in serious conflict with Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection, since the Darwinian theory makes an attempt to explain exactly how a complex world could come into existence over time without assuming a divine creator. But Darwin himself believed in God and saw no incompatibility between his theory and his religious beliefs. Can you see a way of making the two compatible?

### The Argument from Design: Saint Thomas Aquinas

*The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.*

—From *Summa Theologica*

### A Reply: David Hume

*In a word, Cleanthes, a man who follows your hypothesis is able, perhaps, to assert or conjecture that the universe sometime arose from something like design; but beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology by the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis. This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and imperfect compared to a superior standard and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance; it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity and is the object of derision to his superiors; it is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity and, ever since his death, has run on at adventures from the first impulse and active force which it received from him. You justly give signs of horror, Demea, at these strange suppositions; but these, and a thousand more of the same kind, are Cleanthes' suppositions, not mine. From the moment the attributes of the Deity are supposed finite, all these have place. And I cannot, for my part, think that so wild and unsettled a system of theology is, in any respect, preferable to none at all.*

—From *Dialogues on Natural Religion*

**The Ontological Argument** In addition to the cosmological argument and the argument from design, a common philosophical argument for rational belief in God's existence was formulated by an eleventh-century monk named Saint Anselm, and it is called the ontological argument. (This argument too is one of Aquinas' "Five Ways.") The word "ontological" means having to do with the nature of existence, and the argument, which has been developed in hundreds of variations, is essentially this:

1. We cannot conceive of God except as an infinite and most perfect being.
2. A being who had all perfections (justice, omnipotence, omniscience, and so on) except for the perfection of existence, would not be "most perfect."
3. Therefore, the most perfect being necessarily exists.

#### The Ontological Argument: Descartes

*But now, if just because I can draw the idea of something from my thought, it follows that all which I know clearly and distinctly as pertaining to this object does really belong to it, may I not derive from this an argument demonstrating the existence of God? It is certain that I no less find the idea of God, that is to say, the idea of a supremely perfect Being, in me, than that of any figure or number whatever it is; and I do not know any less clearly and distinctly that an [actual and] eternal existence pertains to this nature than I know that all that which I am able to demonstrate of some figure or number truly pertains to the nature of this figure or number, and therefore, although all that I concluded in the preceding Meditations were found to be false, the existence of God would pass with me as at least as certain as I have ever held the truths of mathematics (which concern only numbers and figures) to be.*

*This indeed is not at first manifest, since it would seem to present some appearance of being a sophism. For being accustomed in all other things to make a distinction between existence and essence, I easily persuade myself that the existence can be separated from the essence of God, and that we can thus conceive God as not actually existing. But, nevertheless, when I think of it with more attention, I clearly see that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having its three angles equal to two right angles be separated from the essence of a [rectilinear] triangle, or the idea of a mountain from the idea of a valley; and so there is not any less repugnance to our conceiving a God (that is, a Being supremely perfect) to whom existence is lacking (that is to say, to whom a certain perfection is lacking), than to conceive of a mountain which has no valley.*

—From *Meditations*

So stated, the argument is peculiar and somewhat crude, but the variations on it in recent years have turned it into a logically powerful argument, which has proven acceptable to many logicians. (For some examples, see *The Many-Faced Argument*, by John Hick.) The point behind the argument in all of its variations, however, is to prove by logic alone that, from the very idea we have of God, it is necessary that He exists. And if this is so, then belief in God is rational belief, justifiable on the basis of strict logical considerations.

**Rational Faith** Some attempts to show that belief in God is rational are of a very different kind. The German philosopher Kant, for example, rejected all three of the above arguments (the cosmological argument, the argument from design, and the ontological argument) and instead tried to show that belief in God is rationally necessary for anyone who would be a morally good person. The argument is familiar: in order for virtue to be rewarded and vice to be punished, there must be some all-powerful, all-wise judge who can—if not in this life, then in another one—make justice prevail, reward the good, and punish the wicked. Kant called the belief in such a God *faith*, but by this he does not mean an irrational feeling. Faith, for Kant and many other philosophers, is a purely rational attitude, one that can be defended with reasons, with arguments, and with proofs.

**Pascal's Wager** A different kind of proof is an argument formulated by the French philosopher-scientist Blaise Pascal. Pascal's argument presents us with a kind of betting situation, and the argument is therefore called *Pascal's wager*. It runs like this: Either we believe in God or we do not. If we believe in God and he exists, we will be rewarded with infinite bliss. If we believe in God but He does not exist, then the worst that has happened is that we have lost some time in prayer and given up a few sinful pleasures that we might otherwise have enjoyed.

Pascal's Wager		
Either	Then, if God exists	Then, if God does not exist
We believe	ETERNAL REWARD	We've only wasted some time in prayer and missed a few pleasures in life.
We do not believe	ETERNAL DAMNATION	We're Ok, and we've had some good times.



If we do not believe, however, and God does exist, we may enjoy a few pleasurable sins, but we will be punished with eternal damnation. If we do not believe and God does not exist, then, of course, there is no problem. Now you don't have to be much of a gambler to figure out which alternative is the better bet; it is to believe. Any rational person, therefore, will believe in God, for why risk eternal damnation in return for a few sinful earthly pleasures?

**Irrational Faith** But not all arguments for believing in God are rational arguments, and not all belief need be backed up by an argument aimed at convincing anyone else. The most prominent example of a philosopher with this view of religious belief is Kierkegaard, whom we have already discussed. For Kierkegaard, unlike Kant, for instance, *faith* is distinctively irrational, and proofs of God's existence are utterly irrelevant. Here we can talk about that conception of belief in God in the tradition called mysticism, which says that one can come to believe in God by way of a special experience or vision, which cannot be described or communicated to anyone else. (Such experiences are said to be ineffable.) A mystic might agree that his experience has proved to him that God exists, but need not say anything at all. In fact, a mystic does not even have to

### The Moral Argument for Belief: Kant

*Happiness is the condition of a rational being in the world, in whose whole existence everything goes according to wish and will. It thus rests on the harmony of nature with his entire end and with the essential determining ground of his will. . . . Still, the acting rational being in the world is not at the same time the cause of the world and of nature itself. Hence there is not the slightest ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and proportionate happiness of a being which belongs to the world as one of its parts and as thus dependent on it. . . . Nevertheless, in the practical task of pure reason, i.e., in the necessary endeavor after the highest good, such a connection is postulated as necessary: we should seek to further the highest good (which therefore must be at least possible). Therefore also the existence is postulated of a cause of the whole of nature, itself distinct from nature, which contains the ground of the exact coincidence of happiness with morality. . . . Therefore, the highest good is possible in the world only on the supposition of a supreme cause of nature which has a causality corresponding to the moral intention. . . . Therefore, the supreme cause of nature, in so far as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being which is the cause (and consequently the author) of nature through understanding and will, i.e., God. . . . Therefore, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.*

—From *Critique of Practical Reason*

### Mystical Experience

*These three dimensions represent three kinds of knowledge. The first is sensual: the eye sees things at a distance. The second is intellectual and is much higher in rank. The third represents [the function of] that aristocratic agent of the soul, which ranks so high that it communes with God, face to face, as he is. This agent has nothing in common with anything else. It is unconscious of yesterday or the day before, and of tomorrow and the day after, for in eternity there is no yesterday nor any tomorrow, but only Now, as it was a thousand years ago and as it will be a thousand years hence, and is at this moment, and as it will be after death.*

—Meister Eckhardt, Sermon 12

*If anyone thinks that mysticism consists in useless dreaming, or in the idle and selfish enjoyment of wonderful experiences without any practical and valuable effects in life, they have here their answer. It is the universal testimony of those who know that mystical experience transforms human life, and alters character—often from the squalid and mean to the noble and selfless.*

*I was standing at the recessed window of cell No. 40 and with a piece of iron-spring that I had extracted from the wire mattress, was scratching mathematical formulae on the wall. Mathematics, in particular analytical geometry, had been the favourite hobby of my youth, neglected later on for many years. . . . Now, as I recalled the method and scratched the symbols on the wall, I felt the same enchantment.*

*And then, for the first time, I suddenly understood the reason for this enchantment: the scribbled symbols on the wall represented one of the rare cases where a meaningful and comprehensive statement about the infinite is arrived at by precise and finite means. The infinite is a mystical mass shrouded in a haze; and yet it was possible to gain some knowledge of it without losing oneself in treacherous ambiguities. The significance of this swept over me like a wave. The wave had originated in an articulate verbal insight; but this evaporated at once, leaving in its wake only a wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity, a quiver of the arrow in the blue. I must have stood there for some minutes, entranced, with a wordless awareness that "this is perfect—perfect"; until I noticed some slight mental discomfort nagging at the back of my mind—some trivial circumstance that marred the perfection of the moment. Then I remembered the nature of that irrelevant annoyance: I was, of course, in prison and might be shot. But this was immediately answered by a feeling whose verbal translation would be: "So what? is that all? have you got nothing more serious to worry about?"—an answer so spontaneous, fresh and amused as if the intruding annoyance had been the loss of a collar-stud. Then I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist.*

—Arthur Koestler



### The Rejection of Religion: Karl Marx

*The basis of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the human world, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion which is an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its general basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human being inasmuch as the human being possesses no true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.*

*Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.*

*The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions.*

—From Critique of Hegel

### The Rejection of Religion: Friedrich Nietzsche

*The deity of decadence, gelded in his most virile virtues and instincts, becomes of necessity the god of the physiologically retrograde, of the weak. Of course, they do not call themselves the weak; they call themselves "the good."*

*The Christian conception of God—God as god of the sick, God as a spider, God as spirit—is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! God—the formula for every slander against "this world," for every lie about the "beyond"! God—the deification of nothingness, the will to nothingness pronounced holy!*

—From The Antichrist

### The Rejection of Religion: Sigmund Freud

*... if we turn our attention to the psychical origin of religious ideas. These, which are given out as teachings, are not precipitates of experience or end results of thinking: they are illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes. As we already know, the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection—for protection through love—which was provided by the father; and the recognition that this helplessness lasts throughout life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one. Thus the benevolent rule of a divine Providence allays our fear of the dangers of life; the establishment of a moral world-order ensures the fulfilment of the demands of justice, which have so often remained unfulfilled in human civilization; and the prolongation of earthly existence in a future life provides the local and temporal framework in which these wish-fulfilments shall take place. Answers to the riddles that tempt the curiosity of man, such as how the universe began or what the relation is between body and mind, are developed in conformity with the underlying assumptions of this system. It is an enormous relief to the individual psyche if the conflicts of its childhood arising from the father-complex—conflicts which it has never wholly overcome—are removed from it and brought to a solution which is universally accepted.*

*When I say that these things are all illusions, I must define the meaning of the word. An illusion is not the same thing as an error; nor is it necessarily an error ... we call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfilment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification.*

—From The Future of An Illusion

*insist that what he has "seen" is true at all, but only that it is extremely significant personally. Thus there is no argument with a mystic, for he doesn't have to tell you anything, and there is nothing you can say to refute him.*

### Understanding Your Belief

*Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.*

—Paul Tillich

*If God plays any significant role in your philosophy, it is important to come to terms with these various conceptions, attitudes, and arguments. What or who is the God you believe in? What do you expect of Him? What does He expect of you? Why do you believe in him? Should other people believe in Him too, or is*

## 82 God

that none of your business? Can you or should you prove that your belief in God is rational? If not, why would you accept an *irrational* belief? Psychiatrists, beginning with Sigmund Freud, define irrationality not only as that which cannot reasonably be believed but also as that which is *harmful* to believe. Freud argued that belief in God is irrational because it is a childish illusion which gives us unwarranted and sometimes destructive attitudes and expectations toward life. Other philosophers—for example, Karl Marx—have argued that belief in God is like a drug, which prevents us from seeing the ways in which we could actually improve the world we live in. ("Religion is the opiate of the people," he said.) So one cannot simply say without thought, "I just believe in God on faith, that's all." Faith must have its justification or your beliefs are not your own. Even if you accept the idea of an irrational belief, it is important to show why that belief is something more than mere illusion (as Freud argued) or escapism (as Marx argued).

## CLOSING QUESTIONS

1. Give a general description of God, noting those characteristics without which you would not be willing to call Him "God." If you don't believe in God, say with some precision what it is that you don't believe in.
2. If you believe that there is a God and that He is all-powerful, all-knowing and concerned with justice and the well-being of humanity, explain how there can be so much evil and suffering in the world. Pursue as far as you can the responses and objections to one of the various attempts to answer the problem of evil. (A good way of doing this is to have a friend act as devil's advocate and try to refute your efforts to defend a solution to the problem.)
3. Try to explain to an atheist friend (real or imagined) *why* you believe in God.
  - If you think there are good reasons for believing, state them.
  - If you think there are good arguments for, or a *proof* of, God's existence, state the arguments or the proof and defend it against your atheist friend's objections.
  - If you think that the only way to believe in God is through faith, answer your atheist friend's objections that you are being irrational, that you are simply indulging in "wishful thinking," that you are escaping from your responsibilities to change the world and instead, accepting a fantasy in which God will take full responsibility.
4. Choose one of the traditional proofs of God's existence and work it out in some detail, answering objections and making the argument as irrefutable as you can. (See Bibliography for further readings.)
5. If you don't believe in God, what would convince you that He does exist?
  - If you do believe in God, what would convince you that He does not exist?

Van Til on The Trinity
------------------------

Van Til (1895-1987) wrote:

"We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person. We have noted how each attribute is co-extensive with the being of God. We are compelled to maintain this in order to avoid the notion of an uninterpreted being of some sort. In other words, we are bound to maintain the identity of the attributes of God with the being of God in order to avoid the specter of brute fact" (Systematic Theology syllabus, 1955, p. 238).

According to one of Van Til's best interpreters:

"(Brute fact, in Van Til's terminology, is uninterpreted being.) The argument here is somewhat elliptical, but if we fill in some missing premises, it seems to go like this: If we deny that God is one person, then the unity among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit becomes an impersonal unity. The diversities among the three in that case would not be functions of personal planning and interpretation; rather these diversities would "just happen" to exist. Such a view would in effect place an impersonal "chance" or impersonal "fate" behind and above the persons of the Godhead. Somehow, then, the three persons must function in such intimate interdependence that it may be truly said that the three are one person" (John Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox," in Foundation of Christian Scholarship, Gary North ed., pp. 306-307).

In logical form the argument is this:

1. The ultimate unity in God is either personal or impersonal.
2. If it is personal, then there is ultimately one person in God.
3. If it is impersonal, then impersonal "chance" or "fate" is more ultimate than the personal in God.
4. But (3) is obviously wrong since it makes "fate" more ultimate than a personal God.
5. Therefore, ultimately there is one person in God.

Put in this form, there are problems with premises 1,2,3, and 4.

First, does ultimate "unity" mean unity in attributes (essence) or unity in activity (or operation) which persons do. Sure there is both in God, but Van Til cannot argue a strict either/or. In this case premise (3) is equivocal, since it assumes that if there is an ultimate, impersonal unity in God, then there cannot be an ultimate personal unity as well.

Second, does it follow that there must be one person simply because there is unity between three persons? Why cannot there be personal unity between three persons without there being another person to bind the persons together? Further, if there were another more ultimate person which unites the three persons, is this a fourth person in the Trinity? Does this not

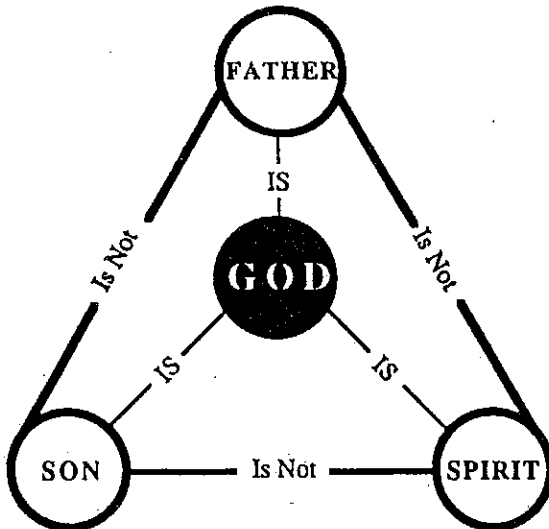
## DIFFERENT VIEWS OF GOD

<b>Monarchianism</b> (mono = one: arche = ruler) One Person / One God		<b>Trinitarianism</b> (trinus = triple) Three Persons / One God	<b>Tritheism</b> (tri = three, theos = God) Three Persons / Three Gods
A second and third century heresy that denies the doctrine of the trinity maintaining that the only true God has always existed as one Person not three Persons. The teaching exists today in two forms:		The Biblical view of God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate Persons who have always existed as ONE TRUE GOD. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three Gods nor are they three names for the same Person.  Although the word Trinity is not found in the Bible, the idea or teaching is found throughout Scripture.	The belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate Gods. This is actually a form of Polytheism (the belief in more than one true God).
<b>Modalism</b>  This view holds that God exists as one Person who is revealed in history in different modes using different names. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simply different names for the same Person. Therefore, the Father was born at Bethlehem and crucified at Calvary, but at the same time He was called Jesus.  Currently taught by the United Pentecostal Church.	<b>Dynamic</b>  This heresy teaches that Jesus is not God but a special man who became (or was adopted as) the Son of God (usually thought to have occurred prior to the Genesis creation or at His Baptism).  Currently taught by The Watchtower (Jehovah's Witnesses)	<b>Currently taught by the Bible and Orthodox Christians</b>  Currently taught by Mormonism in a modified form. Mormonism is actually a thoroughly polytheistic belief system.	

## TRINITY

### (The Tri-Unity of God)

The doctrine of the Trinity sets Christianity apart from every other world religion. Many religions hold to a plurality of Gods and some hold to only one God. Christianity is unique in holding to one God in three persons.

DEFINITION	DIAGRAM	DEFENSE						
<p>Trinity: God exists as 1 essence with 3 persons. Essence: That which makes up a being or thing. (Objective "What") Person: A center of intention (intellect, emotion, will). (Subjective "Who").</p> <p>AUGSBURG CONFESSION (1530): "...there is one divine essence which is called and is God...yet there are three Persons of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."</p> <p>WESTMINSTER CONFESSION (1647): "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 is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."</p>		<p>There is one God      Deuteronomy 6:4; I Cor. 8: 4-6; Ephesians 4: 3-6</p> <p><u>OT names/pronouns imply plurality:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Elohim (plural of El) - the plural may suggest "majesty" or "plurality."</li><li>* Genesis 1:26; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8 - the use of "us", "we", "our" indicate plurality. Note shift from "I" to "us" in Isaiah 6:8.</li></ul> <p><u>Father, Son, Spirit are all called God</u></p> <table><tr><td>Father</td><td>John 6:27; Gal. 1:1; I Pet. 1:2</td></tr><tr><td>Son</td><td>John 1:1,14; 8:57-59; 20:28; Col. 2:9</td></tr><tr><td>Spirit</td><td>Acts 5: 3-9</td></tr></table> <p><u>Father, Son, Spirit appear together in Scripture as distinct, yet equal persons</u></p> <p>(Matthew 28: 19-20; I Cor. 12: 4-6; II Cor. 1: 21-22; II Cor. 13:14; I Peter 1: 1-2)</p>	Father	John 6:27; Gal. 1:1; I Pet. 1:2	Son	John 1:1,14; 8:57-59; 20:28; Col. 2:9	Spirit	Acts 5: 3-9
Father	John 6:27; Gal. 1:1; I Pet. 1:2							
Son	John 1:1,14; 8:57-59; 20:28; Col. 2:9							
Spirit	Acts 5: 3-9							
ILLUSTRATIONS (inadequate though helpful)	RELEVANCE							
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The triple point of WATER: water in a vacuum tube at zero degrees centigrade will contain liquid, ice and vapor and yet all will be H2O.</li><li>2. An EGG. An egg has three parts - white, yolk &amp; shell but is one egg.</li><li>3. The SUN. The sun itself, which we do not see, is like the Father. The light from the sun, which we do see is like the Son. The power of the sun which, makes the plants grow, is like the Spirit.</li><li>4. One being (a man) can exist with three distinct relationships (husband, father, brother).</li><li>5. Eternity x Eternity x Eternity = Eternity</li></ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* While we can understand something of the Trinity, we acknowledge that our understanding is not exhaustive. The Trinity is a mystery. It is what we can know together with what we cannot understand that compels us to WORSHIP such a great God.</li><li>* PRIORITY AND EQUALITY WITHOUT INFERIORITY as seen in the Trinity is the exemplary basis for proper relationships between men and women (I Cor. 11:3) and in other human relationships as well.</li></ul>							

## Alternatives To The Trinity

<h1 style="text-align: center;">The Trinity</h1> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Jehovah's Witnesses</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Way, International</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>United Pentecostal Church</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Worldwide Church of God</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Unification Church</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>There Is Only One True God</b></p>	<p>Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: Isaiah 43:10 10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. 1 Corinthians 8:4 ...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is some other God but one.</p> <p>(Mormonism): I will preach on the plurality of Gods. ... I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. ... I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit; and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 370).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>One God</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>One God</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>One God</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>One God</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>One God</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Father Is God The Son Is God The Holy Spirit Is God</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Father, Son, and Spirit are God</b></p>	<p>(Jehovah's Witnesses): "The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that Satan is the originator of the trinity doctrine.... Nevertheless, sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God" (Let God Be True, pp. 101-102). "...this Son was actually a creature of God.... The Messianic prophecy at Isaiah 9:6 foretold that he would be called 'Mighty God,' though not the Almighty God...." (Insight on the Scriptures, pp.52, 54).</p>	<p>(The Way, International): In other words, I am saying that Jesus Christ is not God, but the Son of God. They are not 'co-eternal, without beginning or end, and co-equal.' Jesus Christ was not literally with God in the beginning; neither does he have all the assets of God" (Jesus Christ is Not God, p. 5).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Father, Son, and Spirit are God</b></p>	<p>(Worldwide Church of God): "As I have written before, we do not teach the doctrine of the Trinity" (The Worldwide News, 25 August 1992, p. 1). "Someone may ask, 'Does this mean we now accept the doctrine of the Trinity?' No, it does not. The doctrine of the Trinity in the Western Church states the union of three Persons in one Godhead, so that the three are one God as to substance, but three persons as to individualities. We do not accept that teaching; we believe that the word person is inaccurate when referring to the Holy Spirit" (Ibid, 23 December 1991, p. 1).</p>	<p>(Unification Church): "Therefore, we cannot deny that Jesus was a man who had attained the purpose of creation. In like manner, Jesus, being one body with God, may be called a second God (usage of God), but he can by no means be God Himself" (Divine Principle, p. 211). "Some try to identify Jesus with God on the basis of the quote in John 8:58.... But Jesus didn't mean that he was God" (Outline of The Principle, Level 4, p. 142).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Are Three Distinct Persons</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Three Persons</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Two Persons Jesus ≠ God</b></p> <p>"But the holy spirit has no personal name. The reason for this is that the holy spirit is not an intelligent person. It is the impersonal, invisible active force that finds its source and reservoir in Jehovah God...." (Let Your Name Be Sanctified, p. 269).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Two Persons Jesus ≠ God</b></p> <p>"Spirit" with an upper case S and "spirit" with a lower case s are two different things.... The Giver is God [the Father], the Spirit. His gift is spirit.... holy spirit, power from on high...." (Receiving the Holy Spirit Today pp. 2-4).</p>	<p>(United Pentecostal Church): "...they reject the doctrine of the Trinity and taught that Jesus Christ was at one and the same time Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions, p. 564). The UPC "...came to believe that the one true God who had revealed himself as Father, in the Son and as the Holy Spirit was none other than Jesus Christ.... The distinctive beliefs of the UPC center on a non-Trinitarian view of God...." (Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, pp. 861, 864).</p>	<p>[Note: The Worldwide Church of God is in the process of changing some of its doctrine. For example the church no longer teaches that men and women can become part of the Godhead, "It is impossible.... we thought we could be part of the Godhead. The Church has withdrawn from making those statements" (Michael Snyder interview with Watchman Fellowship, 12 April 1991). However they still do not affirm the Trinity doctrine on the last two points. They deny that the Holy Spirit is fully God and that He is a Person. "Why does the statement use the word Divinity in reference to the Holy Spirit. It is eternality of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit cannot be less than divine" (Worldwide News, 23 December 1991)].</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Two Persons Jesus ≠ God</b></p> <p>"Thus, Unification theology thinks of the Holy Spirit not as an individual person but rather as a sign of God's work in history...." (Unification Theology, p. 202)</p>

# THE TRINITY

## I. The Contemporary Debate

### A. Problems due to the modern idea of "person"

"If someone today, whether Christian or not, hears the statement that there are three persons in God, he will think instinctively of three subjects differing from one another in their subjectivity, knowledge, and freedom, and wonder what kind of logic it is that permits three persons understood in this way to be simultaneously one and the same God" (K. Rahner Theological Investigations (Crossroad, 1983), 18: 110-11).

### B. Problems that attend the notion of "substance"

"The term used in the Athanasian Creed, and from this source incorporated into the traditional doctrine of the Trinity taught by the church, 'una substantia, tres personae', must (i.e., should) sound strange to us from the outset. What room is there for the idea of 'substantia' in Christian theology? Indeed, it represents that intellectual aberration which substitutes speculative and impersonal thinking for the line of thought controlled by revelation; thus 'God' now becomes a neutral 'ens', 'the Absolute', instead of God who is 'Lord' of heaven and earth" (E. Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 227).

### C. Problems arising from the practice of prayer

"In terms of religious devotion, one can ask: Is the prayer to one of the three personae in whom the one divine substance exists directed toward someone different from another of the three to whom another prayer is directed? If there is no difference, why does one not simply address the prayer to God? If there is a difference, for example, in function, how is tritheism avoided?" (P. Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3: 289).

### D. Problems with the seemingly contradictory and/or unnecessary character of the doctrine

Thomas Jefferson referred to the doctrine as "incomprehensible jargon." Matthew Arnold spoke of it as "the fairytale of the three Lord Shaftesburys." Former Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike called the doctrine "excess baggage." Others have spoken of it as a God who is a "3 headed monster."

## II. Some Evangelical Statements

- A. B.B. Warfield - "There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence" ("Trinity," in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ed. James Orr (Eerdmans, 1939), 5: 3012).
- B. J.I. Packer - "[We give] praise to one God in three persons...Trinitas is a Latin word meaning three-ness. Christianity rests on the doctrine of the trinitas, the three-ness, the tri-personality, of God" (Knowing God (Intervarsity, 1973), p. 57).
- C. Donald Bloesch - "God is sovereign but not solitary. God is not simply a unity but a triunity. He is differentiated within Himself. He not only exists but also coexists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...

The Trinity must be thought of neither as one God in three manifestations nor as a symmetrical triad of three persons with separable functions; instead the Trinity signifies one God in three modes of existence-- Father, Son, and Spirit, and each of these participated in the activity of the other" (Essentials of Evangelical Theology (Harper and Row, 1978), 1: 35).

- D. J. Kenneth Grider - "This [doctrine] is the audacious Christian understanding that God consists of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who share a common nature or essence. It is the understanding that God is tripersonal, but, at the same time, one in substance or nature or kind of being. There are three Hims, but the three are one in a most fundamental way."

"This means that while we are talking about three Persons, three Thous, we are not talking about three Gods (Tritheism) - but only one. In fact, it might be that, since the three are one, there is an intensification of the oneness, the unity, that would not obtain if there were not three who make the one. This is not the three of arithmetic, where you have three of, perhaps, the same kind. It is the kind of oneness that obtains in an organism--where one organism is characterized by three systems (and more): respiration, circulation, and reproduction" ("The Holy Trinity", in Beacon Dictionary of Theology, ed. Richard S. Taylor (Beacon Hill Press, 1983), p. 530).

### III. Biblical Support For The Doctrine

#### A. The Old Testament

- 1. Declarations and assumptions of the unity of God--both numerical oneness and uniqueness (unicity).

Exodus 20:2-3; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:8; 45:5, 14b, 18b, 21, 22



2. Intimations of the plurality of God.

- a. Elohim? - Genesis 1:1, 3, et al.
- b. Plural pronouns - Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8
- c. Image of God in human beings - Genesis 1:27
- d. Aaronic benediction - Numbers 6: 24-26
- e. Other texts and arguments - Exodus 35:7; Isaiah 48:16

B. New Testament Teachings

1. Declarations of the unity of God

I Cor. 8: 4,6; I Tim. 1:17; 2: 5-6; James 2:19

2. Affirmations of three-ness within God

- a. At the baptism of Jesus - Mark 1: 10-12
- b. In the Christian baptismal formula - Matt. 28:19
- c. In benedictions and prayers - II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3: 14-17
- d. In the works of God - John 20: 21-22; I Cor. 12: 4-6; Eph. 1:3-14
- e. In certain relationships - John 14: 16-21, 26; 15:26; 16: 13-15, 26-28; 20: 21-22; Eph. 4: 4-6

C. Systematic Argumentation

1. There is only one God (Deut. 6:4; James 2:19)

2. Each of the three--Father, Son, and Spirit is referred to as "God" or "Lord"

- a. Father - Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:3; 6:23; I Pet. 1:2
- b. Son - John 1:1,18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; II Pet. 1:1; I John 5:20
- c. Spirit - Acts 5: 3-4; II Cor. 3: 17-18  
(cf. also Romans 8: 9-10)

3. Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct from one another

Mark 1: 10-12; John 14:26; 16: 13-15 (see also the Scriptures above under NT affirmations)

4. Father, Son, and Spirit are all spoken of as personal

- a. Father - John 16:27 ("the Father Himself"); John 17
- b. Son - Gospels (e.g., John 3:16 - "everyone believing in Him" [αὐτὸν]; John 17

- c. Spirit - John 14:26; 16:13 - both use the masculine ἐκεῖνος ("that one", "he") even though πνεῦμα ("Spirit") is neuter.
- 5. The virtually inescapable conclusion from the fourfold basis above is the doctrine of the Trinity.

#### IV. Inadequate Conceptions

- A. Modalism (also called Sabellianism; modalistic monarchianism; related to patripassionism) -- God is one person who reveals Himself to us variously as Father, Son, or Spirit. Not three distinct persons, but three different names, roles, or activities of the Godhead. Upholds the deity of Christ and Holy Spirit, but denies the distinction of persons within the Godhead.

Advocated in second and third centuries by Noetus of Smyrna, Praxeas, and Sabellius, and today by United Pentecostals and many within liberalism who espouse an "economic" trinity.

- B. Economic Trinity very similar to modalism, sometimes equated with it.

Found in second and third centuries in Hippolytus and Tertullian. Tertullian spoke of Father, Son, and Spirit as three manifestations of the one God. As with a root and its shoot, and the sun and its light, so Father, Son and Spirit are three "extensions" of the one divine substance (yet it is not divided).

In the Enlightenment and modern era, it is found in some form or another (but often without emphasis on "substance") in many theologians, e.g. Hegel, Brunner, Rahner, Kung.

"The triadic formulas of the New Testament are to express, not an 'immanent' but an 'economic' theology of the Trinity; not an inner-divine (immanent) essential trinity in itself but a salvation-historical (economic) unity of Father, Son and Spirit in their encounter with us. The N.T. is not concerned with God in Himself, but with God for us, as He has acted on us through Jesus Himself in the Spirit, on which the reality of our salvation depends" (Hans Kung, On Being A Christian [Doubleday, 1976], pp. 475-76).

- C. Dynamic Monarchianism (much the same as the later "adoptionism") Jesus was an ordinary man, though completely virtuous, who was empowered in a special way ("adopted") by the Father at his baptism. At this event the Spirit, or the Christ, descended upon Jesus and enabled him to do miraculous works. Thus God was dynamically present in the life of the man Jesus, but Jesus was not God.

Advocated in second and third centuries by Theodotus and Paul of Samosata, and by Christian Science today.

D. Three basic lines of trinitarian thought since Aquinas, according to William J. Hill, The Three Personed God, 1982.

1. Symbolic and modal trinitarianism

- a. Symbolic trinitarians - e.g. F. Schleiermacher, P. Tillich, C. Richardson
- b. Neo-modal trinitarians - e.g., K. Barth, C. Welch, K. Rahner

2. Neo-economic trinitarianism

e.g., J. Moltmann, W. Pannenberg

3. Process trinitarianism

e.g., C. Hartshorne, J. Cobb, L. Ford, J. Bracken.

V. Historical Development of The Doctrine

Athenagoras (167-77) - "Who, then, would not be astonished to hear those called atheists who admit God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and who teach their unity and power and their distinction in rank?" (Plea 10)

Theophilus (180-81) - first used the term "trinity" (τρίας) to speak to "Father," "Logos," and "Wisdom" (Holy Spirit), but without clarifying the relationship between the three (To Autolychus 2:15).

Tertullian (c. 213) - first to use Latin word trinitas. God is one by unity of substance (substantia), yet there are three distinct persons (personae). "The Spirit of God is God, and God's Word is God, as coming from God, but it is not identical with God from who he is. That which is God of God, as concrete existent (substantivares) will not be God himself, but God in the sense of being of the substance of God himself, as a concrete existent, as a portion of the whole..." (Against Praxeas 26). This treatise "represents the most important contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity in the Ante-Nicene period" (J. Quaten, Patrology [Spectrum, 1975], 2: 285).

Creed of Nicea (325) - "We believe in one God, the Father almighty... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance [οὐσίᾳ] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance [ὁμοούσιον] with the Father...And in the Holy Spirit." (J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds [Longmans, Green, 1950], pp. 215-16).

Nicene - Constantinopolitan Creed (381) - "And in our Lord Jesus Christ...begotten not made, of one substance with the Father [ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ] .... And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified..." (Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, p. 297-98).

The key formula is "one οὐσία (essence, nature) in three ὑποστάσεις (modes of being; hypostases). See Weber, Foundations of Dogmatics, 1: 375-79.

"Athanasian" Creed (c. 5th century) -

3. ...we worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons; nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father; another of the Son; another of the Holy Ghost.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
16. And...there are not three Gods; but one God.
21. The Father is made of none; neither created; nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone; not made; nor created; but begotten.
23. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; not made, neither created; nor begotten; but proceeding.
25. An in this Trinity none is before or after another: none is greater or less than another.
26. But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal.
28. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity. (Phillip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 5th ed. [Eerdmans, 1979 reprint], 3: 691-93).

Articles of Religion (as established in 1801) -

1. "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; ...And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."
2. "The Son...of one substance with the Father...."
3. "The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and Son, very and eternal God" (The Book of Common Prayer, According to the use of The Episcopal Church [Seabury, 1979], pp. 867-68).

VI. Necessary Ingredients of a Biblical/Orthodox Trinitarian Doctrine  
(see also Erickson, Christian Theology, 1: 337-38)

- A. Essential unity of the Godhead (both oneness and uniqueness)
- B. Threefold, eternal self differentiation (social analogy)
- C. Eternal, ontological equality of members
- D. Temporary functional and economic subordination, without inferiority of essence or being
- E. Essential, unchanging deity of each member
- F. Distinct personal character of each member
- G. Incomprehensibility of the doctrine!

VII. Analogies and Illustrations of The Trinity

Egg	H2O	Math: Eternity x Eternity x Eternity = ETERNITY
-----	-----	--

Sun	Human Family
-----	--------------

Cube (C.S. Lewis) Shamrock or clover

Human personality:

Augustine -- remembering God, knowing (understanding) God, loving God (On The Trinity 14. 10-12)

Erickson -- individual human psychology; interpersonal human relations (Systematic Theology, pp. 340-41)

VIII. Practical Values of The Doctrine

(see Demarest and Lewis, Integrative Theology, 1: 284-89; and Carter, A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology, 1: 403-405)

- A. It encapsulates numerous biblical doctrines, and can therefore be useful for teaching the essentials of Christianity.
- B. It serves as a test of orthodox belief in an increasingly pluralistic world.
- C. It assists us in worship and prayer (both public and private).
- D. It enriches our personal life and ministry.

- E. It provides powerful missionary motivation.
- F. It aids in evangelism, both in our personal understanding of God's activity and in explaining the gospel correctly.
- G. It deepens our relational unity within our families, within the Church, and within the human race.
- H. It constitutes a marvelous foundation for a meaningful social ethics (see "Toward a Wesleyan Social Ethics" in Leon O. Hynson, To Reform The Nation [Francis Asbury/Zondervan, 1984], pp. 39-60).

---

## Science and the Bible

What if Jesus had never been born? What would our world be like? In the area of science, there is so much to be said.

The Greeks and Romans could have done much in the realm of science. But because they believed that nature was started by itself, kept itself going, and everything was material and nothing was spiritual (in short, evolutionistic), man remained enslaved to superstition and fear. To the Hebrew, the natural world was cause to praise and worship the Creator.

To the animists, the natural world contains living spirits of various gods and ancestors, and therefore cannot be experimented with. To the Hindus and Buddhists, the physical world is unreal; therefore, do not waste time on the unreal. To the existentialists of today, the natural world is irrational; therefore, there are no absolutes. But to the Christian there is a rational God who created a rational world that is governed by rationalistic or reasonable (scientific) laws.

It was the Protestant Reformation that caused men to have an interest in learning about the natural world which God had created for His glory and our good. Even

though the Bible is not a science book, the Bible in hundreds of ways teaches about His creation; modern science is built upon biblical principles. For example, Psalm 8:8 led Matthew F. Maury to spend 40 years discovering and mapping out the ocean currents. Other creationist scientists were Louis Pasteur (bacteriology), Isaac Newton (calculus and physics), Johannes Kelper (celestial mechanics), Robert Boyle (chemistry), Charles Babbage (computer science), Michael Faraday (electromagnetics), and Gregor Mendel (genetics).

By the middle of the 16th century almost all of what we know about the physical laws which govern the universe had been discovered. The discovery of these laws led to the technological advances of the 20th century.

Scientists discovered that a reasoning God has set up a reasonable, orderly universe. Since man was created in God's image, he has the ability to reason, to think God's thoughts after Him. Scientists learned that, *"The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth by understanding hath He established the heavens."*

~ Proverbs 3: 19-20

Author Unknown

# The Logic of Trinitarian Doctrine (Part 1)

by  
Dr. Phillip Cary,  
Professor at Villanova University  
Ph.D., Yale University

When I was growing up in the faith, I heard a lot about the doctrine of the Trinity, but never learned what the doctrine was. In high school and college I worshipped at faithful, Biblical churches in which pastors often affirmed the importance of the Trinity, even preached whole sermons on how important it was, yet never told us what the doctrine actually said. To find that out I had to go to graduate school and read the Church Fathers. This article and its sequel are intended to pass on what I learned from that reading to anyone else who thinks the doctrine is important but has never actually learned what it is. In the first article I will discuss the logic of the doctrine (i.e. the things it says and how they hang together) and in the second its history. In this first article I will do my best to stick to convictions that all orthodox (i.e. Nicene) theologies have in common.

To begin with, in talking about the Trinity it will be convenient to distinguish three levels: first, there is talk about the holy Trinity itself, i.e. about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Second, there is talk about the trinitarian faith: because our God is the holy Trinity, our Christian beliefs, worship and prayer are (or should be) trinitarian. Thirdly, there is talk about the doctrine of the Trinity, i.e. about the propositions and concepts by which we give a theoretical account of the shape of our trinitarian faith. This article focuses on the third (and least important) level of discourse. Church life consists largely of the second-which is in turn directed at the first, i.e. at God himself.

The trinitarian faith is inseparable from the worship of any Biblical church, for the Trinity is the Biblical God. Hence to grow up without learning the doctrine of the Trinity is not to miss out on the trinitarian faith. Rather, it is to miss out on something much less important but still indispensable for thinking Christians: an explicit formulation of the basic assumptions of trinitarian faith. In the Biblically-faithful churches of my youth I did learn the trinitarian faith, even though I did not learn the doctrine of the Trinity. I learned to pray "our Father," to call Jesus "Lord," and to glorify the Holy Spirit as God. What I did not learn was how all these practices of prayer and worship hang together with the Christian view of the nature of God. That is what the doctrine of the Trinity is about: it articulates how the trinitarian Christian faith is grounded in God himself.

## Formulating the Doctrine

The doctrine of the Trinity is the view of the nature of God that goes along with the confession that Christ is

God. Of course the divinity of Christ is a theme of the doctrine of Christology as well as of the doctrine of the Trinity, but there is a difference: Christology is concerned with the relation between Christ's divinity and his humanity, while the doctrine of the Trinity is concerned with the relation between his divinity and the divinity of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The humanity of Christ, in other words, is strictly speaking a theme of Christological rather than trinitarian doctrine.

Unlike the Trinity itself, the doctrine of the Trinity is not incomprehensible or beyond our understanding. It consists of human words meant to be understood by human beings. And it can be formulated without using abstract or unbiblical language. All it takes is seven simple propositions. 1 First and foremost are three propositions which together confess the name of the Triune God:

1. The Father is God.
2. The Son is God.
3. The Holy Spirit is God.

Then come three propositions which indicate that these are not just three names for the same thing (ruling out the heresy known as Modalism or Sabellianism):

4. The Father is not the Son.
5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.

Finally there is the clincher, which gives the doctrine its distinctive logic:

7. There is only one God.

These seven propositions are sufficient to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity--to give the bare bones of what the doctrine says and lay out its basic logical structure. The logical peculiarities of the doctrine arise from the interaction of these seven propositions.

Of course it is not hard to see what is peculiar about the logic--or rather the arithmetic--of these propositions. After describing three distinct things as God in propositions 1-6, we turn around in proposition 7 and claim there is only one God. This arithmetic is odd but distinctively Christian, and more familiar than it might seem. It is woven into the very texture of Christian

worship, as for example in the opening of the Episcopal Sunday service:

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
And blessed be *his* kingdom, now and forever.  
It is as if Christians had their own special grammar when speaking of God: after mentioning these three distinct names for God, we go on to speak of *his*, not *their* kingdom.

Trinitarian grammar avoids plurals. Like the Bible, the traditional trinitarian liturgies always speak of God in the singular. Even in abstract doctrinal discussions, Nicene theologians avoid using plural terms whenever possible. Hence our seven propositions use no words in the plural. Notice that even the word "three" is absent--and in general, it is a word worth avoiding. To call God "three in one" is certainly not wrong, but it is at best only a label for the doctrine, not a way of stating it. After all, three peas in a pod are "three in one," but they are not at all like the holy Trinity. Notice also that our seven propositions do not contain any abstract language such as "essence" or "hypostasis." Such language is not needed to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity, though it is indispensable in defending the doctrine against certain heresies and misunderstandings.

In fact, the words we need to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity make a very short list:

We need the Triune name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We need the general concept "God."

We need the word "one."

We need to grasp the notion of identity and its negation--i.e. that when we say "the Father is *not* the Son", etc. (in propositions 4-6) what that means is that the Father is not identical with the Son, but different.

### Trinitarian Grammar

The most important words on the list are clearly the names: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are what give the doctrine its particular content, anchoring it in the Biblical narrative. The word "God", by contrast, is rather vague and general (after all, you do not have to be trinitarian or even Christian to talk about God) and in trinitarian grammar its reference is actually rather unstable. That is to say, Christians can use the word "God" to refer to the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, or to the Trinity as a whole--and it is often hard to tell which. (However, as a rule when the Bible or Christian worship speaks of "God" without qualification, it is most often referring to the Father in particular.)

The peculiar logic of the seven propositions makes this vagueness and instability inevitable: the first three propositions refer to each member of the Trinity as God, and then proposition 7 claims there is only one God, which implies that the Trinity as a whole--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--is God. Thus the term "God" is hard to pin down, because it floats between four possible reference points: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the whole Trinity.

There is nothing particularly wrong with this vagueness. It just means that for trinitarian grammar

the word "God" functions as a general term, while the concrete reality of God is represented by the words "Father," "Son" and "Holy Spirit," which are names rather than general terms. This has important consequences for the practice of the Christian faith. The vagueness of the term "God" causes no problems as long as our talk of God is trinitarian--i.e. so long as we remember to use not only the general term "God" but also the proper names "Father", "Holy Spirit" and "Son" (as well as "Christ"). But when Christians get into the habit of talking about God without mentioning the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the result is that they may literally forget what they are talking about. Their talk becomes abstract and far removed from the particularities of the Christian faith--becomes, in fact, less Christian and more generic. If we are not talking about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then we are not talking about the Christian God but only about some general concept of God that is shared with other religions and philosophies.

What is true of the word "God" is true of general descriptions of divine attributes as well--including words like "holy" or "eternal" or "creator." Each of these terms applies equally to Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and the Trinity as a whole. Because they describe attributes of God, these words get drawn into the same peculiar trinitarian grammar as the word "God." Consider for instance what happens to the little sentence "God is the creator" when the doctrine of the Trinity gets a hold of it. It implies that the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Creator, and the Holy Spirit is the Creator (like propositions 1-3), and yet that there is only one Creator (like proposition 7). Thus the word "Creator" has the same vagueness and instability of reference as the word "God": it can refer to the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, or the whole Trinity. The same can be said of words like "Redeemer" and "Sanctifier," or "Holy" and "Most High."

One important consequence of this peculiarity of trinitarian grammar is that we cannot adequately state the doctrine of the Trinity by talking about "Creator," "Redeemer," and "Sanctifier." There is nothing particularly trinitarian about these three terms--no more than (say) "Eternal", "Infinite" and "Omnipotent." All these terms apply to Father, Son and Holy Spirit alike, and therefore cannot be used to distinguish Father from Son, Son from Holy Spirit, and Holy Spirit from Father. You cannot use general terms to distinguish the three members of the holy Trinity; you have to use the names, or something closely related to them. (This is a deep and important point to which we shall return later).

For instance, when we say "God created the world" we may of course have God the Father specifically in mind, yet it would be a mistake to deny that the Son or the Holy Spirit created the world. For the Son also is the Creator, and so is the Holy Spirit--for the Son also is God, as is the Holy Spirit. Indeed the Son is the Creator precisely because he is God--and not a different or inferior God either. He is not a different God from the Father (as if he were an uncreative God) nor a lesser God (as if he were not powerful enough or pre-eminent



enough to be the Creator of all things). And of course the same must be said of the Holy Spirit.

Hence when we call the Father "the Creator," we are not denying that Jesus Christ is the Creator. Indeed very little of what we say about the Father excludes Christ, and likewise very little of what we say about the divinity of Christ excludes the Father and the Holy Spirit. Let me give two more examples of this, taken directly from Christian worship. First, in the Nicene Creed Christians confess that God the Father created "all things visible and invisible." This is a phrase that the Bible originally applied to Christ (Col. 1:16). This transfer of language from Son to Father is entirely appropriate, for the Father did indeed create all things, visible and invisible--and he did so through the Son.

Second, in the *Gloria*, Christians extol the glory of Christ, saying:

You alone are Holy,  
You alone are the Lord

You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ... Does this thrice-repeated "alone" imply that the Father is not Lord, or the Holy Spirit not Holy? Not a bit of it, as the song immediately indicates when it continues:

With the Holy Spirit

In the glory of God the Father.

Just as the Father, who alone is the Creator, does not create the world without his Word (which is the Son), so Jesus Christ alone is holy and Lord and most high, in the sense that no other creature is holy and Lord and most high like him--but of course the father too is holy and Lord and most high, and so is the Holy Spirit.

Hence even when we use words like "alone" or "only" in speaking of one of the Trinity, that does not necessarily exclude the other members of the Trinity. It is perfectly good trinitarian grammar to say "Christ alone is God"--for it is understood that the word "alone" does not exclude the Father or the Holy Spirit. And it is perfectly fine to say that "the Father is the one true God", for that does not exclude the Son or the Holy Spirit from being the one true God. Much misunderstanding of Biblical usage will be avoided if this little grammatical rule is understood!

### The Arithmetical Peculiarity

Orthodox talk about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit has a very peculiar grammar, and it is important to understand that grammar in order to speak the language of Christian faith well. But now we must move on to a different and more intractable peculiarity--one that is better known but even less well understood. And that is the peculiar arithmetic of trinitarian doctrine.

It is here that we must begin introducing abstract philosophical terms. So far, I have been talking rather loosely about "members" of the Trinity, in contrast to the "whole" Trinity. But that sort of talk can be misleading. When we see why it can be misleading, the value of the more abstract terminology will start to become clear. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not "members" of the Trinity the way arms and legs are

members of a human body. They are not parts of a whole. If they were, then there would be no logical peculiarity about the doctrine of the Trinity after all: God would have three parts, and when you put all three parts together you would get one whole God. But that is clearly not how the doctrine of the Trinity works. Each "member" of the Trinity is fully God, not just a part of God. Our first proposition does not say "The Father is part of God" but rather "The Father is God." Likewise, the Son is never called a "part" of God--for a part is an incomplete thing, and the Son is a complete individual being that is God. So what we need, rather than loose talk about "members," is a term for "complete individual being." The word for that, in technical trinitarian parlance, is "hypostasis" (from the Greek) or "subsistence" (from the Latin).

Now it is clear what the key logical difficulty in the doctrine of the Trinity is: Christians confess three distinct individual beings, and say each is God--and yet also say that there is only one God. That is the arithmetical peculiarity: the three hypostases of the Trinity do not "add up" to make three gods. It is as if when talking about the Trinity we forget how to count.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the logical difficulty of the doctrine of the Trinity lies in the arithmetic. In fact, if our seven propositions are interpreted using ordinary arithmetic, they produce a flat logical contradiction. Hence any logic that makes sense of the doctrine of the Trinity will be a logic without arithmetic. But this is less of a problem than you might think. As a rule, modern logicians devise their systems of logic without any mathematical concepts built in, and then add on set theory, arithmetic and other mathematical concepts. In talking about the Trinity, we are in effect using a logic that does not have these added features--which is a perfectly respectable thing for any modern logician to do.

Still, that does not solve all our problems. For what does the word "one" mean in proposition 7, if it is not a piece of arithmetic? It must mean a kind of oneness that is deeper and logically prior to the arithmetical number one.<sup>4</sup> This may sound strange, but in fact there are many philosophies which have such a notion of oneness, including the leading school of philosophy (i.e. neo-Platonism) at the time of the Church Fathers. Hence when the Church Fathers claimed that God is One in a deeper sense than mere arithmetic, they did not get any objections from contemporary philosophers.

A defense of the logical consistency of the doctrine of the Trinity hinges on the meaning of proposition 7. That is what must be interpreted in a peculiar way if the seven propositions, taken together, are to escape being logically contradictory. Which is to say: the logical difficulties of trinitarian doctrine cluster around the peculiar trinitarian notion of the oneness of God.<sup>5</sup> Notice that there is no hint of logical inconsistency until we get to that last proposition--the monotheistic claim that there is only one God. Up to that point, our talk is perfectly consistent--like that of perfectly consistent polytheists. A pagan, for instance, could say:

1. Zeus is God
- a. Apollo is God

3. Poseidon is God

4. Zeus is not Apollo... and so on down the line, until he got to proposition 7, where the natural conclusion would be: there are three gods. But Christians are too Jewish to say that. And that is why the doctrine of the Trinity is so difficult, interesting and strange.

### Why Not Three Gods?

Why not say there are three Gods? That was an urgent question facing the Church Fathers as they worked out the logic of trinitarian doctrine. Of course they knew the Bible would not allow them to say there were three Gods, and they were determined to follow the Bible. But they needed a logical answer to their heretical opponents, who were asking questions like: how can you say those first six things and not conclude there are three Gods? Doesn't the logic of your Trinity lead you away from Biblical monotheism? For example, if Christ is God just like the Father (proposition 2), and yet is not identical to the Father (proposition 4), then is he not a second God (contradicting proposition 7)?

To understand the Church Fathers' answer to this question, we will need some abstract philosophical terms. But four will be enough<sup>6</sup>:

1. *Hypostasis*, or "concrete or particular being," e.g. a human being, a cat, a tree or a stone--or God the Father, or Jesus Christ.

2. *Essence* or nature, such as humanity or divinity (or "Godhead") or a species of animal or other *kind* of thing. Depending on which philosopher you ask, "essence" can mean something very different and very complicated, but Trinitarian doctrine does not have to take sides on such questions. It is enough if we associate "essence" (Greek *ousia*) with a kind of thing, as opposed to "hypostasis," which refers to particular or individual things--so that essence is to hypostasis as human nature is to Paul. Note that essences are always singular: there are many human hypostases, but only one human essence--many men and women, but only one humanity.

3. *Quality* is not a complete individual thing, but rather something that is *in* a thing. E.g. when we say Mary is old and brown and wise, we are talking about her qualities. *She* is a hypostasis, but "wise" is one of her qualities. (Qualities are typically referred to by adjectives rather than nouns--though of course you can make a noun out of the adjective, like "wisdom," and call that a quality as well.

4. Relations are not *in* a thing like qualities, but *between* two things; e.g. Mary is *taller than* Paul, or *standing to the right of* Peter, or *the daughter of* Anna. As you can readily see, some relations are rather superficial (e.g. "standing to the right of") while others may be a deep part of your identity (e.g. "daughter of").

First let me make clear what the answer was not. The Church Fathers did not argue that God is One because of having only one essence. Of course they did affirm that there is only one divine essence, but that does not mean there cannot be three gods. For there is only one

human essence (i.e. one human nature) and yet there are many human beings. And a pagan could perfectly well say there is only one divine essence and still affirm that Zeus, Apollo and Poseidon are three different gods.

So why did the Church Fathers say there is only one divine essence? Why, in the Nicene creed, do we bother to confess that Christ is "of one essence (*homo-ousios*) with the Father"? Precisely because that means he is not a different kind of God than the Father--not a lesser or lower or later divinity (as the heretical Arians had claimed). This *homo-ousios* clause has the job of repudiating the Arian heresy, and it does that job quite well. It serves as a commentary on proposition 2, to the effect that when we say the Son is God, we mean "God" in exactly the same sense as the Father--not a different kind of God. Hence the *homo-ousios* clause does not rule out tritheism (the doctrine that there are three Gods), but that is not its job. We rule out tritheism by the simple expedient of confessing that there is only one God (proposition 7).

So the question still needs to be answered: why not conclude, logically, that there are three Gods? Of course the basic answer is still: because Scripture forbids it. But what answer can we give to the criticism that in confessing three distinct hypostases as God, we are falling into tritheism, whether we mean to or not? Peter, Paul, and Mary are three human hypostases; and whether we like it or not, they add up to three humans. So if Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three divine hypostases, why don't they add up to three Gods?

The basic answer given by the Church Fathers is this: each of the three hypostases of the Trinity has exactly the same *qualities* as the others. For example, the Fathers' wisdom is exactly the same as the Son's, which is exactly the same as the Holy Spirit's. And the Father's greatness is exactly the same as the Son's, which is exactly the same as the Holy Spirit's--and so on. This is quite different from three distinct human hypostases like Peter, Paul and Mary. Peter may be just as wise as Mary, but his wisdom is not exactly the same as hers. And he may be just as brown as Mary, but his brownness is not exactly the same thing as hers. As a rule, different individuals have different qualities. But the Trinity breaks that rule. In the Trinity all three hypostases have exactly the same qualities. That is why Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not add up to three Gods--unlike Peter, Paul and Mary, who add up to three humans.

Notice how this answer fits the peculiar grammar of trinitarian doctrine. A word like "wise" or "omnipotent" works just like the word "God" or "Creator." It can be applied to either Father, Son or Holy Spirit, or to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit--but it can never be applied in the plural. Just as there are not three Gods, so there are not three wisdoms or three creators in the Triune God. Indeeds there are not three Gods precisely because there are not three wisdoms, not three creators, etc.<sup>8</sup>

This answer to the question, "why not three Gods?" is so radical that it immediately provokes the opposite question: if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each have the same qualities, then what makes them three? How can you tell them apart? What makes them different from each other, if everything about them is the same? The answer is that not everything about them is the same. Their *qualities* are all the same, but the *relations* between them are not. The Son is different from the Holy Spirit because he is *the son of the Father*, and the Holy Spirit is not. "Son of" is a relation, and what makes the Son different from the Holy Spirit is that he has this relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit does not. There is another way of putting this, which amounts to the same thing. It is to say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinguished from one another by their *mode of origination* (Greek *tropos hyparxeos*): i.e. the Son is begotten from the Father, the Father is unbegotten, and the Holy Spirit is not begotten but proceeds. (This is how theologians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition tend to put it, while the Western tradition prefers talking about relations.)

### Conclusion

At this point we have the basic logic of the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is shared by all the Nicene churches, East and West. We can briefly summarize the historical development of this logic thus: (1) First and most fundamental is the Biblical conviction that *Christ is God* (proposition 2, above). (2) The council of Nicea (AD 325) in effect appends to this conviction the commentary: Christ is not a different kind of God than the Father (the *homo-ousios* clause). (3) Once proposition 3 (above) is interpreted in the same way (i.e. the Holy Spirit too is confessed as God in exactly the same sense as the Son and the Father) then the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity is completed. This takes place at the council of Constantinople in 381. (4) Meanwhile, however, a serious question arises: why not say there are three Gods? The answer to that question, given a generation after Nicea by the Cappadocian Fathers, establishes the basic rules of trinitarian grammar: that all qualities in God are one, not three. Hence we always describe God in the singular: one God, one Creator, one Wisdom, one Omnipotence. (5) In that case, what distinguishes the Father, Son and Holy Spirit from one another? The Cappadocians answered: their relations of origin, e.g. the fact that the Father begets the Son but not the other way around.

In arriving at the relations of origin, we have come from the *logic* of trinitarian doctrine to what we could call its *dynamics*--its description of cause and effect. At this point things become richer, more complicated, and more controversial. Let me simply in conclusion mention a doctrine that all Nicene traditions agree on. Since the Father begets and is not begotten by the Son, he is cause rather than effect--and similarly with respect to the procession of the Holy Spirit, where the Father is cause of the procession rather than its effect. The Father is the cause of the other hypostases, and therefore he is "the source of divinity" (*pege theotetos* in Greek, *fons et origo totius divinitatis* in the official Latin

formulation). Here the notion of *ousia* comes in for a richer use than in the *homo-ousios* clause. The Father gives his *ousia*, his very being and divinity and all his divine attributes, to the Son. Hence the Son is all that the Father is, except being Father. That is why all their qualities are the same. This complete self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son's receiving his whole being and self from the Father, is one of the great starting points for Christian meditation on who God is. "All that the Father has is mine," says our Lord Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to "take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:15).

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

#### Church Fathers on the Trinity

##### A. Collections:

(FoC) Fathers of the Church series (Now published by Catholic U. of America Press). Contains most of the important works of the Church Fathers in separate, medium-sized volumes.

(NPNF) Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series (reprint edition, T & T Clark and Eerdmans) The old standard, originally published in the 19th century, gives you 500pp. of Athanasius in one double-columned volume, and similarly voluminous but tightly packed editions of other Church Fathers. This is still the only affordable way to own much in the way of patristic texts. The translations are in Victorian prose but usually reliable (the Greek less so than the Latin). The scholarship is of course dated, and the footnotes must sometimes be taken with a grain of salt.

Hardy, E.R., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), Library of Christian Classic series. Includes trinitarian treatises by the two Gregories.

Rusch, W.G., *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Handy paperback collection of documents from the Arian controversy.

##### B. Treatises:

Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith* (really a treatise on the Trinity) and *On the Holy Spirit* (its sequel). Not as deep and difficult as Augustine, Ambrose's treatises provided the West with an introduction to Cappadocian trinitarianism, and still offer that service today. The whole production is long and repetitious, but you could try book 1 (20 pp.) and see what you think. Available in NPNF.

Augustine *On the Trinity*. The great classic of Western trinitarianism. Massive and not for beginners. Available in NPNF, FoC, and a new translation with extensive introductions and helps for the reader in the series *The Works of Saint Augustine; a translation for the 21st century*.

Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*. This short treatise (50 pp.) is a splendid introduction to Eastern trinitarianism. Basil's *Letters* (in the same volume in NPNF, but available separately in FoC) give us

snapshots of Nicene orthodoxy in the making. See esp. letters 8, 38, 52, 125, 189, 214 and 236.

Gregory Naziansen, *Theological Orations* (= Orations 27-31). Rhetorically uncongenial to a modern reader, these discourses are nonetheless the classic statement of Eastern trinitarianism. Available in NPNF and Hardy.

Gregory of Nyssa, *To Ablabius: On "Not Three Gods"*. This brief (10 pp.) treatise contains the crucial Cappadocian answer to the question: why not three Gods? Available in NPNF, Rusch and Hardy.

John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, Book I, chapters 5-8. Perhaps the last Church Father and probably the first systematic theologian, John has written the most comprehensive brief (15 pp.) statement of Greek trinitarian doctrine. Available in NPNF and FoC.

### Notes

1. These seven propositions are extracted from Augustine's summary of the doctrine of the Trinity in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* 1:5.

2. It is not always possible in abstract doctrinal discussion to avoid using plurals, but you might be surprised how ingenious a serious Nicene theologian can be in the attempt to avoid them. The most common exceptions to the rule "avoid plurals" are found in negations (e.g. "there are not three Gods") and in the use of a phrase like "three hypostases."

3. See Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* §44.

4. Cf. Basil, *Letter* 8.2.

5. More precisely: both unity and identity are concepts that take on a peculiar meaning in Trinitarian doctrine. For just as applying ordinary arithmetical notions of oneness to our seventh proposition produces a contradiction, so also using ordinary notions of identity produces a contradiction. I.e. the following interpretation of proposition 7 makes it logically inconsistent with the others: "For all x and y, if x is God and y is God, then x = y." The equal sign represents the predicate "is identical to", which would normally figure in propositions 4-6 as well (i.e. The Father is not identical to the Son, etc.). For an example of a non-standard concept of identity used in a logical system in which trinitarian propositions come out consistent, cf. P. van Inwagen, "And Yet They are Not Three Gods But One God," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. Morris (U. of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 241-278.

6. The basic philosophical resource here is Aristotle's treatise, *Categories*, which Augustine drew upon extensively in his treatise *On the Trinity*.

7. In ordinary Greek the two terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* had been more or less synonymous. But in the interest of clarity, the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil and the two Gregories) proposed restricting *hypostasis* to the sense of "concrete individual being" (which Aristotle called "first ousia" or "primary substance") and reserving the term *ousia* for "essence" (which Aristotle called "second ousia" or "secondary substance"). Basil spells out this distinction in his Letter 38 (which may have been written rather by his brother Gregory of Nyssa, but see also Letters 214.4 and 236.6. In order to bring out this Cappadocian distinction as clearly as possible I prefer to translate *ousia* (at least in connection with the homousios clause) with the word "essence" rather than "substance" or "being" (which are also very common and quite respectable translations).

8. This is why the "Athanasian" Creed says: Such as the Father is, so is the Son and so is the Holy Spirit... (e.g.) The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal--and yet not three eternals, but one eternal....

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty and the Holy Spirit Almighty, and yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet not three Gods, but one God.

(The "Athanasian" Creed--or *Quicumque vult*, as it is also known from its first two words--is named in honor of the great Greek Church Father Athanasius, but was undoubtedly written by a Latin theologian working under the influence of Augustine).

*That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think of it as a matter of no great consequence.*

*Flannery O'Connor*

# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

(Part 2) by

Dr. Phillip Cary, Ph.D.

Villanova University

In a previous article, "The Logic of Trinitarian Doctrine," I tried to spell out as clearly and simply as possible the basic content of the doctrine of the Trinity. In this article I describe how the doctrine took shape historically and also the historical diversity within the orthodox (i.e. Nicene) tradition of trinitarian thought. In the previous article I focused on teachings that all Nicene theologies have in common, avoiding terms or concepts that were controversial or reflected the viewpoint of one particular tradition or other within the Nicene faith. Hence some notions that are especially familiar to us in the West (like "person") were left out. In this article I bring them back into the story and show how they relate to the basic logic of Nicene doctrine, how they developed out of it and how they raise further questions that are still debated today.

## Biblical Reflections before Nicaea

The doctrine of the Trinity originates in Holy Scripture. While the Bible does not contain much by way of explicit trinitarian doctrine, it does continually bear witness to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian doctrine results from Christian reflection on how the various aspects of this Biblical witness hang together--for example, how the confession that "the Word was God" (John 1:1) coheres with the confession that God is one (e.g. Deut. 6:4, Isa. 46:9). Trinitarian reflection began historically with Christians attempting to understand what it means to believe that *Christ is God*. Of course there are relatively few Biblical passages that clearly affirm the divinity of Christ (the Prologue to the Gospel of John being probably the most important) but it is worth considering why those passages deserve the pre-eminence they have in trinitarian doctrine.

If the only Gospel in the canon of Scripture were Mark's, then an opponent could plausibly claim that the Gospel gives no support to the doctrine of the Trinity. But when John's Gospel is set beside Mark's and we read them together as joint witnesses to Christ, then the strong claims made about Christ's divinity at the beginning of John end up determining our interpretation of Mark. Logically, this is inevitable: after accepting the truth of the stronger claims, we must interpret the weaker claims to be consistent with them. Weak claims leave questions open, while a strong claim forces a commitment. Thus Mark's Gospel does not confess Christ as God, yet does not rule out the possibility either. But John's Gospel insists on Christ's divinity--so that tells us which of the options left open by Mark we should take. Therefore we interpret Mark's Gospel in light of John's--which is to say, we read the Bible in a trinitarian way. The Bible is a trinitarian document through and through because the whole canon of Scripture must be read together, so that the weaker claims are interpreted consistently with the stronger.

That is why a relatively few Biblical passages served to guide Christian reflection on the Trinity in the first few centuries. When John tells us that the Word is God and existed with God in the beginning before the creation of all things--and then that this Word is none other than Jesus Christ--that calls for reflection. The most important trinitarian reflections leading up to Nicaea turned on the question of how the Word originated--or, to ask the same question in different terms, how the Son was begotten of the Father. One very early tradition, favored in the West (e.g. by Tertullian and Hippolytus) turned on the metaphor of uttering aloud a word that was originally within the mind.<sup>1</sup> When God utters his Word, that is the begetting of the Son. Subsequently, God uses his Word to create the world.

The odd thing about this teaching, when compared to later trinitarianism, is the notion that there was a state God was in before the begetting of the Son--a state in which the Word dwelt within God and was apparently not yet distinct from God. If you take this state as the natural one for God to be in, you get a form of modalism (or Sabellianism), the heresy which says there are no real, permanent differences between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact from then on until recently, when Western theologians flirted with trinitarian heresy, it was usually some form of modalism--some denial of the proper distinctions between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This early Western view was not necessarily modalist, but it was vulnerable to modalist attacks and modalist interpretations. Its great weakness was that it conceived the begetting or generation of the Son as a *process*--something that had a beginning and an end in time, so that there was a point before which it had not yet begun. It was this assumption which led to the problematic notion of a state of God's being before the begetting or generation of the Son. The next great advance in Trinitarian thinking came when Origen, the great theologian of the East, formulated the notion of the eternal generation or begetting of the Son. This meant that the Son did not originate in a process in time, and hence there was no point at which it could be said that he was not yet begotten. From all eternity, without any beginning in time, the Father is the cause of the Son's existence.

Whereas the earlier form of trinitarianism had used Stoic philosophical categories, Origen was a Platonist. He used his Platonist philosophy to advantage in articulating the eternal generation of the Son, but in other areas it misled him. For Platonists, all cause-effect relations are hierarchical: the cause is higher, better, and more powerful than the effect. This philosophical theory, applied to the begetting of the Son by the Father, results in "subordinationism." Because the Son is related to the Father as effect to cause, a

consistent Platonism must conclude that he is subordinate in being, lower in dignity, and less in power. Hence for example Origen contends that we should not pray to Christ, but only to the Father through Christ, because "we should not pray to anyone begotten." <sup>2</sup> One of the key tasks of Greek theology in succeeding centuries was to devise an alternative to this subordinationist interpretation of the pattern of Christian prayer.

### Nicea and Divine Substance

Subordinationism bore bad fruit in Alexandria, Origen's

hometown, when Arius, a presbyter in the church there, took offense at the old form of trinitarianism on (roughly) Platonist grounds. It cannot be, Arius argued, that the Word originated from within the Father as part of his very being or substance (*ousia*). Unlike Origen, Arius was thinking of begetting as a process, and of the *ousia* of God as a kind of material substance out of which God was made. He objected to the idea that in coming forth from the Father the Son took some of that substance with him, thus dividing the Father's substance and lessening him. And to give Arius his due, that is indeed an objectionable idea, which orthodox Christian doctrine did eventually reject quite explicitly.

*"In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God. He  
was in the beginning with God.  
All things came into being through  
Him, and apart from Him  
nothing has come into  
being that has come  
into being."  
John 1: 1-3*

*"The Cosmos is all that is  
or ever was  
or ever will be."  
Carl Sagan*

But Arius's solution was worse. He argued that if God alone existed in the beginning, and the Word did not belong to God's very substance, then there was no prior substance the Word could have originated from. So the Word must have been created from *nothing*, just like every other creature--which meant that, just like every other creature, "there was once when he was not." This was the Arian claim which was most offensive to ordinary Christians, and the need to reject it in a really thorough way forced the Orthodox to recognize unambiguously that Christ belonged at the same level of being as God the Father--not subordinate to him. Hence Nicene theology came to reject subordinationism of all kinds along with Arianism.

As a result of its fight against Arianism, the Orthodox came to see more clearly than ever before that there were only two kinds of being: things that God made and the God that made them. The Son of God belongs in the latter category, not the former--he is the Creator, not a creature. That means he stands at exactly the same level of the hierarchy of being as God the Father. He is not a lesser and lower God, but has exactly the same kind of divinity as the Father. He is begotten, not made--eternally generated from the Father rather than created out of nothing. Hence the notion of eternal generation made its way into the creed and into Christian doctrine.

The first worldwide (in Greek,

"ecumenical") council of the Christian Church was held in AD 325 at Nicaea, not far from Constantinople. There Arius' teaching was condemned and a creed was adopted which affirmed not only Christ's eternal generation but also his being *homo-ousios* with the Father-variously translated as "of the same *ousia* essence, substance or being" as the Father. As the variety of translations indicates, however, *ousia* is a word of many meanings, and as a result the meaning of the *homo-ousios* clause was not entirely clear and became a matter of fierce debate over the next half century.

The orthodox interpretation of this clause, as well as the final text of what we now call the "Nicene" creed, was not fully settled until after the second ecumenical council, held at Constantinople in 381. In the interval there were orthodox bishops who opposed Nicaea because the *homo-ousios* clause seemed to them to mean that the Father and Son were not two distinct beings (which would make Nicaea modalist or Sabellian). What eventually allowed all the orthodox to agree on Nicaea was an interpretation of *ousia* which associated it with a *kind* of thing like humanity or divinity (or human nature and divine nature). The point of the *homo-ousios* clause, then, is that Christ not a different or lesser kind of God than the Father; he is "God" in exactly the same sense of the word as the Father. This is all that is needed to rule out Arianism, which is the only point of the clause.

This interpretation of the *homo-ousios* clause is minimalist, in the sense that it makes as few commitments as possible to philosophical theories about *ousia* or essence. It makes weak claims about the meaning of *ousia* and thus leaves open the possibility of richer, less minimalist interpretations and thereby of stronger claims about the nature of the divine *ousia*.<sup>3</sup> So for example nearly all patristic (as well as medieval and Reformation) theologians affirmed some version of the doctrine of the "simplicity" of the divine *ousia* - a highly abstract metaphysical concept that serves to characterize the unique unity of God and explain why all divine qualities are necessarily one. But this doctrine is not meaning of the *homo-ousios* clause.

There is however one possible meaning of the clause that the orthodox did intend to rule out, and that is the "materialist" interpretation, according to which *homo-ousios* means something like "made out of the same stuff." That would make the divine essence or *ousia* into a kind of material out of which the Father and Son were both made--like two rings made of gold. In that case Arius would be right to object that the divine substance was divided, and the Father was lessened by giving birth to the Son. Not only that, the divine substance or *ousia* would be something other than Father and Son, a thing underlying them both and more fundamental than they are--as gold exists before the rings which are made out of it and could continue to exist even if the rings were melted down and destroyed. The general point is that the divine *ousia* cannot mean some fourth thing behind, beneath or before Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For there is no God or divine essence other than the Father, the Son and the Holy

Spirit.

On the other hand, what all Nicene theologies can and do say about the divine *ousia* is that the Father gives his whole *ousia* or essence to the Son in begetting him (cf. John 5:26 and 16:15). This is quite unmateriastic. Imagine making a second ring out of exactly the same gold as the first--it's quite impossible unless you destroy the first one. Yet God the Father is not destroyed but precisely becomes Father in begetting the Son. He is eternally giving away all of his substance to his beloved Son and thereby becoming himself--one of the many lovely implications the doctrine of the Trinity in all its glorious strangeness. The divine *ousia* or substance originates with the Father and is wholly bestowed on the Son and Holy Spirit, so that giving and receiving is at the heart of the Triune life of God.

### The Cappadocians and Augustine

The orthodox interpretation of Nicaea was formulated by three Greek Church Fathers from Cappadocia in Asia Minor: Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, his brother, and Gregory Naziansen, Basil's friend, who presided at the council of Constantinople in 381, where his orations on the doctrine of the Trinity earned him the title "the Theologian" (i.e. the preeminent interpreter of the Christian doctrine of God). These Cappadocian Fathers not only established the meaning of *ousia* as *kind* of thing (by contrasting it with "hypostasis," which they gave the technical meaning of *particular* thing), they also developed the Nicene council's confession of the divinity of Christ into a fully trinitarian doctrine by insisting on the full divinity of the Holy Spirit as well--so that the Holy Spirit too is *homo-ousios* with the Father.

As a result, the Cappadocians were the first to face the question: why not three Gods? If there are three distinct particular things (i.e. hypostases) that are each divine in exactly the same sense, then why are they not three gods--just as three distinct human hypostases (like Peter, Paul and Mary) make three humans? In the previous article, I discussed the Cappadocian answer and its implications at some length. The basic idea is that all general terms (wisdom, power, goodness) refer to God in the singular: there is only one wisdom, one power, one goodness in God, not three. But the Cappadocians went farther than that. They taught that there is only one Will and Activity (Greek *energeia*, Latin *operatio*) in God. It is not like Peter, Paul and Mary, who may co-operate with one another or not as they choose. Everything God does is done by Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together. They do not merely agree, having three wills in harmony, but rather have only one Will in the first place. Hence Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three distinct centers of willing and activity that may or may not harmonize. Every work of God is necessarily the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit--the work of one God.

The Eastern Churches have always looked to the Cappadocian Fathers, together with Athanasius (bishop of Alexandria in the period between the first two ecumenical councils) as a kind of gold standard of



Nicene trinitarianism--and this judgement has come to predominate also in today's ecumenical discussions between the various Nicene churches. That means in effect that Eastern trinitarianism has come to be accepted as the standard by which Western trinitarianism is judged. If the Latin tradition (i.e. Roman Catholics and Protestants) stray too far from the Cappadocian interpretation enshrined in the Greek and other Eastern Orthodox churches, the presumption is that the Latin developments are at best optional and at worst a mistake. I share that presumption, but I also think the contrast between West and East has often been overdrawn. My study of Augustine, the great fountainhead of the distinctively Western tradition of Nicene trinitarianism, has convinced me that he does not depart from the Cappadocian theology, except in the sense that he builds on it and asks the appropriate questions for someone who has understood its point.

Working in the generation after the council of Constantinople, Augustine wrote a multi-volume treatise *On the Trinity*, which has had an immense influence on Western thought. In books 5-7 of this treatise, he works out the logic of the Cappadocian doctrine in great detail, using categories borrowed from Aristotle. Building on the Cappadocian answer to the question, "Why not three Gods?" he proceeds to ask what is logically the next question: "three what?"<sup>4</sup> That is to say, if every general term (like God, Creator, Wisdom, Power) describes what is one in God rather than what is three, then what general term do we have for what the three are? None, really, says Augustine, except a very abstract term for "particular individual," such as the Greek term *hypostasis* and the Latin term *persona*.

### Hypostasis and "Person"

With this we come upon an important and easily misunderstood piece of terminology. Augustine's Latin word *persona* did not have the same range of meanings as our English word "person." It did not suggest much of what we now associate with "personhood" or "personality," and in particular contained no hint of an inner self or ego or center of self-consciousness. In fact these are specifically modern ideas. The closest equivalent to them in ancient thought is soul, mind, or will--and the Nicene Fathers all agree that "soul" is an inappropriate concept to apply to God and that the other two apply to God only in the singular. Hence God is *not* three persons in the modern sense of the word--for three distinct divine persons, with three distinct minds, wills and centers of consciousness, would surely be three Gods (just as the Cappadocians said).

Augustine used the word *persona* because it was the standard technical term in Latin to designate what was three rather than one in the Trinity. It had first been used for this purpose by Tertullian two centuries earlier. What exactly Tertullian had in mind is still a matter of dispute, but it is useful to know that originally *persona* meant "mask", and then "character or role in a play" (since actors in ancient dramas always wore masks representing their particular characters--hence even today a playbill often begins with a list of

characters called in Latin *dramatis personae*, literally "masks of the drama"). That meaning branched out to include characters in the "drama" of a conversation or a trial at court. Finally, it was used to indicate the concrete presence of an individual person (like a character on the stage or in the courtroom). But notice that in all these senses we are looking at persons "from outside," perceiving their concrete individuality but not their inner consciousness. Thus when Tertullian originally introduced the term *persona*, he may have had in mind the distinct roles played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the drama of salvation, or he may have intended to say something like "concrete individual"--but in either case what he did not have in mind was will or consciousness or inner self.

Despite the significant shifts in meaning of the word "person" over the past two millennia, well-informed Latin trinitarianism has always been aware that "three persons" does not mean three minds or wills or centers of consciousness. One crucial moment in the history of the word should be noted, however. In the century after Augustine, the Christian philosopher Boethius gave what was to become the standard definition of *persona* for Latin trinitarianism: "individual substance of rational nature." "Individual substance" clearly means *hypostasis* (Latin "subsistence," equivalent to Aristotle's "primary substance"). To this Boethius adds the notion of rationality: persons are not just any kind of individual substance (such as a tree or a dog) but rational ones. The phrasing is crucial: "of rational nature" is in the singular, and suggests that there is one rationality or rational nature that all rational beings share (just as all humans share in one human nature). Hence the trinitarian implication is not that there are three minds or rationalities in the Trinity but rather only one "rational nature"--just as there is only one Wisdom, Power, Will, and so on.

Interpreting the word "person" in this way, the West has for many centuries said the same thing as the East in different words: while the East says God is three hypostases with one essence (*ousia*), the West says God is three persons in one substance (*substantia*). As a final terminological note, the East did have an equivalent to *persona*, the Greek word *prosopon*, but it was never quite so central a term as "person" in the West. When they want to be really precise, the Eastern theologians always prefer to talk of "hypostases." Given the shifting meanings of the word "person," it is a good idea for Western theologians to follow suit.

### Social and Psychological Analogies

So far we have seen only agreement between West and East--saying the same thing in different words. Now we need to examine a divergence between East and West that has been much overplayed in 20th-century scholarship. You will often read about the contrast between the Western "psychological" Trinity and the Eastern "social" Trinity. While there is some truth to the notion that the West favors "psychological" analogies for the Trinity, to talk of "social trinitarianism" in the East is wildly misleading at best.



Genuinely social doctrines, in which the Trinity is conceived of on the model of a society of three human persons, are a recent Western phenomenon, dependent on the modern notion of "person." To ascribe a "social" Trinity to the Greek Fathers is to read modern Western preoccupations into ancient Eastern theology.

First of all, it is important to see that both "social" and "psychological" imagery for the Trinity is rooted in Scripture, which confesses Christ as both Son of God and Word of God. To speak of "Father and Son" suggests "social" imagery for the Trinity, while to speak of God and his Word suggests "psychological" imagery. In the first case we seem to be talking about two persons and in the second case about one--or at least that is how it would seem if we took either of these images literally. But of course, the Church Fathers repeatedly pointed out that taking either set of images literally is a grave mistake, because God is not like human persons. (Humans are made in the image of God, but God is not made in the image of humanity!) God the Father and God the Son are not like a human father and son, for the latter are two men but the former are not two Gods. And the eternal Word of God is not like an inner word in a human mind, because the human word is part of the human mind, not a complete individual being like the Word of God. In other words, social analogies taken literally become tritheist, and psychological analogies taken literally become modalist. Hence no Nicene theology has ever been thoroughly "psychological" or thoroughly "social."

"Psychological" analogies (i.e. talk about the Word and Spirit of God) are of course found in both Eastern and Western theologians. But it is true that more tends to be made of such talk in the West. This is mainly because of the influence of Augustine, who in the second half of his treatise *On the Trinity* (book 7-15) took Biblical talk of Word and Spirit as a clue to the "traces of the Trinity" (*vestigia trinitatis*) in the human soul. (Note, he never said the Triune God resembles a human soul, but rather that the human soul resembles the Triune God). Later Western theologians, most notably Thomas Aquinas in the middle ages, extended this line of reflection into "psychological" analogies, where the begetting of the Son is like the conception of a word in the heart, and the procession of the Spirit is like the origin of love in the soul.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, "social" analogies for the Trinity (i.e. talk of Father and Son) are commonplace in both traditions, but have never been developed in a speculative way like the Western psychological analogies--until recently, with the rise of "social trinitarianism" in the West. You will often find scholars (usually Westerners) who say the Greeks or the Cappadocians developed a distinctively social trinitarianism, but this is simply not true. As we have seen, the Cappadocians compared the Trinity to a society of three human beings precisely in order to show why the comparison breaks down--i.e. why the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three Gods, *unlike* Peter, Paul and Mary, who are three humans.<sup>6</sup>

East and West

False contrasts between East and West have unfortunately obscured the extent to which there have been specifically Western problems with both types of imagery. To begin with, as we have seen, since long before Nicaea Western theologians less astute than Augustine have been led into modalism by taking the analogy between God and a human mind too seriously. This is not just a theoretical problem: it means in practice that many Westerners (especially in the past two centuries) have worshipped and prayed in a less than Trinitarian fashion. You will hear contemporary churchgoers wondering whether all the liturgical talk about Father, Son and Holy Spirit is really necessary, and whether it wouldn't be simpler just to talk about "God"--as if we knew what we were talking about when we used that word!

One of the great blessings of the past few decades of ecumenical discussion is that Eastern trinitarianism, and especially Eastern liturgical theology, has pushed the West to be more self-consciously trinitarian in its worship and teaching. The most successful ecumenical dialogues have the doctrine of the Trinity as their foundation and touchstone, and the need for East and West to think together about this doctrine has produced some of the most beautiful theology of this or any century (interestingly, the best Trinitarian theology of our time seems to be concentrated not in treatises on the Trinity but in work on ecclesiology and the sacraments).

On the other hand, it is a good idea to be wary of Western theologians who have nothing but praise for the East and complaints about the West--as if they hated their own heritage and envied the others'. Of course in the present disarray of Western (especially Protestant) theology, there is much for us to learn from the Eastern Orthodox--but that is because modern Christians can always learn from ancient orthodoxy, whether of East or West. Recently, however, some Western theologians have looked to Eastern Christianity the way that secular Western intellectuals sometimes look to Eastern philosophies or religions such as Buddhism--as if those beautiful far-away ideas were just the thing to solve our problems here at home. When that happens, Westerners inevitably practice a form of cultural imperialism, reading their own preoccupations into other traditions.

In our case, the key Western preoccupation of the day no doubt goes under names like "community," "mutuality" and "relationality."<sup>7</sup> Liberal theology, which a century ago had no use for the supposedly abstract and "speculative" doctrine of the eternal Trinity, is now more likely to see in it a reflection of human aspirations for an community of mutual love and equal relationships. *Equal* the three hypostases of the Trinity certainly are--that is stressed by both East and West. But neither tradition has (until the past hundred years) spoken of a community or society of three. An explicit "social analogy" for the Trinity is in fact a modern Western development, emerging in liberal Protestantism with roots in idealist philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

Of the two traditions, the East is least hospitable to such notions, precisely because the Cappadocians gave such a radical answer to the question "why not three Gods?" If (as the Cappadocians insisted) there is only one divine Will and Activity, not three, it is hard to see how the Son can love the Father with a love that is different from the Father's love for the Son. "Mutual love" between two different persons is obviously not the guiding metaphor in Cappadocian trinitarianism.

To develop such a notion within a Cappadocian framework, one would have to stress that the love of the Father for the Son belongs not to the one Will of

God but to the distinctive relation of begetting by which the Father gives his *ousia* to the Son. It is in fact the

West which has developed such a notion most thoroughly, in the context of its psychological analogies. However, rather than distinguishing the Father's love for the Son from the Son's love for the Father, the usual Western suggestion ever since Augustine has been that this Love is one, because it is itself the Holy Spirit, who is literally the hypostatized love of God and as such the bond of love (*vinculum amoris*) between the Father and the Son.



W. R. Inge



There is something right and beautiful about this notion, and it is not foreign to Scripture.<sup>9</sup> But unfortunately it is closely connected to the most serious point of disagreement between East and West. Precisely to the extent that the Holy Spirit is both the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father, he must proceed from both the Father and the Son. This notion of "double procession" found its way into Western versions of the Nicene creed in the *filioque* clause, which says that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Eastern Orthodox do not agree with this theology of double procession, insisting instead that Spirit proceeds only from the Father through the Son (Gregory of Nyssa once said it was like a third torch being lit from a middle torch which had been lit by a first). While the West tends to picture the Trinity as a kind of triangle (Father begets Son equal to himself, and Son and Father between them produce the Holy Spirit), the East pictures a straight line from Father through Son to Spirit. But the difference is more than just a matter of pictures; it is a disagreement about causal relations of origin--i.e. about precisely those things which (as discussed in the previous article) give the three hypostases their distinctive identities.

Although the Eastern Orthodox disagree with the Western doctrine of double procession, most of them are willing to grant that it is not necessarily contrary to the Nicene faith. What they all object to, however, is the Western Church inserting

the *filioque* clause in the Creed without their consent and approval. Recently, ecumenical attempts have been made to interpret the clause in ways that would not be offensive to Easterners, but the sticking point remains that by keeping this clause in its Creed, the West seems to be saying that it is a necessary part of the Nicene faith--a claim that is wholly unacceptable to the East. On this point the Western churches appear ready to concede the East's point and remove the clause from the creed or at least recognize that it is optional, not required. Even in the Roman Catholic communions which remains officially committed to the *filioque* clause as authoritative doctrine, the "Eastern Rite" churches are allowed to use the Creed without the *filioque* clause--suggesting that the clause is not required for the integrity of the faith.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that both Eastern and Western views have dangers and both traditions have built-in correctives for those dangers. Since we are Westerners, it behooves us to be particularly concerned about our own dangers, and also about the dangers of an ill-informed and onesided appropriation of Eastern ideas. Western "psychological analogies" can become *modalist* if not corrected by the understanding that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are complete individual beings (*hypostases*). On the other hand, Western talk about "three persons" can become *tritheist* if "person" is interpreted in the modern sense, as many "social trinitarians" wish to do. Finally, the Eastern view poses the danger of subordinationism if Westerners do not understand the built-in safeguards against it. The most important of these safeguards is simply the *homo-ousios* clause of the Nicene Creed. Another is the doctrine called *perichoresis*, which teaches that the each hypostasis of the Trinity has its being in the other two.<sup>10</sup>

Also indispensable as a safeguard is the Eastern distinction between "theology" (*theologia*, which in Greek Orthodox usage means the doctrine of the nature of God in eternity, which focuses on the Trinity) and "economy" (*oikonomia* or God's plan of salvation in history, which focusses on the Incarnation). When Easterners want to explain how the Son's love for the Father can be something different from the Father's love for the Son, they point to "the economy," i.e. to the Incarnation. Because the incarnate Christ is man as well as God, he has a human will which is distinct from his divine will. While his divine will is exactly the same thing as the Father's, his human will is different. Hence as a human being, he can submit his will to the Father in loving obedience, facing the Father's will as something *other* than his own (thus saying at Gethsemane: "not my will, but thine be done"). Without this distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, we would have to interpret the obedience of Christ to the Father as an indication that even in his divine being he was subordinate to the Father--and that would be the end of Nicene trinitarianism. This same distinction comes into play when interpreting Christ's saying, "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). The Father is not greater than Christ in his divine nature ("according to the theology") but is of course greater than Christ in his humanity ("according to the economy").

Hence one symptom of Westerners missing the point of Eastern theology is the recent tendency to downplay or even eliminate the distinction between "immanent Trinity" and "economic Trinity"--the i.e. difference between the eternal relations of begetting and proceeding in the Trinity, and the roles played in the history of salvation by God the Father, the incarnate Son, and the pentecostal Spirit. Without the "immanent economic" distinction, the pattern of trinitarian relations "from the Father through the Son to the Spirit" (and its converse, our prayer "to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit") is subordinationist--as the case of Origen illustrates. Subordinationism has always been the heretical temptation of the East, as modalism was until recently of the West. That is precisely why Nicene theologians in the East have always insisted so strongly on the distinction between immanent and economic doctrines of the Trinity or (in their terms) theology and economy. Western theologians would do well to understand this point.

### Introductory Bibliography

#### A. Historical Works:

Cary, P. "On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: a Critique of Rahner on the Trinity" in *The Thomist*, vol. 56/3, July 1992, pp. 365-404. I include this reference for those who desire more detailed argument for the historical interpretations given above.

Hanson, R.P.C., *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988). Copious and magisterial study of the period from Nicea to Constantinople, taking account of recent re-evaluations of the Arian controversy and especially Athanasius' role in it.

Kelly, J.N.D., *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). A classic, and still the best detailed introduction in English to the historical origins of trinitarian doctrine. Kelly has a marvellous gift for compression, giving exact summaries of complex ideas without oversimplification.

Neuner, J. and Dupuis, J., *The Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins 1991). A collection of official Roman Catholic doctrinal pronouncements. Look especially at the council of Toledo (675 A.D.) and the 4th Lateran Council (1215 A.D.) for key statements of Western trinitarianism.

Pelikan, J., *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition 100-600* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1971). Provides a more readable narrative than Kelly, and is perhaps a more useful introduction for those who are new to the theological tradition or the reading of ancient books.

Young, F., *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: a Guide to the Literature and its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Fine introduction to serious reading of patristic literature in the formative period of Nicene orthodoxy.

## B. Major 20th Century Statements:

Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, chapter 2 (pp. 295-489). A major influence on the revival of trinitarian thinking in the 20th century, Barth's work is as always challenging and instructive, because he makes a serious effort to hear God's Word rather than respond to the supposed theological needs of the time.

LaCugna, C., *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991). A major Rahnerian statement, both historical and systematic, that is likely to be a focus of discussion in five to ten years. (See review, below this issue of the BULLETIN).

Moltmann, J., *Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981). Influential statement of a socio-political doctrine of the Trinity.

Rahner, K., *The Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970). For better and worse, the single most influential treatment of doctrine of the Trinity in the 20th century.

## NOTES

1. The word in the mind is *logos endiathetos*; the word uttered aloud is *logos prophorikos*. The terminology originated with the Stoics.

2. Origen *On Prayer*, §15.

3. Note, by the way, that here we are in a different situation than with the strong claims about Christ's divinity in Scripture. There the strong claims were part of the canon, and therefore obligatory to be believed. Here the strong claims are not an integral part of the Nicene faith, and therefore are optional.

4. *On the Trinity* 5:9.10 and 7:4.7-9. This famous question is often quoted in Latin: *quid tres?*

5. Aquinas gives a brief presentation of trinitarian theology in his *Compendium of Theology* §§37-67. The full treatment, of course, is in his *Summa Theologica* Part I, Questions 27-43.

6. Scholarly mistakes sometimes acquire a life of their own as one scholar after another repeats an erroneous opinion without troubling to do a careful reading of the original sources. Two such mistakes in the history of trinitarian doctrine are (1) that the Cappadocians had a social doctrine of the Trinity and (2) that Augustine, in contrast to the Cappadocians, "started with" the unity of the divine essence rather than the distinction of the three persons. This is simply not an accurate account of the shape of Augustine's trinitarian inquiries (for Augustine's actual starting point see *On the Trinity* 1:4.7). Augustine begins where the Cappadocians leave off: accepting their answer to the question "why not three Gods?" he proceeds to ask "three what?" His concern is to elaborate the distinctions between the three on the assumption that they are one God.

Augustine never uses the divine essence *per se* as his starting point. That would be a more accurate description of Aquinas' procedure.

7. As discussed in the previous article, the Church Fathers used the logical category of relation to indicate what distinguished Father, Son and Holy Spirit from one another. This category includes trinitarian relations like "is the Son of" but also quite ordinary and trivial relations like "is taller than." Hence "relation," as the Church Fathers use the term, is a strictly logical category, not to be confused with modern notions such as "personal relationships" (though many recent treatments of the Trinity seem to trade on just such a confusion). Nor did the Church Fathers ever show any interest in "relationality" or "relational ontology"--which would be a highly abstract inquiry that they had no time for.

8. For the early history of social trinitarianism, cf. C. Welch, *In This Name: the Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1952), pp. 29-34 and 133-151. Since Welch wrote, Moltmann and many others have developed influential forms of social trinitarianism, most of which rather blithely run the risk of tritheism.

9. Augustine arrives at the identification of the Spirit as Love from a meditation on 1 John 4:7ff ("...God is love"). Also important is Eph. 4:13 ("the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"), which Augustine takes to be referring to the unifying power of love. Cf. *On the Trinity* 1J: 17.31 and 6:5.7. We might add Romans 5:5 ("the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit").

10. This doctrine is an extension of the Biblical teaching that the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son (John 14:10), developed by the Cappadocians (e.g. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* §18). The actual term *perichoresis* comes later, in John of Damascus, Eastern theologian of the 7th century. The idea was accepted by Western theology (and usually translated either "circuminsession" or "circumincession") beginning with the 12th century, when John's treatise *On the Orthodox Faith* was translated into Latin and circulated in the medieval schools in the generation before Thomas Aquinas.

*Spiritual reading, vigils, and prayer bring the straying intellect to stability. Hunger, exertion, and withdrawal from the world wither burning lust. Reciting the psalms, long suffering, and compassion curb our incensive power.*

*Evagrius the Solitary*

# Reflections on The Mystery of The Trinity

## MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546):

I have learned, not only through the Scriptures but also from severe inner struggles and trials, that Christ is God and has put on flesh, likewise I have learned the doctrine of the Trinity. Today, therefore, I don't so much believe as I know through experience that these doctrines are true. In the worst temptations nothing can help us but faith that God's Son has put on flesh, is bone[of our bone], sits at the right hand of the Father, and prays for us. There is no mightier comfort. From the beginning of the world God has defended this doctrine against all heretics. He always confirms it by miracles, allows us to call his Son the Son of God and true God, and hears us all when we call upon Him in Christ's name.

## JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564):

### *Refutation of antitrinitarian heresies*

Satan, in order to tear our faith from its very roots, has always been instigating great battles, partly concerning the divine essence of the Son and the Spirit, partly concerning the distinction of the persons. He has during nearly all ages stirred up ungodly spirits to harry orthodox teachers over this matter and today is also trying to kindle a new fire from old embers. For these reasons, it is important to resist the perverse ravings of certain persons. The truth which has been peaceably shown must be maintained against all the calumnies of the wicked. Let us use great caution that neither our thought nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. And let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in His Sacred Word, or to think anything about Him that is not

prompted by His Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word.

But if some distinction does exist in the one divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit - something hard to grasp - and occasions to certain minds more difficulty and trouble than is expedient, let it be remembered that men's minds, when they indulge their curiosity, enter into a labyrinth. And so let them yield themselves to be ruled by the heavenly oracles, even though they may fail to capture the height of mystery.

## C.S. LEWIS (1898-1963):

The union between the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trade union, people talk about the "spirit" of that family, or club, or trade union. They talk about its "spirit" because the individual members when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person; it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God. This third person is called...the Holy Ghost or the "spirit" of God.

## GLEASON ARCHER:

The concept of God as one in essence but three in centers of consciousness - what the Greek church referred to as three

hypostases and the Latin church as personae - is absolutely unique in the history of

human thought. No other culture or philosophical movement ever came up with such an idea of God as this - an idea that remains very difficult for our finite minds to grasp. Yet the inability to comprehend fully the richness and fullness of God's nature should not furnish any solid ground for skepticism as to its truth. For if we are to accept and believe only what we can fully understand, then we are hopelessly beyond redemption. Why so? Because we shall never fully understand how God could love us enough to send His only Son to earth in order to die for our sins and become our Savior.

## HAROLD BROWN:

The doctrine of the Trinity is a theoretical necessity because of the doctrine of the Atonement. Apart from the Trinity, which permits Christ to be understood as distinct from the Father and yet as God, we cannot understand how He can represent us to God or make atonement for our sins. If we were not able to believe in the doctrine of Atonement, Christ might be our teacher or example, but He could not be our substitute. The doctrine of the Atonement is necessary to permit us to reconcile the biblical emphasis on the wrath of God with the equally biblical emphasis on His mercy. The doctrine of the substitutionary atonement, in which Christ identifies Himself with us and stands in our place before the Father, resolves this problem. It in turn depends on the doctrine of the Trinity. Even if one does not know the doctrine explicitly, one must have at least some experience of the work of each of the

Persons in order to be a Christian. One must acknowledge oneself as a sinner before God, and one must come to Jesus as the Savior. Finally, one must have experienced a measure of the work of the Holy Spirit in order to do these two things.

God does not require a *sacerdotium intellectus*, a "sacrifice of the intellect", as part of faith. Because the sacrifice of the intellect is a violent affront to the integrity of one's soul, it is always dangerous and is certainly a poor way to begin to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind.

All the major doctrines are interdependent. The doctrine of man as sinner implies the doctrine of man's need of salvation; the doctrine of salvation requires an adequate Savior, i.e., an adequate Christology. A sound Christology requires a satisfactory concept of God, i.e. a sound special theology - which brings us back to the doctrine of the Trinity. ■

make the doctrine of the "Trinity" an absurdity, if not a heresy?

Third, premise (3) assumes one must posit "fate" or "chance" as the basis of unity in God, if there is not a personal basis. But this seems incorrect for two reasons:

1. Why can't three persons simply be united in one necessary and eternal essence, which is very different from "fate" or "chance"?
2. Why do persons have to be based or grounded in anything? This implies that they are separate and dependent beings -- which is a category mistake (confusing persons and essence). Are not the three persons of the Trinity simply the co-eternal and co-necessary personal manifestations of that one eternal and necessary essence? Why make a person more ultimate than essence (or the reverse)? Van Til seems to assume a radical form of voluntarism (not uncommon to strong Calvinism) which places person(s) over and above essence and not necessarily limited by essence (as is the essence of God limited to these three persons).

*There is not the smallest accident, which may seem unto man as falling out by chance, and for no consequence, but that the same is caused by God, to effect something else by; yea, and oftentimes to effect things of the greatest worldly importance, either presently, or in many years after, when the occasions are either not considered or forgotten.*

Sir Walter Raleigh (c.1554-1618)

#### The unknown god(dess)

**"God says, 'I am Sophia, I am Yahweh, I am any word you need.' The wonderfulness about the I AM is you can change it every day according to what you need God to be for you. Who knows who God is? Nobody knows, and if someone comes forward and says that they know, there is the heresy."**

—Catholic nun MIRIAM THERESA WINTER, in her address to the November 1995 Re-Imagining Gathering (quoted in Christian News, Nov 27, 1995)





People of the World Believe  
the Trinity



Left: Egyptian sculpture of the second millennium (B.C.E.) Triad of Amon-Ra, Ramses II, and Mut. Right: Fourteenth century (C.E.) Trinity sculpture of Jesus Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Note, three persons but only four legs.

## Contents

- 3 Should You Believe It?
- 3 How Is the Trinity Explained?
- 5 Is It Clearly a Bible Teaching?
- 7 How Did the Trinity Doctrine Develop?
- 12 What Does the Bible Say About God and Jesus?
- 16 Is God Always Superior to Jesus?
- 20 The Holy Spirit—God's Active Force
- 23 What About Trinity "Proof Texts"?
- 30 Worship God on His Terms

Should You Believe in the Trinity? English (tl-E)  
Made in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern language  
New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References 1984 Edition

©1988  
WATCHTOWER  
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA  
All rights reserved  
Publishers  
WATCHTOWER  
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY  
OF NEW YORK, INC.  
INTERNATIONAL  
BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION  
Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.  
First Printing in English:  
5,000,000 Copies

## Should You Believe It?

**D**O YOU believe in the Trinity? Most people in Christendom do. After all, it has been the central doctrine of the church for centuries.

In view of this, you would think that there could be no question about it. But there is, and lately even some of its supporters have added fuel to the controversy.

Why should a subject like this be of any more than passing interest? Because Jesus himself said: "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." So our entire future hinges on our knowing the true nature of God, and that means getting to the root of the Trinity controversy. Therefore, why not examine it for yourself?—John 17:3, Catholic Jerusalem Bible (JB).

Various Trinitarian concepts exist. But generally the Trinity teaching is that in the Godhead there are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; yet, together they are but one God. The doctrine says that the three are co-equal, almighty, and uncreated, having existed eternally in the Godhead.

Others, however, say that the Trinity doctrine is false, that Almighty God stands alone as a separate, eternal, and all-powerful being. They say that Jesus in his prehuman existence was, like the angels, a separate spirit person

created by God, and for this reason he must have had a beginning. They teach that Jesus has never been Almighty God's equal in any sense; he has always been subject to God and still is. They also believe that the holy ghost is not a person but God's spirit, his active force.

Supporters of the Trinity say that it is founded not only on religious tradition but also on the Bible. Critics of the doctrine say that it is not a Bible teaching, one history source even declaring: "The origin of the [Trinity] is entirely pagan."—*The Paganism in Our Christianity*.

If the Trinity is true, it is degrading to Jesus to say that he was never equal to God as part of a Godhead. But if the Trinity is false, it is degrading to Almighty God to call anyone his equal, and even worse to call Mary the "Mother of God." If the Trinity is false, it dishonors God to say, as noted in the book *Catholicism*: "Unless [people] keep this Faith whole and undefiled, without doubt [they] shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: we worship one God in Trinity."

There are good reasons, then, why you should want to know the truth about the Trinity. But before examining its origin and its claim of truthfulness, it would be helpful to define this doctrine more specifically. What, exactly, is the Trinity? How do supporters of it explain it?

## How Is the Trinity Explained?

**T**HE Roman Catholic Church states: "The Trinity is the term employed to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion . . . Thus, in the words of the Athanasian Creed: 'the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God.' In this Trinity . . . the Persons are co-eternal and co-equal: all alike are uncreated and omnipotent."—*The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

Nearly all other churches in Christen-

dom agree. For example, the Greek Orthodox Church also calls the Trinity "the fundamental doctrine of Christianity," even saying: "Christians are those who accept Christ as God." In the book *Our Orthodox Christian Faith*, the same church declares: "God is triune. . . . The Father is totally God. The Son is totally God. The Holy Spirit is totally God."

Thus, the Trinity is considered to be "one God in three Persons." Each is said to be without beginning, having existed for eternity.

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

3

A Jehovah's Witness/  
Watchtower Pamphlet

Each is said to be almighty, with each neither greater nor lesser than the others.

Is such reasoning hard to follow? Many sincere believers have found it to be confusing, contrary to normal reason, unlike anything in their experience. How, they ask, could the Father be God, Jesus be God, and the holy spirit be God, yet there be not three Gods but only one God?

#### "Beyond the Grasp of Human Reason"

THIS confusion is widespread. *The Encyclopedia Americana* notes that the doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be "beyond the grasp of human reason."

Many who accept the Trinity view it that same way. Monsignor Eugene Clark says: "God is one, and God is three. Since there is nothing like this in creation, we cannot understand it, but only accept it." Cardinal John O'Connor states: "We know that it is a very profound mystery, which we don't begin to understand." And Pope John Paul II speaks of "the inscrutable mystery of God the Trinity."

Thus, *A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge* says: "Precisely what that doctrine is, or rather precisely how it is to be explained, Trinitarians are not agreed among themselves."

We can understand, then, why the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* observes: "There are few teachers of Trinitarian theology in Roman Catholic seminaries who have not been badgered at one time or another by the question, 'But how does one preach the Trinity?' And if the question is symptomatic of confusion on the part of the students, perhaps it is no less symptomatic of similar confusion on the part of their professors."

The truth of that observation can be verified by going to a library and examining books that support the Trinity. Countless pages have been written attempting to explain it. Yet, after struggling through the labyrinth of confus-

ing theological terms and explanations, investigators still come away unsatisfied.

In this regard, Jesuit Joseph Bracken observes in his book *What Are They Saying About the Trinity?*: "Priests who with considerable effort learned . . . the Trinity during their seminary years naturally hesitated to present it to their people from the pulpit, even on Trinity Sunday. . . . Why should one bore people with something that in the end they wouldn't properly understand anyway?" He also says: "The Trinity is a matter of formal belief, but it has little or no [effect] in day-to-day Christian life and worship." Yet, it is "the central doctrine" of the churches!

Catholic theologian Hans Küng observes in his book *Christianity and the World Religions* that the Trinity is one reason why the churches have been unable to make any significant headway with non-Christian peoples. He states: "Even well-informed Muslims simply cannot follow, as the Jews thus far have likewise failed to grasp, the idea of the Trinity. . . . The distinctions made by the doctrine of the Trinity between one God and three hypostases do not satisfy Muslims, who are confused, rather than enlightened, by theological terms derived from Syriac, Greek, and Latin. Muslims find it all a word game. . . . Why should anyone want to add anything to the notion of God's oneness and uniqueness that can only dilute or nullify that oneness and uniqueness?"

#### "Not a God of Confusion"

HOW could such a confusing doctrine originate? *The Catholic Encyclopedia* claims: "A dogma so mysterious presupposes a Divine revelation." Catholic scholars Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler state in their *Theological Dictionary*: "The Trinity is a mystery . . . in the strict sense . . . which could not be known without revelation, and even after revelation cannot become wholly intelligible."

The disciples of Jesus were the humble common people, not the religious leaders

However, contending that since the Trinity is such a confusing mystery, it must have come from divine revelation creates another major problem. Why? Because divine revelation itself does not allow for such a view of God: "God is not a God of confusion."—1 Corinthians 14:33, *Revised Standard Version (RS)*.

In view of that statement, would God be responsible for a doctrine about himself that is so confusing that even Hebrew, Greek, and Latin scholars cannot really explain it?

Furthermore, do people have to be theo-

gians 'to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent?' (John 17:3, *JB*) If that were the case, why did so few of the educated Jewish religious leaders recognize Jesus as the Messiah? His faithful disciples were, instead, humble farmers, fishermen, tax collectors, housewives. Those common people were so certain of what Jesus taught about God that they could teach it to others and were even willing to die for their belief.—Matthew 15:1-9; 21:23-32, 43; 23:13-36; John 7:45-49; Acts 4:13.

## Is It Clearly a Bible Teaching?

IF THE Trinity were true, it should be clearly and consistently presented in the Bible. Why? Because, as the apostles affirmed, the Bible is God's revelation of himself to mankind. And since we need to know God to worship him acceptably, the Bible should be clear in telling us just who he is.

First-century believers accepted the Scriptures as the authentic revelation of God. It was the basis for their beliefs, the final authority. For example, when the apostle Paul preached to people in the city of Berea, "they received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so."—Acts 17:10, 11.

What did prominent men of God at that time use as their authority? Acts 17:2, 3 tells us: "According to Paul's custom . . . he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving by references [from the Scriptures]."

Jesus himself set the example in using the Scriptures as the basis for his teaching, repeatedly saying: "It is written." "He interpreted to them things pertaining to himself in all the Scriptures."—Matthew 4:4, 7; Luke 24:27.

Thus Jesus, Paul, and first-century believers used the Scriptures as the foundation for their teaching. They knew that "all Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God

may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work."—2 Timothy 3:16, 17; see also 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

Since the Bible can 'set things straight,' it should clearly reveal information about a matter as fundamental as the Trinity is claimed to be. But do theologians and historians themselves say that it is clearly a Bible teaching?

#### "Trinity" in the Bible?

A PROTESTANT publication states: "The word Trinity is not found in the Bible . . . It did not find a place formally in the theology of the church till the 4th century." (*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*) And a Catholic authority says that the Trinity "is not . . . directly and immediately [the] word of God."—*New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* also comments: "In Scripture there is as yet no single term by which the Three Divine Persons are denoted together. The word τριάς [tri'as] (of which the Latin *trinitas* is a translation) is first found in Theophilus of Antioch about A. D. 180. . . . Shortly afterwards it appears in its Latin form of *trinitas* in Tertullian."

However, this is no proof in itself that Tertullian taught the Trinity. The Catholic work *Trinitas—A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity*, for example, notes that some of Tertullian's words were later used by others to

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?





describe the Trinity. Then it cautions: "But hasty conclusions cannot be drawn from usage, for he does not apply the words to Trinitarian theology."

#### Testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures

WHILE the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, is at least the idea of the Trinity taught clearly in it? For instance, what do the Hebrew Scriptures ("Old Testament") reveal?

The *Encyclopedia of Religion* admits: "Theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity." And the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* also says: "The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not taught in the Old Testament."

Similarly, in his book *The Triune God*, Jesuit Edmund Fortman admits: "The Old Testament . . . tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a [Trinity] within the Godhead. . . . Even to see in [the 'Old Testament'] suggestions or foreshadowings or 'veiled signs' of the trinity of persons, is to go beyond the words and intent of the sacred writers."—Italics ours.

An examination of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves will bear out these comments. Thus, there is no clear teaching of a Trinity in the first 39 books of the Bible that make up the true canon of the inspired Hebrew Scriptures.

#### Testimony of the Greek Scriptures

WELL, then, do the Christian Greek Scriptures ("New Testament") speak clearly of a Trinity?

The *Encyclopedia of Religion* says: "Theologians agree that the New Testament also does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity."

Jesuit Fortman states: "The New Testament writers . . . give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the Trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. . . . Nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead."

The *New Encyclopædia Britannica* observes: "Neither the word Trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament."

Bernhard Lohse says in *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*: "As far as the New Testament is concerned, one does not find in it an actual doctrine of the Trinity."

The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* similarly states: "The [New Testament] does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence" [said Protestant theologian Karl Barth].

Yale University professor E. Washburn Hopkins affirmed: "To Jesus and Paul the doctrine of the trinity was apparently unknown; . . . they say nothing about it."—*Origin and Evolution of Religion*.

Historian Arthur Weigall notes: "Jesus Christ never mentioned such a phenomenon, and nowhere in the New Testament does the word 'Trinity' appear. The idea was only adopted by the Church three hundred years after the death of our Lord."—*The Paganism in Our Christianity*.

Thus, neither the 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures nor the canon of 27 inspired books of the Christian Greek Scriptures provide any clear teaching of the Trinity.

#### Taught by Early Christians?

DID the early Christians teach the Trinity? Note the following comments by historians and theologians:

"Primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds."—*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*.

"The early Christians, however, did not at first think of applying the [Trinity] idea to their own faith. They paid their devotions to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and they recognised the . . . Holy Spirit; but there was no thought of these three being an actual Trinity, co-equal and united in One."—*The Paganism in Our Christianity*.

"At first the Christian faith was not Trinitarian . . . It was not so in the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages, as reflected in the [New]

[Testament] and other early Christian writings."—*Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*.

"The formulation 'one God in three Persons' was not solidly established, certainly not fully assimilated into Christian life and its profession of faith, prior to the end of the 4th century. . . . Among the Apostolic Fathers, there had been nothing even remotely approaching such a mentality or perspective."—*New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

#### What the Ante-Nicene Fathers Taught

THE ante-Nicene Fathers were acknowledged to have been leading religious teachers in the early centuries after Christ's birth. What they taught is of interest.

Justin Martyr, who died about 165 C.E., called the prehuman Jesus a created angel who is "other than the God who made all things." He said that Jesus was inferior to God and "never did anything except what the Creator . . . willed him to do and say."

Irenaeus, who died about 200 C.E., said that the prehuman Jesus had a separate existence from God and was inferior to him. He showed that Jesus is not equal to the "One true and only God," who is "supreme over all, and besides whom there is no other."

Clement of Alexandria, who died about 215 C.E., called Jesus in his prehuman existence "a creature" but called God "the uncreated and imperishable and only true God." He said that the Son "is next to the only omnipotent Father" but not equal to him.

Tertullian, who died about 230 C.E., taught

the supremacy of God. He observed: "The Father is different from the Son (another), as he is greater; as he who begets is different from him who is begotten; he who sends, different from him who is sent." He also said: "There was a time when the Son was not. . . . Before all things, God was alone."

Hippolytus, who died about 235 C.E., said that God is "the one God, the first and the only One, the Maker and Lord of all," who "had nothing co-equal [of equal age] with him . . . But he was One, alone by himself; who, willing it, called into being what had no being before," such as the created prehuman Jesus.

Origen, who died about 250 C.E., said that "the Father and Son are two substances . . . two things as to their essence," and that "compared with the Father, [the Son] is a very small light."

**"There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a [Trinity] within the Godhead."—The Triune God**

Summing up the historical evidence, Alvan Lamson says in *The Church of the First Three Centuries*: "The modern popular doctrine of the Trinity . . . derives no support from the

language of Justin [Martyr]; and this observation may be extended to all the ante-Nicene Fathers; that is, to all Christian writers for three centuries after the birth of Christ. It is true, they speak of the Father, Son, and . . . holy Spirit, but not as co-equal, not as one numerical essence, not as Three in One, in any sense now admitted by Trinitarians. The very reverse is the fact."

Thus, the testimony of the Bible and of history makes clear that the Trinity was unknown throughout Biblical times and for several centuries thereafter.

## How Did the Trinity Doctrine Develop?

AT THIS point you might ask: "If the Trinity is not a Biblical teaching, how did it become a doctrine of Christianity?" Many think that it was formulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E.

That is not totally correct, however. The

Council of Nicaea did assert that Christ was of the same substance as God, which laid the groundwork for later Trinitarian theology. But it did not establish the Trinity, for at that council there was no mention of the holy spirit as the third person of a triune Godhead.

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?



Constantine's Role at Nicaea

FOR many years, there had been much opposition on Biblical grounds to the developing idea that Jesus was God. To try to solve the dispute, Roman emperor Constantine summoned all bishops to Nicaea. About 300, a fraction of the total, actually attended.

Constantine was not a Christian. Supposedly, he converted later in life, but he was not baptized until he lay dying. Regarding him, Henry Chadwick says in *The Early Church*: "Constantine, like his father, worshipped the Unconquered Sun; . . . his conversion should not be interpreted as an inward experience of grace . . . It was a military matter. His comprehension of Christian doctrine was never very clear, but he was sure that victory in battle lay in the gift of the God of the Christians."

What role did this unbaptized emperor play at the Council of Nicaea? The *Encyclopædia Britannica* relates: "Constantine himself presided, actively guiding the discussions, and personally proposed . . . the crucial formula expressing the relation of Christ to God in the creed issued by the council, 'of one substance with the Father' . . . Overawed by the emperor, the bishops, with two exceptions only, signed the creed, many of them much against their inclination."

Hence, Constantine's role was crucial. After two months of furious religious debate, this pagan politician intervened and decided in favor of those who said that Jesus was God. But why? Certainly not because of any Biblical

"Constantine had basically no understanding whatsoever of the questions that were being asked in Greek theology."—*A Short History of Christian Doctrine*

conviction. "Constantine had basically no understanding whatsoever of the questions that were being asked in Greek theology," says *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*. What he did understand was that religious division was a threat to his empire, and he wanted to solidify his domain.

None of the bishops at Nicaea promoted a Trinity, however. They decided only the nature of Jesus but not the role of the holy spirit. If a Trinity had been a clear Bible truth, should they not have proposed it at that time?

#### Further Development

AFTER Nicaea, debates on the subject continued for decades. Those who believed that Jesus was not equal to God even came back into favor for a time. But later Emperor Theodosius decided against them. He established the creed of the Council of Nicaea as the standard for his realm and convened the Council of Constantinople in 381 C.E. to clarify the formula.

That council agreed to place the holy spirit on the same level as God and Christ. For the first time, Christendom's Trinity began to come into focus.

Yet, even after the Council of Constantinople, the Trinity did not become a widely accepted creed. Many opposed it and thus brought on themselves violent persecution. It was only in later centuries that the Trinity was formulated into set creeds. *The Encyclopedia Americana* notes: "The full development

of Trinitarianism took place in the West, in the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, when an explanation was undertaken in terms of philosophy and psychology."

#### The Athanasian Creed

THE Trinity was defined more fully in the Athanasian Creed. Athanasius was a clergyman who supported Constantine at Nicaea. The creed that bears his name declares: "We worship one God in Trinity . . . The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three gods, but one God."

Well-informed scholars agree, however, that Athanasius did not compose this creed. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* comments: "The creed was unknown to the Eastern Church until the 12th century. Since the 17th century, scholars have generally agreed that the Athanasian Creed was not written by Athanasius (died 373) but was probably composed in southern France during the 5th century. . . . The creed's influence seems to have been primarily in southern France and Spain in the 6th and 7th centuries. It was used in the liturgy of the church in Germany in the 9th century and somewhat later in Rome."

So it took centuries from the time of Christ for the Trinity to become widely accepted in Christendom. And in all of this, what guided the decisions? Was it the Word of God, or was it clerical and political considerations? In *Origin and Evolution of Religion*, E. W. Hopkins answers: "The final orthodox definition of the trinity was largely a matter of church politics."

#### Apostasy Foretold

THIS disreputable history of the Trinity fits in with what Jesus and his apostles foretold would follow their time. They said that there would be an apostasy, a deviation, a falling away from true worship until Christ's return, when true worship would be restored before God's day of destruction of this system of things.

Regarding that "day," the apostle Paul said: "It will not come unless the apostasy comes

#### "The Triad of the Great Gods"

Many centuries before the time of Christ, there were triads, or trinities, of gods in ancient Babylonia and Assyria. The French "Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology" notes one such triad in that Mesopotamian area: "The universe was divided into three regions each of which became the domain of a god. Anu's share was the sky. The earth was given to Enlil. Ea became the ruler of the waters. Together they constituted the triad of the Great Gods."

first and the man of lawlessness gets revealed." (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 7) Later, he foretold: "When I have gone fierce wolves will invade you and will have no mercy on the flock. Even from your own ranks there will be men coming forward with a travesty of the truth on their lips to induce the disciples to follow them." (Acts 20:29, 30, JB) Other disciples of Jesus also wrote of this apostasy with its 'lawless' clergy class.—See, for example, 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1-3; Jude 3, 4.

Paul also wrote: "The time is sure to come when, far from being content with sound teaching, people will be avid for the latest novelty and collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and then, instead of listening to the truth, they will turn to myths."—2 Timothy 4:3, 4, JB.

Jesus himself explained what was behind this falling away from true worship. He said that he had sowed good seeds but that the enemy, Satan, would oversow the field with weeds. So along with the first blades of wheat, the weeds appeared also. Thus, a deviation from pure Christianity was to be expected until the harvest, when Christ would set matters right. (Matthew 13:24-43) *The Encyclopedia Americana* comments: "Fourth century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching." Where, then, did this deviation originate?—1 Timothy 1:6.



### What Influenced It

THROUGHOUT the ancient world, as far back as Babylonia, the worship of pagan gods grouped in threes, or triads, was common. That influence was also prevalent in Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the centuries before, during, and after Christ. And after the death of the apostles, such pagan beliefs began to invade Christianity.

Historian Will Durant observed: "Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. . . . From Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity." And in the book *Egyptian Religion*, Siegfried Morenz notes: "The trinity was a major preoccupation of Egyptian theologians. . . . Three gods are combined and treated as a single being, addressed in the singular. In this way the spiritual force of Egyptian religion shows a direct link with Christian theology."

Thus, in Alexandria, Egypt, churchmen of the late third and early fourth centuries, such as Athanasius, reflected this influence as they formulated ideas that led to the Trinity. Their own influence spread, so that Morenz considers "Alexandrian theology as the intermediary between the Egyptian religious heritage and Christianity."

In the preface to Edward Gibbon's *History of Christianity*, we read: "If Paganism was conquered by Christianity, it is equally true that Christianity was corrupted by Paganism. The pure Deism of the first Christians. . . . was changed, by the Church of Rome, into the incomprehensible dogma of the trinity. Many of the pagan tenets, invented by the Egyptians and idealized by Plato, were retained as being worthy of belief."

A *Dictionary of Religious Knowledge* notes that many say that the Trinity "is a corruption borrowed from the heathen religions, and ingrafted on the Christian faith." And *The Paganism in Our Christianity* declares: "The origin of the [Trinity] is entirely pagan."

That is why, in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings wrote: "In Indian religion, e.g., we meet with the trinitarian group of Brahma, Siva, and Visnu; and in Egyptian religion with the trinitarian group of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. . . . 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 is "triadically repre-

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

sented." What does the Greek philosopher Plato have to do with the Trinity?

### Platonism

PLATO, it is thought, lived from 428 to 347 before Christ. While he did not teach the Trinity in its present form, his philosophies paved the way for it. Later, philosophical movements that included triadic beliefs sprang up, and these were influenced by Plato's ideas of God and nature.

The French *Nouveau Dictionnaire Universel* (New Universal Dictionary) says of Plato's influence: "The Platonic trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave birth to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian churches. . . . This Greek philosopher's conception of the divine trinity. . . can be found in all the ancient [pagan] religions."

The *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* shows the influence of this Greek philosophy: "The doctrines of the Logos and the Trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who. . . were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy. . . . That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source can not be denied."

The *Church of the First Three Centuries* says: "The doctrine of the Trinity was of gradual and comparatively late formation; . . . it had its origin in a source entirely foreign from that of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures; . . . it grew up, and was ingrafted on Christianity, through the hands of the Platonizing Fathers."

By the end of the third century C.E., "Christianity" and the new Platonic philosophies became inseparably united. As Adolf Harnack states in *Outlines of the History of Dogma*, church doctrine became "firmly rooted in the soil of Hellenism [pagan Greek thought]. Thereby it became a mystery to the great majority of Christians."

The church claimed that its new doctrines were based on the Bible. But Harnack says: "In reality it legitimized in its midst the Hellenic speculation, the superstitious views and customs of pagan mystery-worship."

In the book *A Statement of Reasons*, Andrews Norton says of the Trinity: "We can

## Hindu Trinity

**The book "The Symbolism of Hindu Gods and Rituals" says regarding a Hindu trinity that existed centuries before Christ: "Siva is one of the gods of the Trinity. He is said to be the god of destruction. The other two gods are Brahma, the god of creation and Vishnu, the god of maintenance. . . . To indicate that these three processes are one and the same the three gods are combined in one form."—Published by A. Parthasarathy, Bombay.**

trace the history of this doctrine, and discover its source, not in the Christian revelation, but in the Platonic philosophy . . . The Trinity is not a doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, but a fiction of the school of the later Platonists."

Thus, in the fourth century C.E., the apostasy foretold by Jesus and the apostles came into full bloom. Development of the Trinity was just one evidence of this. The apostate churches also began embracing other pagan ideas, such as hellfire, immortality of the soul, and

idolatry. Spiritually speaking, Christendom had entered its foretold dark ages, dominated by a growing "man of lawlessness" clergy class.—2 Thessalonians 2:3, 7.

### Why Did God's Prophets Not Teach It?

**W**HAT, for thousands of years, did none of God's prophets teach his people about the Trinity? At the latest, would Jesus not use his ability as the Great Teacher to make the Trinity clear to his followers? Would God inspire hundreds of pages of Scripture and yet not use any of this instruction to teach the Trinity if it were the "central doctrine" of faith?

Are Christians to believe that centuries after Christ and after having inspired the writing of the Bible, God would back the formulation of a doctrine that was unknown to his servants for thousands of years, one that is an "inscrutable mystery" "beyond the grasp of human reason," one that admittedly had a pagan background and was "largely a matter of church politics"?

The testimony of history is clear: The Trinity teaching is a deviation from the truth, an apostatizing from it.

## What Does the Bible Say About God and Jesus?

**I**F PEOPLE were to read the Bible from cover to cover without any preconceived idea of a Trinity, would they arrive at such a concept on their own? Not at all.

What comes through very clearly to an impartial reader is that God alone is the Almighty, the Creator, separate and distinct from anyone else, and that Jesus, even in his prehuman existence, is also separate and distinct, a created being, subordinate to God.

### God Is One, Not Three

**T**HE Bible teaching that God is one is called monotheism. And L. L. Paine, professor of ecclesiastical history, indicates that monothe-

ism in its purest form does not allow for a Trinity: "The Old Testament is strictly monotheistic. God is a single personal being. The idea that a trinity is to be found there . . . is utterly without foundation."

Was there any change from monotheism after Jesus came to the earth? Paine answers: "On this point there is no break between the Old Testament and the New. The monotheistic tradition is continued. Jesus was a Jew, trained by Jewish parents in the Old Testament scriptures. His teaching was Jewish to the core; a new gospel indeed, but not a new theology. . . . And he accepted as his own belief the great text of Jewish monotheism:

*SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?*

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God."

Those words are found at Deuteronomy 6:4. The Catholic *New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB) here reads: "Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh." In the grammar of that verse, the word "one" has no plural modifiers to suggest that it means anything but one individual.

The Christian apostle Paul did not indicate any change in the nature of God either, even after Jesus came to the earth. He wrote: "God is only one."—Galatians 3:20; see also 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

Thousands of times throughout the Bible, God is spoken of as one person. When he speaks, it is as one undivided individual. The Bible could not be any clearer on this. As God states: "I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory." (Isaiah 42:8) "I am Yahweh your God . . . You shall have no gods except me." (Italics ours).—Exodus 20:2, 3, JB.

Why would all the God-inspired Bible writers speak of God as one person if he were actually three persons? What purpose would that serve, except to mislead people? Surely, if God were composed of three persons, he would have had his Bible writers make it abundantly clear so that there could be no doubt about it. At least the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures who had personal contact with God's own Son would have done so. But they did not.

Instead, what the Bible writers did make abundantly clear is that God is one Person—a unique, unpartitioned Being who has no equal: "I am Jehovah, and there is no one else. With the exception of me there is no God." (Isaiah 45:5) "You, whose name is Jehovah, you alone are the Most High over all the earth."—Psalm 83:18.

### Not a Plural God

**J**ESUS called God "the only true God." (John 17:3) Never did he refer to God as a deity of plural persons. That is why nowhere in the Bible is anyone but Jehovah called Almighty. Otherwise, it voids the meaning of the word

\* God's name is rendered "Yahweh" in some translations, "Jehovah" in others.

*SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?*

"almighty." Neither Jesus nor the holy spirit is ever called that, for Jehovah alone is supreme. At Genesis 17:1 he declares: "I am God Almighty." And Exodus 18:11 says: "Jehovah is greater than all the other gods."

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word 'elo'h'ah (god) has two plural forms, namely, 'elo-him' (gods) and 'elo-heh' (gods of). These plural forms generally refer to Jehovah, in which case they are translated in the singular as "God." Do these plural forms indicate a Trinity? No, they do not. In *A Dictionary of the Bible*, William Smith says: "The fanciful idea that ['elo-him'] referred to the trinity of persons in the Godhead hardly finds now a supporter among scholars. It is either what grammarians call the plural of majesty, or it denotes the fullness of divine strength, the sum of the powers displayed by God."

The *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* says of 'elo-him': "It is almost invariably construed with a singular verbal predicate, and takes a singular adjectival attribute." To illustrate this, the title 'elo-him' appears 35 times by itself in the account of creation, and every time the verb describing what God said and did is singular. (Genesis 1:1-2:4) Thus, that publication concludes: "[ 'Elo-him ] must rather be explained as an intensive plural, denoting greatness and majesty."

'Elo-him' means, not "persons," but "gods." So those who argue that this word implies a Trinity make themselves polytheists, worshippers of more than one God. Why? Because it would mean that there were three gods in the Trinity. But nearly all Trinity supporters reject the view that the Trinity is made up of three separate gods.

The Bible also uses the words 'elo-him' and 'elo-heh' when referring to a number of false idol gods. (Exodus 12:12; 20:23) But at other times it may refer to just a single false god, as when the Philistines referred to "Dagon their god ['elo-heh]." (Judges 16:23, 24) Baal is called "a god ['elo-him]." (1 Kings 18:27) In addition, the term is used for humans. (Psalm 82:1, 6) Moses was told that he was to serve as "God" ['elo-him'] to Aaron and to Pharaoh.—Exodus 4:16; 7:1.

Obviously, using the titles 'elo-him' and 'elo-heh' for false gods, and even humans, did not imply that each was a plurality of gods; neither does applying 'elo-him' or 'elo-heh' to Jehovah mean that he is more than one person, especially when we consider the testimony of the rest of the Bible on this subject.

#### Jesus a Separate Creation

WHILE on earth, Jesus was a human, although a perfect one because it was God who transferred the life-force of Jesus to the womb of Mary. (Matthew 1:18-25) But that is not how he began. He himself declared that he had "descended from heaven." (John 3:13) So it was only natural that he would later say to his followers: "What if you should see the Son of man [Jesus] ascend to where he was before?"—John 6:62, *NJB*.

Thus, Jesus had an existence in heaven before coming to the earth. But was it as one of the persons in an almighty, eternal triune Godhead? No, for the Bible plainly states that in his prehuman existence, Jesus was a created spirit being, just as angels were spirit beings created by God. Neither the angels nor Jesus had existed before their creation.

Jesus, in his prehuman existence, was "the first-born of all creation." (Colossians 1:15, *NJB*) He was "the beginning of God's creation." (Revelation 3:14, *RS*, Catholic edition). "Beginning" [Greek, *arkhe*] cannot rightly be interpreted to mean that Jesus was the 'beginner' of God's creation. In his Bible writings, John uses various forms of the Greek word *arkhe* more than 20 times, and these always have the common meaning of "beginning." Yes, Jesus was created by God as the beginning of God's invisible creations.

Notice how closely those references to the origin of Jesus correlate with expressions uttered by the figurative "Wisdom" in the Bible book of Proverbs: "Yahweh created me, first-fruits of his fashioning, before the oldest of his works. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I came to birth; before he had

made the earth, the countryside, and the first elements of the world." (Proverbs 8:12, 22, 25, 26, *NJB*) While the term "Wisdom" is used to personify the one whom God created, most scholars agree that it is actually a figure of speech for Jesus as a spirit creature prior to his human existence.

As "Wisdom" in his prehuman existence, Jesus goes on to say that he was "by his [God's] side, a master craftsman." (Proverbs 8:30, *JB*) In harmony with this role as master craftsman, Colossians 1:16 says of Jesus that "through him God created everything in heaven and on earth."—*Today's English Version* (TEV).

So it was by means of this master worker, his junior partner, as it were, that Almighty God created all other things. The Bible summarizes the matter this way: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things." (Italics ours.)—1 Corinthians 8:6, *RS*, Catholic edition.

It no doubt was to this master craftsman that God said: "Let us make man in our image." (Genesis 1:26) Some have claimed that the "us" and "our" in this expression indicate a Trinity. But if you were to say, 'Let us make something for ourselves,' no one would normally understand this to imply that several persons are combined as one inside of you. You simply mean that two or more individuals will work together on something. So, too, when God used "us" and "our," he was simply addressing another individual, his first spirit creation, the master craftsman, the prehuman Jesus.

#### Could God Be Tempted?

AT MATTHEW 4:1, Jesus is spoken of as being "tempted by the Devil." After showing Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," Satan said: "All these things I will give you if you fall down and do an act of worship to me." (Matthew 4:8, 9) Satan was trying to cause Jesus to be disloyal to God.

But what test of loyalty would that be if Jesus were God? Could God rebel against himself? No,

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

but angels and humans could rebel against God and did. The temptation of Jesus would make sense only if he was, not God, but a separate individual who had his own free will, one who could have been disloyal had he chosen to be, such as an angel or a human.

On the other hand, it is unimaginable that God could sin and be disloyal to himself. "Perfect is his activity . . . A God of faithfulness, . . . righteous and upright is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4) So if Jesus had been God, he could not have been tempted.—James 1:13.

Not being God, Jesus could have been disloyal. But he remained faithful, saying: "Go away, Satan! For it is written, 'It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render sacred service.'"—Matthew 4:10.

#### How Much Was the Ransom?

ONE of the main reasons why Jesus came to earth also has a direct bearing on the Trinity. The Bible states: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a corresponding ransom for all."—1 Timothy 2:5, 6.

Jesus, no more and no less than a perfect human, became a ransom that compensated exactly for what Adam lost—the right to perfect human life on earth. So Jesus could rightly be called "the last Adam" by the apostle Paul, who said in the same context: "Just as in Adam all are dying, so also in the Christ all will be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45) The perfect human life of Jesus was the "corresponding ransom" required by divine justice—no more, no less. A basic principle even of human justice is that the price paid should fit the wrong committed.

If Jesus, however, were part of a Godhead, the ransom price would have been infinitely higher than what God's own Law required. (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-21) It was only a perfect human, Adam, who sinned in

Eden, not God. So the ransom, to be truly in line with God's justice, had to be strictly an equivalent—a perfect human, "the last Adam." Thus, when God sent Jesus to earth as the ransom, he made Jesus to be what would satisfy justice, not an incarnation, not a god-man, but a perfect man, "lower than angels." (Hebrews 2:9; compare Psalm 8:5, 6.) How could any part of an almighty Godhead—Father, Son, or holy spirit—ever be lower than angels?

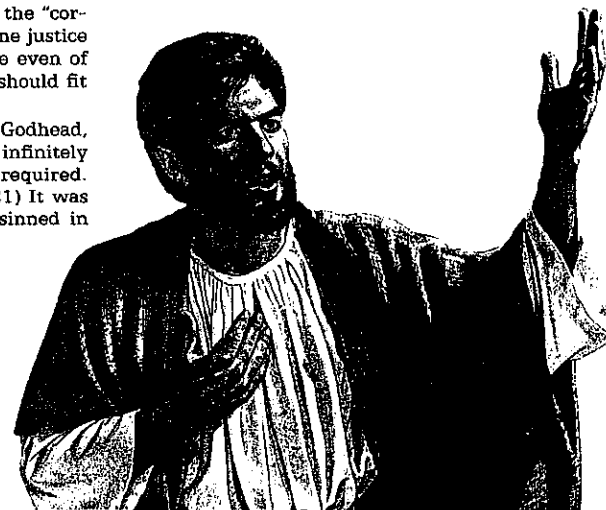
#### How the "Only-Begotten Son"?

THE Bible calls Jesus the "only-begotten Son" of God. (John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) Trinitarians say that since God is eternal, so the Son of God is eternal. But how can a person be a son and at the same time be as old as his father?

Trinitarians claim that in the case of Jesus, "only-begotten" is not the same as the dictionary definition of "begetting," which is "to procreate as the father." (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*) They say that in Jesus' case it means "the sense of unoriginated relationship," a sort of only son relationship without the begetting. (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*) Does that sound logical to you? Can a man father a son without begetting him?

Furthermore, why does the Bible use the very same Greek word for "only-begotten" (as Vine admits without any explanation) to describe the

Jesus said that he had a prehuman existence, having been created by God as the beginning of God's invisible creations





relationship of Isaac to Abraham? Hebrews 11:17 speaks of Isaac as Abraham's "only-begotten son." There can be no question that in Isaac's case, he was only-begotten in the normal sense, not equal in time or position to his father.

The basic Greek word for "only-begotten" used for Jesus and Isaac is *mo-no-ge-nēs*, from *mo'nos*, meaning "only," and *gi'no-mai*, a root word meaning "to generate," i.e., "to become (come into being)," states Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance*. Hence, *mo-no-ge-nēs* is defined as: "Only born, only begotten, i.e. an only child." —A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament, by E. Robinson.

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, says: "[*Mo-no-ge-nēs*] means 'of sole descent,' i.e., without brothers or sisters." This book also states that at John 1:18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9, "the relation of Jesus is not just compared to that of an only child to its father. It is the relation of the only-begotten to the Father."

So Jesus, the only-begotten Son, had a beginning to his life. And Almighty God can rightly be called his Begetter, or Father, in the same sense that an earthly father, like Abraham, begets a son. (Hebrews 11:17) Hence, when the Bible speaks of God as the "Father" of Jesus, it means what it says—that they are two separate individuals. God is the senior. Jesus is the junior—in time, position, power, and knowledge.

When one considers that Jesus was not the only spirit son of God created in heaven, it becomes evident why the term "only-begotten Son" was used in his case. Countless other created spirit beings, angels, are also called "sons of God," in the same sense that Adam was, because their life-force originated with

Jehovah God, the Fountain, or Source, of life. (Job 38:7; Psalm 36:9; Luke 3:38) But these were all created through the "only-begotten Son," who was the only one directly begotten by God.—Colossians 1:15-17.

#### Was Jesus Considered to Be God?

WHILE Jesus is often called the Son of God in the Bible, nobody in the first century ever thought of him as being God the Son. Even the demons, who "believe there is one God," knew from their experience in the spirit realm that Jesus was not God. So, correctly, they addressed Jesus as the separate "Son of God." (James 2:19; Matthew 8:29) And when Jesus died, the pagan Roman soldiers standing by knew enough to say that what they had heard from his followers must be right, not that Jesus was God, but that "certainly this was God's Son."—Matthew 27:54.

Hence, the phrase "Son of God" refers to Jesus as a separate created being, not as part of a Trinity. As the Son of God, he could not be God himself, for John 1:18 says: "No one has ever seen God."—RS, Catholic edition.

The disciples viewed Jesus as the "one mediator between God and men," not as God himself. (1 Timothy 2:5) Since by definition a mediator is someone separate from those who need mediation, it would be a contradiction for Jesus to be one entity with either of the parties he is trying to reconcile. That would be a pretending to be something he is not.

The Bible is clear and consistent about the relationship of God to Jesus. Jehovah God alone is Almighty. He created the prehuman Jesus directly. Thus, Jesus had a beginning and could never be coequal with God in power or eternity.

In every period of his existence, whether in heaven or on earth, his speech and conduct reflect subordination to God. God is always the superior, Jesus the lesser one who was created by God.

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

#### Jesus Distinguished From God

TIME and again, Jesus showed that he was a creature separate from God and that he, Jesus, had a God above him, a God whom he worshiped, a God whom he called "Father." In prayer to God, that is, the Father, Jesus said, "You, the only true God." (John 17:3) At John 20:17 he said to Mary Magdalene: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (RS, Catholic edition) At 2 Corinthians 1:3 the apostle Paul confirms this relationship: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Since Jesus had a God, his Father, he could not at the same time be that God.

The apostle Paul had no reservations about speaking of Jesus and God as distinctly separate: "For us there is one God, the Father, . . . and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 8:6, JB) The apostle shows the distinction when he mentions "the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels." (1 Timothy 5:21, RS Common Bible) Just as Paul speaks of Jesus and the angels as being distinct from one another in heaven, so too are Jesus and God.

Jesus' words at John 8:17, 18 are also significant. He states: "In your own Law it is written, 'The witness of two men is true.' I am one that bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." Here Jesus shows that he and the Father, that is, Almighty God, must be two distinct entities, for how else could there truly be two witnesses?

Jesus further showed that he was a separate being from God by saying: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." (Mark 10:18, JB) So Jesus was saying that no one is as good as God is, not even Jesus himself. God is good in a way that separates him from Jesus.

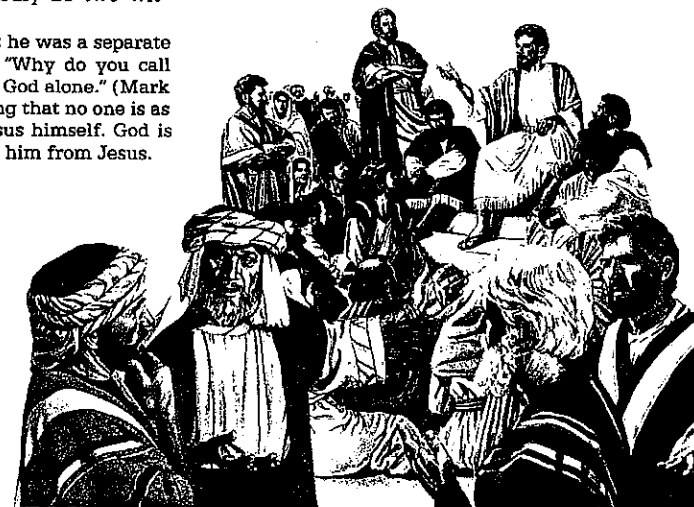
Jesus told the Jews: "I have come down from heaven to do, not my will, but the will of him that sent me."—John 6:38

#### God's Submissive Servant

TIME and again, Jesus made statements such as: "The Son cannot do anything at his own pleasure, he can only do what he sees his Father doing." (John 5:19, *The Holy Bible*, by Monsignor R. A. Knox) "I have come down from heaven to do, not my will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38) "What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me." (John 7:16) Is not the sender superior to the one sent?

This relationship is evident in Jesus' illustration of the vineyard. He likened God, his Father, to the owner of the vineyard, who traveled abroad and left it in the charge of cultivators, who represented the Jewish clergy. When the owner later sent a slave to get some of the fruit of the vineyard, the cultivators beat the slave and sent him away empty-handed. Then the owner sent a second slave, and later a third, both of whom got the same treatment. Finally, the owner said: "I will send my son [Jesus] the beloved. Likely they will respect this one." But the corrupt cultivators said: "This is the heir; let us kill him, that the inheritance may become ours." With that they threw him outside the vineyard and killed him." (Luke 20:9-16) Thus Jesus illustrated his own position as one being sent by God to do God's will, just as a father sends a submissive son.

The followers of Jesus always viewed him as a submissive servant of God, not as God's



## Is God Always Superior to Jesus?

JESUS never claimed to be God. Everything he said about himself indicates that he did not consider himself equal to God in any way—not in power, not in knowledge, not in age.

equal. They prayed to God about "thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, . . . and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus."—Acts 4:23, 27, 30, RS, Catholic edition.

#### God Superior at All Times

AT THE very outset of Jesus' ministry, when he came up out of the baptismal water, God's voice from heaven said: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved." (Matthew 3:16, 17) Was God saying that he was his own son, that he approved himself, that he sent himself? No, God the Creator was saying that he, as the superior, was approving a lesser one, his Son Jesus, for the work ahead.

Jesus indicated his Father's superiority when he said: "Jehovah's spirit is upon me, because he anointed me to declare good news to the poor." (Luke 4:18) Anointing is the giving of authority or a commission by a superior to someone who does not already have authority. Here God is plainly the superior, for he anointed Jesus, giving him authority that he did not previously have.

Jesus made his Father's superiority clear when the mother of two disciples asked that her sons sit one at the right and one at the left of Jesus when he came into his Kingdom. Jesus answered: "As for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father," that is, God. (Matthew 20:23, JB) Had Jesus been Almighty God, those positions would have been his to give. But Jesus could not give them, for they were God's to give, and Jesus was not God.

Jesus' own prayers are a powerful example of his inferior position. When Jesus was about to die, he showed who his superior was by praying: "Father, if you wish, remove this cup from

me. Nevertheless, let, not my will, but yours take place." (Luke 22:42) To whom was he praying? To a part of himself? No, he was praying to someone entirely separate, his Father, God, whose will was superior and could be different from his own, the only One able to "remove this cup."

Then, as he neared death, Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Mark 15:34, JB) To whom was Jesus crying out? To himself or to part of himself? Surely, that cry, "My God," was not from someone who considered himself to be God. And if Jesus were God, then by whom was he deserted? Himself? That would not make sense. Jesus also said: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." (Luke 23:46) If Jesus were God, for what reason should he entrust his spirit to the Father?

After Jesus died, he was in the tomb for parts of three days. If he were God, then Habbakkuk 1:12 is wrong when it says: "O my God, my Holy One, you do not die." But the Bible says that Jesus did die and was unconscious in the tomb. And who resurrected Jesus from the dead? If he was truly dead, he could not have resurrected himself. On the other hand, if he was not really dead, his pretended death would

not have paid the ransom price for Adam's sin. But he did pay that price in full by his genuine death. So it was "God [who] resurrected [Jesus] by loosing the pangs of death." (Acts 2:24) The superior, God Almighty, raised the lesser, his servant Jesus, from the dead.

Does Jesus' ability to perform miracles, such as resurrecting people, indicate that he was God? Well, the apostles and the prophets Elijah

When Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" he surely did not believe that he himself was God

and Elisha had that power too, but that did not make them more than men. God gave the power to perform miracles to the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles to show that He was backing them. But it did not make any of them part of a plural Godhead.

#### Jesus Had Limited Knowledge

WHEN Jesus gave his prophecy about the end of this system of things, he stated: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:32, RS, Catholic edition) Had Jesus been the equal Son part of a Godhead, he would have known what the Father knows. But Jesus did not know, for he was not equal to God.

Similarly, we read at Hebrews 5:8 that Jesus "learned obedience from the things he suffered." Can we imagine that God had to learn anything? No, but Jesus did, for he did not know everything that God knew. And he had to learn something that God never needs to learn—obedience. God never has to obey anyone.

The difference between what God knows and what Christ knows also existed when Jesus was resurrected to heaven to be with God. Note the first words of the last book of the Bible: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him." (Revelation 1:1, RS, Catholic edition) If Jesus himself were part of a Godhead, would he have to be given a revelation by another part of the Godhead—God? Surely he would have known all about it, for God knew. But Jesus did not know, for he was not God.

#### Jesus Continues Subordinate

IN HIS prehuman existence, and also when he was on earth, Jesus was subordinate to God. After his resurrection, he continues to be in a subordinate, secondary position.

Speaking of the resurrection of Jesus, Peter and those with him told the Jewish Sanhedrin: "God exalted this one [Jesus] . . . to his right hand." (Acts 5:31) Paul said: "God exalted him to a superior position." (Philippians 2:9) If Je-

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

sus had been God, how could Jesus have been exalted, that is, raised to a higher position than he had previously enjoyed? He would already have been an exalted part of the Trinity. If, before his exaltation, Jesus had been equal to God, exalting him any further would have made him superior to God.

Paul also said that Christ entered "heaven itself, so that he could appear in the actual presence of God on our behalf." (Hebrews 9:24, JB) If you appear in someone else's presence, how can you be that person? You cannot. You must be different and separate.

Similarly, just before being stoned to death, the martyr Stephen "gazed into heaven and caught sight of God's glory and of Jesus standing at God's right hand." (Acts 7:55) Clearly, he saw two sepa-

rate individuals—but no holy spirit, no Trinity Godhead.

In the account at Revelation 4:8 to 5:7, God is shown seated on his heavenly throne, but Jesus is not. He has to approach God to take a scroll from God's right hand. This shows that in heaven Jesus is not God but is separate from him.

In agreement with the foregoing, the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* in Manchester, England, states: "In his post-resurrection heavenly life, Jesus is portrayed as retaining a personal individuality every bit as distinct and separate from the person of God as was his in his life on earth as the terrestrial Jesus. Alongside God and compared with God, he appears, indeed, as yet another heavenly being in God's heavenly court, just as the angels were—though as God's Son, he stands in a different category, and ranks far above them."—Compare Philippians 2:11.

The *Bulletin* also says: "What, however, is said of his life and functions as the celestial Christ neither means nor implies that in divine status he stands on a par with God himself and is fully God. On the contrary, in the New Testament picture of his heavenly person and ministry we behold a figure both separate from and subordinate to God."



In the everlasting future in heaven, Jesus will continue to be a separate, subordinate servant of God. The Bible expresses it this way: "After that will come the end, when he [Jesus in heaven] will hand over the kingdom to God the Father . . . Then the Son himself will be subjected to the One who has subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all." —1 Corinthians 15:24, 28, *NJB*.

#### Jesus Never Claimed to Be God

THE Bible's position is clear. Not only is Almighty God, Jehovah, a personality separate from Jesus but He is at all times his superior. Jesus is always presented as separate and lesser, a humble servant of God. That is why the Bible plainly says that "the head of the Christ is God" in the same way that "the head of every man is the Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:3) And this is why Jesus himself said: "The

Father is greater than I."—John 14:28, *RS*, Catholic edition.

The fact is that Jesus is not God and never claimed to be. This is being recognized by an increasing number of scholars. As the *Rylands Bulletin* states: "The fact has to be faced that New Testament research over, say, the last thirty or forty years has been leading an increasing number of reputable New Testament scholars to the conclusion that Jesus . . . certainly never believed himself to be God."

The *Bulletin* also says of first-century Christians: "When, therefore, they assigned [Jesus] such honorific titles as Christ, Son of man, Son of God and Lord, these were ways of saying not that he was God, but that he did God's work."

Thus, even some religious scholars admit that the idea of Jesus' being God opposes the entire testimony of the Bible. There, God is always the superior, and Jesus is the subordinate servant.

## The Holy Spirit—God's Active Force

ACCORDING to the Trinity doctrine, the holy spirit is the third person of a God-head, equal to the Father and to the Son. As the book *Our Orthodox Christian Faith* says: "The Holy Spirit is totally God."

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word most frequently used for "spirit" is *ru'ach*, meaning "breath; wind; spirit." In the Greek Scriptures, the word is *pneuma*, having a similar meaning. Do these words indicate that the holy spirit is part of a Trinity?

#### An Active Force

THE Bible's use of "holy spirit" indicates that it is a controlled force that Jehovah God uses to accomplish a variety of his purposes. To a certain extent, it can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations.

At Genesis 1:2 the Bible states that "God's active force ["spirit" (Hebrew, *ru'ach*)] was moving to and fro over the surface of the waters." Here, God's spirit was his active force working to shape the earth.

God uses his spirit to enlighten those who serve him. David prayed: "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Your spirit [*ru'ach*] is good; may it lead me in the land of uprightness." (Psalm 143:10) When 70 capable men were appointed to help Moses, God said to him: "I shall have to take away some of the spirit [*ru'ach*] that is upon you and place it upon them."—Numbers 11:17.

Bible prophecy was recorded when men of God were "borne along by holy spirit [Greek, from *pneuma*]." (2 Peter 1:20, 21) In this way the Bible was "inspired of God," the Greek word for which is *Theo-pneustos*, meaning "God-breathed." (2 Timothy 3:16) And holy spirit guided certain people to see visions or to have prophetic dreams.—2 Samuel 23:2; Joel 2:28, 29; Luke 1:67; Acts 1:16; 2:32, 33.

The holy spirit impelled Jesus to go into the wilderness after his baptism. (Mark 1:12) The spirit was like a fire within God's servants, causing them to be energized by that force. And it enabled them to speak out boldly and courageously.—Micah 3:8; Acts 7:55-60;

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

On one occasion the holy spirit appeared as a dove. On another occasion it appeared as tongues of fire—never as a person

18:25; Romans 12:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

By his spirit, God carries out his judgments on men and nations. (Isaiah 30:27, 28; 59:18, 19) And God's spirit can reach everywhere, acting for people or against them.—Psalm 139:7-12.

#### 'Power Beyond Normal'

GOD'S spirit can also supply "power beyond what is normal" to those who serve him. (2 Corinthians 4:7) This enables them to endure trials of faith or to do things they could not otherwise do.

For example, regarding Samson, Judges 14:6 relates: "The spirit of Yahweh seized on him, and though he had no weapon in his hand he tore the lion in pieces." (JB) Did a divine person actually enter or seize Samson, manipulating his body to do what he did? No, it was really "the power of the LORD [that] made Samson strong."—TEV.

The Bible says that when Jesus was baptized, holy spirit came down upon him appearing like a dove, not like a human form. (Mark 1:10) This active force of God enabled Jesus to heal the sick and raise the dead. As Luke 5:17 says: "The Power of the Lord [God] was behind his [Jesus'] works of healing."—JB.

God's spirit also empowered the disciples of Jesus to do miraculous things. Acts 2:1-4 relates that the disciples were assembled together at Pentecost when "suddenly there occurred from heaven a noise just like that of a rushing stiff breeze, . . . and they all became filled with holy spirit and started to speak with different tongues, just as the spirit was granting them to make utterance."

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?



So the holy spirit gave Jesus and other servants of God the power to do what humans ordinarily could not do.

#### Not a Person

ARE there not, however, Bible verses that speak of the holy spirit in personal terms? Yes, but note what Catholic theologian Edmund Fortman says about this in *The Triune God*: "Although this spirit is often described in personal terms, it seems quite clear that the sacred writers [of the Hebrew Scriptures] never conceived or presented this spirit as a distinct person."

In the Scriptures it is not unusual for something to be personified. Wisdom is said to have children. (Luke 7:35) Sin and death are called kings. (Romans 5:14, 21) At Genesis 4:7 *The New English Bible (NE)* says: "Sin is a demon crouching at the door," personifying sin as a wicked spirit crouching at Cain's door. But, of course, sin is not a spirit person; nor does personifying the holy spirit make it a spirit person.



Similarly, at 1 John 5:6-8 (NE) not only the spirit but also "the water, and the blood" are said to be "witnesses." But water and blood are obviously not persons, and neither is the holy spirit a person.

In harmony with this is the Bible's general usage of "holy spirit" in an impersonal way, such as paralleling it with water and fire. (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8) People are urged to become filled with holy spirit instead of with wine. (Ephesians 5:18) They are spoken of as being filled with holy spirit in the same way they are filled with such qualities as wisdom, faith, and joy. (Acts 6:3; 11:24; 13:52) And at 2 Corinthians 6:6 holy spirit is included among a number of qualities. Such expressions would not be so common if the holy spirit were actually a person.

Then, too, while some Bible texts say that the spirit speaks, other texts show that this was actually done through humans or angels. (Matthew 10:19, 20; Acts 4:24, 25; 28:25; Hebrews 2:2) The action of the spirit in such instances is like that of radio waves transmitting messages from one person to another far away.

At Matthew 28:19 reference is made to "the name . . . of the holy spirit." But the word "name" does not always mean a personal name, either in Greek or in English. When we say "in the name of the law," we are not referring to a person. We mean that which the law stands for, its authority. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* says: "The use of name (*onoma*) here is a common one in the Septuagint and the papyri for power or authority." So baptism 'in the name of the holy spirit' recognizes the authority of the spirit, that it is from God and functions by divine will.

#### The "Helper"

JESUS spoke of the holy spirit as a "helper," and he said it would teach, guide, and speak. (John 14:16, 26; 16:13) The Greek word he used for helper (*para-kle-tos*) is in the

masculine gender. So when Jesus referred to what the helper would do, he used masculine personal pronouns. (John 16:7, 8) On the other hand, when the neuter Greek word for spirit (*pnou'ma*) is used, the neuter pronoun "it" is properly employed.

Most Trinitarian translators hide this fact, as the Catholic *New American Bible* admits regarding John 14:17: "The Greek word for 'Spirit' is neuter, and while we use personal pronouns in English ('he,' 'his,' 'him'), most Greek MSS [manuscripts] employ 'it.'"

So when the Bible uses masculine personal pronouns in connection with *para-kle-tos* at John 16:7, 8, it is conforming to rules of grammar, not expressing a doctrine.

#### No Part of a Trinity

VARIOUS sources acknowledge that the Bible does not support the idea that the holy spirit is the third person of a Trinity. For example:

*The Catholic Encyclopedia*: "Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find any clear indication of a Third Person."

Catholic theologian Fortman: "The Jews never regarded the spirit as a person; nor is there any solid evidence that any Old Testament writer held this view. . . . The Holy Spirit is usually presented in the Synoptics [Gospels] and in Acts as a divine force or power."

*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*: "The O[ld] T[estament] clearly does not envisage God's spirit as a person . . . God's spirit is simply God's power. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly." It also says: "The majority of N[ew] T[estament] texts reveal God's spirit as *something*, not *someone*; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God."—Italics ours.

A *Catholic Dictionary*: "On the whole, the New Testament, like the Old, speaks of the spirit as a divine energy or power."

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

Hence, neither the Jews nor the early Christians viewed the holy spirit as part of a Trinity. That teaching came centuries later. As *A Catholic Dictionary* notes: "The third Person was asserted at a Council of Alexandria in 362 . . . and finally by the Council of Constantinople of 381"—some three and a half cen-

turies after holy spirit filled the disciples at Pentecost!

No, the holy spirit is not a person and it is not part of a Trinity. The holy spirit is God's active force that he uses to accomplish his will. It is not equal to God but is always at his disposition and subordinate to him.

## What About Trinity "Proof Texts"?

IT IS said that some Bible texts offer proof in support of the Trinity. However, when reading such texts, we should keep in mind that the Biblical and historical evidence does not support the Trinity.

Any Bible reference offered as proof must be understood in the context of the consistent teaching of the entire Bible. Very often the true meaning of such a text is clarified by the context of surrounding verses.

#### Three in One

THE *New Catholic Encyclopedia* offers three such "proof texts" but also admits: "The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not taught in the O[ld] T[estament]. In the N[ew] T[estament] the oldest evidence is in the Pauline epistles, especially 2 Cor 13:13 [verse 14 in some Bibles], and 1 Cor 12:4-6. In the Gospels evidence of the Trinity is found explicitly only in the baptismal formula of Mt 28:19."

In those verses the three "persons" are listed as follows in *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Second Corinthians 13:13 (14) puts the three together in this way: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." First Corinthians 12:4-6 says: "There are many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all." And Matthew 28:19 reads: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

Do those verses say that God, Christ, and the holy spirit constitute a Trinitarian Godhead, that the three are equal in substance, power, and eternity? No, they do not, no more than listing three people, such as Tom, Dick, and Harry, means that they are three in one.

This type of reference, admits McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, "proves only that there are the three subjects named, . . . but it does not prove, by itself, that all the three belong necessarily to the divine nature, and possess equal divine honor."

Although a supporter of the Trinity, that source says of 2 Corinthians 13:13 (14): "We could not justly infer that they possessed equal authority, or the same nature." And of Matthew 28:18-20 it says: "This text, however, taken by itself, would not prove decisively either the *personality* of the three subjects mentioned, or their *equality* or *divinity*."

When Jesus was baptized, God, Jesus, and the holy spirit were also mentioned in the same context. Jesus "saw descending like a dove God's spirit coming upon him." (Matthew 3:16) This, however, does not say that the three are one. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned together numerous times, but that does not make them one. Peter, James, and John are named together, but that does not make them one either. Furthermore, God's spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism, showing that Jesus was not anointed by spirit until that time. This being so, how could he be part of a Trinity where he had always been one with the holy spirit?

Another reference that speaks of the three

together is found in some older Bible translations at 1 John 5:7. Scholars acknowledge, however, that these words were not originally in the Bible but were added much later. Most modern translations rightly omit this spurious verse.

Other "proof texts" deal only with the relationship between two—the Father and Jesus. Let us consider some of them.

#### "I and the Father Are One"

THAT text, at John 10:30, is often cited to support the Trinity, even though no third person is mentioned there. But Jesus himself showed what he meant by his being "one" with the Father. At John 17:21, 22, he prayed to God that his disciples "may all be one, just as you, Father, are in union with me and I am in union with you, that they also may be in union with us, . . . that they may be one just as we are one." Was Jesus praying that all his disciples would become a single entity? No, obviously Jesus was praying that they would be united in thought and purpose, as he and God were.—See also 1 Corinthians 1:10.

At 1 Corinthians 3:6, 8, Paul says: "I planted, Apollos watered . . . He that plants and he that waters are one." Paul did not mean that he and Apollos were two persons in one; he meant that they were unified in purpose. The Greek word that Paul used here for "one" (*hen*) is neuter, literally "one (thing)," indicating oneness in cooperation. It is the same word that Jesus used at John 10:30 to describe his relationship with his Father. It is also the same word that Jesus used at John 17:21, 22. So when he used the word "one" (*hen*) in these cases, he was talking about unity of thought and purpose.

Regarding John 10:30, John Calvin (who was a Trinitarian) said in the book *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*: "The ancients made a wrong use of this passage to prove that Christ is . . . of the same essence with the Father. For Christ does not argue about the unity of substance, but



about the agreement which he has with the Father."

Right in the context of the verses after John 10:30, Jesus forcefully argued that his words were not a claim to be God. He asked the Jews who wrongly drew that conclusion and wanted to stone him: "Why do you charge me with blasphemy because I, consecrated and sent into the world by the Father, said, 'I am God's son?'" (John 10:31-36, NE) No, Jesus claimed that he was, not God the Son, but the Son of God.

#### "Making Himself Equal to God?"

ANOTHER scripture offered as support for the Trinity is John 5:18. It says that the Jews (as at John 10:31-36) wanted to kill Jesus because "he was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God."

But who said that Jesus was making himself equal to God? Not Jesus. He defended himself against this false charge in the very next verse (19): "To this accusation

Jesus replied: . . . 'the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing.'—JB.

By this, Jesus showed the Jews that he was not equal to God and therefore could not act on his own initiative. Can we imagine someone

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

Jesus prayed to God that his disciples might "all be one," just as he and his Father "are one"



equal to Almighty God saying that he could "do nothing by himself"? (Compare Daniel 4: 34, 35.) Interestingly, the context of both John 5:18 and 10:30 shows that Jesus defended himself against false charges from Jews who, like the Trinitarians, were drawing wrong conclusions!

#### "Equal With God?"

AT PHILIPPIANS 2:6 the Catholic Douay Version (Dy) of 1609 says of Jesus: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." The King James Version (KJ) of 1611 reads much the same. A number of such versions are still used by some to support the idea that Jesus was equal to God. But note how other translations render this verse:

1869: "who, being in the form of God, did not regard it as a thing to be grasped at to be on an equality with God." *The New Testament*, by G. R. Noyes.

1965: "He—truly of divine nature!—never self-confidently made himself equal to God." *Das Neue Testament*, revised edition, by Friedrich Pfafflin.

1968: "who, although being in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to greedily make his own." *La Biblia Concordata*.

1976: "He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God." *Today's English Version*.

1984: "who, although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God." *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

1985: "Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped." *The New Jerusalem Bible*.

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

Some claim, however, that even these more accurate renderings imply that (1) Jesus already had equality but did not want to hold on to it or that (2) he did not need to grasp at equality because he already had it.

In this regard, Ralph Martin, in *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, says of the original Greek: "It is questionable, however, whether the sense of the verb can glide from its real meaning of 'to seize', 'to snatch violently' to that of 'to hold fast.'" *The Expositor's Greek Testament* also says: "We cannot find any passage where ἀρπάζω [*har-pa'zo*] or any of its derivatives has the sense of 'holding in possession,' 'retaining'. It seems invariably to mean 'seize,' 'snatch violently'. Thus it is not permissible to glide from the true sense 'grasp at' into one which is totally different, 'hold fast.'"

From the foregoing it is apparent that the translators of versions such as the Douay and the King James are bending the rules to support Trinitarian ends. Far from saying that Jesus thought it was appropriate to be equal to God, the Greek of Philippians 2:6, when read objectively, shows just the opposite, that Jesus did not think it was appropriate.

The context of the surrounding verses (3-5, 7, 8, Dy) makes it clear how verse 6 is to be understood. The Philippians were urged: "In humility, let each esteem others better than themselves." Then Paul uses Christ as the outstanding example of this attitude: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ

Jesus." What "mind"? To 'think it not robbery to be equal with God'? No, that would be just the opposite of the point being made! Rather, Jesus, who 'esteemed God as better than himself,' would never 'grasp for equality with God,' but instead he 'humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death."

Surely, that cannot be talking about any part of Almighty God. It was talking about Jesus Christ, who perfectly illustrated Paul's point here—namely the importance of humility and obedience to one's Superior and Creator, Jehovah God.

#### "I Am"

AT JOHN 8:58 a number of translations, for instance *The Jerusalem Bible*, have Jesus saying: "Before Abraham ever was, I Am." Was Jesus there teaching, as Trinitarians assert, that he was known by the title "I Am"? And, as they claim, does this mean that he was Jehovah of the Hebrew Scriptures, since the *King James Version* at Exodus 3:14 states: "God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM"?

At Exodus 3:14 (KJ) the phrase "I AM" is used as a title for God to indicate that he really existed and would do what he promised. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, edited by Dr. J. H. Hertz, says of the phrase: "To the Israelites in bondage, the meaning would be, 'Although He has not yet displayed His power towards you, He will do so; He is eternal and will certainly redeem you.' Most moderns follow Rashi [a French Bible and Talmud commentator] in rendering [Exodus 3:14] 'I will be what I will be.'"

The expression at John 8:58 is quite differ-

ent from the one used at Exodus 3:14. Jesus did not use it as a name or a title but as a means of explaining his prehuman existence. Hence, note how some other Bible versions render John 8:58:

1869: "From before Abraham was, I have been." *The New Testament*, by G. R. Noyes.

1935: "I existed before Abraham was born!" *The Bible—An American Translation*, by J. M. P. Smith and E. J. Goodspeed.

1965: "Before Abraham was born, I was already the one that I am." *Das Neue Testament*, by Jörg Zink.

1981: "I was alive before Abraham was born!" *The Simple English Bible*.

1984: "Before Abraham came into existence, I have been." *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

Thus, the real thought of the Greek used here is that God's created "firstborn," Jesus, had existed long before Abraham was born.—Colossians 1:15; Proverbs 8:22, 23, 30; Revelation 3:14.

Again, the context shows this to be the correct understanding. This time the Jews wanted to stone Jesus for claiming to "have seen Abraham" although, as they said, he was not yet 50 years old. (Verse 57) Jesus' natural response was to tell the truth about his age. So he naturally told them that he "was alive before Abraham was born!"—*The Simple English Bible*.

#### "The Word Was God"

AT JOHN 1:1 the *King James Version* reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God." Trinitarians claim that this means that "the Word" (Greek, *ho lo'gos*) who came to earth as Jesus Christ was Almighty God himself.

Note, however, that here again the context lays the groundwork for accurate understanding. Even the *King James Version* says, "The Word was with God." (Italics ours.) Someone who is "with" another person cannot be the same as that other person. In agreement with this, the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, edited by Jesuit Joseph A. Fitzmyer, notes that if the latter part of John 1:1 were interpreted to mean "the" God, this "would then contradict the preceding clause," which says that the Word was with God.

Notice, too, how other translations render this part of the verse:

1808: "and the word was a god." *The New Testament in an Improved Version, Upon the Basis of Archbishop Newcome's New Translation: With a Corrected Text*.

1864: "and a god was the word." *The Emphatic Diaglott*, interlinear reading, by Benjamin Wilson.

1928: "and the Word was a divine being." *La Bible du Centenaire*, L'Evangile selon Jean, by Maurice Goguel.

1935: "and the Word was divine." *The Bible—An American Translation*, by J. M. P. Smith and E. J. Goodspeed.

1946: "and of a divine kind was the Word." *Das Neue Testament*, by Ludwig Thimme.

1950: "and the Word was a god." *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*.

1958: "and the Word was a God." *The New Testament*, by James L. Tomanek.

1975: "and a god (or, of a divine kind) was the Word." *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, by Siegfried Schulz.

1978: "and godlike kind was the Logos." *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, by Johannes Schneider.

At John 1:1 there are two occurrences of the Greek noun *the-os* (god). The first occurrence refers to Almighty God, with whom the Word was ("and the Word [*lo'gos*] was with

God [a form of *the-os*]). This first *the-os* is preceded by the word *ton* (the), a form of the Greek definite article that points to a distinct identity, in this case Almighty God ("and the Word was with [the] God").

On the other hand, there is no article before the second *the-os* at John 1:1. So a literal translation would read, "and god was the Word." Yet we have seen that many translations render this second *the-os* (a predicate noun) as "divine," "godlike," or "a god." On what authority do they do this?

The Koine Greek language had a definite article ("the"), but it did not have an indefinite article ("a" or "an"). So when a predicate noun is not preceded by the definite article, it may be indefinite, depending on the context.

The *Journal of Biblical Literature* says that expressions "with an anarthrous [no article] predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning." As the *Journal* notes, this indicates that the *lo'gos* can be likened to a god. It also says of John 1:1: "The qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun [*the-os*] cannot be regarded as definite."

So John 1:1 highlights the quality of the Word, that he was "divine," "godlike," "a god," but not Almighty God. This harmonizes with the rest of the Bible, which shows that Jesus, here called "the Word" in his role as God's Spokesman, was an obedient subordinate sent to earth by his Superior, Almighty God.

There are many other Bible verses in which almost all translators in other languages consistently insert the article "a" when translating Greek sentences with the same structure. For example, at Mark 6:49, when the disciples saw Jesus walking on water, the *King James Version* says: "They supposed it had been a spirit." In the Koine Greek, there is no "a" before "spirit." But almost all translations in other languages add an "a" in order to make the rendering fit the context. In the same way, since John 1:1 shows that the Word was with God, he could not be God but was "a god," or "divine."

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

Jesus showed the Jews that he was not equal to God, saying that he could 'do nothing by himself but only what he saw the Father doing'



Joseph Henry Thayer, a theologian and scholar who worked on the *American Standard Version*, stated simply: "The Logos was divine, not the divine Being himself." And Jesuit John L. McKenzie wrote in his *Dictionary of the Bible*: "Jn 1:1 should rigorously be translated . . . 'the word was a divine being.'"

#### Violating a Rule?

SOME claim, however, that such renderings violate a rule of Koine Greek grammar published by Greek scholar E. C. Colwell back in 1933. He asserted that in Greek a predicate noun "has the [definite] article when it follows the verb; it does not have the [definite] article when it precedes the verb." By this he meant that a predicate noun preceding the verb should be understood as though it did have the definite article ("the") in front of it. At John 1:1 the second noun (*theos*), the predicate, precedes the verb—"and [*theos*]" was the Word." So, Colwell claimed, John 1:1 should read "and [the] God was the Word."

But consider just two examples found at John 8:44. There Jesus says of the Devil: "That one was a manslayer" and "he is a liar." Just as at John 1:1, the predicate nouns ("manslayer" and "liar") precede the verbs ("was" and "is") in the Greek. There is no indefinite article in front of either noun because there was no indefinite article in Koine Greek. But most translations insert the word "a" because Greek grammar and the context require it.—See also Mark 11:32; John 4:19; 6:70; 9:17; 10:1; 12:6.

Colwell had to acknowledge this regarding the predicate noun, for he said: "It is indefinite ['a' or 'an'] in this position only when the context demands it." So even he admits that when the context requires it, translators may insert an indefinite article in front of the noun in this type of sentence structure.

Does the context require an indefinite article at John 1:1? Yes, for the testimony of the entire Bible is that Jesus is not Almighty God. Thus, not Colwell's questionable rule of grammar, but context should guide the translator in

such cases. And it is apparent from the many translations that insert the indefinite article "a" at John 1:1 and in other places that many scholars disagree with such an artificial rule, and so does God's Word.

#### No Conflict

DOES saying that Jesus Christ is "a god" conflict with the Bible's teaching that there is only one God? No, for at times the Bible employs that term to refer to mighty creatures. Psalm 8:5 reads: "You also proceeded to make him [man] a little less than godlike ones [Hebrew, *'elo-him*]," that is, angels. In Jesus' defense against the charge of the Jews, that he claimed to be God, he noted that "the Law uses the word gods of those to whom the word of God was addressed," that is, human judges. (John 10:34, 35, JB; Psalm 82:1-6) Even Satan is called "the god of this system of things" at 2 Corinthians 4:4.

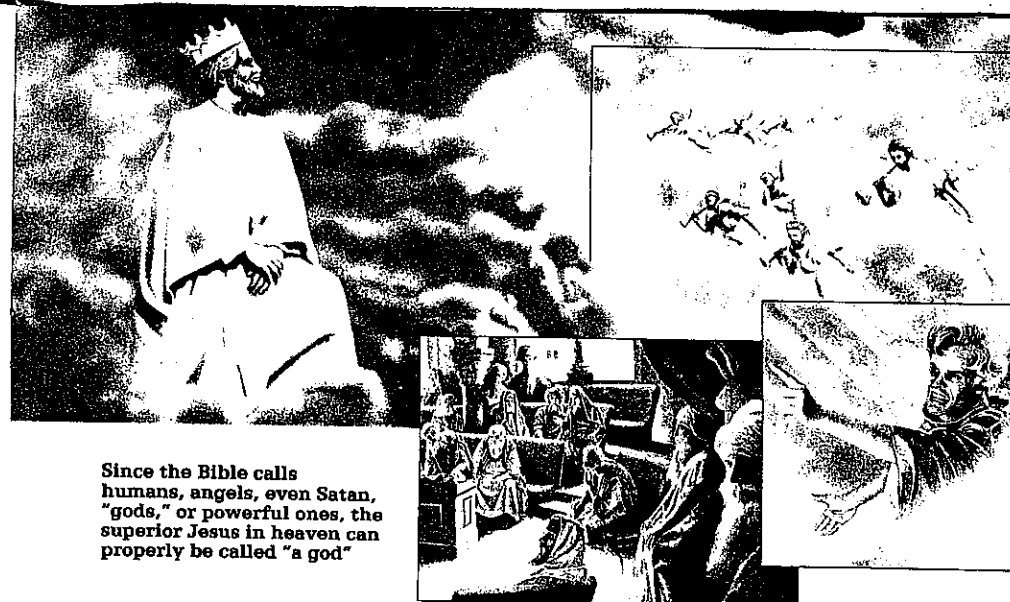
Jesus has a position far higher than angels, imperfect men, or Satan. Since these are referred to as "gods," mighty ones, surely Jesus can be and is "a god." Because of his unique position in relation to Jehovah, Jesus is a "Mighty God."—John 1:1; Isaiah 9:6.

But does not "Mighty God" with its capital letters indicate that Jesus is in some way equal to Jehovah God? Not at all. Isaiah merely prophesied this to be one of four names that Jesus would be called, and in the English language such names are capitalized. Still, even though Jesus was called "Mighty," there can be only one who is "Almighty." To call Jehovah God "Almighty" would have little significance unless there existed others who were also called gods but who occupied a lesser or inferior position.

The *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* in England notes that according to Catholic theologian Karl Rahner,

while *theos* is used in scriptures such as John 1:1 in reference to Christ, "in none of these instances is '*theos*' used in such a manner as to identify Jesus with him who elsewhere in the New Testament figures as '*ho Theos*,' that is, the Supreme God." And the *Bulletin* adds: "If the New Testament writers believed it vital that

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?



Since the Bible calls humans, angels, even Satan, "gods," or powerful ones, the superior Jesus in heaven can properly be called "a god"

the faithful should confess Jesus as 'God', is the almost complete absence of just this form of confession in the New Testament explicable?"

But what about the apostle Thomas' saying, "My Lord and my God!" to Jesus at John 20:28? To Thomas, Jesus was like "a god," especially in the miraculous circumstances that prompted his exclamation. Some scholars suggest that Thomas may simply have made an emotional exclamation of astonishment, spoken to Jesus but directed to God. In either case, Thomas did not think that Jesus was Almighty God, for he and all the other apostles knew that Jesus never claimed to be God but taught that Jehovah alone is "the only true God."—John 17:3.

Again, the context helps us to understand this. A few days earlier the resurrected Jesus had told Mary Magdalene to tell the disciples: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God." (John 20:17) Even though Jesus was already resurrected as a mighty spirit, Jehovah was still his God. And Jesus continued to refer to Him as such even in the last book of the Bible, after he was glorified.—Revelation 1:5, 6; 3:2, 12.

Just three verses after Thomas' exclamation, at John 20:31, the Bible further clarifies the SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

matter by stating: "These have been written down that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God," not that he was Almighty God. And it meant "Son" in a literal way, as with a natural father and son, not as some mysterious part of a Trinity Godhead.

#### Must Harmonize With the Bible

IT IS claimed that several other scriptures support the Trinity. But these are similar to those discussed above in that, when carefully examined, they offer no actual support. Such texts only illustrate that when considering any claimed support for the Trinity, one must ask: Does the interpretation harmonize with the consistent teaching of the entire Bible—that Jehovah God alone is Supreme? If not, then the interpretation must be in error.

We also need to keep in mind that not even so much as one "proof text" says that God, Jesus, and the holy spirit are one in some mysterious Godhead. Not one scripture anywhere in the Bible says that all three are the same in substance, power, and eternity. The Bible is consistent in revealing Almighty God, Jehovah, as alone Supreme, Jesus as his created Son, and the holy spirit as God's active force.

# Worship God on His Terms

JESUS said in prayer to God: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) What kind of knowledge? "[God's] will is that all sorts of men should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) *The Amplified Bible* renders the latter phrase this way: "Know precisely and correctly the [divine] Truth."

So God wants us to know him and his purposes accurately, in conformity with divine truth. And God's Word, the Holy Bible, is the source of that truth. (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) When people learn accurately what the Bible says about God, then they will avoid being like those mentioned at Romans 10:2, 3, who had "a zeal for God; but not according to accurate knowledge." Or like the Samaritans, to whom Jesus said: "You worship what you do not know."—John 4:22.

Therefore, if we want God's approval, we need to ask ourselves: What does God say about himself? How does he want to be worshiped? What are his purposes, and how should we fit in with them? An accurate knowledge of the truth gives us the right answers to such questions. Then we can worship God on his terms.

## Dishonoring God

"THOSE honoring me I shall honor," says God. (1 Samuel 2:30) Does it honor God to call anyone his equal? Does it honor him to call Mary "the mother of God" and the "Mediatrice . . . between the Creator and His creatures," as does the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*? No, those ideas insult God. No one is his equal; nor did he have a fleshly mother, since Jesus was not God. And there is no "Mediatrice," for God has appointed only "one mediator between God and men," Jesus.—1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1, 2.

Beyond a doubt, the Trinity doctrine has confused and diluted people's understanding of God's true position. It prevents people from

accurately knowing the Universal Sovereign, Jehovah God, and from worshiping him on his terms. As theologian Hans Küng said: "Why should anyone want to add anything to the notion of God's oneness and uniqueness that can only dilute or nullify that oneness and uniqueness?" But that is what belief in the Trinity has done.

Those who believe in the Trinity are not "holding God in accurate knowledge." (Romans 1:28) That verse also says: "God gave them up to a disapproved mental state, to do the things not fitting." Verses 29 to 31 list some of those 'unfitting' things, such as 'murder, strife, being false to agreements, having no natural affection, merciless.' Those very things have been practiced by religions that accept the Trinity.

For instance, Trinitarians have often persecuted and even killed those who rejected the Trinity doctrine. And they have gone even further. They have killed their fellow Trinitarians in wartime. What could be more 'unfitting' than Catholics killing Catholics, Orthodox killing Orthodox, Protestants killing Protestants—all in the name of the same Trinitarian God?

Yet, Jesus plainly said: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves." (John 13:35) God's Word expands on this, saying: "The children of God and the children of the Devil are evident by this fact: Everyone who does not carry on righteousness does not originate with God, neither does he who does not love his brother." It likens those who kill their spiritual brothers to "Cain, who originated with the wicked one [Satan] and slaughtered his brother."—1 John 3:10-12.

Thus, the teaching of confusing doctrines about God has led to actions that violate his laws. Indeed, what has happened throughout Christendom is what Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard described: "Christendom has done away with Christianity without being quite aware of it."

SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?

This centuries-old sculpture in France depicts the coronation of the "virgin" Mary by the Trinity. Belief in the Trinity led to veneration of Mary as the "Mother of God"



Christendom's spiritual condition fits what the apostle Paul wrote: "They publicly declare they know God, but they disown him by their works, because they are detestable and disobedient and not approved for good work of any sort."—Titus 1:16.

Soon, when God brings this present wicked system of things to its end, Trinitarian Christendom will be called to account. And she will be judged adversely for her God-dishonoring actions and doctrines.—Matthew 24:14, 34; 25:31-34, 41, 46; Revelation 17:1-6, 16; 18:1-8, 20, 24; 19:17-21.

## Reject the Trinity

THERE can be no compromise with God's truths. Hence, to worship God on his terms means to reject the Trinity doctrine. It contradicts what the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians believed and taught. It contradicts what God says about himself in his own inspired Word. Thus, he counsels: "Acknowledge that I alone am God and that there is no one else like me."—Isaiah 46:9, TEV.

God's interests are not served by making him confusing and mysterious. Instead, the more that people become confused about God and his purposes, the better it suits God's Adversary, Satan the Devil, the 'god of this world.' It is he who promotes such false doctrines to 'blind the minds of unbelievers.'

(2 Corinthians 4:4) And the Trinity doctrine also serves the interests of clergymen who want to maintain their hold on people, for they make it appear as though only theologians can understand it.—See John 8:44.

Accurate knowledge of God brings great relief. It frees us from teachings that are in conflict with God's Word and from organizations that have apostatized. As Jesus said: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."—John 8:32.

By honoring God as supreme and worshiping him on his terms, we can avoid the judgment that he will soon bring on apostate Christendom. Instead, we can look forward to God's favor when this system ends: "The world is passing away and so is its desire, but he that does the will of God remains forever."—1 John 2:17.

## Picture Credits

Listed by page, location, and number:  
Church of Tagnon, France, page 10, (7).  
Collegiate of Montréal, Yonne, France, page 31.  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Troyes, page 2, (right).  
Musée du Louvre, Paris, page 10, (1), (3).

Musée Guimet, Paris, page 10, (5).  
Musées Nationaux, France, page 10, (2).  
Museo Bardini, Florence, page 10, (8).  
Museo Egizio, Turin, page 2, (left).  
Scala New York/Florence, page 8.

# Theology Proper

## Communicable Attributes of God

(Shared by us to a limited degree)

<p><b>Holiness</b> ♥God is unique and morally pure♥</p>	<p><b>Love</b> ♥God actively seeks our highest good &amp; welfare♥</p>	<p><b>Mercy</b> ♥God does not give us what we deserve♥</p>
<p>Leviticus 11:44    Isaiah 6: 3-7 Habakkuk 1:13</p>	<p>I John 4: 7-8 Psalm 36:5</p>	<p>II Samuel 24:14    Psalm 103:13 Lamentations 3: 21-23</p>
<p><b>Our Response:</b> <i>We should be holy because God is holy</i></p>	<p><b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are commanded to respond to God's love for us by proving our love for Him in the process of loving others (seeking their best interest)</i></p>	<p><b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are continually humbled in the understanding that God deals with us in mercy and we are exhorted to follow God's example by treating others with mercy</i></p>
<p>I Peter 1: 14-16</p>	<p>John 3:16    Romans 5:8 I John 3:16; 4: 9-12, 19-21</p>	<p>Proverbs 3:3    Micah 6:8    Luke 6:36 Romans 9:15-16; 11:30-32    Colossians 3:12 Jude 22-23</p>
<p><b>Justice</b> ♥God is lawful and impartial♥</p>	<p><b>Truth</b> ♥God is faithful and reliable♥</p>	<p><b>Grace</b> ♥God gives us what we do not deserve♥</p>
<p>Psalm 19:9    Psalm 89:14 Zephaniah 3:5</p>	<p>Numbers 23:19    John 14:6 Titus 1:2</p>	<p>Exodus 34:6 Ephesians 1: 3-8</p>
<p><b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are comforted and challenged in knowing we will be judged fairly and impartially by God and we are encouraged to treat others fairly and impartially</i></p>	<p><b>Our Response:</b> <i>Since God is true, His Word is inerrant and trustworthy, and therefore we have strong encouragement in awaiting the certain fulfillment of all God's promises. Since God is true, we as His people should live lives of truthfulness - in the things we say and the way we behave</i></p>	<p><b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are continually humbled in the knowledge that our salvation is purely a matter of God's grace and not our works, and our desire to live to please God is motivated by grace and not law</i></p>
<p>Acts 17:31    Romans 2: 6-8 Colossians 3:25; 4:1</p>	<p>Hebrews 6:18</p>	<p>Ephesians 2: 8-9 Titus 2:11; 3: 4-8</p>



<b>Sovereignty</b> ▼Absolute Rule▼	<b>Theology Proper</b> <b>Incommunicable Attributes of God</b> (true of God alone)	<b>Aseity</b> ▼Self-existence▼
Psalm 115:3; 135:6 Ephesians 1:11	<b>Omnipresence</b> ▼God is Everywhere▼	Revelation 1:8 Exodus 3:14
<b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are assured that His purposes will be accomplished</i>	I Kings 8:27    Jeremiah 23:23,24 Acts 17: 27-28	<b>Our Response:</b> <i>Realization of our utter dependence on God who is the cause of our existence and the reason we continue to exist</i>
Isaiah 46: 8-10 Job 42:2	<b>Our Response:</b> <i>It is comforting knowing God is always with us</i>	John 1:3    Colossians 1:17 Hebrews 1:3
<b>Infinity</b> ▼Without Limits▼	<b>Omniscience</b> ▼God is All Knowing▼	<b>Eternality</b> ▼God is Timeless▼
I Kings 8:27 Romans 11:33	Psalm 139:2    Proverbs 15:3 Matthew 6:8; 10: 29-30    Romans 11:33	Psalm 90:2 Jude 25
<b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are assured that God can do anything and meet any need we have</i>	<b>Our Response:</b> <i>We can feel secure and comforted by realizing God sees and knows everything. We should be challenged to think and act at all times as if we lived in public, for God is always our audience</i>	<b>Our Response:</b> <i>We are assured that God has no time limits and that His purposes cannot be frustrated by time and space</i>
Psalm 147: 5-6 Romans 11: 33-36	Psalm 139:24 Romans 11:33,34; Hebrews 4:13	Isaiah 46:10
<b>Immutability</b> ▼God is Unchangeable▼	<b>Omnipotence</b> ▼God is All-Powerful▼	<b>Immateriality</b> ▼God is a Spirit▼
Malachi 3:6 James 1:17	Job 42:2    Psalm 115:3 Matthew 19:26	John 4:24    Colossians 1:15 I Timothy 1:17
<b>Our Response:</b> <i>We can have complete trust in God because His promises will be kept and His nature will not change</i>	<b>Our Response:</b> <i>We should be humbled and comforted as we trust and serve our God who can accomplish whatever He pleases and who is not hindered by human limitations</i>	<b>Our Response:</b> <i>The basis of our faith and life is the unseen spiritual world, which is "more real" than our physical, material world</i>
Hebrews 6: 17-18 Hebrews 13:18	Psalm 115: 1-3 Philippians 4:13	John 4:24 Romans 1:20    II Corinthians 5:7

# THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

### A. The Significance of The Doctrine

#### 1) The character of God.

"For most people, it is not just believing in God that is important, but believing in the 'right' God, the true God -- that is, having the right conception and understanding of God, even if, as Spinoza argued, it is one and the same God for all of us."

#### 2) A study of the attributes of God raises several key issues:

- a. The relationship of God's attributes to His essence
- b. How we should think about God's attributes
- c. A suggested model for understanding God's attributes
- d. Selected problems in thinking about the attributes

### B. Any analysis of the God of the Bible should result in at least the following:

- 1) A model of the attributes of God with definitions and key texts (knowledge)
- 2) An ability to recognize perversions of the doctrine of God and the ability to better communicate truths about God in life and ministry (skills)
- 3) An integration of knowledge and skills personally so that we are motivated to worship our God in daily living

### C. Importance of the study

- 1) C. Ryrie has made an important observation: "The important thing to study is the attribute itself to learn not only what it reveals about God but also what implications that it has for one's personal outlook and life."

## II. SOME DEFINITIONS OF ATTRIBUTES (IN COMPARISON WITH ESSENCE, the WHAT)

### A. Various historical confessions

- 1) The Apostle's Creed (2nd cent. AD) affirms: "We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. . . And in the Holy Spirit; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the flesh." (Old Roman Version). The Nicene Creed (4th cent.) uses the same statement. Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches still use one or both of these creeds regularly in worship. A classic statement is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), "God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself, and is alone and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any of the creatures which He has made, not deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and has most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleases." The Shorter Catechism of the same states,



"God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

- 2) Fred Kooster, in Basic Christian Doctrines (ed. Henry), p. 22, says "The attributes may be defined as those perfections of God which are revealed in Scripture and which are exercised and demonstrated by God in His various works."
- 3) Gordon Clark, in Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p.78, says "The divine attributes are, in the language of ordinary conversation, simply the characteristics or qualities of God."
- 4) Ronald Nash, in The Concept of God, pp. 16-17 says, "A divine attribute is an essential property of God. A property is essential to some being if and only if the loss of that property entails that that being ceases to exist. A divine attribute is a property which God could not lose and continue to be God. . If the being called God lost just one of His essential properties, He would no longer be God. A divine attribute then is a property that God could not lose and continue to be God. A divine attribute must be necessary to our idea of God" (underlining mine).

-- Summary of definitions (Lanier Burns, Dallas Seminary)

"Attributes are God's properties, excellencies, perfections, qualities, or characteristics." This leaves however several crucial questions. Can God be divided into parts (at least for purposes of discussion and analysis)? How does each part relate to the others and to the whole?

#### B. "Attributes", "essence" and analogical language

Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, 1.179-180, "God draws upon those elements in man's universe of knowledge that can serve as a likeness of or partially convey the truth in the divine realm. His revelation employs analogical language, which is midway between univocal and equivocal language. In univocal usage, a term is employed in only one sense. In equivocal usage, a term possesses completely different meanings. Thus if we use the word row as a noun to describe a configuration of trees and as a verb to refer to propelling a boat by means of oars, we are using the word equivocally. In univocal usage, a term employed predicatively with different subjects has the same meaning in both instances, as when we say, for example, that a man is tall and a building is tall. In analogical usage, there is always at least some univocal element, but there are differences as well, as when we say that Jeff runs the 100 yard dash and that the Chicago and Northwestern commuter train runs between Chicago and Elmhurst. As we are here using the term analogical, we mean: qualitatively the same; in other words, the difference is one of degree rather than of kind or genus. God is powerful as man is powerful, but much more so. When we say that God knows, we have the same meaning in mind as when we say that man knows -- but while man knows something, God knows everything. God loves just as man loves, but God loves infinitely. We cannot grasp how much more of these qualities God possesses, or what it means to say that God has man's knowledge amplified to an infinite extent. Having observed only finite forms, we find it impossible to grasp infinite concepts. In this sense, God always remains incomprehensible. It is not that we do not have knowledge of Him, and genuine knowledge at that. Rather, the shortcoming lies in our inability to encompass Him within our knowledge. Although what we know of Him is the same as His knowledge of Himself, the degree of our knowledge is much less. It is not exhaustive knowledge of Him, as is his knowledge of Himself, and in that respect it will be incomplete or nonexhaustive even in the eschaton."

This awesome God, however, should not be conceived in terms that are static, cold, distant, and utterly beyond us. Erickson continues, (1.299) "The Bible does not speak of God as some sort of infinite computer. Rather, the images used are very concrete and warm. God is pictured as a father, shepherd, and friend. . . the best mode [method] of investigating the attributes of God, then, is to examine the scriptural statements carefully and make reasonable inferences from them" (underlining mine).

The difference between God and man in most cases is not absolute, for though we are finite and fallen we bear God's image and we remain God's regents with creative personalities. Thus we may rightly use terms taken from the world of people to specify who God is, what He is like, and what He does. When applied to God, these terms are used analogically (that is, with a certain correspondence of meaning and at the same time a certain contrast).

#### C. Cautions in analyzing God's attributes

##### 1) Biblically

- a. A biblical method can be as misleading as any other if proof texts are arbitrarily selected and artificially arranged in some kind of order. There will be truth, but in the final analysis conclusions will be inadequate, artificial and biased.
- b. A true biblical method will reflect inductive theological study which discovers attributes from biblical content with contextual accuracy (hermeneutics). The theologian can expect a balanced understanding (esp. on difficult issues like transcendence -- immanence) from God's self-revelation in Scripture which no other method can provide.
- c. Especially helpful will be God's self-identifying ("I am") statements like Exodus 3:13-15; 34:6-7; His revelatory names, and the "I ams" in John's theology.

##### 2) Philosophically

- a. The early church was forced to defend (esp. in the patristic period) and then to systematize (esp. in the early modern period) truth about God against paganism from without and heresy from within. Three methods (or viae, "ways") were often employed to explain God's attributes:
- b. Via negationis (expression by negation, i.e. "God is not..."); ex: Dionysius the Areopagite.
- c. Via eminentiae (ascent by analogy from finite to the infinite, i.e. "God is like..." to a higher and greater degree; the way of analogy). The theologian (scholastic theologians like Aquinas) reasons from man (who knows) to angels (who know more) to God (who knows all).
- d. Via causalitatis (ascent from world phenomena to necessary, [first] analogous divine causation; God as known by His works).
- e. The philosophical methods understandably resulted in an emphasis upon God's transcendence, what God is in Himself as Absolute Other, Holy Other, who in the essence of His being is free, unconditioned, and self-sufficient. These types of thinking have helped us to understand how God is

distinct from His creation. The biblical method affirms transcendence, but it emphasizes in an even greater way God's gracious relationship with His creation, i.e. His immanence. The Bible emphasizes how much God has shared Himself with us in creation and providence, the climax and fulfillment of which are the comings of His Son (John 1:14; Rev. 19: 11-21).

3. One's thinking on these matters must be consistent with and in submission to God's self-revelation in Scripture. Additional avenues of knowledge may be legitimately investigated, but Scripture is to be the normative and final source of authority. The God of the Bible is not a god of man's own making or thinking or choosing, but He is the God of His own revelation!!!

### III. AN ARRANGEMENT OF THE ATTRIBUTES

- A. The selection that follows is not comprehensive because it cannot be in analyzing the nature of God. But it does serve as a model and as a guide for better understanding and for dealing with some crucial problems.
- B. Some basic descriptions of God
  - 1) God is a Trinity. God is one essence, and He is three Persons, who are subordinate in function. (Matt 3:16-17; 28:18-20; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14) He is simple (Shedd, 1.338 = His being is uncompounded and indivisible; Berkhof = free from division into parts, that is, each attribute expresses God's being). This unity is not inconsistent with triunity, for unity is not the same as a unit. A unit is marked by mere singleness. The unity of God allows for the existence of a category of the divine nature, recognizing without contradiction that the divine nature is numerically and eternally one. Unity does not imply that the persons of the Trinity are not separate persons within the divine essence. God is one. But God is three persons, and each is equally and eternally God. Many, indeed almost all, sects and cults have broken with the doctrine of three persons and one essence.
  - 2) God means that an adequate world-view must include supernaturalism (miracles). Miracles with theism can be anticipated as a part of the biblical world-view (argument of C.S. Lewis). It was the advent of anti-supernaturalism c.1800 that they (miracles) became an issue.
- C. Analyzing the attributes
  - 1) Some attributes concern the divine essence, the unique, divine qualities of the transcendent Creator. Orthodox Christianity teaches that God is both transcendent (having His existence beyond the universe) and immanent (involved with the universe). It rejects extreme views of transcendence like deism which deny God's personal dealings with people or His intervention in the material creation (esp. the incarnation). It rejects extreme views of immanence which subject God to the limitations of material and finite existence, so that He could not be Lord of all, (from pantheism to finite godism).
  - 2) INFINITE, unlimited, without limitation in nature and existence (1 Kings 8:27; 1 Tim 1:17)
    - a. ETERNAL = infinity applied to time (past and future and over and beyond). Ps 90:1-2; 102:25-27; John 1:1; 1 Tim 6:15-16; Heb 9:14
    - b. SELF-EXISTENT = God is not caused nor dependent in any sense. Shedd, 1.338 = the ground of His existence is in Himself. Also called ASEITY. God is an uncaused being. Ex 3:14; Rev 1:8

c. THE INFINITY AND ETERNITY OF GOD: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES:

Different Conceptions of Time and Eternity  
(cf. Emil Brunner, Eternal Hope, pp. 42-57)

- A. The Mythical View -- the Cyclical View: time is connected with the changing seasons.
- B. The Indian and Greek View -- Timelessness
  - \* In the Vedanta Religion of India
  - \* In Plato and Neo-Platonism
  - \* That which truly is, is timeless
- C. Cullmann's View -- Linear Conception (cf. Christ and Time)
  - \* To think correctly about time and eternity we must think as unphilosophically as possible.
  - \* Eternity is endless time.
  - \* Christ is the mid-point of time.
  - \* God is the Lord over time. All that comes before Christ is fulfilled by Him. All that comes after Him is determined by Him.
- D. Emil Brunner's View -- God as the Lord of Time.  
(cf. Eternal Hope, Chapter 5)
  - 1. Brunner is dissatisfied with all of the above-mentioned views.
    - a. Against the cyclical view he says History has a purpose.
    - b. Against Timelessness he says the eternal has entered time in the Christ-event.
    - c. Against Cullman's Linear View he says the linear view is not peculiar to the New Testament. Rather it is what everyone means by time.
      - i. Time, contrary to Cullman, has a beginning and an end.
      - ii. There is a qualitative difference between God's mode of existence and ours.
  - 2. God is the Lord of Time
    - a. God is the Lord of history.
    - b. In Christ eternity has invaded time/space.

- c. Christ changes the way we relate to time.
  - i. He delivers us from the guilt of the past (justification).
  - ii. He frees us from anxiety about the future (glorification)
  - iii. Thus he enables us to live constructively in the present (sanctification)

#### The Meaning of Infinity and the Eternity of God

- A. God and God alone, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), is the self-existent one.
  - B. God is the Lord of time.
    - 1. Past, present and future are equally vivid to Him.
    - 2. He is not trapped in the time stream.
  - C. Time has meaning for God. Gal 4:4
  - D. If the eschaton is not completely static, i.e, timeless, in other words if anything happens, there will be a before and after, a sequencing of events, for God's creatures. In that case we have time whether we call it time or not.
3. IMMUTABLE, unchangeable in character, nature and existence. God is dependable. Mal 3:6; James 1:17

The focus of the Bible is on God's unchanging will for creation and his utter dependability. Any idea of a process God is foreign to the biblical revelation.

J. I. Packer, in his classic work Knowing God, (pp. 68, 72) is helpful at this point as he seeks to relate the biblical witness to our own contemporary experience. "But how can this sense of the remoteness from us of the biblical experience of God be overcome? Many things might be said, but the crucial point is surely this. The sense of remoteness is an illusion which springs from seeking the link between our situation and that of the various Bible characters in the wrong place. It is true that in terms of space, time, and culture, they, and the historical epoch to which they belonged, are a very long way away from us. But the link between them and us is not found at that level. The link is God Himself (underlining mine). For the God with whom they had to do is the same God with whom we have to do. We could sharpen the point by saying, exactly the same God; for God does not change in the least particular. Thus it appears that the truth on which we must dwell in order to dispel this feeling that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the position of men in Bible times and our own, is the truth of God's immutability. . If God is the same, this is not an issue that any one of us can evade."

- 4) GLORIOUS -- HOLY (Isa 6:3-5; Ex 33:18-23; 34:29-33; Lev 11:44-45; Hab 1:13; 1 Pet 1:16; Rev 4:8). Many consider this to be the most important or characteristic attribute of deity; an "umbrella attribute." God shines with perfection, and His

powerful presence radiates absolute righteousness, purity, and separation, prompting reverence and worship.

- 5) INDEPENDENT (FREE), God is not dependent for His being, will and activity. By implication, if we say we believe in the God of the Bible, we are saying something about ourselves as well: that we are creatures wholly dependent on God the Creator for our existence, our continuance, our circumstances, and our destiny. Rom 11:33-36.

D. Analyzing the attributes: some further observations

- 1) Other attributes concern God's personal relationships with mankind, whom He has chosen to communicate with and whose history He providentially governs to its fulfillment. The basis for God as personal to us is that we bear "the image of God" (Gen 1:26-28). People have personality to rule over the earth in fellowship with God. This is the basis of understanding God analogically as well. In some ways we are genuinely like Him.
- 2) God as personal has its highest expression in the covenant name Yahweh (Ex. 3): "I am the unchanging, eternal one who is making myself known to you"; And, of course, in the incarnate of Christ (John 1:14; Heb 1:1).

Packer again has a word for us (p. 44): "If I have been enabled to see this, and in mind and heart to go to Calvary and lay hold on the Calvary solution, then I can know that I truly worship the true God, and that He is my God, and that I am even now enjoying eternal life, according to our Lord's own definition, 'this is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3)."

- 3) OMNI (infinity applied to)-SCIENCE. God by nature and without effort knows everything actual and possible. Ps 139; Prov 15:3; Matt 6:8; 10:29-30; I John 3:20. God can know perfectly in prospect what I can know only imperfectly in retrospect.
  - a. God knows all about us
  - b. Nothing can be hidden from God (Matt 10:26; Heb 4:13)
  - c. God knows the future (Acts 1:7)
  - d. God's wisdom and knowledge is unfathomable (Ps 147:5; Rom 11:33).

WISE. God knows perfectly how to apply omniscience in accomplishing His righteous will for creation (Deut 4:5-8).

Packer, pp. 80-1. "Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it...wisdom without power would be pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes Him utterly worthy of our fullest trust."

\* Does God really and truly know all things without exception? Until the contemporary age this was not questioned, but times have changed. Paul Tillich calls such an interpretation of omniscience absurd (I, p. 278). Others focus on the future, anthropology and soteriological concerns. Even a neo-evangelical such as Clark Pinnock has questioned God's omniscience on soteriological (freewill) and philosophical (deterministic) grounds (Predestination and Free-Will, ed. David & Randall Basinger, p. 155-58).

Does God know the future in detail? If so, is there real freedom for humans?  
 Theologian Donald Bloesch, (Essentials of Evangelical Theology, I, p. 29) says:  
 "although God knows the future before it happens, he does not literally know the  
 concrete event until it happens." Bloesch takes this position to preserve human  
 freedom as he understands it. This is similar to Pinnock and an untenable position.

Basically, Three Main Positions with Regard to God's Knowledge of the Future Can  
 Be Outlined In This Regard: (per Bob Culpepper, former SEBTS prof. of  
 Theology).

- a. God knows every detail, and every detail is determined from above.
    - \* John Calvin, Institutes, III, xxi, 5; III, xxii, 8
    - \* Ulrich Zwingli, De Providentia, cf. Brunner, II, p. 171.
  - b. God's absolute knowledge of the future is limited in order to preserve freedom. God's omniscience is denied.
    1. Process Theology  
 (cf. Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, p. 57)  
  
 "Each divine creative impulse into the world is adventurous in that  
 God does not know what the result will be."
    2. Gordon Kaufmann, pp. 155-156: God's omniscience is not a  
 knowledge of facts-past, present and future -- but that of a loving  
 Creator and Father who grants his creatures genuine freedom.
  - c. An affirmation of God's complete knowledge of the Future and of Human Freedom.
 

Two foci:

    1. Humans must be free
    2. God's complete knowledge (past, present, future, and potential)  
 must be maintained. This position is justified on 3 grounds:
      - \* Biblical revelation
      - \* Necessary for Judgment
      - \* Necessary for Eschatology

Some would see little difference in positions a and c. Position c is  
 more antinomous.
4. OMNIPOTENCE. God by nature and without effort is able to accomplish and control anything actual and possible as expressed particularly in creation and providence/preservation (Gen 1; 17:1; Ex 6:3; Job 42:2; Ps 115:3; Matt 19:26; Luke 1:37).

Points of importance:

- a. God can do anything consistent with his own will and nature.
- b. No limitations are imposed on God from without.

- c. Limitations in God that do exist are self imposed.
- d. The omnipotence of God is expressed in divine holy love.
- e. Omnipotence is at the root of the absoluteness or infinity of God.

5. OMNIPRESENCE (Ps 139) = everywhere present. He not only fills space but He transcends space (immense). In God remoteness and proximity are one (1 Kings 8:27; Jer 23:23-24; Jonah; Acts 17:27-28).

Bob Culpepper says, "Finite beings are present here and not there. The Infinite being is present here and there because he is everywhere." God is present both generally and particularly.

(TRANSITION: the personal now shifts to a moral emphasis.)

6. LOVING. God selflessly accomplishes the good of His creation as expressed specifically in Christ's work for mankind (Ps 36:5; Jonah 4:2; John 3:16; I John 4:8).

Vine, Expository Dictionary, 2.21, "The deep and constant interest of a perfect being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the giver."

- a. GRACIOUS. God's unmerited favor upon the objects of His love (Ex 34:6; Ezek 16; Eph 1:3-8).

Packer, Knowing God, "The grace of God is love freely shown towards guilty sinners, contrary to their merit and indeed in defiance of their demerit," p. 120. Also, p. 226, ". . . grace means God's love in action towards men who merited the opposite of love."

Charles Baker, Dispensational Theology, p. 171, "Whereas mercy is God's attitude toward those in distress, grace is His attitude toward those who are ungodly and sinful. It will be noticed that in the apostolic salutations, grace always precedes mercy (I Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2, etc.)."

- b. MERCIFUL. God has compassion (or pity) for the helpless (Ex. 3:7, 16 2:23-25; 2 Sam 24:14; Ps 103:13; Lamen 3:21-23).
- c. LOYAL. ( Heb. hesed). God's steadfast loyalty and unswerving lovingkindness to His people in spite of their sinfulness (cf. eternal security, Ex. 34:6-7; Rom 8:38-39).
- d. JEALOUS. God is zealous in protecting His exclusive position, prerogatives, and relationships, especially with his covenant people but also all of his creation (Ex. 20:2-7).
- e. THE NATURE OF IDOLATRY
  - \* Rom 1 (what is it?) = worshipping the creature rather than the creator (cf. Gen 1).
  - \* Eph 5:5, Col 3:5 (why do we do it?) = motivation of creature-worship which is self-centeredness.



- \* the effect (result) is one of despair (from the impersonality and caprice of human projections) rather than blessing and joy in genuine, true worship.

7. **RIGHTEOUS (STANDARD), PERFECT -- HOLY.** God is not and cannot be evil in any sense, actual or possible, and this is the only standard of absolute perfection (Isa 6:3; 1 Pet 1:15-16 quoting Lev 11:44-45, etc.).

- a. **JUST.** The expression of righteousness in relationships (Deut 32:4; Ps 19:9; 84:14; Zeph 3:5; Rom 1; Acts 17:31).

C. S. Lewis, in his classic, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Macmillan, 1952), provides valuable food, (philosophical food) for thought:

*And, of course, that raises a very big question. If a good God made the world why has it gone wrong? And for many years I simply refused to listen to the Christian answers to this question because I kept on feeling "whatever you say, and however clever your arguments are, isn't it much simpler and easier to say that the world was not made by an intelligent power? Aren't all your arguments simply a complicated attempt to avoid the obvious?" But then that threw me back into another difficulty.*

*My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it? A man feels wet when he falls into water, because man is not a water animal: a fish would not feel wet. Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too -- for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist -- in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless -- I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality -- namely my idea of justice -- was full of sense. Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning; we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be without meaning. (underlining mine)*

- b. **TRUE.** God is self-consistent in His being and activity (Num 23:19; John 14:6; Titus 1:2).

"That perfection of His being by virtue of which He fully answers to the idea

of the Godhead, is perfectly reliable in His revelation, and sees things as they really are." (Berkhof)

8. WRATH. The settled and consistent response of God to violation(s) of His standard (Rom 1:18-32; 2:1-3:20).

Packer, p. 139, says, "The wrath of God in Romans denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin."

- E. A summarizing attribute: God is incomparable

1. In being: He is unique (Ex 15:11; Deut 4:34-39)
2. In values and priority: He is supremely WORTHY (Deut 6, Matt 22).

Our response: Packer cites Oswald Chambers, p. 253, and says, "The best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies, but its obedience." Colson says, "to love God is to obey God".

#### IV. ISSUES IN THE ATTRIBUTES

- A. The humanness of the divine or the divineness of the human (the image of God in Gen 1:26-28).

1. Problem: The issue of God's "repentance" in the biblical text and His immutability

- \* Ex 32:14
- \* 1 Sam 15:11,35
- \* Jonah 3:10

= God's repentance is expressed anthropomorphically, but it is clearly his appropriate response from His immutable character, personalness and righteousness to acceptance or rejection of His standard. It is not the changing of His nature or will, but His willing of a change rooted in His unchanging essence/being.

2. Problem: The incarnation and immutability

Issue: a new nature was added to the divine Person. The incarnation was not a subtraction of deity but an addition of humanity.

3. Issue: The emphasis on mutability in process theology (a radical recasting of truth in evolutionary terms in which God "actually" becomes (evolves) with everything else) and finite godism (Pinnock and Reichenbach in Predestination and Free Will), eds. Basinger and Basinger, Intervarsity, 1986). This is blatantly contrary to the biblical revelation. The biblical God is not a process God.

- B. God's infinite abilities and the problems of injustice and evil.

The problem is not God but rather man's perversion of creation after the fall. God permits the world to progress in its sin so that people can see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and be prompted to turn to Him. Interestingly, after all of the lessons of history sin is often denied by a vast portion of the world's population.

- C. Consistency of the divine personality, especially God's love and His wrath. God would be contradictory if He didn't have consistent responses to His standard/will.

## Faith in God at heavenly heights

By Leslie Miller  
USA TODAY

When it comes to religion, the USA is a land of believers.

Not only do 96% believe in God, a new USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll shows most Americans also believe in:

- Heaven, 90%.
- Miracles, 79%.
- Angels, 72%.

Belief in heaven is up 6% from 1981; angels and miracles were asked about just this year.

Do findings reflect wishful thinking? Not necessarily. Belief in hell and the devil also were up from past years.

Results don't surprise religion researchers.

"Americans have a tendency to take their religion straight, like their whiskey. That means don't water it down with an awful lot of intellectualism," says Conrad Cherry, Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University and Purdue University, Indianapolis.

The poll of 1,016 adults also shows more believe in:

- Reincarnation, 27% (up from 21% in 1990).
- Contact with the dead,

### On the rise

People say they believe in:

#### Heaven

'94 90%  
'81 84%

#### Hell

'94 73%  
'81 67%

#### The devil

'94 65%  
'91 52%

Source: USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup.  
Poll of 1,016 adults, Dec. 16-18.  
margin of error ± 3 percentage points.

By Marty Baumann, USA TODAY.

28% (18% in 1990).

This seems consistent with other surveys, says Jeffrey S. Levin, Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk. He's found "mystical" beliefs appear "more common with each successive generation."

But increases don't necessarily mean people didn't believe before, Levin says.

"Over the last decade or two, there's less of a social stigma to talking about one's faith," he says, including religious experiences. "Mystical things are more openly acknowledged."

USA Today Jan. 95

# V. SOME ALTERNATE MODELS FOR STUDYING GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

<b>A. H. Strong</b>	<b>L. S. Chafer</b>	<b>M. Erickson</b>	<b>H. Thiessen</b>
<b>ABSOLUTE</b>	<b>CONSTITUTIONAL</b>	<b>GREATNESS</b>	<b>ESSENCE</b>
Spirituality	Simplicity	Spirituality	Spirituality
Life	Unity	Personality	Incorporeal
Personality	Infinity	Life	Invisible
Infinity	Eternity	Infinity	Life
Self-existence	Immutability	Constancy	Personal
Immutability	Omnipresence		Self-existence
Unity	Sovereignty		Omnipresence
Perfection			Eternity
Truth			
Love			
Holiness			
<b>RELATIVE</b>	<b>PERSONALITY</b>	<b>GOODNESS</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>
Time and space	Omniscience	Moral purity	NON-MORAL
Eternity	Sensibility	Holiness	Omnipresence
Immensity	Holiness	Righteousness	Omniscience
Creation	Justice	Justice	Omnipotence
Omnipresence	Love	Integrity	Immutability
Omniscience	Goodness	Genuineness	MORAL
Omnipotence	Truth	Veracity	Holiness
Moral	Will	Faithfulness	Righteousness
Veracity	Freedom	Love	Justice
Faithfulness	Omnipotence	Benevolence	Goodness
Mercy		Grace	Truth
Goodness		Mercy	
Justice		Persistence	
Righteousness			

# VI. CONCLUSION

Packer, KG, p. 17, says, "What do I intend to do with my knowledge about God, once I have got it? For the fact that we have to face is this: that if we pursue theological knowledge for its own sake, it is bound to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited. The very greatness of the subject-matter will intoxicate us, and we shall come to think of ourselves as a cut above other Christians because of our interest in it; and we shall look down on those whose theological ideas seem to us crude and

inadequate, and dismiss them as very poor specimens. For, as Paul told the conceited Christians, 'knowledge puffeth up...(1 Cor 8:1 f.)...Our aim in studying the Godhead must be to know God Himself the better. Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance, not simply with the doctrine of God's attributes, but with the living God whose attributes they are. As He is the subject of our study, and our helper in it, so He must Himself be the end of it. We must seek, in studying God, to be led to God. It was for this purpose that revelation was given, and it is to this use that we must put it."

ATTRIBUTES OF THE TRIUNE GOD			
Attribute	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Life	Joshua 3:10	John 1:4	Romans 8:2
Omniscience	Psalms 139:1-6	John 4:17-18	1 Corinthians 2:10-12
Omnipotence	Genesis 1-2	John 1:3	Job 33:4
Omnipresence	Jeremiah 23:23-24	Matthew 28:20	Psalms 139:7-10
Eternity	Psalms 90:2	John 1:1	Hebrews 9:14
Holiness	Leviticus 11:44	Acts 3:14	Matthew 12:32
Love	1 John 4:8	Romans 8:37-39	Galatians 5:22
Truth	John 3:33	John 14:6	John 14:17

*"God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all."*

C. S. Lewis

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD			
KNOWABILITY	PERSONALITY	GREATNESS	CHARACTER
Incomprehensible Job 5:9 Romans 11: 33-36	Living Deuteronomy 5:26 Hebrews 10:31	Self Existent Psalm 36:9	Holy Isaiah 6: 1-5
Knowable John 17:3 I Cor. 2:11	Intelligent I Samuel 2:3	Eternal Deuteronomy 33:27	Truth Romans 3:4
	Purposive Ephesians 3:11	Immutable James 1:17	Love John 3:16
	Free Psalm 135: 5-9	Omnipresent Psalm 147:4	Righteous Psalm 145:17
	Self Conscious Exodus 3:14	Omnipotent Revelation 19:6	Faithful Deuteronomy 7:9
	Emotional Isaiah 62:5	Perfect Psalm 18:30	Merciful Deuteronomy 4:31
	Spirit John 4:24	Infinite Psalm 40:5	Grace Romans 3:24
		Incomprehensible	Wrath Romans 1:18
		Sovereign Ephesians 1: 3-23	

**The Attributes of God:  
Varieties of Categorization**

<b>THEOLOGIANs</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>
Henry C. Thiessen Vernon D. Doerksen	Non-moral	omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, immutability
	Moral	holiness, righteousness, justice, goodness, mercy, and truth
Augustus Hopkins Strong	Absolute/Immanent	Spirituality: life, personality Infinity: self-existence, immutability, unity. Perfection: truth, love, holiness
	Relative/Transitive	Related to time and space: eternity, immensity; Related to creation: omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence; Related to moral beings: truth, faithfulness, mercy, goodness (transitive love), justice, righteousness (transitive holiness)
William G.T. Shedd Charles Hodge Louis Berkhof Herman Bavinck	Incommunicable	Shedd/Hodge: self-existence, simplicity, infinity, eternity, immutability Berkhof: self-existence, immutability, unity, infinity (perfection, eternity, immensity) Bavinck: independence, self- sufficiency, immutability, infinity: eternity, immensity (omnipresence); oneness (numerical, qualitative)
	Communicable	Shedd/Hodge: wisdom, benevolence, holiness, justice, compassion, truth Berkhof: spirituality, intellectual, knowledge, wisdom, veracity, moral, goodness, holiness, righteousness, remunerative justice, retributive justice, sovereignty, sovereign will, sovereign power Bavinck: Life and Spirit - spirituality, invisibility, perfect in self- consciousness, knowledge, omniscience, wisdom, veracity, ethical nature- goodness, righteousness, holiness, Lord, King, Sovereign will, freedom, omnipotence, absolute blessedness- perfection, blessedness, glory

THEOLOGIANS	CATEGORIES	ATTRIBUTES
Millard J. Erickson	Greatness	spirituality, personality, life, infinity, constancy
	Goodness	Moral purity - holiness, righteousness, justice Integrity - genuineness, veracity, faithfulness Love - benevolence, grace, mercy, persistence
Gordon R. Lewis	Metaphysically	self-existent, eternal, unchanging
	Intellectually	omniscient, faithful, wise
	Ethically	holy, righteous, loving
	Emotionally	detests evil, long-suffering, compassionate
	Existentially	free, authentic, omnipotent
	Relationally	transcendent in being, immanent universally in providential activity, immanent with His people in redemptive activity

Although good systematic theology must be phrased in the language of the present and interact with and speak to contemporary concerns, it must be controlled by the biblical data. Any number of supposedly biblical theologies in our day are so heavily infected with contemporary, personalist, existential, or historical thinking as to render their biblical basis highly suspect, and the remark is even more relevant to current systematic theology.

D.A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament", Scripture and Truth, D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 82.



## Names God Uses To Describe Himself

1. **"I am, that I am"** (speaks of God's infinity and eternity) - I was, I am, I will always be. (Exodus 3:14)
  
2. **Elohim** - probably means "strong one" - El is the singular form. It was used also to describe heathen gods. Im is the plural suffix in Hebrew; it allows for distinctions within the Godhead. It may also refer to a "plurality of majesty" or "fullness of power." The term is used over 2,500 times in the OT.
  
3. **Jehovah** - the most specific name for God in the OT. It is God's covenant name with His people. It is actually an artificial English word for YHWH - Yahweh and Adonai (the vowels from Adonai combined with the consonants YHWH). The Jews would not say YHWH, but they would say Adonai. Its meaning is somehow connected with the Hebrew infinitive, "to be." (Ex. 6:6) Here it refers to God's power to release the Israelites from bondage. It occurs nearly 7,000 times in the OT. It is most often associated with (1) God's covenant relationship with His people; (2) holiness - Lev. 11:44-45; (3) hatred of sin - Gen. 26; (4) and provision for redemption - Is. 53:1,5,6,10.
  
4. **Adonai** - is the tetragrammaton (a substitute for YHWH, which the Jews would not pronounce). It is a basic designation for God, which means "Lord" or "master." It affirms:
  - a. The absolute authority of God (Ex. 1:21).
  - b. Isaiah in his commission by his master (Is. 6: 8-11).
  - c. The servant-master relationship. The servant owes allegiance to his master, and the master owes protection to his servant. In this regard, Christ is now our master, or owner, or Adonai.
  
5. **Compound Designations**
  - a. **El-elyon** (the most high) Genesis 14:22
  - b. **El-olan** (the everlasting God) Genesis 21:33; Is 40:28
  - c. **El-shaddai** (God almighty) Genesis 17:1; Ruth 1:20-21; Job- used 31 times

- d. **Yahweh-Jirah** (the Lord provides) used one time in Genesis 22:14
- e. **Yahweh-nissi** (the Lord is my banner) Exodus 17:15
- f. **Yahweh-shalom** (the Lord is peace) Judges 6:24
- g. **Yahweh-sabaoth** (the Lord of Hosts or armies) I Sam. 1:3
- h. **Yahweh-Maccaddeshcem** ( the Lord is the sanctifier) Exodus 31:13
- i. **Yahweh-Roi** (The Lord is our shepherd) Psalm 23:1
- j. **Yahweh-tsidkenu** (the Lord is our righteousness) Jer. 23:6
- k. **Yahweh-shammah** (the Lord is there) Ezek. 48:35
- l. **Yahweh-elohim** (the LORD God of Israel) Judges 5:3
- m. **Qadosh Israel** (the Holy One of Israel) Is. 1:4
- n. **Yahweh-rapha** (the Lord that healeth) Ex. 15:26

**\*\*** In the east (the Bible is an eastern Semetic book, not a western book) a name is more than an identification, it is descriptive of the bearer. As a result, all of the above-mentioned names are indications of God's nature, personality and character.

The Attributes of God
-----------------------

Based primarily upon L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th ed.  
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), pp. 57-81.

## I. THE INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

- A. Self-existence (synonyms: aseity, independence, freedom) - that perfection of God by which He has the ground (basis, foundation) of His existence in Himself. Exodus 3: 12-15; John 5:26; John 8:58

Note the name YAHWEH ("LORD"), the self-existent God, who reveals Himself and is faithful to His covenants.

- B. Immutability - that characteristic of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises.  
Malachi 3:6; James 1:17

Note two key concepts here: Erickson, p. 279

- 1) anthropomorphism - attributing human physical characteristics to God.
- 2) anthropopathism - attributing human emotions to God.

- C. Infinity - that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations.
1. Absolute perfection (the infinity of the divine Being considered in itself) - that quality of God whereby whatever He is and does is perfect beyond all creaturely ideas of perfection. Psalm 145:3; Matthew 5:48
  2. Eternity (the infinity of God in relation to time) - that perfection of God whereby He always was and always will be and is not bound by temporal limits. Psalm 90:2; II Peter 3:8
  3. Immensity (The infinity of God in relation to space) - that perfection of God by which He transcends all spatial limitations (transcendence - Isaiah 66:1), and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being (immanence, omnipresence, also ubiquity - Psalm 139: 7-10; Isaiah 57:15; Jeremiah 23: 23-24
- D. Unity (or singularity) - that perfection of God by which He is both numerically one (oneness - Deuteronomy 6:4) and (as such) unique (unicity). Exodus 15:11

## II. THE COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

- A. Personality - that characteristic of God by which He has the power of perfect self-consciousness and perfect self-determination.  
Exodus 34: 5-7; I John 1:3
- B. Spirituality - that perfection of God whereby He consists of a unique spiritual essence which is living, invisible, and without composition or extension.  
John 4:24; I Timothy 1:17; II Timothy 6: 15-16
- \* C. Omniscience (knowledge) - that perfection of God whereby He, in an entirely unique manner, knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act. Psalm 147:5; Romans 11:33; I John 3:20
- D. Wisdom - that perfection of God whereby He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. Romans 11: 33-34; Ephesians 3: 9-11
- E. Veracity - that perfection of God whereby He is absolutely true and faithful.  
Numbers 23:19; John 14:6; I John 5:20
- F. Goodness - that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all His creatures. Summum bonum - the highest good.  
Psalm 145:9, 15-16
1. love - that aspect of God's goodness by which He is eternally moved to communicate Himself and to give Himself (even at a great sacrifice) to His creatures. John 3:16; I John 3:1

God is love	I John 4:16	God's self-giving nature
God is Spirit	John 4:24	God's essential nature
God is Light	I John 1:5	God's revealing nature
God is a Consuming Fire	Hebrews 12:29	God's holy nature

2. grace (Gk., charis) - that aspect of God's goodness by which He manifests His unmerited favor and power to those who have forfeited it, and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation.
- a. saving grace - God's favor and power which lead to salvation  
( Romans 3:24, 4:16; I Corinthians 15:10; Ephesians 2:8;)

- b. common grace - God's favor and power to all people, even those who reject Him (Isaiah 26:10)
- c. sanctifying grace - God's favor and power in the life of the believer, purifying and enabling him to live and serve God effectively ( I Cor. 15:10)
- 3. mercy - that aspect of God's goodness shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of what they deserve. Psalm 145:9
- 4. longsuffering - (patience) - that aspect of God's goodness whereby He bears with evildoers in spite of their long continued disobedience. Exodus 34:6; II Peter 3:9.
- G. Holiness - that perfection of God whereby He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in His moral creatures. Leviticus 11:44-45; Psalm 34:9; Revelation 4:8 - fear of the Lord - reverential trust - Majestic holiness - the absolute majesty and greatness of God - Exodus 15:11
- H. Righteousness (justice) - that perfection of God which leads Him always to do what is right according to His own eternal law. Psalm 145:17; Daniel 9:14

Righteousness -- His character is right

Justice -- His actions are right

- \* I. Omnipotence - that perfection of God by which He is able, through the mere exercise of His will, to do whatever He wills to do. Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:37

Note - the name Elohim ("God"), "the strong one".

- \* J. Sovereignty - that perfection of God by which He is always in total control of every aspect of His creation. I Chronicles 29: 11-12; II Chronicles 20:6; Psalm 33:11

Note - also the name Adonai ("Lord")

\* These attributes probably fit better under the category of "incommunicable."

## A Response To God's Moral Attributes

- I. Holiness - Be Holy  
Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 1: 14-16
  
- II. Justice and Righteousness
  - A. We should also be just.  
I Kings 3:9; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1
  
  - B. Assurance that we will not be unjustly treated by Him.  
I Chronicles 21:13; Psalm 19:9; Zephaniah 3:5; Romans 2: 6-8; Ephesians 6: 7-8; Colossians 3:25
  
  - C. Perfection
    - 1. We should strive for God-like moral excellence in His power.  
Matthew 5:48
  
    - 2. Assurance that He will bring us to perfection.  
Psalm 18: 30-32; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 10:14
  
  - D. Jealousy - He alone should be the object of our ultimate devotion and love.  
Exodus 20:5; 34: 14-15; Psalm 78: 58-59; I Corinthians 10:21-22
  
  - E. Truthfulness
    - 1. We should pursue truth.  
John 4:24; Philippians 4:8
  
    - 2. Truth is absolute.  
Mark 13:31; Hebrews 6:18
  
  - F. Goodness and love - Do good to all men.  
John 15: 12-13; Galatians 6:10; I John 4:7

## An Additional Word on God's Attributes

UNLIKE -	<p>God is Different in being (essence, kind) from ALL creatures. UNIQUE. DIVINE. THE ONE AND ONLY TRUE GOD. This can be seen best in creation accounts.</p> <p>A. He ALONE is self existent, transcendent CREATOR B. The fall is caused by humanity's disobedient, a rebellious attempt to be "Like Him"</p> <p>WE MUST NOT CONFUSE THE "DIVINE" AND "HUMAN"</p>
LIKE +	<p>God is PERSONAL, providentially immanent (involved) in the affairs of the world through His mediators (human and angelic). THE INCOMPARABLE KING of kings. This can be seen best in the Exodus accounts (Ex. 3, 32-34).</p> <p>WE MUST NOT CONFUSE "PERSONAL" AND "HUMAN"</p>
BOTH ±	<p>God is absolutely, immutably (unchangingly) HOLY (perfect) in His being, character, and will (Lev. 11:44, 19:2, 20:7). His UNIQUE holiness is to be REFLECTED in the progressive RIGHTEOUSNESS of His people (an attribute which seems to lie between 1 and 2 above). DIVINE ESSENCE is a basis for HUMAN CHARACTER. BE HOLY (command) for (not as) I AM HOLY (absolutely, unchangingly). I Peter 1:16</p>

### Suggestion for Systematic Study

1. The Holy of Holies: the divine presence among the nation.
2. The Logos "shekinahed" among us (John 1:14): God's mediating presence in the incarnation.
3. You (the church) are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19): personal, indwelling presence of the Spirit - Trinity.
4. The cubical Tabernacle (Rev. 21): eternal, glorified presence of, with, in, through the Trinity.



## THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ESSENCE

### I. PRINCIPLES.

A. God is One in essence: the Oneness of God and/or the glory of God refer to His essence (John 10:30).

B. All of the characteristics of Divine Essence are resident in God, but not all are manifest at one time.

1. Certain situations in life bring out certain characteristics.
2. Illustration of light: all of the colors are present in a white ray of light, but are manifest only under certain conditions of refraction and reflection.

C. Examples of Divine Essence:

1. In salvation, love and eternal life are manifest.
2. In judgment, righteousness and justice are manifest.
3. In faithfulness, immutability and veracity are manifest.
4. In God's plan, omniscience and sovereignty are manifest.
5. In God's will, sovereignty is manifest.
6. In God's revelation, veracity, love and omniscience are manifest.

### II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE "ESSENCE BOX."

#### A. Sovereignty.

1. God is the Supreme Being of the universe (Deut. 4:39; 1 Sam. 2:6-8; 1 Chro. 29:11; 2 Chro. 20:6; Psal. 83:18; Isa. 45:5,6; Acts 17:24a).
2. King of heaven and earth (Psa. 47:2; 93:1a; Matt. 6:13b; Heb. 8:1; Rev. 4:2,3,11).
3. Eternal (Psa. 93:2), infinite (Psa. 8:1; Acts 5:39; Heb. 6:13), and self-determining (Job 9:12; Psal. 115:3; 135:6; Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:35).
4. Expression of divine volition (Isa. 46:10b; Eph. 1:5), resulting in a plan for humanity (Psa. 24; Heb. 6:17).

a. Salvation (John 1:13; Rom. 9:15-23).

b. Post-salvation conduct and provision (Eph. 4:4-13).

S	O
+R	O
J	O
L	I
E.L.	V

5. Application to unbeliever! Although God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9), He cannot and will not coerce His absolute will against the volition He gave man (John 7:17; 3:36; Rev. 22:17).
6. Application to believer: Acts 9:6a; 13:22; Eph. 1:4-6; Phil. 2:13.

### B. Righteousness.

1. God is absolutely holy or righteous (Lev. 19:2b; 1 Sam. 2:2; Psal. 22:3; 47:8; 111:9; Isa. 6:3; John 17:11; Rev. 3:7; 4:8; 6:10).
2. Good (Psal. 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 119:68; Luke 18:19).
3. Free from sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 1:5).
4. Perfect in His character and Person (Deut. 32:4b; Psal. 7:9; 11:7; 97:6; 111:3; 119:137a; Jer. 23:6; John 17:25a; Rom. 1:17; 10:3; 1 John 2:29).
5. Therefore, He is righteous in all His attitudes and actions (Deut. 32:4a; 2 Sam. 22:31a; Psal. 119:137b; 145:17; Dan. 9:14; Rev. 19:2).
6. Application to unbeliever:

- a. God's concept of righteousness is absolute. He cannot fellowship with sin. He must demand the same perfection in His creatures.
- b. Man's concept of righteousness is relative (Isa. 64:6).
- c. No one can measure up to the divine standard (Psal. 14:3; Rom. 3:23) nor achieve absolute righteousness by self-effort (Tit. 3:5).
- d. However, the righteousness of God is available to all who believe (Rom. 3:22).

7. Application to believer: Rom. 6:13,18; 1 Tim. 6:11; 1 John 1:9.

### C. Justice.

1. It is impossible for God to do anything unfair. God's judgments are perfect and demand perfection. Justice administers the penalty which righteousness demands (Deut. 32:4; 2 Chro. 19:7; Job 37:23; Psal. 19:9; 50:6b; 58:11; 89:14; Isa. 45:21; Jer. 50:7; Rom. 3:26; Heb. 10:30,31; 12:23; 1 John 1:9; Rev. 15:3).
2. Divine justice is best exemplified in the plan of redemption:

- a. The Lord Jesus Christ, through His vicarious, efficacious, spiritual death (1 Pet. 2:24), transferred the guilt of the sinner (Rom. 5:12; 6:23) upon Himself, and thus satisfied the perfect justice of God.
- b. God is now free to pardon and justify the sinner who accepts His saving grace (Rom. 3:21-28; 4:5; 8:1).
- c. God is equally free to justly condemn all who reject salvation (John 3:18,36; John 5:28-30).
- d. The basis of their indictment is WORKS, never sins (Rev. 20:11-15).

3. Judgment is committed to Him who was judged for us (John 5:22; Heb. 9:27,28).

4. Application to believer: 1 Cor. 11:31; 1 John 4:17.

### D. Love.

1. God is eternal and unchangeable love (Jer. 31:3).



2. The infinite, boundless love of God compelled Him to reach out to the ones who are loved.
3. Application to unbeliever:
  - a. God's righteousness cannot fellowship with sin; furthermore, His justice must demand a penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23a).
  - b. Therefore, a barrier, which was insurmountable by man (who, in his fallen state, was doomed to eternal separation from God — Isa. 59:2), stopped the love of God from coming through to man.
  - c. This barrier was removed en toto at the cross (Isa. 63:9b; Luke 19:10; John 10:17; 15:13; 16:27; Rom. 5:8-11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4).
4. In setting forth saving grace, divine love was threefold:
  - a. The Father's love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9).
  - b. The Son's love (1 John 3:16a).
  - c. The Holy Spirit's love (John 16:8-11; 1 Cor. 2:9-11).
5. Application to believer:
  - a. Those who appropriate the grace of God in salvation are accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6) and cannot be separated from the love of God (Rom. 8:38,39).
  - b. The love of God is produced in the life of the Spirit-filled believer (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22,23) and manifests itself in love toward others (1 John 4:7-21).

#### E. Eternal Life.

1. God is absolute existence, Jehovah, "the self-existent One who reveals Himself" (Ex. 3:14; John 8:58).
2. God has neither beginning (existed in eternity past) — Gen. 1:1a; Isa. 43:13a; Col. 1:17, nor end (will exist forever) — Deut. 32:40; 33:27; Job. 36:26; Psa. 9:7; 90:2; 102:27; 135:13; Lam. 5:19; Hab. 3:6; John 1:1-4; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 5:11; Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13.
3. Application to unbeliever: Rejection of Christ — eternal punishment (John 8:24; Matt. 25:46a).
4. Application to believer: Eternal life in Christ (John 3:16; 10:28,29; 1 John 5:11); Assurance (John 8:51; 14:1-3).

#### F. Omniscience.

1. God is all-knowledge (1 Sam. 2:3; Job 26:6; 31:4; 34:21; 37:16; 42:2b; Psa. 139:1-6,12; 147:4; Jer. 16:17; Ezek. 11:5; Matt. 10:29,30; Heb. 4:13).
2. Infinite in wisdom and understanding (1 Sam. 16:7; Psa. 44:21; 147:5b; Prov. 3:19; 5:21; 17:3; Isa. 40:13,14; Jer. 17:10; 51:15; Nah. 1:7; Matt. 6:8; Rom. 8:27; 11:33; 1 John 3:20).
3. Knowing the end from the beginning (foreknowledge): (Isa. 41:26; 42:9; 43:9; 46:10; Acts 2:23; 15:18; 1 Pet. 1:2a).
4. As God, the Lord Jesus Christ knew all things and all men (Matt. 9:4; John 2:24; 19:28; 21:17).
5. Application to believer: Job 23:10; Matt. 6:31,32; John 13:7; Rom. 8:28; Col. 1:10; Jas. 1:5; 3:17.

#### G. Omnipresence.

1. God is ever-present, neither limited by time nor space, immanent and transcendent (Jer. 23:24; Acts 17:27).
2. The heavens cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24b).
3. Heaven is His throne, the earth His footstool (Deut. 4:39; Isa. 66:1b).

4. Man cannot escape the presence of God (Job 34:21,22; Psa. 139:7-10; Prov. 15:3).
5. Application to believer: Promise and comfort of His presence (Gen. 28:15; Ex. 33:14; Josh. 1:9; Psa. 121:3,4; Matt. 18:20; 28:20b; 1 Cor. 3:16; Heb. 13:5).

#### H. Omnipotence.

1. God is all-powerful; limitless in ability, within the range of His holy character (Gen. 17:1; 18:14; Job 26:7; 42:2; Psa. 24:8; 93:1b; 147:5a; Isa. 40:26; 50:2; Jer. 27:5; 32:27; Matt. 19:26; Mark 14:36a; Luke 1:37; Rev. 4:8).
2. Limitless in authority (Psa. 33:9; Rom. 13:1; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 19:6).
3. Manifestation of His power (2 Chro. 16:9; 25:8; Psa. 74:13).
4. Power of the Son (Matt. 9:8; 28:18; John 10:18; 17:2,3).
5. Application to believer: 1 Sam. 17:47; Psa. 27:1; Isa. 26:4; 40:29; Jer. 33:3; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 1:19; 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:5.

#### I. Immutability.

1. God is neither capable of nor susceptible to change (Psa. 102:26,27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:12).
2. He is absolute stability (Isa. 40:28; Jas. 1:17).
3. His Word and His works are unchanging (Psa. 119:89; Eccl. 3:14; Isa. 40:8).
4. From His immutability stems His great faithfulness (Psa. 36:5; 89:33; 119:90; Lam. 3:23).
  - a. Faithful to keep His promises (Num. 23:19; 1 Kings 8:56; 2 Cor. 1:20; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 10:23; 11:11).
  - b. Faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9).
  - c. Faithful to keep us saved (2 Tim. 2:12,13).
  - d. Faithful to deliver in pressure (1 Cor. 10:13) and faithful in suffering (1 Pet. 4:19).
  - e. Faithful in providing a partnership with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9).
  - f. Faithful to provide in eternity (1 Thess. 5:24).
  - g. Faithful to stabilize the believer (2 Thess. 3:3).
5. The faithfulness of Christ (Heb. 3:1,2; 13:8; Rev. 1:5; 19:11).

#### J. Veracity.

1. God is absolute Truth (Deut. 32:4b).
2. His veracity is manifested in His ways (Psa. 25:10; 86:15; Rev. 15:3).
3. In His works (Psa. 33:4; 111:7,8; Dan. 4:37).
4. In His Word (2 Sam. 7:28; 1 Kings 17:24; Psa. 19:9; 119:142,151; Psa. 138:2; John 8:45; 17:17; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13).
5. The veracity of the Godhead:
  - a. The Father Psa. 31:5; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 10:10a; John 3:33; 17:3; Rom. 3:4).
  - b. The Son (John 1:14; 8:32; 14:6; 1 John 5:20; Rev. 16:7; 19:11).
  - c. The Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6).
6. Application to believer (Prov. 6:16,17; Matt. 5:37; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 John 4:6).
7. Application to unbeliever: (Isa. 38:19b; Psa. 69:13).

## **“Some Thoughts on God, His Sovereignty, and His Decrees”**

“All things are included in God’s plan, but some things He causes and others He permits.”--E.H. Bancroft, Elemental Theology, p. 65

“Sinful acts, for example, do not frustrate the plan of God, but neither is God the author of them. They are within the scope of God’s decree and are part of His eternal plan and purpose, but man is nonetheless responsible for sinful acts.”--Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p.205

“The most important aspect of the Divine decree is, that it brings all things that come to pass in space and time into a *plan*. There can be no system of the universe, if there be no one Divine purpose that systematizes it. Schemes in theology which reject the doctrine of the divine decree, necessarily present a fractional and disconnected view of God, man, and nature.”--Shedd, p.398-9.

When people die, you will hear some people say that God called that person. I don’t believe that. I mean I believe in God but I am not accepting that.... Yes, there may be some people that God will call in my mind. But God didn’t call Ennis [Cosby’s son]. It wasn’t his time. The person who murdered Ennis is somewhere out there riding with the Devil.--Bill Cosby, *Newsweek*, March 17, 1997

“amid all the darkness, we can yet see that God is so overruling sin as to cause it greatly to redound to his glory and the happiness of his creatures.”--James P. Boyce, Abstract of Systematic Theology, (Christian Gospel Foundation, 1887), p. 123

“A distinction must be made between the decree and its execution,”--Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1941), p.102-3

# "Why God is not Mother": A response to feminist God-talk in the church.

CHRISTIANITY  
TODAY

By Dr. Elizabeth Achtemeier

*Sexuality and gender issues continue to have a profound impact on church and society. Now some feminist thinkers are challenging the idea of God as our heavenly Father. (Fortunately, most evangelical feminists are more interested in fairness than in revising names for God.)*

*Elizabeth Achtemeier believes the issues in this debate penetrate to the core of the Christian faith. Not all readers will agree with every aspect of her analysis (as, for instance, our own J. I. Packer and Kenneth Kantzer disagree with each other about women's ordination). Most readers, however, will agree with Achtemeier's conviction about what is at stake.*

**N**O ASPECT OF THE FEMINIST movement promises to affect the church's life more basically than that movement's attempts to change language for God. Rather than refer to God as Father, many feminists insist, Christians must be more "inclusive" in how they speak to or about God.

With the introduction of the first volume of the National Council of Churches' *Inclusive-Language Lectionary* in 1983, such language has steadily made its way into the Scriptures, prayers, liturgies, hymns, and publications of the mainline churches, often to the dismay of the people in the pews. While inclusive language for God is less hotly debated in evangelical churches, the issue has wide implications and relevance for all Christians.

The radical feminists argue that women in the church have been oppressed since the first century, and that language has contributed to the oppression. By the use of generic terms such as *man* and *mankind*, males have come to be seen as the definition of what it means to be human. And the use of masculine titles and pronouns for God absolutizes maleness and gives men the right to rule over women. "Since God is male," radical feminist Mary Daly says, "the male is God." Claims feminist theologian Anne Carr, "God as father rules over the world, holy fathers rule over the church, clergy fathers over laity, males over females, husbands over wives and children, man over the created world." Such a hierarchical worldview must be abolished, say these feminists, and one way to do that is by changing our language.

In many respects, women have legitimate cause for concern. They have suffered discrimination in the church for centuries. They have been denied respect for their learning and persons. They have been labeled the source of sin in the world. They have been kept from key leadership roles because they do not biologically "resemble Christ." Discrimination continues today, with the Bible misused as its instrument.

Such discrimination is a corruption and fundamental denial of the Christian gospel. The Scriptures clearly proclaim that both female and male are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), that husband and wife are to join flesh in a marital union of mutual helpfulness (Gen 2:18); that the ancient enmity between the sexes and the subservience of women are a result of human sin (Gen. 3), that such enmity and subservience have been overcome by the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that all women and men are called equally to discipleship in the service of their risen Lord. The Scriptures further show that our Lord consistently treated women as equals and that the New Testament churches could have women as their leaders.

It therefore seems only fair for feminists in the church to ask that the church's language about *human beings* be changed to include them, so that males no longer define humanity. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible takes seriously that request, and in its translation, generic English terms have been changed to reflect the meaning of the original texts. For example, John 12:32 now reads, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people [rather than 'men'] to myself."

There is, however, a great difference between feminism as fairness and feminism as ideology, as Catholic thinker Richard John Neuhaus has cogently pointed out, and it is in relation to language about God that some feminists are most radically ideological. By attempting to change the biblical language used of the deity, these feminists have in reality exchanged the true God for those deities which are "no gods," as Jeremiah put it (2:11).

## Is "HE" REALLY "SHE"?

**T**HE FEMINIST CLAIM IS THAT ALL language about God is analogical and metaphorical, and that therefore it can be changed at will to overcome the church's patriarchy and foster women's liberation. The radical feminists therefore seek to eliminate all masculine terminology used of God, either by supplementing it with feminine terminology or by using only neuter or female images for the deity.

In speaking of God and Christ, some simply use *she* and *her*. For the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, others substitute *Creator*, *Liberator*, and *Comforter*. They avoid the excessive use of terms such as *Father*, *King*, and *Master* by substituting *God*, *Yahweh* (the Hebrew name for God), or *Abba* (an affectionate Aramaic word for Father). In *An Inclusive Lectionary*, the Bible's *Father* is changed to *Father (and Mother)*; *Lord to Sovereign*; *King to Ruler or Monarch*; *Son of Man to Human One*; and *Son of God to Child of God*.

Theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether consistently calls

her deity *Godless*, while Jewish feminist Rita Gross uses *God-She*. Others apply feminine usage only to the Holy Spirit or avoid the problem altogether by using impersonal terms for God such as *Wisdom*, *Holy One*, *Rock*, *Fire*, and *First and Last*, or neuter terms like *Liberator*, *Maker*, *Defender*, *Friend*, and *Nurturer*. Jesus is described as a male only in his earthly life, while he becomes *Liberator*, *Redeemer*, and *Savior* in his representation of the new humanity.

Those who attempt to justify such changes in biblical usage point to female imagery for God in the Bible or claim that the Catholic cult of Mary furnishes us with a tradition of female language and imagery in speaking of the divine. "If we do not mean that God is male when we use masculine pronouns and imagery," asks Rita Gross, "then why should there be any objections to using female imagery and pronouns as well?" She continues, "Female God language compels us to overcome the idolatrous equation of God with androcentric [man-centered] notions of humanity in a way

that no other linguistic device can."

Several things must be said in reply:

- *Biblical scholars agree universally that the God of the Bible has no sexuality.* Sexuality is a structure of creation (Gen. 1-2), confined within the limits of the creation (Matt. 22:30), and the God of the Bible is consistently pictured as totally "other" than all creation. This is what the Bible means when it says that God is "holy": he is "set apart." "I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst," he says in Hosea 11:9. "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" asks the prophet (Isa. 40:18).

By thus insisting on female language for God, the radical feminists simply continue to emphasize the nonbiblical view that God does indeed have sexuality. In fact, some of them have misused the biblical concept of the image of God to say that God must be female as well as male, since both sexes are made in God's image (Gen 1:27). That is a complete (or fundamental) distortion of the biblical understanding of

## Encountering the Goddess at Church

Recently I went to the regular Thursday Holy Communion service at the theological school where I teach. A highly visible feminist leader led the service, an ordained minister who has for some time had an uncommon fixation on the worship of the goddess Sophia, or *Wisdom*, poetically described as the agent of creation in a few biblical passages.

I come from a tradition that views Communion as a sacrament that unites the body of Christ. In all my 60 years of participation in the United Methodist Church, I have never seriously considered withdrawing from a Communion service because of a scrupulous conscience. This time I struggled with whether to attend at all. At one point, I told myself I should not because I might be tempted to do or say something rash. (The ugly fantasy of dumping over the Communion table flitted through my mind.) No, that would merely cause a stir and tend toward scandal and disunity. And this *is* my worshiping community, so I felt I had a right to receive the sacrament duly administered, even if occasionally by an unworthy minister. I decided I must go.

### Bad poetry, worse theology

Our first hymn, entitled "Sophia," sang the praise of the goddess Sophia, who "ordains what God will do." "She's the teacher we esteem, and the subject of life's theme." This was bad poetry, sung

to the tune of *Salve Regina*, which Catholics sing in honor of the mother of the incarnate Lord.

With this surrogate hymn I began to feel more queasy. I wondered if I was in a place where some Lord other than Jesus Christ was being worshiped.

Then came the homily, addressed solely to feminists and those who readily make concessions to radical feminists' demands. In the name of inclusiveness, all other audiences were demeaned and excluded.

The sermon focused not on a Scripture text, but on an event in the woman's experience as a feminist preacher. It was a "victory" story in which a pious Methodist lay leader and other members were driven out of her church and forced to join another after they challenged her authority to offer the Lord's Supper in the name of the goddess Sophia. She recounted triumphantly how she had preached on the virtues of doctrinal diversity and invited all members who did not agree with her to look for another church. She was apparently oblivious to the fact that in the name of inclusiveness she was practicing exclusion.

Scripture was imported occasionally into the service, but it was culled chiefly from the Apocrypha, Proverbs, and Psalms. She quoted the apocryphal Sirach, but only passages that seem to reify Wisdom into a deity distinguishable from the triune God. Then, incredi-

bly, she likened the yoke of discipleship to sadistic and masochistic sex.

Could I in good conscience receive Holy Communion under these circumstances? I began to consider how I might inconspicuously withdraw from the service. And I confess that for a brief moment I did ponder a comic response: going calmly to receive Holy Communion while holding my nose. But that seemed out of sync with the very nature of the service of Communion.

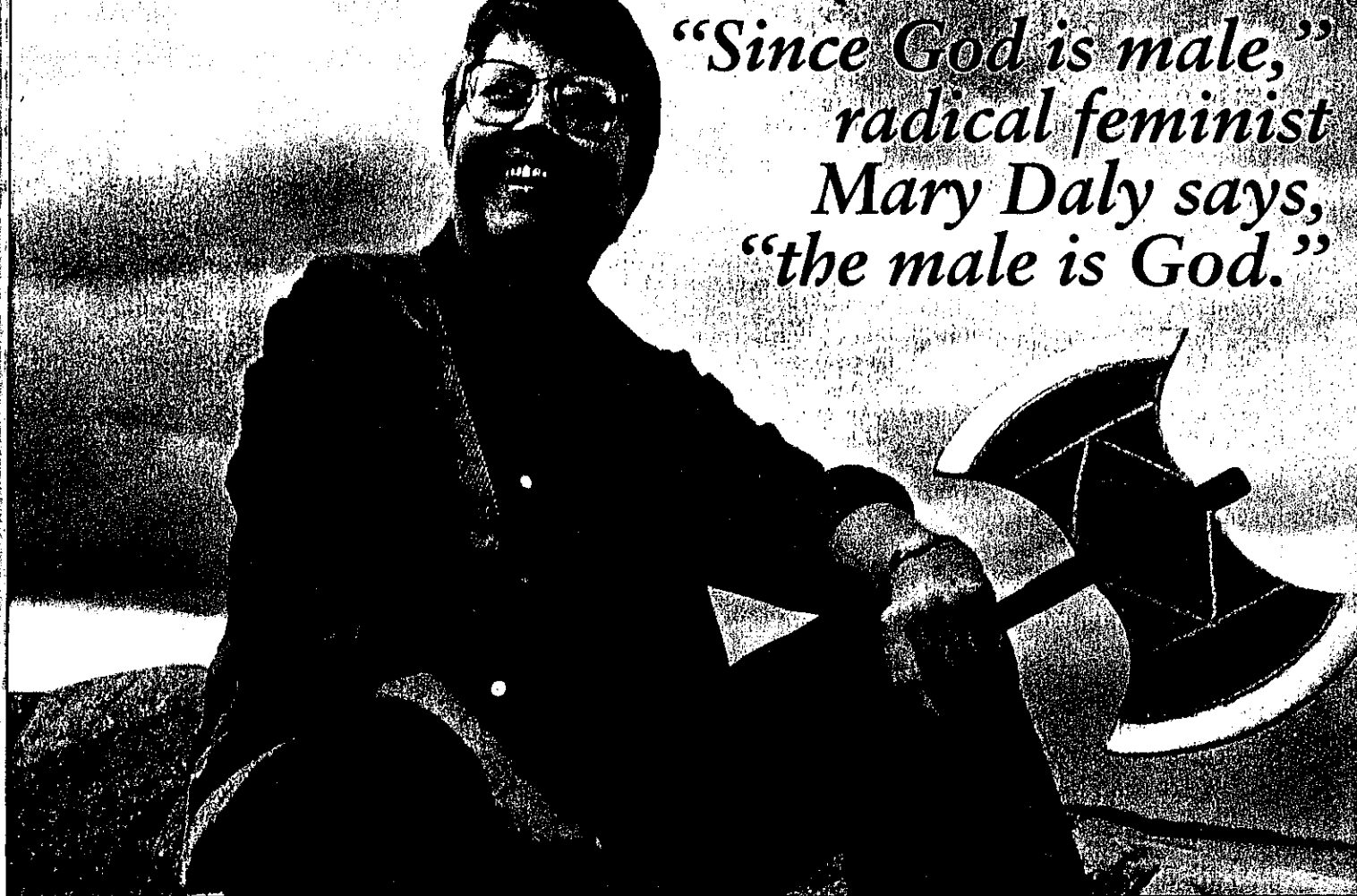
I prayed for wisdom to know what to do—not to her goddess but to God, who by grace illumines our hearts and minds.

The preacher herself gave me the decisive clue. She urged those present not to wait to assert their authority in worship. She then offered the invitation to come to the Lord's Table, not in the Lord's name, but in the name of the goddess who was speaking through Christ. We were invited to Christ's table, but only in Sophia's name.

That did it. I decided that she was inadvertently correct, that I could not delay in attesting the authority of Christ in the worship service. As we were "passing the peace," I grasped the hands of two or three women nearby, then quietly left. As I went down the steps from the chapel, I gave hearty thanks to God for his kind counsel of wisdom in a profoundly knotty situation. □

By Thomas Oden.

*"Since God is male,"  
radical feminist  
Mary Daly says,  
"the male is God."*



God, who is without sexual characteristics.

- *The few instances of feminine imagery for God in the Bible all take the form of simile, not metaphor*, as literary critic Roland Frye has amply demonstrated. That distinction is instructive. A simile compares one aspect of something to another. For example, in Isaiah 42:14, God will "cry out like a woman in travail," but only his *crying out* is being referred to; he is not being identified as a whole with the figure of a woman in childbirth. In metaphors, on the other hand, the whole of one thing is compared to the whole of another. God is Father or Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Thus the metaphor, as Frye writes, "carries a word or phrase far beyond its ordinary lexical meaning so as to provide a fuller and more direct understanding of the subject." Language is stretched to its limit, beyond ordinary usage, to provide new understanding.

- *The Bible uses masculine language for God because that is the language with which God has revealed himself.* Biblical Christian faith is a revealed religion. It claims no knowledge of God beyond the knowledge God has given of himself through his words and deeds in the histories of Israel and of Jesus Christ and his church. In fact, it is quite certain that human beings, by searching out God, cannot find him. Unless God reveals himself, he remains unknown to humanity.

But the God of the Bible *has* revealed himself. Contrary to modern theologies (such as that of Sallie McFague) that claim God is the great Unknown and that therefore human beings must invent language for God, the God of the Bible has revealed himself in five principal metaphors: King, Father, Judge, Husband, and Master, and then finally, deci-

sively, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we ask, "What is the actual nature of God?" we must reply, "God is the Father of Jesus Christ." As the Episcopal writer Alvin Kimel explains,

God is not just like a father; he is *the* Father. Jesus is not just like a son; he is *the* Son. The divine Fatherhood and Sonship are absolute, transcendent, and correlative. . . . The relationship between Christ Jesus and his Father, lived out in the conditions of first-century Palestine and eternally established in the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, belongs to the inner life of God. It constitutes the identity of the Almighty Creator. . . . "Father" is not a metaphor imported by humanity onto the screen of eternity; it is a name and filial term of address revealed by God himself in the person of his Son.

If one believes that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh, the Son of God incarnate in time and space—a belief that feminists such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether and a host of others would deny—then there is no contradiction that can be made to the particularity of God's self-revelation. God is not just any god, capable of being named according to human fancy. No, God is the one whom Jesus reveals as his Father.

## GOD DEFINES HIMSELF

**W**E FIND THE SAME PARTICULARITY in the Hebrew Scriptures. Once again, God is not to be identified with just any god. For this reason, the central commandment in the Bible, first contained in Deuteronomy 6:4, begins with,

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." That is, the God of Israel is not identical with the diffuse gods known to other peoples but is one particular God who has done particular things in particular times and places. Principally, he is "the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2 and throughout the Old Testament). If Israel asks who God is, the reply is that he is the God of the Exodus. And it is that God of the Exodus whom Jesus also reveals to be his Father (see Mark 12:29-30). God defines himself in the Bible, through centuries of acting and speaking in the life of his covenant people, and it is only through that self-revelation, now handed down to us in the Scriptures, that we have any knowledge of him.

Several questions arise, however. The first is this: Why does God reveal himself primarily in personal terms? If God has no sexuality, if he is Spirit (John 4:24), then why does he not name himself through the medium of impersonal, metaphorical language? Why are not his primary designations Rock, Fire, Living Water, Bread, Way, Door, Refuge, Fortress, and other such metaphors found throughout the Scriptures? Put another way, why does the Bible insist on those awkward anthropomorphisms for God, in which he is described as having hands and feet and mouth like a person, and which are finally brought to their ultimate anthropomorphism in the incarnation of Jesus Christ? Why a personal God when God transcends all human personality?

For one, a God named primarily Rock or Door does not demand that we do anything. All those impersonal biblical metaphors for God are encompassed within a principal revelation of God as supremely personal. The God of the Bible meets us Person to person and asks from us the total commitment of ourselves: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5); "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). God asks of us primarily love in return for his love that was manifested in his dealings with us: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1); "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). No impersonal designations of God, except they be explained by the Bible's personal names for him, can adequately express that gracious and demanding relationship of love with himself into which God woos and calls us.

More pressing for the radical feminists, however, is the question of why God reveals himself only in masculine terms. Scholar Elaine Pagels is quite correct when she states that "the absence of feminine symbolism of God marks Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in striking contrast to the world's other religious traditions, whether in Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome, or Africa, Polynesia, India, and North America." But why could a personal God not have revealed himself in feminine metaphors instead? God is never called Mother in the Bible and is never addressed or thought of as a female deity. That was unique in the ancient Near Eastern world; Israel was surrounded by peoples who worshiped female deities—Asherah and Anat, Nut and Isis, Tiamat and the Queen of Heaven, Demeter and Artemis. And such a masculine conception of the deity is still unique in our world.

The radical feminists argue that the names for God in the Bible have been determined by the patriarchal cultures out of which the Bible arose, but that argument founders on the revelation in Jesus Christ, as we have seen. These feminists

have a very difficult time with God the Father and the Son, although some of them hold that the feminine element is introduced by the Holy Spirit, even though the Spirit, too, proceeds from the Father and from the Son and is one with them. No, the Bible's language for God is masculine, a unique revelation of God in the world.

The basic reason for that designation of God is that the God of the Bible will not let himself be identified with his creation, and, therefore, human beings are to worship not the creation but the Creator (Rom. 1:25). To be sure, God works in his creation through the instruments of his Word and Spirit; he orders his creation and sustains it; he constantly cares for it; but he is never identified with it. And it is that holiness, that otherness, that transcendence of the Creator, that also distinguishes biblical religion from all others.

## A GOD WHO BREAST-FEEDS?

IT IS PRECISELY THE INTRODUCTION of female language for God that opens the door to such identification of God with the world, however. If God is portrayed in feminine language, the figures of carrying in the womb, of giving birth, and of suckling immediately come into play. For example, feminist Virginia Ramey Mollenkott writes of "the undivided One God who births and breast-feeds the universe." The United Church of Christ's *Book of Worship* prays, "You have brought us forth from the womb of your being." A feminine goddess has given birth to the world! But if the creation has issued forth from the body of the deity, it shares in deity's substance; deity is in, through, and under all things, and therefore everything is divine. Holding such a worldview, Mollenkott can say that "our milieu" is "divine," just as Zsuzsanna E. Budapest can go even further and write, "This is what the Goddess symbolizes—the divine within women and all that is female in the universe. . . . The responsibility you accept is that you are divine, and that you have power." If God is identified with his creation, we finally make ourselves gods and goddesses—the ultimate and primeval sin (Gen. 3).

But we can never rightly understand ourselves and our place in the universe, the Bible tells us, until we realize that we are not gods and goddesses. Rather, we are creatures, wondrously and lovingly made by a sovereign Creator: "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves" (Ps. 100:3). The Bible will use no language that undermines that confession. It therefore eschews all feminine language for God that might open the door to such error, and it is rigorous in its opposition to every other religion and cultic practice that identifies creation with creator.

The principal fight found in Deuteronomy through 2 Kings and in the prophets is with Canaanite baalism and with Mesopotamian star worship, in which God has been identified with his world. The New Testament implicitly endorses the separation of creation and Creator by carefully stating that before there was the creation, there was the Word and the Word was God (John 1:1). Indeed, prophets and psalmists and the New Testament are quite certain that the world may pass away, but God will not pass away, because God and his world are not one (Pss. 46:1-2; 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; Mark 13:31 and parallels).

God, the biblical writers are saying, is in no way contained

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

# What's So Good About the Goddess?

Some feminists argue that it is not enough to use feminine images for God; we must also alter *names* for God. Consider these claims:

- The word play of Genesis 49:25 between *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) and *shaddim* (breasts) demonstrates that the Deity should aptly be named "the God with Breasts."

- The Eucharist is "a drinking at the breast of God the Mother."

- When we proclaim that people "must be born again," we are "urging them to experience the womb and birth canal of God the Mother."

Some feminist theologians even call for a return to goddess religion. Mary Daly writes of "cutting away the Supreme Phallus," explaining that the son of a divine patriarch (Jesus) is the one who *cannot* save women from the horrors of patriarchy. Some biblical revisionists call for a return to deistic terms for God such as *Creative Process* and *Divine Eros*. Such terminology so depersonalizes God that he no longer can hear personal prayers or respond to supplications.

Daly's revision is greater than this, though. She claims that there will be no second coming of Christ, but instead a "surge of consciousness" realized in the Second Coming of Women. It is this men have been dreading, for they will be robbed of their power. She demands that we move beyond the patriarchalism that has resulted in what she calls "Christolatry" (worshiping Christ because he is divine).

## An old religion in new clothes

The call for goddess worship is no mere corrective to the worship of Yahweh; it is a call to a new religion. More precisely, it is an old religion in new clothes. In it, the goddess dwelt with a male god as his consort. Pantheons of male and female deities were, like humans, sexually active. The fertility of humanity and the earth was thought to depend on the fertility and the eroticism of the gods. In fact, the development of temple prostitution evolved as persons, through their own eroticism, wanted to inspire the behavior of the gods so that they might again bring fecundity to the earth.

This idea of an impregnating male God and a female deity giving birth to the world appears nowhere in Scripture. While it is true that goddess worship was common, even popular, in the religions of the Sumerians, Egyptians, Canaanites, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, it is regarded only in a negative perspective by the Old Testament writers. Israelite religion, while informing us about the maternal characteristics of God, strongly opposed goddess worship.

There are some who argue that the prophets (and later, Jesus) did not speak of God as Mother because hearers would not have been able to grasp this. But the people of Israel were surrounded by peoples who envisioned their gods in just that way. As Elizabeth Achtemeier remarks, "It must puzzle those feminist theologians, who appeal to the prophets' championship of the oppressed, that the prophets nevertheless never address God as female," quite sparingly use female images for God's activity, "and indeed, condemn the worship of all goddesses." (See Deuteronomy 16:21; 2 Kings 23:4; Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 7:18-20; 17:2, 44:17-23; and Micah 5:13-14.)

## Disappointment with goddesses

It is also worth noting that goddess worship can work against feminist goals. In no pagan religion was the goddess the Chieftess; rather, she always played a subordinate role. In the pagan religions mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, El is the senior god, the father of humankind. The goddesses Anat, Baal, and Asherat are all given secondary roles.

And goddesses are always interconnected with motherhood and fertility. In biblical times, infertility was the ultimate curse that could befall a woman. At this time, when feminists are attempting to fight against being reduced to "baby factories," the appeal to a

goddess religion as salvation from patriarchy seems contradictory.

In spite of this, some still call for a return, not only to goddess worship, but also to matriarchal societies in which women ruled in peace and harmony. They stress the move away from the judgmental and bloody Yahweh religion of the Old Testament with its concomitant patriarchal oppression.

That female deities make for a more peaceable religious tradition is contestable. Theologian Susanne Heine writes that the Canaanite goddess Anat "acts just like Yahweh, at least when it comes to annihilating her enemies. Why is Yahweh then accused of violence by feminists and not Anat? At any rate, it is a sign of progress that Yahweh does not wade with joy in the blood of his enemies (as Anat does)."

Further, societies that worshiped goddesses were far more oppressive and patriarchal than that of the Old Testament.

The biblical message is clear: there is no multiplicity of divinities; God needs no female partner to perform the sex act with him, thereby giving birth to the earth and its creatures; God is above the condition of human sexuality. When it comes to goddess worship, the whole tenor of the He-

brew Scriptures is open hostility.

The rejection of goddess worship ultimately comes from understanding that Creator and created are separate. Hebrew society did not reject goddess worship because of its patriarchalism (though it clearly was patriarchal), but because of its awareness of God's transcendence. God did not create the world as a result of some cosmic sex act, but by a simple verbal command: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6). God is not our equal, but our Maker. □



By Dale Youngs, associate pastor of Forest Hills Presbyterian Church, Helotes, Texas.



*Rosemary Ruether has written liturgies for worshiping groups of women that celebrate the cycles of the moon, the solstices and the seasons, as well as the cycles of menstruation and menopause.*

in or bound up with or dependent on or revealed through his creation. God creates the world outside of himself, by the instrument of his Word. Between God and his world stands the Word of God (John 1:2), which always addresses the creation as an object of the divine speech (see Isa. 1:2; 40:22, 26; Mic. 6:2-8). The world does not emanate out of the being of God or contain some part of him within it. He has not implanted divinity within any part of the creation, not even in human beings, and therefore no created thing or person can be claimed to be divine.

## VANITY OF VANITIES

**T**HE ASSURANCE AND meaning that this biblical understanding of the Creator's relation to this creation give to faith, then, are profoundly important. First, because God is not bound up with his creation, that means that heaven and earth may pass away—we may blow the earth off its axis at the push of the nuclear button—but the eternal God is able to take those who love him into an everlasting fellowship with himself that does not pass away (see Ps. 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; Mark 13:31 and parallels). In this nuclear age, the person of biblical faith can therefore lead a life not of fear and anxiety, but of joy and certain hope in God's eternal salvation (Ps. 46:1-3).

Second, because God is not bound up with nature's cycle but stands above and beyond its spiral and subjects it to the linear time of his purpose (see Rom. 8:19-23; Isa. 11:6-9), the pattern for human life is no longer that of nature's endless round of becoming and passing away. It becomes instead a joyful pilgrimage toward God's kingdom.

The feminists, who want to make Creator and creation one, should realize that there is no meaning to human life if it is patterned after and subjected to nature's round. As Ecclesiastes puts it, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. . . . A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains



forever. . . . What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun" (1:2, 4, 9).

In Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, no action takes place because all action is meaningless. Life goes around in a circle and finally means nothing. History is an endless repetition of events, having no goal or purpose.

Such meaninglessness results from a theology that identifies God with his creation. And that identification almost automatically comes about when feminine language for God is used. Many feminists argue that that does not necessarily happen. But feminist writings demonstrate it does.

This can perhaps most clearly be shown from the works of Rosemary Radford Ruether, perhaps the leading feminist theological writer in the United States today. Ruether wants to use female language for God, and therefore she names the divine *God/ess*. But Ruether, like many feminist

writers, does not want her deity to rule over her. For them, God must be not a Sovereign but a "friend" (Sallie McFague) or a "householder" (Letty Russell) or the power of love-in-relation (Isabel Carter Heyward, Dorothee Sölle). Ruether therefore defines her God/ess as the Primal Matrix, as "the great womb within which all things, gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings are generated." But this is no mere image or metaphor for Ruether. This God/ess is divine reality: "the empowering Matrix; She, in whom we live and move and have our being . . . She comes; She is here."

For Ruether, then, this God/ess is very much bound up with nature's life. Therefore in her book *Women-Church*, Ruether offers liturgies for worshiping groups of females that celebrate the cycles of the moon, the solstices and the seasons, as well as the cycles of menstruation and menopause. We "reappropriate the hallowing of nature and cyclical time of ancient pre-Judeo-Christian traditions," she says. We "reclaim our true relationship with somatic reality, with body

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



and earth, and with the Great Goddess that sustains our life in nature." That is clearly a return to the worldview of Canaanite baalistic and Mesopotamian pagan theologies.

The result is that Ruether and all those feminists who want to erase the distinction between God and his creation finally share with the most radical feminists, who have abandoned the Christian church and faith altogether, a view of divinity that is at home in modern witches' covens. Writes Starhawk, a self-proclaimed Wicca worshiper,

There is no dichotomy between spirit and flesh, no split between Godhead and the world. The Goddess is manifest in the world; she brings life into being, is Nature, is flesh. Union is not sought outside the world in some heavenly sphere or through dissolution of the self into the void beyond the senses. Spiritual union is found in life, within nature, passion, sensuality—through being fully human, fully one's self.

Our great symbol for the Goddess is the moon, whose three aspects reflect the three stages in women's lives and whose cycles of waxing and waning coincide with women's menstrual cycles. . . .

The Goddess is also earth—Mother Earth, who sustains all growing things, who is the body, our bones and cells. She is air . . . fire . . . water . . . mare, cow, cat, owl, crane, flower, tree, apple, seed, lion, sow, stone, woman. She is found in the world around us, in the cycles and seasons of nature, and in mind, body, spirit, and the emotions within each of us. Thou art Goddess. I am Goddess. All that lives (and all that is, lives), all that serves life, is Goddess.

In such views, meaninglessness haunts human life. Perhaps that meaninglessness can be most poignantly illustrated by Ruether's view of death. There is no eternal life for those of faith in Ruether's female God/ess religion. Rather, the end she envisions for all of us and our communities is that we will simply end up as compost: "In effect (at death), our existence ceases as individuated ego/organism and dissolves back into the cosmic matrix of matter/energy, from which new centers of individuation arise. It is this matrix, rather than our individuate centers of being, that is 'everlasting,' that subsists underneath the coming to be and passing away of individuated beings and even planetary worlds."

Such a view finally means that there is no purpose for the creation of each individual human being, and that my life and yours in our communities have no eternal meaning beyond their brief and transitory appearances on this earth.

## EMBODYING THE DEITY

**M**OST DISTURBING OF ALL IS the radical feminists' claim to embody the deity within themselves—in other words, to be divine.

"I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely," exults Carol Christ; that is the logical result of a religion in which the deity is believed to be contained in all things and all persons, and feminists who hold such views then become a law unto themselves. Indeed, for feminists Dorothee Sölle and Isabel Carter Heyward, there is no such thing as original sin, and the "fall" of Genesis 3 is good, a liberation into knowledge and action and reliance on one's self. "We do not have to sit around all year singing, with Luther, 'Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,'" writes Sölle. No, "We are strong; we can accomplish things." According to Sölle, "The most telling argument against our traditional God is not that he no longer exists or that he has

drawn back within himself but that we no longer need him."

God is in us, maintains Sölle, as our capacity to love. We are one with God in a mystical relation. We do not serve God; we manifest him. And because God is in us, all we need is love. That is the central idea in the Bible, she maintains.

To the contrary, however, in a world where torture is the rule in most of the globe's prisons, where a person on a subway platform in New York City can push a woman in front of an oncoming train just for "kicks," where little children in a nursery school can be tied up and sexually abused, where whole races can be uprooted or starved to death or burnt up in gas ovens, it must be said that Sölle's is a naïve understanding indeed. We do need a Power greater than human evil—or, for that matter, a Power greater than even the highest human love and good, for it was the best religion and the best law that erected the cross on Golgotha. If there is not a God who is Lord over life, who intervenes, judges, and confirms, and who has given his final judgment and won his decisive victory in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then human evil will always have the last word and there is no hope for this world.

The radical feminists, believing themselves to be divine, think that by their own power they can restructure society, restore creation, and overcome suffering. But the tortured history of humanity testifies to what human beings do when they think they are a law unto themselves with no responsibility to God, and those feminists who are claiming that God is in them will equally fall victim to human sin.

The God of the Judeo-Christian biblical faith is holy God, the almighty Creator and Lord, totally other than everything and everyone he has made. We therefore cannot know and worship him unless he reveals himself to us. But with a love surpassing human understanding, he has revealed himself to us as the Holy One of Israel, who delivered her out of the house of bondage, and as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In that revelation, now mediated for us through the Scriptures, he has offered to adopt us as his beloved children (John 1:12; Gal. 4:4-7), to allow us to call him Father, *Abba* (see Rom. 8:14-17), and to know him as his Son Jesus Christ knows him.

If in trust and obedience we accept that offering of himself to us, he promises to be with us all our lives long, to guide us in the paths of righteousness, to give us joy in the midst of the world's tribulation, to unite us in communities of love and peace with like-minded believers, to send us out to perform tasks that will give meaning to all our lives, and finally, at death, to receive us into his realm of eternal life and good that cannot pass away.

For my part, I can imagine no reason ever to reject such a God or to exchange him for those deities of earth that are "no gods." Women suffer discrimination, yes; our world is full of all kinds of evil. But God is holy, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and by faith in him we shall always be more than conquerors, and nothing shall ever separate us from the love he has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. □

*Elizabeth Achtemeier is adjunct professor of Bible and homiletics at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. She is the author of several books, including Nature, God, and Pulpit (Eerdmans) and Preaching from the Old Testament (Westminster/John Knox). This article was adapted with permission from a chapter in Speaking the Christian God (Eerdmans), edited by Alvin Kimel.*

## CHRISTIANITY UNDER ATTACK - The Attack on Biblical Miracles

Belief in the supernatural is at the heart of Judeo-Christian monotheism.

Two major options: 1. Supernaturalism  
2. Naturalism/Antisupernaturalism

### I. Attack Upon Supernaturalism from Atheism (the West)

#### A. The modern attack on miracles

Benedict Spinoza - "Nothing, then comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws..."

David Hume - "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, which have been established by unalterable experience."

Immanuel Kant - "Miracles are not at all compatible with reason."

John Dewey - "Values are man discovered, not God given."

Julian Huxley - "The supernatural is being swept away by modern natural discoveries."

\*If it does not have a natural cause and is repeatable (i.e., subject to scientific observation) it does not count as a cause at all or explain anything.

#### B. Basis for the Naturalistic Charge Against Miracles

1. A materialistic view of the universe.
2. An adoption of a totally naturalistic worldview.
3. Exaltation of the scientific method and observable uniform, repeatable experience(s).
4. Laws of probability.

\* Naturalism's case against miracles is cogently summarized in the atheist Antony Flew's argument in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

1. Miracles are by nature particular and unrepeatable.
2. Natural events are by nature general and repeatable.
3. Now in practice, the evidence for the general and repeatable is always greater than that for the particular and unrepeatable.
4. Therefore, in practice, the evidence will always be greater against miracles than for them. (However, what is true in general practice does not always have greater evidence than a specific particular.) Some unique, unrepeatable events have occurred!.

### C. A response to the Atheist Attack on Miracles

- \*
  1. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
  2. The naturalist's arguments often beg the question.  
(Their view is assumed not proven)
  3. The evidence for repeated events is not always greater.  
(Sometimes the improbable does happen)
  4. The evidence for the regular or repeated is not always greater.  
(Ex: The origin of life: The Big Bang?!)

## II. Attack Upon Christian Miracles From Pantheism (the East)

- \* Miracles are super normal or super physical, not supernatural.

### A. The general attack on miracles

1. All things result from natural laws.
2. "Bible miracles are the triumph of Spirit/Mind over matter."  
(Mary Baker Eddy)

### B. The basis for the pantheistic attack on miracles

1. The nature of God: God is Nature and Nature is God, hence all is natural / supernatural.
2. Belief in the super normal, parapsychology, telepathy, clairvoyance, after-death experiences, reincarnation, magic, occultism.

### C. A Christian response to pantheistic attacks on miracles

1. Christians do not deny the supernormal / supernatural realm.
2. There is a difference between occult magic and miracles.
3. Many so-called occult miracles are only tricks.
4. Some supernormal occurrences are demonic.
5. Truly divine miracles are distinctive and superior.

#### Supernatural

Always wins contests  
Can create life  
\* Can reverse death

#### Supernormal

Always loses contests  
Cannot create life  
Cannot reverse death

## Observations with Respect to the Possibility of Miracles

1. It is prejudicial to eliminate the possibility of miracles before one looks at the evidence. (Evidence should form our conclusions and not the reverse.)
2. The fact that every event (effect) has a cause does not mean that every cause must be a natural one.
3. If God exists, miracles are possible.
4. If the Christian God exists, miracles are possible, even probable.
5. Without a faith commitment to God, one will be unable to see the acts of God. He will seek another explanation.
6. The life of Jesus is the greatest evidence for the miraculous. He came into history (i.e., God invaded planet Earth) so that we might see and investigate the God who does the supernatural.

Evidence:

1. Eyewitnesses and substantial evidence
2. Reliable documentation
3. Theological possibilities / probabilities

The Scriptures lay down several tests for a false prophet, even if they perform unusual feats. By these the Christian can distinguish satanic magic from a divine miracle. The following chart summarizes the differences.

MIRACLE	MAGIC
Under God's control	Under man's control
Not available on command	Available on command
Supernatural power	A natural (mystical) power
Associated with good	Associated with evil
Associated only with truth	Associated also with error
Can overpower evil	Can not overpower good ultimately
Affirm Jesus is God in flesh	Deny Jesus is God in flesh
Prophecies always true	Prophecies sometimes false
Never associated with occult practices	Often associated with occult practices

These differences translate into recognizable traits which Christians can look for in association with demonic signs. The following list of characteristics may be noted:

Characteristic	Scripture
witchcraft	Deuteronomy 18:10
fortune-telling	Deuteronomy 18:10
communicating with spirits	Deuteronomy 18:11
mediums	Deuteronomy 18:11
divination	Deuteronomy 18:10
astrology	Deut. 4:19; Is. 47: 13-15
heresy (false teaching)	I Tim. 4:1; I John 4: 1-2
immorality	Eph. 2: 2-3; II Thess. 2:7
self-deification	Is. 14:12; Gen. 3:5
lying	John 8: 44
idolatry	I Corinthians 10: 19-20

It should be noted that in the light of these tests for false teaching the whole of the pantheistic attack on God discussed above is demonic. It violated virtually all of the tests.

# MIRACLES

By: Norman L. Geisler  
(1987)

## 1. The Impossibility of Miracles

### A. Argument (of Spinoza)

1. Miracles are violations of natural laws
2. Natural laws are immutable
3. It is impossible for immutable laws to be violated
4. Therefore, miracles are impossible

### B. Answer

1. Natural laws are not immutable (only general)
2. What is not immutable may have exceptions
3. Miracles (as exceptions) to natural laws may occur

## 2. The Incredibility of Miracles

### A. Argument (of Hume)

1. Natural law is by definition a description of a regular occurrence
2. A miracle is by definition a rare occurrence
3. The evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare
4. A wise man always basis his belief on the greater evidence
5. Therefore, a wise man should never believe in miracles

### B. Answer

1. The evidence for regular events is not always greater
  - a. Big Bang Theory is not based on regular events
  - b. Origin of life on Earth doesn't occur regularly
2. Miracle is a rare event
3. Therefore, evidence against miracles is not always greater (i.e., evidence for particular miracles can be greater)

## 3. The Unrepeatability of Miracles

### A. Argument (of Flew)

1. Miracles are by nature particular and unrepeatable
2. Natural events are by nature general and repeatable
3. Now, in practice, the evidence for the general and repeatable is always greater than that for the particular and unrepeatable
4. Therefore, in practice, the evidence will always be greater against miracles than for them

B. Answer

1. Evidence for general and repeatable is not always greater
  - a. Big Bang
  - b. Origin of Life
2. Miracles are not general and repeatable
3. Therefore, evidence against miracles is not always greater

4. The Unidentifiability of Miracles

A. Argument (of Chrysides)

1. No event can be attributed to a rational agent unless its occurrence is regular and repeatable
2. Miracles are by nature not regular or repeatable
3. Therefore, no miracle can be attributed to any rational agent (e.g., to God).

B. Answer

1. Rational agency can be identified from single events
  - a. Mount Rushmore
  - b. Message from outer space
2. Miracles are single events
3. Therefore, miracles (as single events) can be identified

5. Scientific Invalidity of Miracles

A. Argument (of Alastair McKinnon)

1. A Scientific law is generalization based on past observation
2. Any exception to a scientific law invalidates that law as such and calls for the revision of it
3. A miracle is an exception to scientific law
4. Therefore, any exception (as a miracle) would simply call for a new (broader) scientific law

B. Answer

1. Not all exceptions violate a scientific law (for example, anomalies)
2. Only repeatable exceptions violate a law
3. Miracles are not naturally repeatable exceptions
4. Therefore, miracles do not violate a scientific law nor call for a revision of it

6. The Scientific Unpredictability of Miracles

A. Argument (of Nowell-Smith)

1. Only what has predictive capabilities can qualify as an explanation of an event
2. A miracle cannot be predicted
3. Therefore, a miracle does not qualify as an explanation of any event

B. Answer

1. Predictions are only possible where repetition of the event is involved
2. Many natural events are singular and are not repeated (Big Bang, Origin of Life)
3. Hence, many natural events have no scientific (i.e., natural) explanations (which is absurd)
4. Therefore, neither do miracles need to have predictive capabilities

7. The Non-Historicity of Miracles

A. Argument (of Flew)

1. All critical history depends on the validity of two principles:
  - a. The remains of the past can be used as evidence for reconstructing history only if we presume the same basic regularities of nature held then as now
  - b. The critical historian must use his present knowledge of the possible and probable as criteria for knowing the past
2. But belief in miracles is contrary to both of these principles
3. Therefore, belief in miracles is contrary to critical history

B. Answer to A

1. Miracles don't set aside regularities of nature (they are unrepeatable exceptions)
2. Hence, miracles don't invalidate the critical study of history

C. Answer to B

1. Principle of uniformity is necessary for knowing the past
2. It is our uniform experience that some events are not caused by operational laws of the universe (but only by intelligent intervention)
3. Miracles are caused by intelligent interventions (of God)
4. Hence, miracles do not violate the principle of uniformity

8. The Argument From Scientific Methodology

A. Argument

1. Scientists, as scientists, cannot give up looking for naturalistic explanations for every event
2. To admit even one miracle is to give up looking for a natural explanation
3. Therefore, to admit miracles is to give up the scientific method

B. Answer

1. Scientists need naturalistic explanations only for regularly repeated events, not for singularities
2. Miracles are not regularly repeated events, they are singularities
3. Therefore, scientists do not need naturalistic explanations for singularities (such as miracles)



## 9. Argument From Natural Occurrence

### A. Argument

1. Whatever actually occurs in the natural world is a natural event
2. Some so-called miracles have actually occurred
3. Therefore, these so-called miracles are really natural events

### B. Answer

1. To assume that everything that occurs in the world was caused by a natural law begs the question
2. This argument makes such a naturalistic assumption
3. Therefore, this argument begs the question in favor of naturalism

## 10. A Second Argument From Unidentifiability of Miracles

### A. Argument

1. A miracle must be identifiable before it can be identified
2. A miracle can only be identified in one of two ways:
  - a. As an unusual event in nature, or
  - b. As an exception to nature
3. But an unusual event in nature is simply a natural event, not a miracle
4. And an exception to nature cannot be known (i.e., identified) from within nature
5. Therefore, a miracle is not identifiable

### B. Answer

1. The existence of the supernatural (i.e., God) is possible
2. Miracles can be defined in terms of the supernatural
3. Hence, miracles can be identified as acts of God (you can know what God's "thumb print" looks like if you know what His "thumb" is like)

## 11. Argument From Transcendent Nature of Miracles (Bultmann)

### A. Argument

1. Miracles are more than a natural event
2. What is more than natural cannot be objectively verified
3. Therefore, miracles are not an objective part of the space-time world

### B. Answer

1. Objectivity
  - a. Miracles are more than objective events but not less than objective events
  - b. What is an objective event can be verified
  - c. Therefore, the objective dimension of miracles can be verified
2. Transcendence
  - a. Repeated observation in the present is the basis for scientific inference about the past

- b. Repeated observations indicate some things have an intelligent cause (Sphinx, Mt. Rushmore)
- c. The "more than" natural aspect of miracles can be rationally inferred by analogy
- d. Therefore, even the "more than" (i.e., transcendent) nature of miracles can be known by inference

## 12. Argument from Autonomy of Scientific Method

### A. Argument (Malcolm Diamond)

- 1. Allowing supernaturalistic explanation calls a halt to scientific research
- 2. Now what calls a halt to scientific research rejects the autonomy of science
- 3. But sacrifice of science is an unreasonably high price to pay for allowing miracles because:
  - a. The record shows that in the long run science finds natural explanations
  - b. Science should set rules and referee its own game
  - c. Natural explanations don't sacrifice anything essential to religion

### B. Answer

- 1. First
  - a. Not all scientific research demands natural (non-intelligent) causes (i.e., ancient pottery or search for ETI)
  - b. Miracles call for an intelligent cause, not a naturalistic one
  - c. Hence, miracles do not call a halt to scientific research
- 2. Second
  - a. Goal of scientific research is to find scientific laws
  - b. But scientific laws are based on regular and repeatable events
  - c. And miracles are not regular and repeatable events (they are singularities)
  - d. Hence, positing a supernatural cause of a singularity does not halt scientific research
- 3. Third
  - a. Scientific research is based on observation and repetition (O and R)
  - b. O and R informs us that some events do not have naturalistic (non-intelligent) causes (e.g., an arrowhead, ancient pottery)
  - c. Hence, positing an intelligent cause for some singular events (such as miracles) is based on a scientific procedure
- 4. Finally
  - a. Seeking natural causes for all events is futile (e.g. Sphinx, Mt. Rushmore)
  - b. Therefore, seeking only naturalistic causes frustrates scientific research

# Supernaturalism and Miracles: What Do People Think?

(Source, TIME, April 10, 1995)

Time poll says 69% of Americans believe in miracles.

“Why does this generation ask for a sign?” --Jesus (Matthew 12:39)

“What was incapable of happening never happened, and what was capable of happening is not a miracle...Consequently, there are no miracles. --Cicero

“The real test of faith is when there aren't any signs; faith is relatively easy if you're standing in front of a miracle.” --Clarence Hardy, minister at the Convent Baptist Church in West Harlem, New York City

“I don't think the Bible is literally true. The Bible also says the woman is usually the property of a man. I don't believe that either. The Bible says homosexual people should be put to death. I don't believe that. The Bible says epilepsy is caused by demon possession. I don't believe that. There are a whole lot of literal concepts out of the Bible that have long ago been abandoned. I'd like to think that Christianity is something that would appeal to people who are also well educated and who are modern people.”  
--Bishop John Spong of the Episcopal diocese of Newark, New Jersey

“[Israel] was an occupied country with a lot of poverty, malnutrition, and sickness. Jesus was 'healing' people ideologically, saying the Kingdom of God is against this system. It's not your fault you're sick and overworked. Take command of your body and your destiny.” --John Dominic Crossan, a professor of biblical studies at Catholic De Paul University

“To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle, Every cubic inch of space is a miracle.” --Walt Whitman

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain,”  
--Paul to the Corinthians

“...on no point does the Christian faith encounter more opposition than on the resurrection of the body.” --St. Augustine

They were talking not about the resurrection of the flesh but about the resurrection of Christ's selfhood, his essence. The authors of the New Testament had experiences with an extraordinary person and extraordinary events, and they were trying to find ways to talk about all that. They weren't writing scientific history; they were writing faith history."  
--Jackson Carroll, a professor of religion and society at Duke Divinity School

"If I were an enemy of Christianity, I'd aim right at the Resurrection, because that's the heart of Christianity. I believe he [Jesus] rose bodily. Otherwise you'd have to throw out the Easter story, because he showed the nail prints in his hands. If Christ didn't rise, as Paul said, it all has no meaning."--Billy Graham

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic...or else he'd be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."--C.S. Lewis

"People talk about Bible miracles because there is no miracle in their lives. Cease to gnaw that crust. There is ripe fruit over your head. --Thoreau

"There is an anti-supernaturalist bias. Even if we had a sworn affidavit from a pathologist that Jesus was alive and well, a person would not believe it if he believed in principle that no dead man could ever rise. No evidence would possibly be sufficient." --Murray Harris, Bible professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois

"We have to go back to the basics. Jesus performed these miracles to prove his divinity, and so I accept them, and I accept them by faith. I can't prove everything scientifically. But when I do accept the Scriptures by faith, it has an impact in my own personal life, and I can apply the principles Jesus taught to everyday life. So to me the miracles of Christ are essential. They are not essential to salvation but to one's Christian living."  
--Billy Graham

# Going Deeper in Prayer

By T.W. Hunt

Most of our talk with one another is "shallow-to shallow." Rarely do we go "deep-unto-deep" (Psalms 42:7). But God's thoughts are very deep (Psalms 92:5, KJV). Going deeper is also going higher (Isaiah 58:13-14, Habakkuk 3:19). Prayer is the vehicle for exploring the depths of God, or for walking the high countries. "Going deeper" describes the exploration of unsearchableness. "Going higher" implies attainment, or walking in step with "the high and lofty One" (Isaiah 57:15).

God has two purposes in prayer. The first is to **make us like himself**. For this purpose, we have a number of prayers which are direct response to the Person of God. The second purpose is to *make us participate in His work*.

The first response prayer is **confession**. Confession is response to the holiness of God. The Greek word for "confess" means to speak the same thing, or "to agree." In confession of sin, we tell God that our action was not like Him and not like us in our eternal being.

The second response prayer is **worship**. Worship is response to the glory of God. We love or adore God through this prayer. In adoration, we begin to "go deeper" into God's nature.

*Praise is extremely important  
for our development,  
because you become  
like what you praise.*

The third response prayer is **praise**. Praise is response to the attributes of God, such as power, wisdom or mercy. Worship is loving or adoring God; praise is elevating the attributes of God. Love (worship) comes first; we praise what we love. Love opens our eyes to praiseworthy attributes. Praise is extremely important for our development,

because you become like what you praise.

The last response prayer is **thanksgiving**. Thanksgiving is participating in the riches of God. Ephesians 5:20 tells us to thank God "for everything" — obviously an impossible task unless we realize that thanksgiving is not an event but an attitude. In my own experience, the

more developed the attitude, the more frequently we express thanks in event.

*Thanksgiving is participating  
in the riches of God.*

The Bible actually contains more prayers on **asking** than it does on

*In the  
name of  
the Father,  
the Son  
and the  
Holy  
Spirit  
Amen!*



worship and praise together! Not only that, but the Bible contains considerably more teaching on asking than it does on any other kind of prayer.

Significantly, the one person who taught the most on asking was the Lord Jesus. We find Him teaching on asking as early as the sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:5-13, 7:7-11). Some time later He elaborated on asking with a parable (Luke 11:1-13). Still later, He told the story of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-8) to encourage His disciples to ask freely. Then at the end of His life, in His great Last Discourse, He returned again and again to the subject of proper asking (John 14:12-14, 15:7, 16, 16:23-27). The progress of the kingdom, that is, the growth of the church, would depend on their asking. The prayers and growth of the church in the book of Acts prove that they learned their lesson.

For convenience, we may divide the Bible asking prayers into two categories. The first is asking for oneself, or **petition**. The second is asking for others, or **intercession**.

*The greater prayer, however, is intercession. In praying for others, we demonstrate unselfishness.*

The greatest Bible saints made personal petition. Abraham, Hannah, and Zechariah asked for a son (Genesis 15:2, I Samuel 1:10-11, Luke 1:13). Hezekiah prayed to live (II Kings 20:1-6). We have more than 40 petitions by David.

But in each case, by answering, God also did something for Himself! Abraham's prayer birthed the chosen race. Hannah's prayer produced the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. Hezekiah's prayer preserved the Messianic line into which ultimately the Lord Jesus would come (Isaiah 11:1, 10; Matthew 1:10; Luke 2:4). By making personal petition according to the will of God (I John 5:14-15), these Bible characters secured for themselves a position of greatness in the line of spiritual gi-

ants.

In the right kind of petition, we are **becoming** greater people. God will function as Father when we seek His will. He knows that we are to reign with His glorious Son, and His way of producing greatness in us is to lead us to the right kind of petition.

The greater prayer, however, is intercession. In praying for others, we demonstrate unselfishness. Love, by nature, is other-directed.

The mightiest works in the Bible were carried out through the labor of intercessory prayer. Intercession is *working with* God. Paul himself said that we are God's fellow workers (I Corinthians 3:9; II Corinthians 6:1). In intercession, God functions as Sovereign, directing the work of His people.

### **Why is intercession so important?**

Intercession is the present work of the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 7:25). The Holy Spirit is also an intercessor (Romans 8:26-27). We have, therefore, one intercessor in heaven, the Lord Jesus, and one intercessor on earth with us, the Holy Spirit.

*God's will is that we intercede according to the mind of Christ, in agreement with Him, and according to the mind of the Spirit, following His leadership.*

God's will is that we intercede according to the mind of Christ, in agreement with Him, and according to the mind of the Spirit, following His leadership. These strands will create a threefold cord of intercession — Jesus in heaven praying, the human agent praying, and the Holy Spirit praying with us. *"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

In significant ways, each of the response prayers is concerned with *what God is*. In confession we are responding to His holiness; in worship we respond to His glory; in praise

we respond to His attributes; and in thanksgiving we respond to His riches. In the proper praying of these prayers, we are becoming like God.

The asking prayers, on the other hand, are concerned with *what God does*. We are, therefore, taking part in the vast plan of God by our asking prayers, both petition and intercession.

The response prayers relate us to God as a **Person**. We are persons, and His personal qualities are imputed and realized in us through the praying of the various prayers. The asking prayers bring us into the **work** of God. We learn to discern His will and involve ourselves in the bringing of His kingdom. The response prayers are concerned with **being**. The asking prayers are concerned with **doing**. We *"go deeper"* by developing a complete prayer life that agrees with God's overarching purposes.

Numerically, the predominant prayers of the Bible are praise and intercession. If we are to duplicate the biblical pattern, these should predominate in *"deeper"* prayer.

*The heights and depths of heaven itself are available for any believer who will explore them through prayer.*

Our effort to *"go deeper"* has taken us into unexpected paths. This road does not lead to mystical or strange experiences, as many would have expected. It leads to discipline, and even to spiritual warfare.

Think what depths these biblical pray-ers soldiers explored! The direction of those depths is revealed by the Bible and is the direction in which our prayers should go. The heights and depths of heaven itself are available for any believer who will explore them through prayer. God is looking for *"deeper"* and *"higher"* prayers today!

*T. W. Hunt is specialist, prayer in the Sunday School Board Discipleship & Family Adult Department*



From *The Life of Martin Luther* by Gustav König

# How I Pray

*Counsel on approaching the Almighty*

MARTIN LUTHER

**H**ow should I pray? What exactly should I say? How long should I go on? Such were the questions put to Luther by his barber and lifelong friend, Peter Beskendorf. In response, Luther composed *A Simple Way to Pray*, in which he showed how the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed can guide prayer. Here is an excerpt of the first two sections of Luther's 1535 booklet.

Dear Master Peter: I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen.

When I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the Devil always impede and

obstruct prayer), I take my little Psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.

It may well be that you may have

some tasks which are as good or better than prayer, especially in an emergency. There is a saying ascribed to St. Jerome that everything a believer does is prayer, and a proverb, "He who works faithfully prays twice." Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The Devil, who besets us, is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer.

When your heart has been warmed by such recitation to yourself (of the Ten Commandments, the words of Christ, etc.) and is intent upon the matter, kneel or stand with your hands folded and your eyes



**PRAYERS OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN:** When his close friend Philipp Melanchthon became deathly ill, Luther prayed fervently for him: "I wearied [God's] ears with all his promises of hearing prayers." Luther even threatened to question God's faithfulness if God didn't answer him! Melanchthon recovered, and Luther declared, "God, the dear Father, listens to our prayers."

toward heaven and speak or think as briefly as you can.

"O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward thee or to pray. But because thou hast commanded us all to pray and hast promised to hear us and through thy dear Son Jesus Christ hast taught us both how and what to pray, I come to thee in obedience to thy word, trusting in thy gracious promise. I pray in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, together with all thy saints and Christians on earth as he has taught us: Our Father who art, etc.," through the whole prayer, word for word.

### Expanding each petition

Luther then advises that Peter repeat and elaborate on each petition. For example, here is how the second petition, "Thy kingdom come," might be developed:

Say: "O dear Lord, God and Father, thou seest how worldly wis-

dom and reason not only profane thy name and ascribe the honor due to thee, to lies and to the Devil, but how they also take the power, might, wealth and glory which thou hast given them on earth for ruling the world, and thus serving thee, and use it in their own ambition to oppose thy kingdom. They are many and mighty; they plague and hinder the tiny flock of thy kingdom who are weak, despised, and few.

"Convert them and defend us. Convert those who are still to become children and members of thy kingdom so that they with us and we with them may serve thee in thy kingdom in true faith and unfeigned love and that from thy kingdom which has begun, we may enter into thy eternal kingdom. Defend us against those who will not turn away their might and power from the destruction of thy kingdom, so that when they are cast down from their thrones and humbled, they will have to cease from

their efforts. Amen."

Or as another example, take the sixth petition, "And lead us not into temptation." Say: "O dear Lord, Father and God, keep us fit and alert, eager and diligent in thy word and service, so that we do not become complacent, lazy, and slothful as though we had already achieved everything. In that way the fearful Devil cannot fall upon us, surprise us, and deprive us of thy precious word or stir up strife and factions among us and lead us into other sin and disgrace, both spiritually and physically. Rather grant us wisdom and strength through thy spirit that we may valiantly resist him and gain the victory. Amen."

### Keeping the heart ready

Mark this, that you must always speak the *Amen* firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say "yes" to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone; rather, think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you, and you are standing among them in a common, united petition, which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, "Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth." That is what *Amen* means.

You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer.

I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay, however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forgo the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us, we ought to disregard



the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.

It is of great importance that the heart be made ready and eager for prayer. What else is it but tempting God when your mouth babbles and the mind wanders to other thoughts?

A good and attentive barber keeps his thoughts, attention, and eyes on the razor and hair and does not forget how far he has gotten with his shaving or cutting. If he wants to engage in too much conversation or let his mind wander or look somewhere else he is likely to cut his customer's mouth, nose, or even his throat. How much more does prayer call for concentration and singleness of heart!

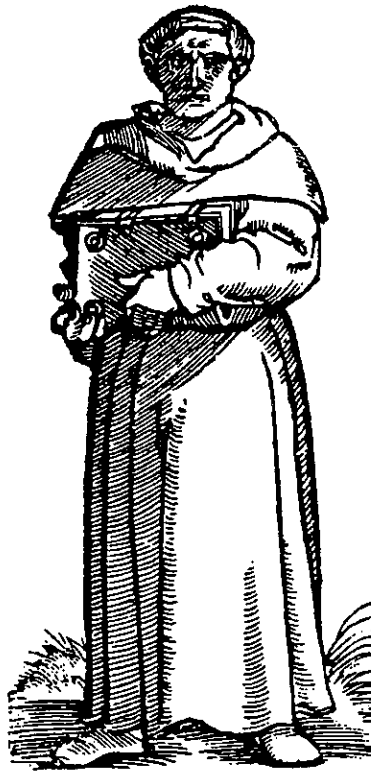
This, in short, is the way I use the Lord's Prayer when I pray it. To this day I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It is the very best prayer, even better than the Psalter, which is so very dear to me. It is surely evident that a real Master composed and taught it.

### Praying the Ten Commandments

If I have had time and opportunity to go through the Lord's Prayer, I do the same with the Ten Commandments.

I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.

*Luther demonstrates his approach for the first commandment, "I am the Lord your God ... You shall have no other gods before me." Here I earnestly consider that God expects and teaches*



**I** have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.

me to trust him sincerely in all things and that it is his most earnest purpose to be my God. I must think of him in this way at the risk of losing eternal salvation. My heart must not build upon anything else or trust in any other thing, be it wealth, prestige, wisdom, might, piety, or anything else.

Second, I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many

gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever—in all eternity—thank him enough!

Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin and ingratitude for having so shamefully despised such sublime teachings and such a precious gift throughout my whole life, and for having fearfully provoked his wrath by countless acts of idolatry. I repent of these and ask for his grace.

Fourth, I pray and say, "O my God and Lord, help me by thy grace to learn and understand thy commandments more fully every day and to live by them in sincere confidence. Preserve my heart so that I shall never again become forgetful and ungrateful, that I may never seek after other gods or other consolation on earth or in any creature, but cling truly and solely to thee, my only God. Amen, dear Lord and Father. Amen."

These are the Ten Commandments in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book. They are intended to help the heart come to itself and grow zealous in prayer.

### Kindling the flame

Take care, however, not to undertake all of this or so much that one becomes weary in spirit. Likewise, a good prayer should not be lengthy or drawn out, but frequent and ardent. It is enough to consider one section or half a section which kindles a fire in the heart. This the Spirit will grant us and continually instruct us in when, by God's word, our hearts have been cleared and freed of outside concerns.

Nothing can be said here about the part of faith and Holy Scriptures [in prayer] because there would be no end to what could be said. With practice one can take the Ten Commandments on one day, a psalm or chapter of Holy Scripture the next day, and use them as flint and steel to kindle a flame in the heart. □

## God's Providential Care of The World

### I. The Biblical Data

- A. General Providence: God's watchcare over all creation  
Psalm 22:28; Psalm 145:16; Proverbs 16:33; Daniel 4:34; Matthew 5:45;  
Acts 14:17; Ephesians 1:11
- B. Special Providence: God's involvement in the particular lives of His children  
Psalm 4:8; Matthew 6:8; Philippians 4:19; I Peter 5:7

### II. The Theological Problem: Why Evil? (Theodicy)

#### A. Problem of the nature of evil

- 1) Problem stated:
  - a. God is the author of everything.
  - b. Evil is something.
  - c. So, God is the author of evil.
- 2) Answer:
  - a. God is the author of everything.
  - b. But evil is not a thing (it is a lack in things).
  - c. Hence, it does not follow that God created evil.

#### B. Problem of the origin of evil

- 1) Problem stated:
  - a. God made everything perfect.
  - b. But imperfection cannot come from perfection.
  - c. So, perfect creatures cannot be the origin of evil.
- 2) Answer: (The Freewill argument)
  - a. God made everything perfect.
  - b. One of the perfect things God made was free creatures.
  - c. Free will is the cause of evil.
  - d. Hence, imperfection (evil) can arise from the perfect (not directly, but indirectly, through freedom).

\*NOTE - a) God created the fact of freedom; man performs the acts of freedom; b) God made evil possible; creatures make it actual.

C. Problem of the persistence of evil

- 1) Problem stated:
  - a. If God is all good, He would destroy evil.
  - b. If God is all powerful, He could destroy evil.
  - c. But evil is not destroyed.
  - d. Hence, there is no such God.
- 2) Answer:
  - a. Evil cannot be destroyed without destroying freedom.
    - 1) Love is the greatest good for free creatures.
    - 2) But love is impossible without freedom.
    - 3) So, to destroy freedom would not be the greatest good.
  - b. Evil will yet be defeated.
    - 1) If God is all powerful, He can defeat evil.
    - 2) If God is all good, He will defeat evil.
    - 3) Evil is not yet defeated.
    - 4) Therefore, evil will one day be defeated.

\*Will there be evil in heaven? Will we be free in heaven?

D. Problem of the purpose of evil

- 1) Problem stated:
  - a. There is no good purpose for much suffering.
  - b. An all-good being (God) must have a good purpose for everything.
  - c. Hence, there cannot be an all-good God.
- 2) Answer:
  - a. Distinctions: Even if we don't know God's purpose, He may still have a good purpose for evil.
  - b. We do know some good purposes for evil.
    - 1) To warn us of greater evil
    - 2) To keep us from self-destruction
    - 3) To help bring about greater goods
    - 4) To help defeat evil

E. Problem of the extent of evil

- 1) Problem stated:
  - a) The greatest good is to save men.
  - b) Even one person in hell would be less than the greatest good.
  - c) Therefore, God cannot send anyone to hell.
- 2) Answer:
  - a) God desires all men to be saved (II Pet. 3:9).

- b) God cannot force anyone to love Him (forced love is a contradiction).
- c) All who go to hell choose to go there (they will it even if they do not want it).

NOTE- (1) It is not one person in hell which would make it evil but one more than is really necessary.

(2) A world with some in hell is not the best world conceivable but it may be the best world achievable (with free creatures).

#### F. Problem of the avoidability of evil

- 1) Problem stated:
  - a. God knows everything.
  - b. So God knew evil would occur when He created the world.
  - c. God had other non-evil possibilities. God could have:
    - 1) Not created anything.
    - 2) Not created anything free.
    - \* 3) Created free creatures that would not sin.
    - 4) Created free creatures who would sin but who would all be saved in the end.
- 2) Answer:
  - a) (1) wrongly implies nothing is better than something.
  - b) (2) wrongly assumes non-free can be compared to the free.
  - c) It is possible that (3) and (4) would never come about freely (and God can't force freedom). Also, if (3) were so, we would have no knowledge of the glory of redemption.

*Is this the God of the Bible?  
"An example of popular finite theism."*

### Does God cause disaster?

The recent devastating floods in Kentucky trigger again the inevitable question, "Why does God allow terrible things to happen?"

Prevailing theology is that God knew "before the foundation of the world" everything that would happen after the foundation, including knowledge of all who would be born, believe or not, and their time and mode of death—another way of insisting that God has ordained everything, since inflexible foreknowledge amounts to mandating everything, good or bad.

The pertinent question: Does God know the future; or, absent such knowledge, does he play it by ear until he ends things, sometimes intruding his presence in the world as he simply sees things unfold—and sometimes not?

Unless one believes God also knew before the foundation of the world when he would change his mind after the foundation of the world (a rather incongruous circumstance), one must conclude God changes his mind.

Many lessons from Scripture indicate this. For instance, God unmistakably decided (Genesis 6:6-8) to end mankind's existence, but changed his mind in light of Noah's righteousness.

Similarly, God decided to destroy the Israelites, his promised seed of Abraham, then rebuild a chosen people with Moses as progenitor (Exodus 32:9-14). Upon Moses' pleading, God changed

his mind. Using Isaiah as his emissary, God indicated to Hezekiah (II Kings 20) that Hezekiah would not recover from his illness, but would die. Before Isaiah could even get off the property, God, answering Hezekiah's prayer, instructed Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that God not only would heal him, but also give him 15 more years of life. God changed his mind.

God unmistakably decided (Jonah 3) he would destroy the people of Nineveh, even instructing Jonah to proclaim this fact, but changed his mind when the people repented. After telling his disciples (John 7:8-10) he would not go to Jerusalem for the

Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus, apparently changing his mind (the only alternative being that he lied), went.

God is dynamic, rather than static, intruding himself, unplanned, into mankind's affairs as he sees fit. Many believers are uncomfortable with this circumstance, since facing God's fluidity means taking greater responsibility for their lives—no more of that "Well, it was his time to go," or "God's will be done."

If this were not the case, intercessory prayers would be silly. Christ certainly was not being silly in Gethsemane when he prayed in full belief that God could, and might, reverse himself.

Has God limited himself to not knowing what a believer will be doing tomorrow? Yes; otherwise, people would be mere automats/robots incapable of personal thought or action. God looks for the grand surprise from believers, not dull inevitability accruing to a cruel divine charade. God is not a cosmic puppeteer, a creator of the unchangeable or the planner of catastrophe.

James L. Clark  
Lexington

## God and Evil:

### A Biblical / Theological Solution

(Adapted from a study by Bill Watkins)

#### I. Cause

- A. Definition - A cause is the necessary and sufficient condition for an effect.
- B. Kinds of causes:

		Ex: <u>a chair</u>	Ex: <u>Adam's Sin</u>
Efficient	<u>by</u> which	Carpenter	Adam
Final	<u>for</u> which	To sit	Pride, lust (Gen 3:5)
Formal	<u>of</u> which	Structure	An <u>act</u> of Adam's will
Material	<u>out of</u> which	Wood	Act of disobedience (Rom 5:19)
Exemplar	<u>after</u> which	Blueprint	Satan's sin (I Tim 3:6)
Instrumental	<u>through</u> which	Tools	Forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6)

#### II. The Nature of Evil

- A. God created (i.e., is the efficient cause of) all things (Gen. 1:1; John 1: 1-3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3).
- B. Every thing God created was and is good (Gen. 1:31; Rom. 14:14; I Tim. 4:4; Tit. 1:15).
- C. Evil is not good (Is. 5:20; Ps. 38:20; Mal. 2:17).
- D. Thus evil is not a thing (in a theistic / theological context).
- E. Since evil is not a thing it must either be (1) nothing, hence an illusion, or (2) no thing, hence a real privation or lack in things.
- F. Evil is not nothing (i.e., nonexistent or an illusion).
- G. Hence evil is no thing, a real privation or positive lack of things.
- H. Now since evil is no thing, and God created all things, God must not have created evil (at least directly).
- I. Therefore God is not the creator of evil.

### III. The Origin of Evil

- A. The origination of evil was either (1) uncaused, (2) self-caused, or (3) caused by another.
- B. Evil was not uncaused - though evil is not a thing it is not nothing, and something (namely a privation in things) cannot come from nothing.
- C. Evil was not self-caused - a potential, which is what evil was, cannot actualize itself; only an actualizer can actualize a potential.
- D. Hence evil must have been caused by another.
- E. It has already been demonstrated above that God was not the efficient cause of evil (cf. Hab. 1:31; John 3: 19-21; Acts 26:18; I John 1:5; James 1:17).
- F. Scripture affirms that evil originated with Satan who in turn tempted man to sin.
  1. Satan, like all the other angels, was created good (Gen. 1:31; Job 38: 4-7).
  2. After an unspecified length of time, Satan (and other angels following him [perhaps 1/3]) rebelled against God, thus committing the first evil act (Ez. 28: 11-19; Jude 6; II Peter 2:4; Rev. 12:4).
  3. Some time after Satan's first evil act, he appears in the Garden of Eden to tempt Eve (Gen. 3; II Cor. 11:31; Rev. 12:9).
  4. Adam and Eve, succumbing to Satan's temptation, were the first humans to commit evil acts (Gen. 3; Romans 5: 12-21).
- G. Now either the evil acts of Satan, and Adam and Eve, were (1) uncaused, (2) caused by another, or (3) self-caused.
- H. They were not uncaused - an uncaused effect (which is what an action is) is contradictory, hence meaningless.
- I. They were not caused (efficiently) by another.
  1. Nowhere in Scripture is it affirmed that God was the efficient cause of Satan's original sin or man's original sin.
  2. Furthermore, even though Scripture affirms that God works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11) and does whatsoever He pleases (Ps. 115:3, 135:6; Is. 46:10), it is clear that God pleases to permit his free creatures to perform various free actions - e.g., good or evil actions - rather than cause them Himself (Job 1-2; I Cor. 16:7; Heb. 6:3). Indeed, God cannot cause anyone to do evil because of his all-good, righteous, and holy nature (Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13).
- J. Therefore they were self-caused - that is, Satan caused himself to sin, and Adam and Eve caused themselves to sin ( Gen. 3:11-14, 17; II Pet. 2:4).
- K. Hence God was not the efficient cause of evil, but Satan and man were; and since their evil acts were self-determined, they (Satan, Adam & Eve) must have been created with free-will (for that is what self-determinism is). Note: Satan only tempted man to sin, he did not cause man to sin: (1) Jesus was tempted but did not sin (Heb. 4:15); (2) God always provides a way of escape when man is tempted (I Cor. 10:13); (3) man's own lust leads him to sin, not external temptation (James 1:14).

#### IV. The Persistence of Evil

- A. Scripture affirms that evil persists because Satan and his demons, and man, are still in willful rebellion against God.
  1. Fallen man is willfully rebellious against God (Rom. 1:18; 2: 4-5; Heb. 10:26).
  2. Fallen man is a willful slave of sin (Rom. 6:16).
  3. Those who put their faith in Christ are released from their slavery of sin (John 8: 34-36; Rom. 6: 5-11; 8: 1-2). Yet even Christians can willfully submit themselves to sin (Rom. 6: 12-14).
  4. Even fallen man still has limited self-determination.
    - a. With respect to horizontal matters, for example:
      - 1) choosing a mate ( I Cor. 7:39);
      - 2) one's virgin daughter (I Cor. 7:37);
      - 3) one's church (I Pet. 5:2);
      - 4) giving money (II Cor. 9:7);
      - 5) requests of friends (Philemon 14).
    - b. With respect to vertical matters, for example:
      - 1) rejecting God's revelation (and/or salvation) (Ez. 30: 15-18; Matt. 23:37; Rom. 1:18, 21-23; I Tim. 2: 3-4; II Pet. 3:9)
      - 2) accepting God's revelation (and/or salvation).
        - a) the "gift" of salvation must be "received" (John 1: 12-13; Rom. 6:23; 10: 1-4, 8-13; Eph. 2: 8-9)
        - b) God expects man to willfully "choose" him (Josh 24: 14-15; I Kings 18:21).
- B. God permits evil to persist for various good purposes, such as the following:
  1. To make known the riches of his glory (Rom. 8:22-24).
  2. To perfect Christ experientially in His humanity (Heb. 2:10; 5: 8-9).
  3. To defeat evil once and for all (Heb. 2: 14-15; Rev. 20-22).
  4. To make us perfect (James 1: 2-4).
  5. To bring about in us perseverance, proven character, and hope (Rom. 5: 3-5).
  6. To make us worthy of the Kingdom of God (I Thess. 1:5).
  7. So that God might be able to demonstrate His highest expression of love (John 15:13; Rom. 5:8).
  8. To warn us of greater evils.
  9. To keep us from self-destruction.
  10. As judgement and punishment for sin.
  11. To save lives (Gen. 50:20).
  12. That we might comfort others (II Cor. 1: 3-11).

## A SYSTEMATIC AND HISTORICAL VIEW OF PRAYER

The critical issue in a theology of prayer is what is to be said about God and God's relation to human existence -Perry LeFevre<sup>1</sup>

Written by  
Jon Walker  
SBC Life

### 1. YOUR THEOLOGY OF PRAYER IS DEFINED BY YOUR VIEW OF GOD

The Jewish theologian and mystic Abraham J. Heschel writes, "The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God."<sup>1</sup> In other words, your view of God will dictate your concepts of prayer: what it is and how it works.

If you believe in a distinct and uncaring God, then you will pray accordingly, making the assumption He is not interested in your day to day problems. If you do not believe in God, then you might describe your prayers as "autosuggestion,"<sup>2</sup> a method for seeking solutions within yourself. If you believe in God as a heavenly Father, as implied in the New Testament's *Abba* language, then you will bring your most intimate requests to Him in prayer.

For example, William James, despite seeing prayer as "the very soul and essence of religion," still had trouble understanding petitionary prayer within the framework of his psychology-based world view. He could not understand a man like George Mueller and his prayer techniques. In James' opinion, God for Mueller was "little more than a sort of supernatural clergyman interested in the congregation of tradesmen and others in Bristol who were his saints and in the orphanages and other enterprises. . . ."<sup>3</sup> This assessment says more about William James and his view of God than it does about George Mueller. It shows that James believes in a God who is only interested in the big picture of the universe and not a God who is aware of a sparrow falling to the ground.



The father of modern liberal theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, argued that God can not be moved and His purposes can not be changed. This being the case, Schleiermacher saw the purpose of prayer as nothing more than a method for aligning believers with the rules of God's Kingdom, "so that the person who prays may as such be regarded as a true and acceptable representative of Christ."<sup>4</sup>

A generation after Schleiermacher, Ludwig Feuerbach suggested Christians could not expect an answer to their prayers because there is no God. Feuerbach argued that what Christians call God is simply a reflection of their own humanity, and prayer is an attempt of the human heart to relate to itself. Through prayer, humans try to touch "the Omnipotence of Goodness, which ultimately is love."<sup>5</sup>

Karl Barth, on the other hand, argued for God's sovereignty. He acknowledged that God is independent of man's reason, yet, man is totally dependent upon God. God initiates prayer and commands us to pray, making it an ethical response to providential action.<sup>6</sup>

Henry Nelson Wieman took Schleiermacher's idea that prayer is a process designed to transform us, and he nearly turned the prayer process itself into God. He said prayer is one of the most significant ways in which the human individual and the human community can become open and responsive to that creative process which is God. So God, this creative process we embrace through prayer, transforms us and our relationships to others.<sup>7</sup>

Another theologian who refused to speak of God in anthropomorphic terms was Paul Tillich. He is famous for having said that God is not a being because God is "Being" itself. Accordingly, he believed it is humanly impossible to pray in the traditional sense because there is no personality to address. Tillich said that is why Paul, writing in Romans 8, said, "we do not know how to pray as we ought." Our relationship with God is not an I-Thou encounter, rather, the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. For Tillich, prayer became a paradox where "He who speaks through us is He who is spoken to."<sup>8</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, watching the failure of institutionalized Christianity in Germany, emphasized a community of the saints praying together, completely surrendered to the will of God. He said through prayer we are acting for one another, and our prayers become the prayers of the church. In fact, it is through our prayers that we show the reality of the church.<sup>9</sup>

Union with God is the point of prayer, according to the mystic Thomas Merton. Through the process of prayer, we take on the form of Christ and become new beings in both our personal and our social existence.<sup>10</sup>

Abraham J. Heschel noted that God is at the heart of prayer because, unless there is a concerned God to hear us, there is no point in praying.<sup>11</sup>

Eugene Peterson might add:

There is a difference between praying to an unknown God whom we hope to discover in our praying, and praying to a known God, revealed through Israel and in Jesus Christ, who speaks our language. In the first we indulge our appetite for religious fulfillment; in the second we practice obedient faith. The first is a lot more fun; the second is a lot more important.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. YOUR COSMOLOGY WILL AFFECT YOUR VIEW OF PRAYER

For example, Stanley J. Grenz implies that your position on whether the universe is open or closed influences your prayers.<sup>13</sup> If you believe the universe is closed, what is the point of petitionary prayer? If you do not believe in the supernatural or in the miracles, why ask God for any assistance? A closed universe reduces prayer to nothing more than Schleiermacher's method for aligning believers with the rules of God's Kingdom;<sup>14</sup> or Wieman's creative process designed to transform us;<sup>15</sup> or modern psychology's "autosuggestion."<sup>16</sup>

Mike Bryan, in his book Chapter and Verse, ran into these same questions when grappling with Calvinistic doctrine:

Another conundrum for Christians posed by Calvinist doctrine is prayer. If God has preordained everything, what is the logic of beseeching Him for divine intercession? Aren't we asking God to contradict Himself, or to change His mind, neither of which is possible, by definition? The orthodox Christian answer is that this is another mystery of the cosmos. Whatever the logic or lack of it that underlies orthodox prayer, the Judeo-Christian faith has historically required that God hear and respond to specific prayers.<sup>17</sup>

Whether God responds to specific prayers is a debate that has raged among theologians for many years. Immanuel Kant did not believe prayer could change God's heart or His plans.<sup>18</sup> Kant argued that true prayer was living a moral life, trusting that God "governs the world justly and beneficently, with the power and wisdom to order it as is best."<sup>19</sup> Schleiermacher wrote that you might as well believe in magic as to believe that prayer could change God or alter the people and events around you.<sup>20</sup>

C. S. Lewis admitted the question of whether or not our prayers influence God was difficult to answer, however, according to Perry LeFevre, Lewis believed our prayers transcend any one-way causal relationship.<sup>21</sup> In other words, we make requests of other people, yet, our requests are not necessarily what provokes their response. They may or may not have been planning to do what we asked anyway. Lewis wrote, "We have nothing that we have not received; but part of what we have received is the power of being more than receptacles."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, Lewis argued our prayers should relate to real people and real actions rather than attempting to cultivate an inner spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Karl Barth, who viewed prayer as an act of obedience to God, also saw God's magnificence in the act of answering our prayers:

The fact that God yields to human petitions, that He alters His intentions and follows the bent of our prayers, is not a sign of weakness. In His own majesty and in the splendor of His might, He has willed and yet wills it so. He desires to be the God who has been made flesh in Jesus Christ. Therein lies His glory, His omnipotence. He does not then impair Himself by yielding to our prayer; on the contrary, it is in so doing that He shows His greatness.<sup>24</sup>

Baptists, among others, argue with certainty that our prayers do influence God as He voluntarily limits Himself in order to make us dynamic partners<sup>25</sup> with Him.

This dynamic partnership is partially defined by Harry Emerson Fosdick in his book on prayer:

Now if God has left some things contingent on man's thinking and working, why may He not have left some things contingent on man's praying? . . . We pray for the same reason that we work and think, because only so can the wise and good God get some things done which He wants done. Indeed, there is a deal of nonsense talked about resignation to God's will as the only attitude in prayer. Not resignation to God's will, but cooperation with God's will is the truer expression of a Christian attitude.<sup>26</sup>

Stanley J. Grenz goes one step further, suggesting prayer is an eschatological activity where we pray the future into the present:

In the Bible, prayer is eschatological - it is directed toward the kingdom of God. In prayer, the believer beseeches the God of the future with the desire that the marks of God's rule (forgiveness, sustenance, deliverance, and the Spirit's fullness) may be present in the current situation, which is filled with want, need, and insufficiency. Petitionary prayer, in other words, requests the coming of the future into the present.<sup>27</sup>

Grenz poetically describes prayer as a cry for the kingdom, which echoes the view of Jewish mystic Abraham J. Heschel when he notes God is in exile from the world He created, and His own creatures have exiled Him by defying His will.<sup>28</sup> "He is not at home in this corrupt world, but our prayers 'bring God back into the world, to establish His kingship for a second at least.'"<sup>29</sup>

In what may be the best argument for God's willingness to listen to our prayers, Grenz notes that, although God offers reconciliation through Christ to all mankind, only those who respond to God in prayer are able to access that saving action.<sup>30</sup> This once again illustrates how prayer is intermingled with many other theological doctrines: If you do not believe that Christ died for all mankind, then you must believe there are some people who will either never pray the sinner's prayer or, if they pray it, God will not answer it. If you are a Universalist, then you would believe that it does not matter whether someone lifts a humble prayer to God asking for salvation because that salvation will come regardless.

### 3. PRAYER IS INITIATED BY GOD, NOT MAN

Many theologians argue prayer is an obedient response to God: some suggesting that we have been commanded to pray so we must pray, others adding that we are incapable of prayer unless God initiates it. In other words, prayer is not asking of God or searching for God, it is simply answering God.<sup>31</sup> This agrees with Helmut Thielicke's overall view of theology, which he says consists of three elements: understanding God has spoken, understanding what God has spoken, and formulating a reply to God.<sup>32</sup>

When you consider that God is Creator and Initiator of all we know, this makes sense: regardless of anything we do, we *are* answering Him. Martin Luther writes we should be eternally grateful to God for openly telling "us in our own language that He intends to be our God."<sup>33</sup> Otherwise, as confirmed in the first chapter of John, we would totally miss God's light.

Thankfully, God does point the way, and according to Karl Barth, He points "out a way that will lead us to prayer." Barth adds:

Prayer is neither an arbitrary act nor a step to be taken blindly. When we pray, we cannot venture according to whim in this or that direction, with just any sort of request. For God commands us to follow Him and to take the place that He has assigned to us. It is a matter ruled by God, not by our own initiative.<sup>34</sup>

Samuel Balentine notes that Barth's discussions of prayer are an attempt to focus on theology rather than anthropology:

For Barth, prayer is first and foremost a matter of obedience to God. One prays not out of power or powerlessness, not out of desire or disposition, but rather in obedience to God's order and command. In this sense, prayer is turning toward God and away from self. It is a preoccupation with God. . . . It is a *listening to* God rather than a *speaking about* God. It is a response to who God is and what God has done in God's world, not a declaration of

humanity's potential or initiative. In short, for Barth authentic prayer necessarily begins and ends in the worship of God through praise and thanksgiving.<sup>35</sup>

The French theologian Jacques Ellul believes that the reason God is silent in our generation is because we believe we initiate prayer: We see in prayer a prerogative for us to talk to God whenever we want to, and we often taking Him for granted. Ellul argues prayer has become a "gadget," and he writes, "I hold my prayer as a person would who is listening on a telephone, and I talk into it. Predictably it works." Ellul adds:

With such a model as our point of departure, how are we to grasp the fact that prayer precisely is not a means of laying hold of God; that prayer precisely is not made possible by a system, but, rather, by a decision of grace on the part of the one who wills indeed to listen; that prayer precisely is not addressed to one who dwells at a distance, but is addressed to one who comes very close (even into our hearts!); that prayer precisely is a miracle and not a technical procedure.<sup>36</sup>

God, aware of our cynical attitude toward prayer, has withdrawn until we begin to take prayer more seriously:

If it be true that we are living in this time of abandonment (which is neither historically unique nor final), then prayer is all the more urgent and necessary. But it represents a battle to be fought on all fronts. In the first place, the combat of prayer is a combat in spite of everything. It is one of obeying the commandment . . . in spite of common sense. This obedience is still demanded of us even if our prayers are not heard, even if we no longer know what prayer means. That is to say that what is expected of us is a radical trust, to the point of the absurd, since in that case prayer acquires its reality, its value, its sense, from that which we do not see.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. OUR PRAYERS SHOULD BE HONEST BEFORE GOD

Samuel Balentine writes that God wants our prayers to be praise as well as lament.<sup>38</sup> Eugene Peterson concurs, writing it is not the intent of prayer to "refine our coarse materiality into pure spirit so that we will not embarrass heaven with the vulgarities of flesh."<sup>39</sup> In addition, Peterson writes:

The Word did not become a good idea, or a numinous feeling, or a moral aspiration: the Word became *flesh* and went on to change water into wine, and then wine into blood. Prayer aids and abets this becoming, taking wispy devotional impulses and making them solid in muscle and bone. . . .<sup>40</sup> The way of prayer is not to cover our unlovely emotions so that they appear respectable, but expose them so that they can be enlisted in the work of the kingdom.<sup>41</sup>

Through prayer, Peterson notes, we are able to understand the implications of our sins, and as we come closer to God in prayer, we are no longer able to act as if our sin had nothing to do with God.<sup>42</sup>

## 5. TRUE PRAYER FORCES US TO FACE OURSELVES

True prayer, then, forces us to face ourselves: to seek God's solution and not our own.<sup>43</sup> We come to God with broken and contrite hearts and allow Him to examine us. If we examine ourselves by our own standards, there is a strong chance we will deceive ourselves.<sup>44</sup> It is in prayer that we acknowledge the truth of Soren Kierkegaard's statement, "God creates everything out of nothing and everything which God is to use He first reduces to nothing."<sup>45</sup>

In prayer, we acknowledge that the true self is a person humbled and clinging to God, deeply aware of his sin and that sin has broken his union with God. According to LeFevre, this is a summation of Thomas Merton's Doctrine of the False Self, which is a contemporary interpretation of the Doctrine of Sin.<sup>46</sup>

Merton says the alienation of the self from God is the self's perverse attachment to itself, apart from God, as if the self apart from God is real. Such a self is not real; it is illusory. Living as if one is an independent self is living a constant lie. It is this condition which underlies contemporary doubt and self-questioning, the existential dread which is experienced as a sense of insecurity, lostness, exile, emptiness, boredom and disorientation.<sup>47</sup>

Ole Hallesby writes that prayer is a combination of confessed helplessness and faith that Christ will take care of our needs.<sup>48</sup> Without this combination, we are not truly involved in prayer. Through our helplessness, we admit there is nothing we can do without God: we are totally dependent upon Him. On the other hand, it is through our faith that we acknowledge Jesus is capable of handling our concerns. True faith is leaving the results up to Him.<sup>49</sup> Hallesby continues:

It is not intended that our faith should help Jesus to fulfill our supplications. He does not need any help; all He needs is access. Neither is it intended that our faith should draw Jesus into our distress, or make Him interested in us, or solicitous on our behalf. He has long since cared for us.<sup>50</sup>

John Calvin's four rules of prayer suggest similar ideas of dependence. He writes:

*First*, approach God reverently, avoiding levity and frivolity, as if He is our buddy;

*second*, pray with sincerity, as if from the heart;<sup>51</sup>

*third*, yield all confidence in ourselves and humbly plead for pardon;

*fourth*, pray with confident hope.

## 6. PRAYER IS WORK OR SERVICE FOR GOD

Importunity is a noteworthy word in many discussions of prayer: We must press upon God, sacrificing through consistent, disciplined prayer.<sup>52</sup> In an interesting observation, Samuel Balentine notes the Hebrew word *Abodah* means work or service, and it is used in the Hebrew Bible to describe sacrificial temple worship; however, it is also used in Rabbinic Judaism as the standard term for prayer.<sup>53</sup> He adds, "In Rabbinic Judaism, and in large measure in contemporary Jewish faith and practice, prayer is the "service . . . of the heart," which constantly interrupts the routine and the mundane with an awareness of the sacred and the absolute." Balentine also notes that the orientation of Jewish worship moved over the years from sacrifice to prayer, giving us insight into the *sacrifice of praise* we are to bring God on our knees.<sup>54</sup>

Henri J. M. Nouwen explained the service of prayer in his book, *The Wounded Healer*:

For a man or prayer is, in the final analysis, the man who is able to recognize in others the face of the Messiah and make visible what was hidden, make touchable what was unreachable. The man of prayer is a leader precisely because through his articulation of God's word within himself he can lead others out of confusion to clarification; through his compassion he can guide them out of the closed circuits of their in-groups to the wide world of humanity; and through his critical contemplation he can convert their convulsive destructiveness into creative work for the new world to come.<sup>55</sup>

## 7. PRAYER IS A COMMUNAL ACTIVITY

Many theologians recognize prayer as a communal event. First, it is communal because prayer is viewed as an alignment with Christ, even to the extent that Calvin writes "we pray through the mouth of Jesus Christ . . . inasmuch as He gives us access and audience, and intercedes for us."<sup>56</sup> Second, prayer has historically been a communal event with emphasis upon the Psalter and public prayer, and it is only after learning to pray through the church community, that we go to "our closets or the mountains, into the street and the markets, and continue our praying. But it is essential to understand that the prayer goes from the center outwards; if we suppose that it proceeds inwards from the convergence of praying individuals we are at cross-purposes with the praying experience of Israel and the church."<sup>57</sup>

Karl Barth argues that no distinction can be made between public and private prayer: "One cannot ask whether it is the Christians who pray, or the church. There is no alternative, for when the Christians pray, it is the church; and when the church prays, it is the Christians."<sup>58</sup> E. Herman adds our private

devotions have become so feeble because we have lost the "corporate consciousness which springs from a worthy doctrine of the One Church."<sup>59</sup> We simply do not understand the reach of our prayers.<sup>60</sup>

It is likely Dietrich Bonhoeffer would agree, arguing through prayer we act for one another.<sup>61</sup> When the individual or the congregation prays in the name of Jesus, they can be sure their prayers reach the ears of God because Christ is their intercessor.<sup>62</sup> Christians are to pray as a fellowship, and in such a way, that their prayers penetrate the world of work, making everything they do a prayer.<sup>63</sup> Bonhoeffer was watching the world and the church collapse around him, and there was little left for him to do but pray. It is understandable why he viewed the church as nothing more than a community of praying saints. In many ways, we would do well to remember this image.

In fact, remembering is another important element to communal prayer: It helps us develop "our memory with God." It reminds us who we are and who God is by recalling His mighty acts that go beyond our "one-generation knowledge" or our "own conversion-experience knowledge."<sup>64</sup> Through communal prayer, particularly liturgical prayer, we are reminded that men have struggled with their faith for thousands of years, and God has been faithful to them for thousands more.

Richard Foster notes liturgical prayer helps modern pray-ers unite with the communion of the saints. It also helps us to stand against the temptation to be entertaining or to slip into a private religion that focuses solely upon self.<sup>65</sup>

## 8. REVIVAL COMES THROUGH PRAYER

Historically, the importance of prayer cannot be overlooked. It has been argued that every "spiritual awakening of significance from the beginning of Acts to the powerful Welsh revival early in this century had its roots in prayer."<sup>66</sup> Stanley J. Grenz sees motivating the people of God to sincere, honest and fervent prayer as the greatest challenge facing the church today.<sup>67</sup> He points out that the New Testament church was a praying church, yet the modern church is the epitome of a "prayerless church,"<sup>68</sup> spending more time planning programs than praying. Grenz suggests there is a relationship between prayer and renewal; therefore, if we want renewal, we need to pray.<sup>69</sup>



Finally, Grenz notes that prayer is "perhaps the only task in which every Christian can participate," so there really are no excuses for churches and church members not to get involved in this sacred activity.

Grenz adds that any "Christian can become a giant of prayer."<sup>70</sup>

It is ironic that we always talk about little old ladies who can pray, saying they are the knees of the church, when, as E. M. Bounds writes, it is time men took this service seriously:

How difficult it appears to be for the church to understand that the whole scheme of redemption depends upon men of prayer! The work of our Lord, while here on earth, as well of the apostle Paul was, by teaching and example, to develop men of prayer, to whom the future church should be committed. How strange that instead of learning this simple and all-important lesson, the modern church has largely overlooked it!<sup>71</sup>

St. Francis spent so much time in prayer that reportedly he seemed "not so much a man praying as prayer itself made man."<sup>72</sup> Would that many modern men could deserve the same description.

## George Mueller

George Mueller was born in Prussia in 1805. His youth was characterized by wickedness and rebellion and that in the midst of training as a student of divinity. He tried self-reform at points along the way, to no avail, and then, at the age of twenty-one he was converted and radically changed. The word of God became more and more precious to him and prayer became the central mark of his life.

In 1829 he moved to London and in 1830 married Mary Groves. This couple agreed that they would look only to the Lord for their material needs, a conviction to which Mueller had earlier come. Mueller was a student of Scripture and continually sought to follow what Scripture taught and to believe what God said. As he studied and prayed and preached, God began directing his heart toward wider fields of service. In 1834 the Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad was begun in Bristol, England to aid day-schools, Sunday schools, and adult schools, to circulate Scripture, and to aid mission efforts. At the same time, Mueller began to be greatly burdened over the plight of orphans in the area.

At the end of 1835 steps were taken to open an orphan house to provide for the spiritual as well as temporal needs of the many orphans in Bristol. In this as in all else, Mueller desired that this venture would be a testimony to God's ability and faithfulness to provide all that was needed. Time after time George Mueller found God faithful to His word to provide and give clear guidance. He kept precise records of God's dealings with him and of God's provision. He wanted to be both a faithful steward toward God and a faithful trustee toward men. His records are the factual account of a walk of faith. A. T. Pierson noted that "in fifty thousand cases, Mr. Mueller calculated that he could trace distinct answers to definite prayers."<sup>1</sup>

For over sixty years, Mueller ministered in England and abroad. His first wife died in 1870 after 40 years of wonderful marriage. In late 1871 Mueller married again and from 1875 to 1892 he and his wife traveled in Europe, America, Asia, Africa, and Australia ministering and preaching. The last six years of Mueller's life (1892-1898) were spent in ministry in Bristol.

Mueller once stated, "God has never failed me! For nearly seventy years every need in connection with this work has been supplied. The orphans from the first until now have numbered nine thousand, five hundred, but they never wanted for a meal. In answer to prayer, \$7,500,000 has been sent to me. We have needed as much as \$200,000 in one year, and it has all come when needed. We have no committees, no collectors, no voting and no endowment. All has come in answer to believing prayer." That is a fitting summary of Mueller's life and work. As he looked to God and His word, God magnified and glorified Himself. He enabled Mueller to live a life and complete a work that stands as "a convincing proof that God hears prayer and that it is safe to trust Him at all times."<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Arthur T. Pierson, *George Muller of Bristol*. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Dick Eastman, *No Easy Road*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971, p. 18.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akin, Daniel L. "Class Lectures on Systematic Theology." Wake Forest, North Carolina: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 1993 - Spring 1994.
- Allen, Lloyd. "A Brief History of Christian Devotion." Faith and Mission, vol. VII, no. 2, Spring 1990.
- Balentine, Samuel E. Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Barth, Karl. Prayer. 2nd ed. Ed. by Don E. Saliers from a trans. by Sara F. Terrien. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985.
- Billheimer, Paul E. Destined for the Throne. Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Xian Literature Crusade, 1975.
- Blackaby, Henry T. and Claude V. King. Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God. Nashville: The Sunday School Board, 1990.
- Brings, Lawrence M., ed. We Believe in Prayer. Minneapolis: T. S. Denison and Company, 1958.
- Bounds, E. M. The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Bryan, Mike. Chapter and Verse: A Skeptic Revisits Christianity. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Coppenger, Mark. "A Conversation with the Prayer Leaders." SBC Life. January 1994.
- Cowen, Gerald. "Class Lectures on Spiritual Formation." Wake Forest, North Carolina: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 1992.
- Crabb, Larry. Understanding People: Deep Longings for Relationship. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.
- Dorsett, Lyle Wesley. E. M. Bounds: Man of Prayer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- Ellul, Jacques. Prayer and Modern Man. New York: The Seabury Press, 1970.
- Erickson, Millard J. Christian Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. The Meaning of Prayer. New York: Association Press, 1949.
- Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. Rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

- George, Timothy. Theology of the Reformers. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988.
- Grenz, Stanley J. Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988.
- Grissom, Fred. "Class Lectures on Church History." Wake Forest, North Carolina: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 1992 - Spring 1993.
- Guyon, Jeanne. Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ. Gardiner, Maine: Christian Books, MCMLXXV.
- Hallesby, Ole. Prayer. USA: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975.
- Herman, E. Creative Prayer. New York: Harper and Row, n.d.
- Hinson, E. Glenn. Seekers After a Mature Faith: A Historical Introduction to the Classics of Christian Devotion (with special psychological commentary by Wayne E. Oates). Nashville: Broadman Press, 1968.
- Houston, James. The Transforming Friendship: A Guide to Prayer. Oxford: Lion, 1989.
- Hunt, T. W. The Doctrine of Prayer. Nashville: Convention Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Going Deeper in Prayer." The Baptist Standard, vol. 106, no. 7, February 16, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Prayer Seminar" Oxford, NC. November 1992.
- Jungmann, Joseph A. Christian Prayer Through the Centuries. Translated by John Coyne, S. J. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- Job, Reuben P. and Norman Shawchuck. A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants. Nashville, Tennessee: The Upper Room, 1983.
- Keating, Thomas. Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel. Rockport, Massachusetts: Element, 1992.
- Koenig, John. Rediscovering New Testament Prayer. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Lawrence (Brother). The Practice of the Presence of God. Springdale, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1982.
- Lea, Larry. Your Guide to Successful Prayer. Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1987.
- Leech, Kenneth. Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977.
- LeFevre, Perry. Understandings of Prayer. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981.
- Lewis, C. S. God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics. Ed. by Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "If God is Sovereign, Why Should We Pray?" Discipleship Journal, issue 79, January/February 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Joyful Christian. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977.
- Lord, Peter. The 2959 Plan. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.
- Luther, Martin. "How I Pray: Counsel on Approaching the Almighty." Christian History, issue 39, vol. XII, no. 3.
- Motley, Julian. "Class Lectures on Christian Initiation and Discipleship Training." Wake Forest, North Carolina: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 1993.
- Müller, George. Answers to Prayer. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour, 1989.
- Murray, Andrew. With Christ in the School of Prayer. U.S.A.: Whitaker House, 1981.
- Packer, J. I. Knowing God. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
- Parrish, Archie. "Prayer: God's Ultimate Weapon" Ligonier's 1994 Conference: The Christian and Society, Orlando, Florida, February 3-4, 1994.
- Peterson, Eugene H. Answering God: The Psalms as Tools of Prayer. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.
- Pratt, Lonni Collins. "Why Pray When You Don't See Answers?" Discipleship Journal, issue 79, January/February 1994.
- Pratt, Richard L., Jr. Pray With Your Eyes Open. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbetyrian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987.
- Spurgeon, Charles. The Power of Prayer in a Believer's Life. Ed. by Robert Hall. Lynnwood, Washington: Emerald Books, 1993.
- Taylor, Jack R. Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach. Nashville: Broadman, 1977.
- Thielicke, Helmut. A Little Exercise for Young Theologians. Trans. by Charles L. Taylor. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962.
- Torrey, R. A. How to Pray. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour, 1989.
- Unger, Merrill F. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Ed. by R. K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos, Cyril J. Barber. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.
- Wakefield, Gordon S., ed. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.
- Walker, Williston, Richard A. Norris, David W. Lotz, and Robert T Handy. A History of the Christian Church. 4th ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985.
- Wangerin, Walter, Jr. "Painting Christmas" Christianity Today, vol 37, no. 15, December 13, 1993.

White, John. The Fight: A Practical Handbook for Christian Living. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1976.

Wilkes, Paul. Merton: A Film Biography. Produced and directed by Paul Wilkes. 30 min. New York: First Run Features, 1984. Videocassette.

Wilkins, Michael J. Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Willard, Dallas. The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.

*If some Christians that have been complaining of their ministers had said and acted less before men and had applied themselves with all their might to cry to God for their ministers — had, as it were, risen and stormed heaven with their humble, fervent, and incessant prayers for them — they would have been much more in the way of success.*

— Jonathan Edwards.

**Unanswered Prayers**  
 I thank Thee, God, for my unanswered prayers,  
 The foolish things I sought Thou hast denied;  
 The palace where I prayed I might abide—  
 For selfish ease, release from earthy care—  
 For honours, riches, preferment and pride,  
 The world's plaudits like the rolling tide—  
 The purple robe of fame for me to wear.  
 How fatherly Thou art! How childish I!  
 Complaining for the sweets that do me harm;  
 No good thing dost Thou ever me deny,  
 All dangers fend and soothest each alarm.  
 O God, my earth desires are full of snares;  
 Forgive and do not answer all my prayers.