

**THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**  
Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 2

**Round Table Discussion:**

- 1) *How do most people think of God?*
- 2) *What do you find most difficult to believe about God based on your own definition of God?*

Bibliography:

A.A. Hodge, [Chapt. 2](#)

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, [Book 1, Chapters 10-14](#) (Book 1, Chapter 13. Trinity)

Herman Witsius, *The Apostles Creed*, Vol. 1, Dissertation V, "On Faith In God

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, Chapter 2, 4, 7, 8, 9

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 57-81

Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*

Augustine, *The Trinity*.

Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Eerdmans, 1998)

Plantinga, Cornelius, "The Threeness/Oneness problem of the Trinity". *Calvin Theological Journal* 23:37-53, April 1988.

Study Guide:

*If "theo-logy" is the study of God, why do you think we typically call all articles of Christian faith topic in "theo-logy"? What are we assuming about God?*

*The knowledge of God is the only dogma, the sole content of the entire field of Dogmatics. All the doctrines treated in Dogmatics-- whether in regard to the universe, man, Christ, etc.-- are but the explication of the central dogma of the knowledge of God. Everything is treated with God as center and starting-point. Under him all things are subsumed. To him all things are traced back. It is the knowledge of HIM, of Him ALONE, which it must display and show forth.*

Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*

***The Being and Character of God***

WCF 2:1-2

(Communicable and Incommunicable Attributes of God)

- 1) Biblical scholars have long distinguished between the *communicable* and *incommunicable* attributes of God. What is the difference?
  - a. Communicable:

- *Those attributes relative to God "that emphasis his personal nature"*
  - *What we can know in a real sense, albeit not exhaustively.*
  - *The attributes of God that find a corollary in humanity, albeit not perfectly.*
- b. Incommunicable:
- The attributes of God that are incomprehensible
  - That don't have human correlation.

The Incommunicable Attributes of God

2) What should we expect in terms of our understanding of God?

E.g. Notice the "incommunicable" language of our Confession.

*who is infinite in being and perfection, ... invisible, ... immense, eternal, incomprehensible*

3) What does it mean that God is "incomprehensible", and why is this significant to affirm?

*To know him is not to comprehend him, at least not fully!*

*Read Rom. 11:33-36 (See also Job 11:7-9, 26:14, Psalms 145:1-3)*

*Mystery is the vital element of Dogmatics. It is true that the term "mystery" in Scripture does not indicate abstract- supernatural truth in Romish sense; nevertheless, the idea that the believer would be able to understand and comprehend intellectually the revealed mysteries is equally unscriptural. On the contrary, the truth which God has revealed concerning himself in nature and in Scripture far surpasses human conception and comprehension. In that sense Dogmatics is concerned with nothing but mystery, for it does not deal with finite creatures, but from beginning to end raises itself above every creature to the Eternal and Endless One Himself.*

Herman Bavinck

Note Difference between Investigative Mystery and Revelational Mystery

INVESTIGATIVE MYSTERY—mystery that can be investigated clues such as to be solved like a puzzle—mystery "of this world" E.g. an intriguing puzzle in need of solving—

- The Father Brown Mysteries—crime mysteries
- Stonehenge, Bermuda Triangle- phenomena mysteres

REVELATORY MYSTERY

- God is assumed as known by all, the evidence is all around us in the natural world even... but in our unwillingness to want a God in our life—we push it away... c.f. Rom 1.
- **Mystery of God UNTO GODLINESS**—isn't the mystery of his existence in scripture—it's the mystery of Who God IS IN PERSONAL TERMS such as to be CONFESSED as a personal staqtment of purpose of faith and practice—
- GOD is assumed to exist, but then in need of being **revealed**— (vs. solved)
- in this sense, mystery is not something we can solve by an investigation, but mystery itself that needs to be revealed to us—
  - BOTH outwardly (manifest in history—note the use of manifest)
  - AND Inwardly—"as to be received by a willing participant (the supernatural change in our disposition in order to know/confess as Lord, not just qs "existing")-

4) In what ways would you expect God to be incomprehensible? (c.f. Hodge-- *as self-existence, immensity, eternity, intelligence, etc.*\_

- Omnipresence- Jer. 23:24, Psm 139:7-10, Rom 8:38-39,
  - Transcendent- 1 Kg.8:27, Eph 4:6
  - Immanent- Eph 4:6
- Omniscience- ( Is 40:13-14, 46:9-10, Ps 139:1-3, Rom 11:33, Lk 12:7, 1 Jn 3:20)
- Omnipotent- (Mt 19:26, Luke 1:37, Is 40:2, Ps 147:5)  
*"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? Jer.32:27*

5) Notice the "perfection" language of the section 1. What then do you think are the implications of this?

- *Infinite in being and perfection...*
- *Most...*

6) What is the relation between God's being "infinite in being and perfection," and his being "immutable"? What are some of the things about God that "never change" and some implications?

e.g. Many of the various affirmations in this passage refer to the reality that God is completely independent of anything outside of Himself, entirely self-sustaining and complete in Himself. What are some of the specific things in these sections that communicate this reality?

7) What does it mean that "nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain"?

8) How does section 2 apply section 1?

- Notice especially how divine "sovereignty" throughout section 2 is the necessary consequence of who God is in chapter 1!
  - *God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself*
  - *is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient*
  - *not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made*
  - *nor 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 hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth.*

9) Note how thoroughly the sovereignty of God is affirmed in section 2. What other doctrines are established by this teaching?

10) What does it mean to say that God is "sovereign" according to section 2?

- Why, if God is "God" as described here—would it be wrong to reduce the doctrine of God in relation to what happens as "foreknowledge" only? E.g. To deny his absolute "sovereignty"
- Why, if God is "God" as described here—would it be wrong to reduce the doctrine of God to make room for human freedom of the will *absolutely*? E.g. How is God's freedom different than our freedom? (*Hodge p. 52*)

*A very obvious distinction must always be kept in mind between an event being conditioned on other events, and the decree of God with reference to that event being conditioned. Calvinists believe, as all men must, that all events in the system of things depend upon their causes, and*

*are suspended on conditions. That is, if a man does not sow seed, he will not reap; if he does sow, and all the favorable climatic influences are present, he will reap. If a man believes, he shall be saved; if he does not believe, he will not be saved. But the all-comprehensive purpose of God embraces and determines the cause and the conditions, as well as the event suspended upon them. The decree, instead of altering, determines the nature of events, and their mutual relations. It makes free actions free in relation to their agents, and contingent events contingent in relation to their conditions; while at the same time, it makes the entire system of events, and every element embraced in it, certainly future. An absolute decree is one which, while it may determine many conditional events by determining their conditions, is itself suspended on no condition. A conditional decree is one which determines that a certain event shall happen on condition that some other undecreed event happens, upon which undecreed event the decree itself, as well as the event decreed, is suspended. The Confession in this section teaches that all the decrees of God are unconditional. All who believe in a divine government agree with Calvinists that the decrees of God relating to events produced by necessary causes are unconditional.*

- Why, according to who God is, does the confession say “so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain?”

## 11) The Sovereignty of God Explored:

“God is *Sovereign*”-- this represents the purpose of the Triune God as absolute and unconditional, independent of the whole finite creation, and originating solely in the eternal counsel of His will. He appoints the course of nature and directs the course of history down to the minutest details.

*Acts 17:24-31(also Gen.14:19, Ex.18:11, Dt.10:14,17, Ps.22:26, 47:2,3,7,8, Ps.50:10-12, Ps.145:11-13, Jer.27:5, Luke 1:53, Rev. 19:6)*

### 1. The Sovereign Wisdom of God

*1 Corinthians 1:20-25, Rom. 16:2*

- What are some implications that God is wise AND sovereign? (Eph.1:10-11)
- What are some implications that God is wise AND incomprehensible to finite people? (Rom. 11:33ff)
- What does God's wisdom make of human wisdom when in violation to God's? (1 Cor.1:19)
- Where is God's wisdom made to be practically known to us? (Psalms 119)

### 2. The Sovereign Will of God (God's Absolute vs. Relative Freedom of Will)

*Job 11:10, 33:13,k Prov. 21:1, Isa 10:15, 29:16, Rom. 9:15-18, 20-21, etc.*

God's sovereignty finds expression in the absolute freedom of God's will to execute God's wisdom... the divine will as the final cause of things such that God's actions are contingent on no other action(s) outside of himself. (Note Confession)

Thus, Everything is derived from God's will

- Ps.135:6, Jer.18:6, Rev. 4:11-- creation and providence
- Prov.21:1, Dan.4:35-- government
- Rom.9:15,16, Eph.1:11-- election and reprobation

- The sufferings of Christ-- Luke 22:42, Acts 2:23
- Regeneration-- Jas.1:18
- Sanctification-- Phil.2:13
- Suffering of believers-- 1Pet.3:17
- Even the smallest things of life-- Mt.10:29

### 3. Notable distinctions as it pertains to the issue of God's will.

- antecedent vs. consequential
  - E.g. In relation to sin--decreed will determined the entrance of sin into the world, yet God is not the author of sin.
- Absolute vs. Conditional (will note contingent on any other—"mere good pleasure"- or "because God wants to")
- Secret will vs. revealed will-- Dt. 29:29, Ps.115:3, Dan.4:17, 25, 32, 35, Rom.9:18-19, etc. (fixed and effected by God) Blue-print—yes, revealed blueprint—no necessarily.
- Revealed will -- Mt.7:21, 12:50, Jn.4:34, Rom. 12:2 (prescribes the duties of man)
- Decreed vs. moral will -- what God's makes to happen vs. what standard God would have us to live by...

Arminian-- make the will of God equal to permission and dependant upon his foreknowledge.

Reformed-- maintains that the decreed will included sin (Acts. 2:23, 3:8, etc) that God's decrees also include sinful deeds of man in so far as they are vessels of wrath or mercy which brings glory to God.. (Rom. 9)

### 4. The Sovereign Power of God

*Job9:12, Ps115:3, Jer.32:17, Mt 19:26, Luke 1:37, Heb.1:3, 1Cor.1:24...*

The sovereignty of God finds expression in the omnipotence of God, i.e. the power to execute his will which is an expression of his will

- God is the highest causality
- Absolute power-- is able to do that which he will not do, but is possible to be done
- Ordinate power-- does do as decreed to do by his will.
- Sovereign will of God-- can realize whatsoever is present in his will or counsel.

So then...

Gen. 18:14, Jer.32:27, Zech.8:6, Mt.3:9, 26:53-- The power of God extends beyond that which is actually realized... I.e. we cannot say that what does not happen God has no power to make happen...

Num23:19, 1Sam.15:29, 2Tim.2:13, Geb.6:18, Jas.1:13,17-- And yet, there are many things that God will/can-not do that is contrary to his will (cannot sin, lie, change, deny himself etc)

12) What is accomplished by God's Sovereignty?

Preserves us: **Psm.46:1-2**

Governs us: **Prov. 16:1, Philipians 2:13. Psm. 103:19**

If God were to be seated on a literal throne, what two words might you expect to be inscribed upon the foundation of His throne which depicts his exercise of sovereignty toward us?

*Read Psalm 89:14, see also Psalm 71:19*

What does God's throne represent?

What does sovereignty teach us to expect about our response to the things God does?

13) What does sovereignty teach us to do when confronted with the knowledge of God?

14) Therefore, the "most" Adjectives are communicable: Several of the attributes here are qualified by the adverb "most." *American Heritage* defines this use of the word "most" as follows: "In the highest degree, quantity, or extent. Used with many adjectives and adverbs to form the superlative degree." We might say "supremely", as: "supremely wise, supremely holy, supremely free, supremely absolute, supremely loving...supremely just". Is there a difference between "supremely" loving and "infinitely" loving?

#### The Communicable Attributes:

15) What can we know of God and how would we know it? E.g. What makes the doctrine of God "communicable?"

**Ex. 7:17** *Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood.*

**Is. 52:6** *Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.*

16) The Bible describes God as a "jealous" God? Why, at first glance, might this bother us? So what does this have to do with God's attributes?

17) How can we reconcile section 1's statements concerning God's "most loving...forgiving iniquity" and God's "most just and terrible judgments... by no means clear the guilty"? E.g. What is the significance of the cross on this point?

*The cross is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that his holiness and his love are equally infinite...it consists in the combination of inflexible righteousness, with its penalties, and transcendent love. Emil Brunner, The Mediator*

18) How is God's "Goodness" expressed in scripture?

**God's Goodness** = We speak of something as good when it answers in all parts to the ideal. (Distinguished from kindness) Hence in our ascription of goodness to God the fundamental idea is that He is in every way all that He as God should be and therefore answers perfectly to the ideal expressed in the word "God." Mark 10:18, Ps.36:9

God's Goodness, may be described under the three fold categories of Creation, Holiness and Love

**1. The Goodness of God in Creation**--that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all his creatures.

*Gen.1:26-27, 2:7 , Psalms 33:6-9 and Nehemiah 9:6 (see also John 1:1-4)*

What existed before Creation?

From what sources or "building blocks" did God create the world?

What means did God use to create the world?

**Hebrews 11:3**, By faith we understand that the worlds (ages) were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

How is God's goodness evidence in Creation?

"that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all his creatures"  
Berkhower

Thus, Ps.145:9,15, 16

So then, Ps.36:6, 104:21; Mt.5:45; 6:26, Luke 6:35, Acts 14:17

What response is warranted by God's creatures in regard to the goodness of God in creation?

*Read Psalm 139:13-16*

Does the fact that God created us mean that we are rightfully accountable to God for our actions?

*Read Gen 2:15-17*

What is the human relationship to God that is pointed out by this passage?

*Creation ought more to be understood as a Covenant made between the Creator and Creation than simply the object natural history. As created in covenant with the Creator-- we are by nature accountable to God such that God is just to condemn those who act outside of that covenant! Note how this relates to our being connected to God for our living existence such that to violate God IS in fact to violate the source and meaning of our existence.*

1. If God is these things, and we are made in covenant with Him, what ought our relation to God be like?

a. If God is in fact OUR Creator, what does this mean for our lives?

b. If God is in fact "sovereign" what does this mean for our lives?

c. If God is in fact "wise", what does this mean for our lives?

**2. The Goodness of God In Holiness –**

*It is not correct to think of holiness primarily as a moral L. Berkof*

*or religious quality, as is generally done. Its fundamental idea is that of a position of relationship existing between God and some person or thing. Berkof*

*Exodus 15:11, Isaiah 6:3, Psalm 99:1-5*

- How is God described in these passages?
- If we were to come face to face with God in his holiness, would be our response?
- Because God is holy, what ought his creation to be?
- What is the opposite of holiness?

a. God is holy "distinct" from all His creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty.... He is holy in everything that reveals Him, in His goodness and grace as well as in His justice and wrath... It may be called the "majestic-holiness" of God. (Ex.15:11, 1Sam.2:2, Isa.57:15, Hos.11:9)

b. God is holy in the ethical aspect-- again "separation" but in this case it is a separation from moral evil or sin such as to have no communion with sin. (Job 34:10, Hab.1:13)

*... that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellance, abhors sin, and demands purity in his moral creatures. Berkof*

**a. Righteousness** (standard) (*mode of his holiness--* Shedd, Strong calls it "transitive holiness" )

The fundamental idea of God's righteousness is revealed in standard of God's law.

I.e Even as there is no law to which God is subject, there is certainly a law in the very nature of God and this is the highest possible standard by which all other laws and God's creatures are measured. Thus "conformity to a standard" as applied to righteousness...

Ezra 9:15, Neh.9:8, Ps.119:137, 145:17, Jer.12:1, Lam.1:18, Dan.9:14, John 17:25, 2Tim.4:8, 1John2:29, 3:7, Rev. 16:5

**b. Justice**

The rectitude which God manifests as the Ruler such as to sustain his righteousness-- either by rewards for obedience and punishments for transgressions.

Isa. 33:22, James 4:12, Dt. 4:8, Ps.99:4, Rom. 1:32

Rewards (Remunerative justice)-- Dt.7:9,12,13, 2Chron.6:15, Ps.58:11, Micah 7:20, Mt.25:21,34, Rom.2:7, Heb.121:26

Punishments (Retributive justice)-- Rom. 1:32, 2:9, 12:19, 2thess 1:8

Note: Divine justice is originally and necessarily obliged to punish evil but not to reward good in so far as the goodness of God is initiated in Creation. (Luke 17:10, 1Cor. 4:7, Job 41:11)

**c. Wrath**

God's Justice exposed against transgression of the righteousness of God and offense to God's holiness.

1. Idea of Provocation: God is provoked to anger.

Dt. 32:16

*They made Him jealous with strange gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger.*



2. Idea of "burning" a verbs depicting God's anger:

Joshua 7:1

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban... therefore the *anger of the Lord burned* against the sons of Israel.

Dt. 4:24 (quoted by NT in Hebrews 12:29)

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

3. Idea of Satisfaction:

Ezk.5:13

Thus my anger will be spent, and I will *satisfy* My wrath on them, and I shall be appeased, then they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent my wrath upon them.

Who or what is being "satisfied" by the "spent wrath"?

What does the idea of "spent" suggest?

What do we expect for ourselves given God's Holiness

We offend God's holiness

We transgress God's standard of righteousness.

God's justice is satisfied in so far as his holy-wrath is directed toward us.

- Sin is a personal offense against a Holy God who is our Sovereign Maker. That God is holy is foundational to biblical religion. So is the corollary that sin is incompatible with his holiness. His eyes are "too pure to look on evil" and He "cannot tolerate wrong". Therefore our sins effectively separate us from him, so that his face is hidden from us and he refuses to listen to our prayers. (Hab.1:13; Is. 59:1)... Closely related to God's Holiness is his wrath, which is in fact his holy reaction to evil... What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. *God's holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it.* So sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin.

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*

Sin is a "transgression" (crossing over) of God's holy laws: Sin is "lawlessness" (1 Jn.3:4), a disregard for God's law and a disobedience of it. But the law cannot be broken with impunity. sinners therefore incur the penalty of their law-breaking. They cannot simply be let off. The law must be upheld, its dignity defended, and its just penalties paid.

John Stott, *The Cross of*

*Christ*

### 3. The Goodness of God in Love--...

*that perfection of God by which He is eternally moved to self-communication....And since God is absolutely good in Himself...He loves his rational creatures for His own sake... He loves in them Himself, His virtues, His work and His gifts. He does not even withdraw His love completely from the sinner in the present sinful state, though the latter's sin is an abomination to Him... Berkof*

*John 3:16, Mt.5:44-45, John 16:27, rom.5:8,k 1 John 3:1*

1) **Grace**--In the general sense, it is "Favor shown to another" such that between person to person, it need not necessarily be "undeserved." Grace from God to humanity is always favor undeserved if but for the relation of creature to Creator, not to mention then the addition of sin. As such, the grace of God is the source of All blessings, not least of which are the spiritual blessings bestowed upon sinners.

*Gen.33:8,10,18, 39:4, 47:25, Ruth 2:2, 1Sam.1:18..., Eph. 1:6,7, 2:7-9, Tit.2:11, 3:4-7, Rom. 3:24, 2 Cor. 8:9*

Grace from God to humanity is always favor undeserved if but for the relation of creature to Creator, not to mention then the addition of sin.

As such, the grace of God is the source of All blessings, not least of which are the spiritual blessings bestowed upon sinners. (saving grace)  
Eph.1:6,7, 2:7-9, Tit.2:11, 3:4-7, Rom. 3:24, 2 Cor.8:9

Even the capacity to see grace for what it is by faith is a free gift of God's grace - Eph. 2:8, Acts 18:27

We are justified by God's free undeserved grace-- Rom.3:24, 4:16, tit. 3:7

We receive eternal life by grace-- Eph. 2:8, tit. 2:11

I.e.

Grace is due to

- a. Our not having any rightful "deserving" status with God as mere creatures.
- b. Our not having any righteousness of our own merits that warrant God's just rewards.

2) **Mercy**--*"The goodness of God's love shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their own worth. In God's mercy He reveals himself as a compassionate god who pities those who are in misery and is ever ready to relieve their distress."* Berkof

*1Tim.1:2, 2Tim.1:1, Titus 1:4, Dt. 5:19, Ps.57:10, 86:5, 1Chron.16:34, 2Chron.7:6, Ps.136, Ezra 3:11*

Often mentioned with the grace of God-- 1Tim.1:2, 2Tim.1:1, Titus 1:4

It is bountiful-- Dt. 5:19, Ps.57:10, 86:5

Is something to "sing" about-- 1Chron.16:34, 2Chron.7:6, Ps.136, Ezra 3:11

3) Longsuffering-- The Hebrew word uses an expression that literally means "long of face" such then to imply "slow to anger", It is that aspect of the goodness of God's love wherein God bears with the evil in spite of their long continued disobedience. Thus the forbearance of God!

*Ex.34:6, Ps.86:15, Rom 2:4, 9:22, 1Pet.3:20, 2Pet.3:15*

19) How is the sovereign goodness of God's holy-love all satisfied by *Christ* ( *Rom.3:21-26, Heb.9* )

The cross is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that his holiness and his love are equally infinite...it consists in the combination of inflexible righteousness, with its penalties, and transcendent love.

Emil Brunner, *The Mediator*

In the cross of Christ, God's justice and love are simultaneously revealed.  
G.C. Berkouwer

In a marvelous and divine way He loved us even when he hated us.  
John Calvin.

(Other Communicable Attributes: God is Spiritual (corollary-human soul, human eternity), God is Intelligent (corollary in human reason), God is Truthful/Faithful (The Veracity of God-- corollary in human loyalty and truthfulness)

### **The Trinity** WCF 2:3

20. In what sense can we say that a true knowledge of God requires the Trinity?

21. What does the doctrine of the Trinity (section 3) have to do with sections 1-2? E.g. what about God makes the Trinity, if not comprehensible, more believable?

22. How are we able to "know" the Trinity?  
c.f. Eph 1:3ff

*GOD being God, all our knowledge of him comes by divine revelation, for it is impossible for us to know God without his willing to be known... God actively reveals himself through himself, through the incarnation of his Son among us as our Savior and by the power of his Spirit... There is no God other than the self-revealed God, and no self-revelation of God apart from the fulfilment of his eternal purpose in his saving and reconciling acts in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus proclaimed to us in the Gospel.*

T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*

What do we learn about God from Christ?

*The words of Jesus are the voice of God. The tears of Jesus are the pity of God. The wrath of Jesus is the judgment of God. All believers confess, with adoring praise, that in their most sacred hours, God and Christ merge in each other with morally indistinguishable identity. When in secret we look into God's face, still it is the face of Christ that rises up before us.*

H. R. Mackintosh (19th Century Scottish Pastor Theologian)

What do we learn about God from the persons of the Trinity in relation to one another? (Christ's relationship to The Father and vice versa... the Holy Spirit, etc)

- Relational
- Co-equal yet different roles
  - Christ's submission to the Father (not vice versa)
    - Note prayer in Christ name to the Father... what does this tell us about the relation of father and son
  - Mutual self-giving
  - Mystical unity of extended to the church John 17

23. The following is an outline of the Biblical Conception and Evidence of the Holy Trinity:

## I. An Apostolic Doctrine

*The Trinitarianism of the New Testament is rarely explicit; but the frequency with which the triadic schema recurs suggests that this pattern was implicit in Christian theology from the start. The impression inevitably conveyed is that the conception of the threefold manifestation of the Godhead was embedded deeply in Christian thinking from the start, and provided a ready-to-hand mold in which the ideas of the apostolic writers took shape.*

J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*

(c.f. Trinity formula at the end of 2 Corinthians, and the baptismal formula at the end of Matthew. Also 1Cor. 6,11; 1 Cor. 12,4f.; 2 Cor. 1, 21f., 1 Thess. 5, 18f....1 Pet. 1, 2. )

### A. The idea of the Trinity:

1. Peculiar to Bible. No other religion has an analogy to the Trinity doctrine.
2. Is taught in Bible in its relation to salvation. Not as a speculative science.
3. The Trinity in Scripture is that point where all other Biblical ideas unite, the beginning and end of all insight into Christianity. Illus. Eph 1 and missional theology, salvation theology, theology proper...
4. Progressive nature of Biblical revelation such that the doctrine of Trinity moves from vague to specific and clear from Genesis to Revelation.  
There is a development of doctrine within the Bible itself.
  - a. Christ's claims that the OT speaks of him. (Luke 4:14-21; 24:25-27)
  - b. Other Examples: Gen.3:14-15, Isa.53:1-12; Micah 5:2 (Mt.2:4ff); Zech.13:7(Mt.26:55-56)

### B. The form of the Doctrine in Scripture:

1. Not Polytheism, but monotheism. (Deut. 6:4 Christ endorsed Monotheism of OT: Mk.12:29)  
*of one substance, power, and eternity*
2. Not tri-theism, but Tri-unity. Mt.28:19 where Christ bracketed the F,S,HS together as "one" (singular) name... (Also Jn.14:23)  
*There be three persons...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost*
3. The Son, not born of, but *eternally begotten of...* the Holy Spirit *proceeding from...*

### C. A Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture

#### 1. That God is One is well-established biblically.

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! (c.f. 1 Cor. 8:6)

#### 2. That this one God is yet three in Persons is established by the following:

a) Explicit references of divinity applied to each three "person" of the Trinity:

1) The Father:

- John 6:27 "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, {even} God, has set His seal."
- John 20:17 Jesus \*said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and

your Father, and My God and your God.”

- Rom. 1:7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called {as} saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 1 Cor. 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## 2) The Son:

- John 1:18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained {Him.}
- John 5:18 For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Rom. 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.
- John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

## 3) The Holy Spirit

- Is. 6:8 Then I heard *the voice of the Lord*, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!” 9 And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’”
- Acts 28:25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, “The Holy Spirit *rightly spoke* through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying, ‘Go to this people and say, “You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;”’”

b) OT language for God applied to Jesus in NT:

Example: Rom. 10:9-13 (cf. vs. 13 quotes Joel 3:5, “Yahweh” and applies to Jesus, see also Acts 2:20-21)

c) Jesus was understood and condemned for his self-awareness concerning his own divinity. (Jn 10:31ff, Jn. 20:17f)

d) The divine communion of God the Father and God the Son. (Jn.5:22, 14:13, 17:1, 5:26, Col1:15, Heb.1:2)

e) The “another” language applied to Holy Spirit in relation to Christ. (Jn 14:16-18...26 “I will come to you”)

## A Doctrine Affirmed by *Antenicene* Fathers:

Justin Martyr: “But we revere and worship Him (the true God), and the Son, ...and the prophetic Spirit.” *Apol.*, I, 6, 2. Justin also reveals his use of Trinitarian baptismal formulae at *Apol.*, I, 61, 3; and I, 61, 10.

Irenaeus: “God the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith. The second point is this: the Word of God, Son of God, Christ

Jesus our Lord, ...through Whom all things were made....And the third point is the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied..." *Epideixis*, ch.6

"For the Church, although scattered throughout the whole world as far as the limits of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples, handed down, its faith in one God the Father almighty, Who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all things in them; and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, Who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit" *Against Heretics*, I, 10, I.

Clement of Alexandria: "For as God liveth, and the Lord Jesus Christ liveth, and the Holy Spirit, who are the faith and hope of the elect..." (*Corinthians*, 58).

Tertullian: "For where the Three are, that is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, there the Church is." *De Baptismo*, 6.

Hippolytus: "I believe in God the Father almighty I believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God... I believe in the Holy Spirit..." *Test. Dom.*

Ignatius "For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to a dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost" *To the Ephesians*, 18, 2:

### **The Nicene Creed 325 AD**

*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets. We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to the life in the world to come. Amen.*

Addendum 1: Brief Summary of Christology Counsels

### **24) Can Trinitarianism compromises Christocentric Spirituality?**

Why not a *Trinitarian* focused methodology?

In support of a Trinity-centered (vs. Christ-centered) methodology in spirituality and practice, the Ephesians doxology in chapter 1 is often referenced. And it's true, the three-fold "to the praise of God's glory" is clearly related to the Trinity as per "God and Father" (vs. 3-6), "in Him... the Son" (vs. 7-12) and "marked by the Holy Spirit (vs. 14) respectively.

And yet, in each of these three doxologies, the clear and overwhelming focus remains on Christ throughout!

- We are to “bless” the Father “of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 3),
- just as the Father chose us “in Christ” (vs. 4),
- adopted us “through his Son Jesus Christ” (vs. 5),
- and accomplished his glorious grace for us “in the Beloved one” (vs. 6),
- and we are said to be “in Him (Christ) sealed by the Holy Spirit” (vs. 13).

In total, Christ is the focus of the Father’s redemptive work on our behalf, even if the Father is known through Christ. The Holy Spirit had been and is being sent to us by Christ even if the Spirit executes the words and actions of Christ on our behalf. And however much the Trinity IS involved in our salvation, it remains true as no less during Christ ascension as during his incarnation that there remains only one mediator between God and humanity. It is all about Christ as distinct, if never separate from his mystical union within the Trinity.

In relation to missions, note Lesslie Newbigin’s push-back against Trinitarian focused missions vs. Christo-centric missions in 1987.

The context involved Newbigin’s involvement in the *World Council of Churches* formally adopting a revised platform at the Uppsala Assembly of 1968 compared to the original platform adopted in 1910 at the “Ecumenical Missionary Conference” in Edinburgh. As explained by Michael Goheen, the transition in the World Council of Churches was toward a “new view of mission” that featured a “shift in focus from God’s work through Christ in the church to His providential and salvific work by His Spirit in the world. The goal of mission was the humanization or shalom of society through the efforts of the laity in co-operation with other social institutions that aimed at the transformation of oppressive political, social, and economic structures.”<sup>1</sup>

Newbigin was concerned that it represented a profound “paradigm shift” from “Christo-centric universalism” to the “Trinitarian model” notwithstanding his general endorsement that a “full Trinitarian theology was needed for an adequate missiology” (c.f. his *Trinitarian Faith for Today’s Mission*, 1963).

Newbigin subsequently sought to nuance the Trinitarian model in that

*“the Trinitarian perspective can be only an enlargement and development of a Christo-centric one, and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history.”<sup>2</sup>*

In other words, the “literally crucial matter” concerning the missionary nature of the church according to Newbigin was “the centrality of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross, that work by which he has won lordship over the church and the world.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

From the Christian Perspective, the knowledge of God is the beginning and end of knowledge about everything else. There is no knowledge that is greater in consequence than the knowledge of God.

*The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the*

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<sup>1</sup> Goheen, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> Amnesia, p.26.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesia, p.28.

*existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity... But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe...*

C.H. Spurgeon

**Conclusion: How should it impact us To know God?**

**1) It would both humble and enlarge us:**

*There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity... But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe...*

C.H. Spurgeon

**2) How would we know that we know God?**

We would know him in humility vs. pride:

As in WCF 2.1, It might seem strange that one of the first attributes of God that is that he is "incomprehensible." How might this be one of the more significant attributes to affirm in our journey to know God?

- *To know him is not then to fully comprehend him*

*Rom. 11:33 O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.*

*Job 11:7 "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? 8 It is higher than heaven--what can you do? Deeper than Sheol--what can you know? 9 Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.*

**3) Note Packer's Knowing God, Chapter 1-2**

*You can know a great deal about God and godliness without much knowledge of God. Those who know their God...*

- o *...have great energy for God*
- o *...have great thoughts of God*
- o *...show great boldness for God*
- o *...have great contentment in God*

*...Knowing God is a matter of personal dealing, as all direct acquaintance with personal beings....*

**4) To know God through Christ will push out all manners of dead religion**

*True conservatism (fogeism vs. godliness)*

*Peck Robinson*



## Addendum 1: Christology Counsels and Relation to Doctrine of the Church

The 5<sup>th</sup> century controversy in Christology was focused on the meaning of Christ's incarnation in relation to his person. The questions were: To what extent was Christ human? And to what extent was Christ divine? The protagonists involved Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople and Bishop Cyril of Alexandria representing the East and West respectively. The former stressed two natures to preserve Christ's humanity. The later stressed one nature to preserve Christ's divinity. And yet both conceded the absolute necessity of preserving a *dialectical understanding of the relationship of the human and divine in Christology*.

It was all charged within the political context surrounding whether to venerate Mary as the "mother of God" (Cyril), or not (Nestorius). As history tells it, the differences in Christology were no doubt accelerated by political expediency. The debate moved between what was most likely competing semantics per vernacular "forms" to competing theological positions per theological "elements." Accordingly, historian Ben Green makes the observation how "the challenge for understanding the debate between Nestorius and Cyril is to distinguish the moderate from the extreme. Each of these theologians can be seen to represent *either* the moderate or the extreme position of his school of thought."<sup>4</sup>

Eventually by means of a convergence in theologizing and politicizing, and after involving a whole host of subsequent personalities (The Antiochene "school" per Eutyches on the east side and the Alexandrian school per Dioscorus on the west side for instance), the counsel of Ephesus in 431 decided in favor of the Cyril-Alexandrian school and against what was by then a more eccentric expression of the Antiochene position than was previously held by Nestorius himself. Again as noted by Ben Green, "in deciding in Cyril's favor, Ephesus did not, however, fully adopt Cyril's Christology." Likewise, "Nestorius' overall delivery of the Antiochene Christology was much more orthodox. He was firmly convinced of the union of the divine and human natures in the single Son, Christ: "I did not say that the Son was one (person) and God the Word another; I said that God *the Word* was by nature one and the *temple* by nature another, one Son by conjunction."<sup>5</sup> Eventually, Ephesus was not able to come to a resolution concerning Christology itself, as it was more a decision concerning the praxis issue of veneration. And even then, Cyril was later deposed as well by the Eastern bishops before the counsel was formerly closed in AD 433.

However much Ephesus settled the issue politically, it took Chalcedon in AD 451 to finally clarify the Christological doctrine itself as would eventually become widely accepted in the Greek, Roman and Protestant traditions. The Chalcedon creed reflected more of a "win-win" compromise between the original Nestorian and Cyril positions. To begin, as per a unified confession, Chalcedon first stipulated how "we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man... the same *one in being (homoousios)* with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity." That is, in so far as Christ's being is two *natures (ousia)*, they are forever being in *union (homo)*, the divine in perfect union with the human as then to establish Christ's communal essence. The counsel would further clarify, "that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation."<sup>6</sup>

Herein the famous "two distinct but not separate" concept is codified. That is, "the distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosôpon*) and one hypostasis." Here again, the distinctly human and *divine* remain fixed in one *static* essence, albeit in an ongoing living communion as one person in communion, "the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the communion." This then was the Caledonian confession of what materialized historically in the incarnation of Christ wherein it was said; "the same

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Green, *Nestorius and Cyril: 5th Century Christological Division and Recent Progress* (Reconciliation Press, 1975) p. 454.

<sup>5</sup> Green.. Quote taken from a sermon Nestorius preached in 430 as quoted by Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox

<sup>6</sup> Green, p. 455

was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born as to his humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God.”<sup>7</sup>

And so there we have it: ecumenical Christology later confessed by all three of the major branches of Christendom—Eastern Catholic, Western Catholic and generally speaking Protestant. And yet, our present interest is not so much Christology, but Christology *applied*! How would this Christology as especially related to the “two distinct but not separate” in Christ’s divinity and humanity correspond to the ascension ministry of Christ today? In so far as the “distinct” is concerned, there is a “distinct-static” orientation expressed. But in so far as the “but not separate” is concerned, there is an “ongoing-vivifying” orientation that is continued. Stated differently if there is a “once and for all” aspect to Christology, is there as well an “ongoing” aspect to Christology in relation to the union of the two natures albeit in one person Jesus Christ? Our proposal then is to ask the question as related to Christ’s ascension ministry today.

Without espousing what has traditionally been described as “Nestorianism” per se, what exactly is the meaning of his earlier clarification, “ I said that God *the Word* was by nature one and the *temple* by nature another, one Son by conjunction.”<sup>8</sup> Was Nestorius distinguishing a “once and for all” ideal-objectifying-word or “covenantal” paradigm in heaven and an ongoing material-subjectifying–communal or “temple” paradigm as mediated on earth?” Enter Augustine’s *Totus Christus* idea concerning Christology as applied to ecclesiology.

The focus of Augustine’s *Totus Christus* Christology in relation to ecclesiology was concerned to address both the “distinct” (not absolutely present) but “not separate” (not abstractly present only) aspects of Christ’s ascension ministry. For instance Augustine wrote:

The Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us; to that flesh is joined the church, and there is made the *total Christ*, head and body.<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of “to that flesh is joined the church” is of particular significance to our thesis per the temple orientation especially. It would appear that Augustine’s point is that the significance of the Eucharist is something more than a simple comparison of Christ’s life to ours by way of a moral example. More than a Eucharist in the position of the Holy Spirit to excite in us the life of holiness and love, Augustine’s point was that the visibly and organically socialized church into a given cultural-linguistic “flesh” BECOMES Christ in the midst of us today. Augustine writes for instance:

Then let us rejoice and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ. Do you understand, brothers, and apprehend the grace of God upon us? Marvel, be glad, we are made Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members: the whole man is he and we... The fullness of Christ, then, is head and members. Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.<sup>10</sup>

In this manner, Augustine clearly understands Christ ascension presence to be full or “total” in the visible flesh and blood of the church on earth. To further illustrate this point in relation to Augustine’s “we are made Christ” idea, the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers often applied Augustines *Totus Christus* to Christ’s presence acting through “one anothering” or the classic “communion of the saints” idea. One sample of this application could be Luther’s application of Christology to ecclesial communion in mercy:

That even as we have eaten and drunk the body and blood of Christ the Lord, we in turn permit ourselves to be eaten and drunk, and say the same words to our neighbor, Take, eat and drink; and this by no means in jest, but in all seriousness, meaning to offer yourself with all your life, even as Christ did with all that he had, in the sacramental words.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Green, p. 457

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, In. Io. XXI.8).

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, Palm Sunday Sermon from 1524 “On Confession and the Lord’s Supper.”

But what about the “distinct” in Christology as then applied to ecclesiology? It seems that for Augustine, as related to the “Head” and “body” distinction, Christology applied to ecclesiology will also want to qualify Christ’s one to one corresponding presence in/with/through the church by the all important “not immediately, but *mediately*” concerning the sovereign advent of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Contrary to how some have defined it, it is not so much that Christ is both “absent” and “present” per se (though it gets to the same concern), but that Christ’s “presence” in the organized church is *predicated upon* the mystery of his sovereign election. Perhaps then the reformation distinction “visible” and invisible” is more related to “what God sees” and “what we see” respectively. But the point is the same. Christ and the church are not *ordinarily* separate, even if they remain distinct.

The all important qualification “ordinarily” is illustrated by Augustine in his comments about the meaning of “I am the bread of life” as applied to the Eucharist. In relation to the Pauline warning that “some have died” concerning a wrongful participation in the Lord’s Supper, Augustine raised the question “why then are there some that have not died who have eaten the bread improperly?” His answer:

“Why? Because they understood the visible food spiritually, hungered spiritually, tasted spiritually, that they might be filled spiritually. For even we at this day receive visible food: but the sacrament is one thing, the virtue of the sacrament another.”

He further explains:

Consequently, he that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, doubtless neither eateth His flesh [spiritually] nor drinketh His blood [although he may press the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ carnally and visibly with his teeth].<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, J. N.D. Kelley will conclude how “in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century... the universal, if somewhat vague assumption was that the sacraments were outward and visible signs marking the presence of an invisible, but none the less genuine grace.” Kelley will go on to explain how according to Augustine’s view of baptismal efficacy, “the sacrament itself is one thing and the power of the sacrament is another... in baptism the water serves as the sacrament of the grace imported, but the grace itself is invisibly operated by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Homilies in John*, Tractate 26, Sec. 11.

<sup>13</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (1978)p. 422.