

THE TRINITY

C. THE CHURCH'S REJECTION OF MONARCHIANISM

1) Rejection of Modalism

The rejection of Modalism occurred as Christian people read their Bibles and considered this proposal. It was just so apparent to the Christian community that this could not be the case. It didn't require a council to meet and defeat it. For example, the Baptism of Jesus; how do you account for this? Who was Jesus praying to in the Garden of Gethsemane? If we have only the Son in a Modalistic understanding, then who is the Father to whom he is praying? Modalism was rejected by the church just through the Christian community reading the Bible and coming to this conclusion that it could not be.

2) Athanasius' Opposition to Arianism

Arianism is another thing altogether. The Arian view (the Subordinationist view) required a lot of effort from the Church to answer the question of the relationship of Jesus to the Father and affirming the deity of the Son while maintaining the deity of the Father. Arius proposed, if you affirm the deity of both, you have left monotheism. There is no way you can claim the deity of the Son and the deity of the Father and claim that there is one God. It is nonsense, he said. How did the Church respond to this challenge of affirming monotheism and yet affirm that the Father is God and the Son is God? This was a huge and difficult problem.

Athanasius was the key person who defended what became the orthodox view on this point. Arius was a very charismatic and convincing speaker and writer. He had quite a following. There was a large group of Arians who were advocating the view that Arius proposed, namely that we ought to honor Jesus because he is the greatest of God's creatures, and it was through the Son that the Father has accomplished so much. We do honor him as the one who died for our sins, but we do not recognize the Son as having the same nature as the Father, being divine himself. This cannot be the case. It was Athanasius who proposed a way of thinking of the Son as equal to the Father and yet as a distinct person from him.

3) Council of Nicea (325)

This was settled finally at the Council of Nicea. At this council there were three main positions represented: **The Arians** were arguing that the Son was a created being and had a different nature, a created nature, a finite nature, different than the Father. **Athanasius** was arguing that the Son had the same nature as the Father. Then there was a middle position that was argued at Nicea, presented by followers of **Origen** (who had long passed away over a century before). Followers of his picked up elements in Origen's writings in which Origen spoke of the Son in terms of his great similarity to the Father. The likeness of the Son to the Father was language that Origen used. So the followers of Origen proposed what they hoped would be a middle position that would solve this problem. It would unite the Athanasius crowd and the Arius crowd and bring them together.

Origen's followers used the term "*homoiousios*" of the Son in relation to the Father. "Homoi" meaning "similar," and "ousios" meaning "nature." The followers of Origen proposed this notion that he was of a nature very similar, very, very much like the nature of the Father. In saying this, there is no way this could ultimately satisfy Athanasius and his followers. No matter how similar something is, if it is not identical, or if it isn't the same, then it is qualitatively different. If God is infinite and this nature is not infinite, if God is self-existent and this nature is not self-existent, if God is eternal and this nature is not eternal, then it is not God. This did not satisfy Athanasius for a moment. In fact he proposed instead that the term that ought to be adopted is "*homoousios*" which means same

nature. "Homo" means same. The creed that was actually drafted at Nicea utilized this language in which the Son was affirmed as the same nature with the Father.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of **one substance** with the Father,*

One substance with the Father, "homoousios" is used of the Son.

At Nicea the Arians lost, the followers of Origen lost, and Athanasius won. What sort of reasons did the Arians propose? For example the terms for Spirit in Old and New Testament respectively "ruach" and "pneuma" are neuter terms which you wouldn't necessarily associate with a person. We know in these languages masculine and feminine are used of all kinds of things that are things and not persons. Nonetheless, you don't find persons spoken of with neuter terms. Shouldn't we think of Spirit, the Arians argued, not as a personal being but as simply the presence of God manifest. In a similar way shouldn't the "ruach adonai" (the Spirit of the LORD) be the same as the hand of the LORD, the eyes of the LORD, and the strong right arm of the LORD, that is, God's presence manifest, seeing, acting, protecting. Both "ruach" and "pneuma" are translated "breath," so why not see God's breath as very similar to God's hand or God's eyes, rather than seeing this as a personal divine being, they would argue. This would solve any further problem of complicating our monotheism by adding yet another God. Here we have essentially two, say the Arians; we've got God the Father, and we've got God the Son. This avoids, at least, adding a third deity to the Christian faith, they argued.

4) Council of Constantinople (381)

This was a harder one to fight for the church and because of that another council was called. The heroes of this particular Council at Constantinople were not the Latin theologians, like Athanasius from the Western Church, but here it was Eastern Church theologians. This plays into something else that happens later regarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Cappadocian Fathers, three of them in particular, are the ones who really championed the deity of the Holy Spirit. There was *Basil the Great*, *Gregory of Nyssa*, (Basil and Gregory of Nyssa were brothers) and *Gregory of Nazianzus*.

This was a harder case to make than the deity of Christ. For the deity of Christ Athanasius could line up all kinds of texts that were very compelling. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. There is this notion of distinction and identity" (Jn 1:1). "I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (Jn 8:58). "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). Philippians 2, in regard to the Kenosis, "he was in very nature God" Paul uses the term "morphe," meaning "in the form" of God with his very nature. There were lots of texts that supported the deity of the Son. There are texts which support the deity of the Holy Spirit, but admittedly, it isn't as overwhelming of a case.

The Cappadocian Fathers argued, number one, **the Spirit is a person**. It is wrong to think of the Spirit of the LORD like we do the hand of the LORD, or the eyes of the LORD. It is wrong to do that because unlike those other metaphors that are used, the Spirit of the LORD is clearly spoken of in personal terms. You don't grieve the right hand of the LORD; you don't grieve the eyes of the LORD, but you can grieve the Holy Spirit. You grieve a person. Think of Acts 5:4; Peter tells Ananias that you have not lied to men but have lied to God when you have lied to the Holy Spirit. How do you lie to a hand or to an eye or to an impersonal power like electricity? Try to lie to electricity, to a light that is in the room. You can't do it. You lie to a moral agency. A moral agency is personal. The Cappadocian Fathers argued for the personhood of the Spirit.

They also argued for **the deity of the Spirit** in passages like the one in Acts 5:4 where Peter said to Ananias, why have you lied to the Holy Spirit about this, you have not lied to man but to God. In another instance, Paul uses of the metaphor of the temple in relation to the Spirit. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and in Jewish terms, what is the temple? What a rich metaphor to use of the residency of God, the place where God dwells, and now he affirms that of our bodies; that is astonishing. He specifically indicates that we are a temple of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:12, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit who knows the thoughts of God. No one can know the thoughts of God, except God.

A lot of arguments were put forward for the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is personal and divine and yet they were fearful that the case was not strong enough to persuade people to use the same language that had been used at Nicea ("homoousios") of the Spirit. Gregory of Nazianzus was the brash, bold, bull-in-the-china-shop type figure who was so committed to the truth that the Holy Spirit is God, he insisted to the other two that they seek to have adopted the term "homoousios" concerning the Spirit, just as it had been adopted of the Son under Athanasius' leadership. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa said, no we don't think they will buy it; we don't think we will win. We think that we will come out of this and lose the vote. Gregory of Nazianzus was so upset about this he up and left. He left the Council of Constantinople in the middle of the meeting and didn't return.

Basil and Gregory went with their strategy to use different terminology that would not be objected to, terminology which had the effect of affirming the deity of the Holy Spirit, even though it didn't use the stronger straight forward term "homoousios", and at Constantinople they won the vote and the council expanded the third article from Nicea. At Nicea in 325 the third article said, we believe in the Holy Spirit, period. Now it gets expanded at Constantinople and it reads as follows:

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

Think about these phrases one at a time.

"And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord." Who is the Lord overall? God. Their strategy here was not to affirm deity straight on as homoousios would but to affirm deity by entailment, by inference, by implication. If this is true then certainly it follows he is God. They had in mind 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul says we are being transformed into the same image of Christ from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. They had in mind there that this is God who does this but it is referred to as the Lord who is the Spirit.

So he is Lord, Life-giver. "And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life." Who can give life, physical life or eternal life? God is the only one who can give life. So again, by implication it affirms deity.

"Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;" Remember Isaiah 42:8 where God says, I will not give My glory to another. God alone is to be glorified. God alone is to be worshiped and honored. Here they affirm of the Spirit, the same worship, adoration, and honor that is to go to God alone. So, clearly by inference it indicates the deity of the Holy Spirit.

They sought language that would be acceptable and did affirm the deity of the Holy Spirit while avoiding, in their view, a term that might have caused their proposal to be voted down.

"Who proceeds from the Father." It is an interesting phrase for a couple of reasons. Let's look again, in regard to the Son, at the second article at Nicea.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,

With the phrase, "begotten of the Father," there was a conviction at Nicea that the relationship between the Father and the Son was one of begetting. He was the only begotten of the Father. When you come to Constantinople and ask what shall we use to describe the relationship of the Father and the Spirit and if you already said that the begetting of the Son is unique, and he is the only begotten, then you can't use begotten. You can't say that the Son is the only begotten of the Father and then in the third article say that the Spirit is begotten of the Father. That is nonsense. You have to come up with other terminology. This was provided by Gregory of Nazianzus before he left the council deliberations. He proposed that we take the term from John 15:26 and use it. This is what describes the relationship of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jn 15:26 When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about Me,

"Who proceeds from the Father..." Gregory of Nazianzus said, instead of using the term "begetting," let's use the term "proceeding." We ought to think of it this way: The Father's relation to the Son is one of eternal generation or eternal begetting; those are used synonymously in the language they invoked. And the relation of the Father and the Spirit is one of eternal procession, or sometimes eternal spiration is used as well. One the hand we have eternal generation and on the other hand we have eternal procession. The ontological conception of eternal generation and eternal procession are nearly identical. What they were affirming of the Son is that the Son has his very being in the Father eternally and the Spirit has his very being in the Father eternally, and yet the terms differ to affirm the uniqueness of the begetting of the Son. This utilizes biblical language where he is spoken of as "monogenes" (only begotten) of the Father. The term "only begotten" and the term from John 15:26, "proceeding from the Father," were terms that were utilized that were distinctive of these two persons of the Trinity in relation to the Father.

One more thing that is interesting about this discussion of proceeding from the Father is that the 381 Constantinople statement says, "who proceeds from the Father." - "and the Son" was not in it (yet...).

D. AUGUSTINE (354-430) ON THE TRINITY

Augustine was not yet a Christian in 381 when the Council of Constantinople met. He became a Christian in 386 and became bishop at this small North African city of Hippo in 395. He was oblivious to all this that was going on in 381 and all the discussion that was taking place. Nonetheless, he had a role of becoming one of the most influential theologians in the history of the church. One of his areas of enormous influence was on the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine wrote a lengthy treatise, "De Trinitate,"; It is filled with incredible, ingenious ways of thinking and understanding the complexities of the Trinity. He wrote this between 399 and 419. He set for the church the standard view on the Trinity.

One of the things that he proposed in that has been adopted ever since, is that we should use the term "person;" to indicate the three simultaneous manifestations of the Trinity. Augustine did not come to this term because he was convinced it was such a great term. In fact, Augustine came to this very begrudgingly, realizing that there was no term that he could think of that conveyed well what the doctrine of the Trinity needed to convey. He picked the term person because it was the least bad term he could find. Please understand that "person" is filled with possible misunderstandings. When you are talking about three persons, you are taking about three centers of consciousness, three different wills, maybe conflicting ideas and different sets of emotions and desires.

Augustine says that would be wrong, but we have, in the Trinity, three persons in so far as these are personal beings. They do have minds, emotions and wills. These are persons, not abstract representations. These are personal representations, but they are representing the one undivided essence or nature of God in three unique ways, three distinctive ways. So as Augustine would talk about it, it is true that the Father is God, the Son is God and Holy Spirit is God, but it is not true that the Father is the Son or that the Son is the Spirit. All three are divine, but all three are not identical. They have identical essence, but they have distinctive personal characteristics that distinguish Father, Son, and Spirit. It isn't a uniting or equality of essence that is like dividing a pie into three equal parts. It is not as though the Father, Son, and Spirit have equal essence in so far as they each share an equal portion of the one divine essence. No. It is rather that the Father, Son, and Spirit share the one undivided essence; each is fully God. It is not that each is equally God because each has same portion of the divine essence; each is equally God by sharing the totality of the divine essence.

As soon as you see that, you realize where most of the analogies for the Trinity break down. They break down in one of two places, and Augustine has chapters in his treatise on the Trinity devoted to analogies of the Trinity that he felt were in one way or another unworkable but perhaps helpful to finite minds in certain ways.

We just don't have anything that quite fits the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine was aware of this. So, he took the notion of person as the best way to explain this concept of personal expression. When asked what distinguishes Father, Son, and Spirit, he gave two answers to this. Essentially one is an ontological answer, and the other is relational.

The ontological answer is that the Father is distinct from the other two because he is unoriginate. He is unbegotten; he is non-proceeding. Nothing originates the Father. The Son is originate qua, as he is eternally begotten. The Spirit is originate qua; he is eternally proceeded. The Father alone is unoriginate. The Son derives his being through the process of eternal generation. The Spirit derives his being through the process of eternal procession. One answer that Augustine gave to what distinguishes them is an ontological one. That is, it has to do with their very being; what constitutes the being of the Father, Son, and Spirit by nature. It is not *Subordinationist* for Augustine, insofar as the nature that is begotten is the identical nature of the Father. The nature that is proceeding is the identical nature of the Father. He uses the analogy of a human generation. I have children, and those children possess equal nature with their parents. The difference is that they don't share the identical natures of their parents. That is what constitutes the uniqueness of this. Both the fact that it is eternal, and the fact that it is the identically, one nature of the Father that is shared fully with the Son. One numerically identically same nature of the Father shared with the Spirit. Ontologically he sees the Son as dependent upon the Father and the Spirit dependent upon the Father for being.

This then leads him to a relational distinction as well, insofar as the Father, Son, Holy Spirit should be viewed in a relationship in which the Son submits to the Father and the Holy Spirit submits to the Son and to the Father. Part of his reason for thinking so is the ontological fact that there is this eternal ontological dependence of the Son and the Spirit on the Father. It is also partly owing to what he sees in Scripture that the Son does the will of the Father. He was sent into the world to fulfill the will of the Father. Repeatedly in Scripture you see evidence that the Son yields to the Father. Jesus said, when the Spirit comes he will glorify me; he will not speak on his own initiative; he will take of mine and disclose it to you (Jn 16). The Spirit likewise is subordinate to the Son in role or function. *This leads him to conclude then that there are relational differences.* For example, even though redemption is the work of God, more precisely redemption is the work of the Father who sends the Son to pay for sin, who goes to the cross in the power of the Spirit. You have this Trinity of persons accomplishing this act. The Son does something that the Father does not do, and the Spirit does something that the Son does not do. Each contributes to the act of

redemption, but each contributes distinctively in it. The same thing could be said of creation and so many other things.

3. IMMANENT (ONTOLOGICAL) AND ECONOMIC TRINITIES

Immanent Trinity is the Trinity considered within the Godhead, apart from creation. The *Ontological Trinity* is the relationship of the three persons together, apart from creation. This is a distinction. God exists eternally as God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit whether he creates the world or not. Shouldn't God be considered apart from creation? Who is God in himself, apart from the created order; that is the Ontological Trinity. How do we think of the Father, Son, and Spirit in and of themselves apart from creation? Ontological or Immanent Trinity are the terms used for that. *Economic Trinity* is the Trinity, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit in relationship to creation. How does God as Father, Son, and Spirit relate to the created order? How do we understand that reality?

There is a movement to reduce the Ontological or Immanent Trinity to the Economic. You start with the human Jesus. Pannenberg was insistent upon this. He said, you cannot start with Christology from above with the deity of Christ first, even though John starts there (John 1:1 is before you have John 1:14). The Word was God and the Word became flesh. You can't do this, says Pannenberg. The drift in theology is to go from below, to look at the lowest common denominator as it relates to human existence. There is a tendency now, in contemporary Trinitarian discussions to essentially reduce the Ontological Trinity to the Economic.

Think of the implications of this. If that is the case, it requires that there be a creation. If there is no other God than the Economic Triune God, then the creation really becomes a necessity for God to be God. If our understanding of God is at the Economic level first and foremost, it skews everything. What I want to do is back up and be quite traditional on this and say, we ought to think of God first in and of himself apart from creation. And then ask the question, how does this God who exists eternally, self-existently, self-sufficiently, in himself, apart from creation, then relate to the created order that he made? It seems to me that the Ontological and then the Economic is the order we ought to follow.