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The Triune God

BY THE LATE: C. D. COLE

The greatest subject for human thought and study is God. Here we are on holy ground. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him" (Psalm 89:7).

By the expression "The Triune God," we mean one God in three persons. We do not mean three Gods, but three persons in one divine essence or substance or nature. Trinity is not Tritheism, which means three Gods.

The Trinity of God is a mystery, but not a contradiction. The Unitarians wrongly call Trinitarians Tritheists, which means the belief in three Gods. We believe in one God as much as the Unitarians do. But we believe that the one God exists as three persons. Unitarians believe in one God in such a sense as to exclude Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as Divine persons.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a philosophy—it is not a matter of human reason—it is purely a matter of divine revelation.

Daniel Webster and a friend went to hear a sermon on the Trinity. Walking home from church the friend said: "Mr. Webster, is not that doctrine a mathematical impossibility?" Said Mr. Webster: "According to the mathematics of earth it seems to be, but I am not acquainted with the mathematics of heaven."

So in dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity, we are not occupied with human philosophy and earthly mathematics, but with divine revelation and heavenly mathematics.

We must distinguish between the Scriptural elements of a doctrine and the human expression

of these elements. The elements of the doctrine of the Triune God are abundant in the Scriptures, but there is no direct Scriptural statement of the doctrine. It is the task of Bible students to take these elements of the doctrine and so express them that they may become the thought of all Christians. The Bible is replete with statements and assertions of one God, and it is also replete with truths respecting the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is a doctrinal book, but it is not a book of doctrinal statements; that is, Bible doctrines are not put in the form of Systematic Theology. The elements of doctrines are in the Bible, but for the good of the church, they need to be put in doctrinal statements.

I. The unity of God is clearly taught in the Bible. (1) Passages which declare explicitly that God is one: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4); "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (Malachi 2:10); "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God, and

there is none other but he" (Mark 12:29-32); "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). (2) Passages that assert that there is none else or none besides Him: "Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deut. 4:35-39); "There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God" (I Sam. 2:2); "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any" (Isaiah 44:6-8). (3) Passages that assert that there is none like Him, nor to be compared to Him: "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Entreat the Lord, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord. And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I entreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only? And he said, To morrow. And he said, Be it according to thy word: that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the Lord our God" (Exodus 8:8-10); "For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth" (Exodus 9:14). (4) Passages which declare that He alone is to be worshipped: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exodus 20:5); "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord

thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). (5) Passages which declare Him to be the true God: "But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation" (Jeremiah 10:10); "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (I Thess. 1:9).

II. The Scriptures also teach that God exists in three modes of existence: As Father, and as Son, and as Holy Spirit. God is called Father, and if there is a Father, there must be a Son. Jesus Christ is called God. Thomas said in John 20:28: "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." Christ said: "My Father and I are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." The Holy Spirit is declared to be God. Christ said: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16).

The three persons are in evidence at the baptism of Jesus. Matt. 3:16,17. The Son was being baptized; the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove lighted upon Him; and the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." The three persons are joined in the benediction of II Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

Having the elements of the doctrine or the proof that three persons are declared to be God, the problem is how to state or express the doctrine.

There are many good statements of the doctrine of God, but my favorite is that found in the New Hampshire Declaration of Faith: "We believe that there is one and only one living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, whose name is Jehovah, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of Heaven and Earth; inexpressibly glorious in holiness and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of human redemption."

Father and Son and Holy Spirit are not used to express order of being as in human relations. In human relations, father is older than son, but in Divine relations, the Son is eternal like the Father. God is one in essence, nature, and being, as Spirit. But in the one nature, essence, or substance, there are three personal relationships.

The Trinity is essential to the very nature

of God. God is love, and love must have an object. God's love is eternal and, therefore, must have had an eternal object. Christ said in John 17:24: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

The Trinity is essential to the doctrine of redemption. Unitarians who deny the doctrine of the Trinity have no doctrine of atonement and regeneration. If God is absolutely and simply one, there can be no mediation and atonement, since between God and the most exalted creature the gulf is infinite. If Christ is not God, He could not bring us to God—He could not be our mediator with God. Christ cannot bring us nearer to God than He is Himself. Only one who is God can reconcile us to Himself. No angel, however holy, can bring us to God. So, only one who is God can regenerate us. Only God can purify our souls. A God who is only unity and not a plurality of persons may be our Judge, but He cannot be our Saviour.

The three persons in the Godhead are equal in every divine perfection—they are one in substance—one in nature—equal in all attributes—but they perform distinct offices in human salvation. The Father elects or chooses the people to be saved—He gives to the Son a people to be redeemed; the Son does the work of redemption—He goes to the cross and bears our sins—He suffers the Just for the unjust in order to bring us to God; the Holy Spirit makes the atonement of Christ effective in our experiences—He convicts of the sin of unbelief and makes Christ precious to us—He takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us.

In human salvation, it is the Father who upholds the claims of justice and demands satisfaction in order to salvation; it is the Son who renders the satisfaction to offended justice by giving His own life; it is the Holy Spirit who applies the atonement to our hearts and makes it effective in our experience.

It is the Father who prescribes the remedy for our sins; it is the Son who provides the remedy in His own blood; and it is the Holy Spirit who applies the remedy.

The Father is the physician who writes the prescription; the Son is the pharmacist who compounds it; and the Holy Spirit is the nurse who administers it.

In the nature of God, there is unity and equality; in human salvation there are three persons and subordination. The Son is subordinate to the Father and does His will; the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Son and performs His will. In this subordination, the Father sends the Son and the Son sends the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ through the Son reveals God and the Holy Spirit reveals the Son.

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