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# THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

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I must begin with a word of caution. This is indeed holy ground and I don't want to treat it as some kind of academic exercise. We do indeed have a barrage of technical terms to reckon with but these are always, I hope, tools of worship and adoration rather than equipment for mental gymnastics.

The problem with which the doctrine of the trinity is concerned contains three basic elements.

First, there is the unity of God. God is one. Amid all the emphasis on God's triune-ness this remains the most basic point in our faith. "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah" (Deut. 6:4). We must never lose sight of that. Pagan religions had a multiplicity of deities, virtually one to each life-force. In Christianity we have one, exclusive Source of life and energy: one Creator, one elemental Power, one Monarchy. However we go on to define other elements in our doctrine, we have to keep this as our guiding principle: no proposition can be allowed to tamper with the emphasis on divine unity.

The second element in the problem is the deity of Christ. This is a point on which the New Testament is emphatic. It is found in all strands of the tradition: Christ is *theos*, Christ is *kurios*, Christ is *Son of God*, Christ is Son of Man. He has all the attributes of God. He performs all the functions of God. He enjoys all the prerogatives of God. And bear in mind the first point: the Unity of God. When we say that Christ is God we cannot mean that He is another God. There is only one God and if Christ is God we can say so only in a sense that fully safeguards our monotheism. The godhead of the Lord is the godhead of the one God.

The third element we have to reckon with is the personalness of the Holy Spirit. He is not simply a divine attribute or a divine function. Nor is He shorthand for God's immanence in the world. He is an agent in His own right, clearly distinguished from both the Father and the Son.

We have, then, three facts to accommodate: the unity of God, the deity of the Son and the personalness of the Holy Spirit. It is tempting to solve the problem by cutting the knot, denying either the Son's deity or the Spirit's personality. We then end up with an Adoptionist Christology in which the Son merely *becomes*, in some sense, God: or with a Modalistic view of the trinity according to which the persons are only aspects or phases of the one person, God.

This is what in fact appears to be happening in many of the modern discussions. In their efforts to escape from the parameters of the historic terminology such scholars as Lampe, Wiles and Mackey succeed only in giving a restatement of old positions or ancient heresies. The *Scottish Journal of Theology*, reviewing Professor Mackey's book, *The Christian*

*Experience of God as Trinity* concluded: "This book, though it forces us to re-examine our assumptions and the expression of our faith in the tribune God, cannot be seen as giving a positive answer to the question of (the) Trinity. Nor can it be commended as making any real contribution to the important, current ecumenical debate on this central Christian doctrine. It is, in fact, essentially, *an anti-trinitarian tract.*" (italics mine). E. L. Mascall passed a similar judgement on Lampe and Wiles: "In comparison with the richness and fecundity of traditional Christianity both their Christology and their theism appear sterile and bleak. For all that our leading Anglican unitarians have to offer us in its place is one third of the Church's God and one half of the Church's Christ". (*Whatever Happened to the Human Mind*, 1980, p. 127).

If these verdicts are correct (and I think they are) there is little to be gained by focussing on current discussions. I propose instead to focus on the historic doctrine, examine its terminology and ascertain its relevance for our situation today.

## Person

Let us begin by looking at the term *person*. The word, as you know, is from the Latin *persona*, meaning first of all a mask and then, by extension, an actor. Later, it came to mean more or less what it means today: a being who performs functions which involve legal accountability and moral responsibility. At this level, it was clearly distinguished from *animal* and *res* (a thing) and this distinction (especially the latter) is obviously still important for theology.

We must always bear in mind Augustine's caveat that in using the word *persona* we are not speaking in order to say something but in order to avoid being silent. There is obviously a profound pessimism in this remark, as if Augustine despaired of finding any meaningful content for the word *persona*. But it would be unhelpful, whatever the respect due to this great Father, to accept his word in a spirit of total helplessness because it is possible to identify real positive content in this historic term.

It reminds us, first of all, that the distinctions between Father, Son and Holy Spirit are real distinctions. There is one *ousia*. There are three *personae*. We state the unity in terms of *ousia*. We state the distinctions in terms of *persona*. These are not simply modalistic or chronological distinctions. They are real, ontological distinctions. In other words, there are *differentia* in the depths of God's own being that correspond to these three *personae*, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

These distinctions appear clearly in many parts of the New Testament. We find them, for example, in the Annunciation, with its reference to the Father's action, the Son's action and the Spirit's action: "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which will be born of you will be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35). In 1 Cor. 15:24 we have a similar distinction, this time between the Father and the Son: the Son delivers up the kingdom to the Father. "From this one passage," writes Tertullian, "we have been already able to show that the Father and the Son are two

separate persons, not only by the mention of their separate names as Father and Son but also by the fact that He who delivered up the kingdom and He to whom it is delivered up must necessarily be two different persons." (*Aversus Praxean*, Chap. IV). The narrative of the Lord's baptism again emphasises the same distinctions: the Son is baptised, the Father speaks in the voice from heaven and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. It is quite impossible to fit this pattern into a modalistic or monarchian framework. Certainly what we see here is only the economic trinity, God in His redemptive action. But behind the redemptive action of God there lie real, distinctions in the very depths of deity itself.

Secondly, *persona* speaks of agency. This is complicated by the principle that the external acts of God (the *opera ad extra*) are to be seen as works of the triune God conceived as one single agency. Creation is the work of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: and providence, too, is the work of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But it is possible, I think, to look more deeply and find divisions of function which point to ultimate ontological distinction.

The most basic of these is the action of each Person on the other Persons. For example, we have the Father sending the Son, we have the Father upholding the Son, we have the Son praying to the Father, we have the Son yielding Himself, and at last yielding the kingdom to the Father. We have the Son glorifying and obeying the Father. We have the Father sending the Spirit. We have the Son sending the Spirit. We have the Spirit interceding with God for the church. In other words, we have agency from Father to Son, agency from Son to Father, agency from Spirit to Son, from Son to Spirit and from Spirit to Father. In all of these, there is a division of functions, involving real, personal, almost individualised agency.

But there is also divisible agency with regard to God's actions on believers. For example, in the New Testament the stress falls very often on the agency of God the Father in our redemption. His love is the root and foundation of the life of the church. It is God the Father who elects, who calls, who justifies, who adopts, who sanctifies and who glorifies. We cannot assert this rigidly, excluding the involvement of the Son and the Holy Spirit, but in the majority of instances it is God's agency that is to the fore in these redemptive acts.

In other connections, it is the Spirit's distinctive agency that is in view. He is the One whose fruit we bear, who convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement, who leads us, who bears witness to our sonship and who helps us in our weakness.

The Son's agency is so prominent that it scarcely needs proof. Yet in Tertullian's controversy with Praxeas this was the crucial issue. Was it the Father who was crucified on the cross of Calvary? Was the Father born in the Virgin's womb? Did He become His own Son? These were the logical implications of strict monarchianism. Christ was only God the Father under another name: the Father was born of the Virgin, the Father became His own Son and the Father was crucified. If we recoil from these conclusions, we have to accept that the Son alone is the subject of the

incarnation and of the crucifixion and of the resurrection. In this connection, there is marvellous precision in John's Prologue where the apostle states that *the Word* was made flesh: the *Logos*. It was not *ho theos*, God the Father or the Deity. It was specifically God the Son who became enfleshed and it was that same Son who underwent the whole experience of humiliation and who at last was exalted in the paradox of Golgotha. The Word became flesh: and it was the Word as flesh who was crucified, dead and buried.

Thirdly, *persona* equals *relation*. There are relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit analogous to those between human individuals. They are not identical with those between human *personae*: but they are analogous. The Bible encapsulates this emphasis on relationship in several key concepts. It is present, for example, in the idea of the Son as *agapetos*. He is the beloved, His dear Son, the Son of His love (Col. 1:13). It is also present in the idea of the Son as *monogenes*. Here the emphasis falls more on the *mono* than on the *gene*. It stresses the uniqueness of the relationship. No man or angel occupies this position. Not even the Holy Spirit is *monogenes*. Christ is the only Son, God's own Son, God's beloved Son.

But the emphasis on relationship is enshrined above all in one great word from John's gospel: "The Word was with God" (Jn. 1: 1). The preposition which John uses here is not one of the common words for *with*. He does not say *sun* or *meta* or even *para*. Instead, he creates this marvellous sentence using the word *pros*: the Word was *towards* God. The witness of Father and Son is not some mere proximity: it is a face-to-face relationship, rich in self expression, rich in glorious out-goingness, rich in what we might almost call its eternal extrovertiness, the outward-lookingness of the divine *agape*. Sometimes, the scholastics (including Reformed scholastics) suggest that God's most fundamental concern is self-love. Herman Hoeksema, for example, writes, "God's absolute and pure Self-centredness is expressed and manifest especially in His love" (Reformed Dogmatics, page 103). This is surely close to blasphemy. At the heart of love there is always *pros*: the turning of the face of the one toward the other. That is where the Son was: *pros ton theon*. And the relationship was mutual. He was His Father's delight.

There is no way that this is going to fit into a modalistic construction. We are not speaking of a mode with a mode, an abstraction with an abstraction or a phase with a phase. We are speaking of person with person.

We begin with our Jewish inheritance with its emphasis on the unity of God: but we move quickly to this other emphasis on pluralness in God: and that pluralness is always richness, manifoldness and inexhaustibility. God is *Elohim*, a plural noun taking singular adjectives and predicates, because the glory of all the *els* is compacted into what He is. There is so much *El-ness* (god-ness) in Him that there is no place for any *El* but Himself. And for us, as Christians, at the very heart of this depth and fulness in deity there lies this *witness* of John's Prologue: godness so complete and inexhaustible that we must speak of *God with God*.

Fourthly, *persona* means rationality. This word has to be handled with

some care. It was Boethius who spoke of a person as “the individual substance of a reasonable (*rationalis*) nature” (see Barth, Church Dogmatics, I: 1, p. 409). But in this context, *rationalis* referred not simply to the logical and the computative. It designated the psychological as distinct from the inanimate and the animal. I would suggest that when we speak of rationality as characterising the divine persons we are using it in the same sense as when in Christology we speak of Christ as having a *reasonable* soul. Here, the word is affirming, over against Apollinarius, the whole truth of the human psychology of Christ. Hence, *rationalis* means not simply intellect. It also means the affective and the emotional because these are part of the rationality that distinguishes us from *the thing* and *the animal*. When, for example, we speak of the Holy Spirit as a person, we are ascribing to Him thought, intellect, purposefulness, volition, affection and, above all, emotion. In so speaking, of course, one is conscious that in so much of our inherited theology there is no place in our concept of God for any kind of “passion”. There is no room for suffering and little place for feeling. “We believe in one God”, wrote John of Damascus, “passionless, unchangeable, unalterable” (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book I, Chapter VIII). Obviously, as I define person I am transgressing these parameters, because I do not see how they can be reconciled with the biblical picture. In the divine personalness of each of the hypostases there is a rationality which includes affection and emotion. The Spirit is grieved; and that is already something impossible for an abstraction or a mode.

One final thing with regard to *persona*: each of the persons has His own unique property or characteristic which is His and His alone. This is the doctrine of the *idiomata*, bequeathed to the church by John of Damascus: “In these *hypostatic* or *personal* properties alone do the three holy subsistences differ from each other, being indivisibly divided not by essence but by the distinguishing mark of their proper and peculiar subsistence” (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book I, Chapter VII). These personal properties, as you know, were that the Son is begotten, the Spirit proceeds and the Father neither is begotten nor proceeds (He is ingenerate). We must be conscious that there is a deceptive simplicity about all this. It is easy to use the labels to designate the distinctives: and probably quite impossible to identify the actual meaning of the labels. The Son, for example, is distinguished by *eternal generation*. But what does that mean? In the Arian controversy, the concept “begotten, not made” had an important negative function in emphasising that the Son was not created. The concept of the eternal generation was also used to emphasise the fact that just as in a human son there is the whole nature of his father so in the divine Son there is the whole nature of His Father. The great inadequacy in all this is that one cannot build upon it any distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit because the Father’s nature is also found in its entirety in the Holy Spirit. All the progress we can make before we fall over the edge of revelation is to say: to beget is not to create and to beget means that the whole of the begetter’s nature is in the begotten. There meaningful progress ends.

The Holy Spirit’s distinctive is that He proceeds and it is safe to say that

with regard to the content of this we know virtually nothing. Our insight is exhausted in the statement of John of Damascus: "Though the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father, yet this is not generative in character but processional. This is a different mode of existence, alike incomprehensible and unknown, just as is the generation of the Son", (ibid). We are simply reading back from the economical trinity, from the fact that the Spirit in His redemptive activity comes from the Father and the Son, to an eternal reality corresponding to this temporal procession. What this ontological procession actually is or what is meant by the Father and the Son spirating or breathing the Spirit, we simply do not know.

### Homoousios

A second term which deserves attention is *Homoousios*, another of the key concepts of our inherited theology. It was used first of all by Athanasius at Nicea to define the Son's relation to the Father and later applied by the Cappadocians to the Holy Spirit. Both Son and Spirit are the same in *substance* as God the Father.

Four brief comments must suffice.

First, the term *homoousios* was brought forward specifically as a test of orthodoxy. Today, many scholars are instituting contrasts between the ancient creeds and those of the Reformation, very much to the detriment of the latter, suggesting that those of the Fathers were distinguished by being doxological and devotional. So far as Nicea is concerned, this is about as far from the truth as it is possible to be. Nicea was an occasion of endless politicking, involving wrangling, jostling, intrigue, scheming and compromise. What Athanasius and his bishop, Alexander, wanted was not a doxology, but a word which enshrined orthodoxy and excluded heresy. It had to be a word which no Arian could adopt. Arius took the position that the Son was *hetero-ousios*. He was of a different substance. He was a different being from the living God. The semi-Arians said the Son was *homoi-ousios*: He was like God. Many orthodox men were perfectly happy with that because it could bear a perfectly scriptural meaning and even claim direct support from the fact that the New Testament defines Jesus as the *homoion* of God. But Athanasius insisted that what was needed was not only something which would express the truth but something which would safeguard it. That was why he chose *homoousios* rather than *homoiouosios*. No Arian could say *homoousios*. Neither could a semi-Arian. Only someone who had an unqualified commitment to the deity of Christ could regard Him as *one and the same in being* with God the Father.

Secondly, the word *homoousios* affirms not merely generic identity but numerical identity. The orthodox view is not that the Son belongs to the same genus or species as God the Father but that the Son has the same being (or is the same being) as God the Father. What is asserted is a numerical identity. Indeed, this is what must be asserted, if we are to remain monotheists. The Lord our God is one. There is one divine *ousia*, one *substantia*, one *theiotes*, one divine nature, one godhead. Hence, the *homoousios* must be numerical. There is one God, one being who is God,

and Christ's deity must be fitted into that fundamental perspective. The three do not form three Gods having a merely generic identity. They form one God with a numerical identity.

Thirdly, the Fathers defined the content of *homoousios* largely in terms of attributes. This was especially true of Athanasius. "Unless the Son possesses all the attributes of the Father it could not be true that He who sees the Son sees the Father" *Orations Against the Arians*, 1:21). Or, even more explicitly: "There is no single attribute which the Father has which the Son has not" (Ibid, III:6). This emphasis rests on solid New Testament foundations. Christ is the *pleroma* (fulness) of God (Col. 2:9). All the fulness (the entirety) of deity is in Him. He is in the *morphe* of God (Phil. 2:6), possessing all that constitutes deity.

Everything that enters into our definition of God is there, including self-existence. Remember the convenient definition (convenient although far from satisfactory) of God given in the Shorter Catechism: "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable." In these terms, *homoousios* means that the Son and the Spirit along with the Father are infinite, eternal and unchangeable. What the Father is the Son is. Anything which is a perfection of God is also a perfection of the Son: otherwise, said Athanasius, how could a man say that when he has seen the Son he has seen the Father? You cannot say that unless the *pleroma* is in the Son. When we say this, of course, we are not merely saying that *theos* is a predicate of Jesus or of Christ. We are also saying that Jesus is a predicate of *theos*. There is in God no un-Christlikeness at all.

### Autotheos

Closely linked with *homoousios* is the word *autotheos*. In Patristic theology (including Tertullian and Athanasius and, to a lesser extent, Augustine) there are clear traces of subordinationism. This appears in the emphasis that the Father has all the attributes from Himself, whereas the Son has them only from the Father; that the Son's self-existence is given to Him by the Father; that the Father *communicated* deity to the Son; and that the Father is the *fons deitatis*, the fountain of deity. In other words, there is this one Person who is God in His own right, God the Father, and the Son and the Spirit who are God in some secondary and derived way. In the Athanasian Creed, there is already a protest against this subordinationist tendency: "In this trinity none is before or after another: none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal and coequal." Despite this, however, the subordinationist strain has continued right down to the present day, even in orthodox Christology. The valuable work done by John Calvin in this area has been largely ignored, apart from the prevalence of a certain suspicion that he was unsound on the doctrine of the eternal sonship. Calvin was responding to the challenge of a certain Valentinus Gentilis who alleged, "The Father alone is *autotheos*." He alone is essentiated by no superior divinity. Only He is God *a se ipso*: "The Logos of God is not that one *autotheos* whose Logos it is." Calvin's response was that such assertions were against every Scripture which makes Christ God. Subordination has

no place when we are speaking *simpliciter* of the deity of Christ: "When, apart from consideration of the Person, we are speaking of His divinity, or, which is the same thing, *simpliciter of the essence*, I say that it is truly predicated of it that it is *a se ipso*. (*Institutes* I:XIII, 25). The Son derived sonship from the Father but He did not derive His essence from the Father. "The Father is the fountain of the deity not with respect to the essence but the order. The Father is not the *Deificator* of the Son" (*Institutes* I:XIII, 25). In fact, said Calvin, if the Son is not *autotheos* he cannot be *theos* at all because self-existence is the most distinctive property of deity. If Christ is not God in His own right, if He is God only by derivation, then we are tampering with His very deity.

There are two points I would make on this.

First of all, as far as I can see, the problem arises from a failure to see the full significance of the *homoousios*. Subordinationism, in all its forms, assumes that there are two essences, the one derived and the other underived. The answer to that is to say, Look, the Son's *ousia* cannot be derived from or subordinated to the Father's *ousia* because it is the same *ousia*. They have one and the same being, one and the same substance, and that makes all derivation of being impossible.

## Filioque

Secondly, we must try to relate this *autotheos* to the so-called *filioque* clause. That means a whole new block of thought: we move on from *homoousios* via *autotheos* to *filioque*. In the earlier creeds (Nicea, for example) we are told that the Spirit proceeds from God the Father. The *filioque* means that we are adding a clause which says, "and from the Son". This clause probably circulated in the church informally and unofficially before it came into the creeds at all. It was taken up by the Synod of Toledo in 589 in the form *et a filio*. But Toledo was only a local council and lacked the moral authority to alter by itself the language of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed. After Toledo, however, versions of the Creed containing the *filioque* clause came to be widely used in the West, especially in Spain and France. For a time the Popes refused to give any sanction to the change of wording, but it was finally approved by Pope Benedict VIII in 1044. This precipitated the breach with the Eastern Church which became a formal reality in 1054.

There are many voices even in the Western church today arguing that it is inadvisable to press the *filioque*, largely because of its implications for ecumenism. Three comments may be made.

First, it is important to remember that this is a debate about Christ, not about the Holy Spirit. What is at issue is the standing and function of the Second Person of the Trinity. To deny that the Son participates in the procession of the Holy Spirit is to reduce *His* status.

Secondly, there can be no doubt that in the economical Trinity the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. It is Christ who baptises in the Spirit: "He has shed forth this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The Spirit is the Son's delegate and the Son's Vicar as much as He is the Father's. It seems fair to assume that this order of redemption

corresponds to a real order in the depths of God Himself.

Thirdly, it is worth pondering whether the whole controversy proceeds on a misunderstanding. The objection of the Greek Fathers (and of some contemporary theologians) is that the *filioque* leads to two *principia* in the godhead: two *fontes deitatis* or two sources of divinity. The Greeks always thought that that compromised the divine *monarchia*, the divine unity. I cannot resist the temptation to say that the answer is to dispense with the whole idea of *principium*, *arche*, *fons*: throw the whole gaboodle out the theological window. So far as I can see there is no place in our thought of God for *principia*: not even to say that God is the cause of His own existence, because the truth is that God's existence is uncaused. God simply *is*. The divine *ousia* has no *principium*. The divine ousia has no *arche*. The divine ousia has no *fons*. If we accept that, then the Greek objection falls because then we no longer have two *principia*: we have no *principia* at all. The unity lies in the simple unity of the essence itself. The idea of *principium* tempts us to go back to a God behind the *ousia*, who accounts for the *ousia*. That is a road down which I can't go.

## Perichoresis

Let's move on to another of the great words, *perichoresis*. This, too, is part of our inheritance, but a very much neglected one. It is the coinage, largely, of John of Damascus, who, in his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Book IV, Chapter XVIII) speaks of "the *perichoresis* of the subsistences in one another." The Latin equivalents were *circumincessio* and *circuminessio*. The basic idea is implicit in John 14:10, "I am in the Father and the Father in me." But within that general idea there are three more specific concepts.

First, *koinonia* or sharing. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have certain things in common. The divine essence, they have that in common. The divine government, the *monarchia*, they have that in common: the divine Son is in the midst of the throne (Rev. 7:17), at the very heart of the monarchy, possessing all the authority (Mt. 28:18). They have the *doxa* in common: "the Lord Jesus Christ, the *doxa*" says James. He *is* the glory, the shekinah. And the love, too, is common. It is mutual. Each loves the other. Each is lovely to the other.

Secondly, the *perichoresis* means the indwelling of each by the other. We have already seen the *pros*, the towardness, of John 1:1. Here we have this new dimension, this intimateness, this interpenetration which human love might wish it could aspire to but finds impossible. In God it is possible for each person to be in, almost inside the other, in a unique intensity of mutuality: "I in the Father and the Father in me."

Thirdly, *perichoresis* includes the idea of the circulation of the divine power; not circulation from a *principium*, but an unbegun circle and an unending circle. At this level, the *circumincessio* involves a sharing of energies, the El-ness of God in unceasing circulation through the divine persons.

## Trinitarian religion

I come at last to my final section: Trinitarian religion. What are the implications of this particular doctrine for the Christian life?

First of all, it is the one thing which can sustain our worship of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Remember Pliny's definition of a Christian: "They are people," he says, "who sing hymns to Christ as to a god." That was the driving force behind Athanasius' great struggle. To worship one who was *heterousios* or even *homoiousios* was, as he saw it, a reversion to paganism. Do we want to end up worshipping angels or super-creatures? What right do we have to bow the knee unless the Saviour is, in the absolute sense, the Son of God? Those called to teach the worshipping church have to preach this doctrine week in, week out, both to justify doxology and liturgy and to motivate to doxology and liturgy.

Who is He, in yonder stall,  
At whose feet the shepherds fall?  
'Tis the Lord, Oh wondrous story,  
'Tis the Lord, the king of glory.

We can never end it there. We must go on to say:

At His feet we humbly fall.  
Crown Him, crown Him, Lord of all:

There doxology and theology merge.

Secondly, there is a very direct link between the nature of God as triune and the structure of human existence as societal. I come back again to John's *pros* (Jn. 1:1). The Word was *with* God. "Let us make man in our image," said the triune God: in the image of our *withness*, in the image of our pluralness, and in the image of our multiformity. Hence the divine observation that it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Man lives in marriage and man lives in families and man lives in community: and when God's own Son becomes man He chooses twelve simply *to be with Him*. In all Christ's human life he has *withness*, except in that terrible moment when, already forsaken by His disciples, He experiences rejection by God Himself. A human life without *withness* is truncated and impoverished. It is surely important to emphasise that. Many psychological problems among Christians are due to violations of this social instinct: an instinct which belongs to the very core of our being as made in the image of God.

Thirdly, there is a direct link between Trinitarian theology and our own Christian lives. Not only human existence in general but our Christian lives must be societal. In those lives there must be sharing, *koinonia*. The Lord's Supper, with its rich symbolism of giving and receiving, illustrates this. Everything is being shared: the gifts, the joys, the sorrows, the strengths, the weaknesses. The church is a *synagoge*, a coming together. It is an *ecclesia*, an assembly. These words bring us back again to the fact that we bear the image of the God who has never been except as triune and cannot be except as triune. Just as we were created for withness, we were redeemed for withness, which means that our churches are supposed to correspond as closely as possible to the life of the triune God. God is love. The church is love. Without love we are nothing. We are

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

called, in the church, to reflect the love of the eternal Father for the eternal Son, remembering all the time that each Christian, like each Person of the godhead, has his own distinct personal property. We must render to God precisely the service which reflects our own uniqueness.

Finally, the religious significance of *perichoresis*. I have spoken of *perichoresis* as the indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit in and through each other. Each is in the other. I think it is fair to say that in the New Testament there is a redemptive *perichoresis* of incredible wealth and complexity. Indeed, what happens in redemption is virtually the opening of the circle of trinitarian life to admit the church. That must be said with great care and with much qualification because the otherness of God remains a fact eternally and there is always a great gulf between us and Him. But do you remember how much emphasis there is in the New Testament on points which, taken together, give us a redemptive *perichoresis*? There is our own *koinonia* with the Father (1 John 1:3), our *koinonia* with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), our *koinonia* in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), our *koinonia* in the sonship of Christ (Eph. 1:5) and our *koinonia* in the sovereignty of Christ (Eph. 1:6). There is the *indwelling* of the believer by the triune God. Each divine Person is in the church and in each believer individually. And there is the *circulation* of the divine energy: what Henry Scougal called "the life of God in the soul of man." We are rooted and built up in Him (Colossians 2:7). We can even say, "I can do all things in the strength which He imparts" (Phil. 4:13).

So we have a *perichoresis* which includes sharing, indwelling and circulation. Last of all, it includes *with*. "Father, I will that they also whom thou has given me be with me where I am: that is, in the glory I had with thee before the world was." That is the end of the road: "With Him". With God. There we shall see Him as He is, face to face.

But let us never forget the cost: that in order to secure our *withness*, God sent forth (*exapeteilen*), sent out from Himself, His own Son. He came to be forsaken by God, to be the One without God, in order to bring us to God. That journey on His part into the Far Country, that loss of *perichoresis*, is an even bigger mystery than the Trinity itself.