

Systematic Theology 1.1

The Being of God

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Part One: The Doctrine of God – Section 1: The Being of God

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

Part One: The Doctrine of God

The Being of God

- The existence of God**
- The knowability of God**
- Being and attributes**
- The names of God**
- Attributes in general**
- Incommunicable attributes**
- Communicable attributes**
- The Holy Trinity**

The Works of God

- Divine decrees
- Predestination
- Creation in general
- The spiritual world
- The world
- Providence

Part Two: The Doctrine of Man in Relation to God

Man in His Original State

- Origin of man
- Constitutional nature
- Image of God
- Covenant of works

Man in the State of Sin

- Origin of sin
- Character of sin
- Transmission of sin
- Sin in the human race
- Punishment of sin

Man in the Covenant of Grace

- Name and concept
- Covenant of redemption
- Nature of the covenant of grace
- Its dual aspect
- Its dispensations

Part Three: The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

The Person of Christ

- History of the doctrine
- Names and natures
- The unipersonality of Christ

The States of Christ

- Humiliation
- Exaltation

The Offices of Christ

- Prophetic office
- Priestly office
- Necessity of the atonement
- Nature of the atonement
- Theories of the atonement
- Purpose and extent of the atonement
- Intercession
- Kingly office

Part Four: The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption

Soteriology

- Soteriology in general
- The Holy Spirit's operations
- Common grace
- Mystical union
- External calling
- Regeneration and effectual calling
- Conversion
- Faith
- Justification
- Sanctification
- Perseverance of the saints

Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace

The Church

- Names and history
- Nature of the Church
- Government
- Power

The Means of Grace

- Means of grace in general
- The Word

Sacraments in general
Christian baptism
The Lord's Supper

Part Six: The Doctrine of the Last Things

Individual Eschatology

Physical death
Immortality of the soul
Intermediate state

General Eschatology

Second coming of Christ
Millennial views
Resurrection of the dead
Final judgement
Final state

I. The Existence of God

Berkhof begins with God, whose existence Scripture assumes and whose reality unbelief cannot finally evade. Reason may support reflection, but God is known first through His own revelation.

A. Place of the Doctrine of God in Dogmatics.

GLOSS Dogmatics: the ordered, systematic presentation of Christian doctrine drawn from Holy Scripture, seeking to display its internal unity and coherence.

WORKS on dogmatic or systematic theology generally begin with the doctrine of God. The prevailing opinion has always recognised this as the most logical procedure and still points in the same direction. In many instances even they whose fundamental principles would seem to require another arrangement, continue the traditional practice. There are good reasons for starting with the doctrine of God, if we proceed on the assumption that theology is the systematized knowledge of God, of whom, through whom, and unto whom, are all things. Instead of being surprised that Dogmatics should begin with the doctrine of God, we might well expect it to be a study of God *throughout* in all its ramifications, from the beginning to the end. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what it is intended to be, though only the first locus deals with God directly, while the succeeding ones treat of Him more indirectly. We start the study of theology with two presuppositions, namely (1) that God exists, and (2) that He has revealed Himself in His divine Word.

And for that reason it is not impossible for us to start with the study of God. We can turn to His revelation, in order to learn what He has revealed concerning Himself and concerning His relation to His creatures. Attempts have been made in the course of time to distribute the material of Dogmatics in such a way as to exhibit clearly that it is, not merely in one locus, but in its entirety, a study of God. This was done by the application of the trinitarian method, which arranges the subject-matter of Dogmatics under the three headings of (1) the Father (2) the Son, and (3) the Holy Spirit. That method was applied in some of the earlier systematic works, was restored to favour by Hegel, and can still be seen in Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics*. A similar attempt was made by Breckenridge, when he divided the subject-matter of Dogmatics into (1) The Knowledge of God Objectively Considered, and (2) The Knowledge of God Subjectively Considered. Neither one of these can be called very successful.

Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century the practice was all but general to begin the study of Dogmatics with the doctrine of God; but a change came about under the influence of Schleiermacher, who sought to safeguard the scientific character of theology by the introduction

of a new method. The religious consciousness of man was substituted for the Word of God as the source of theology. Faith in Scripture as an authoritative revelation of God was discredited, and human insight based on man's own emotional or rational apprehension became the standard of religious thought. Religion gradually took the place of God as the object of theology. Man ceased to recognise the knowledge of God as something that was *given* in Scripture, and began to pride himself on being a seeker after God. In course of time it became rather common to speak of man's discovering God, as if man ever discovered Him; and every discovery that was made in the process was dignified with the name of "revelation." God came in at the end of a syllogism, or as the last link in a chain of reasoning, or as the cap-stone of a structure of human thought. Under such circumstances it was but natural that some should regard it as incongruous to begin Dogmatics with the study of God. It is rather surprising that so many, in spite of their subjectivism, continued the traditional arrangement.

Some, however, sensed the incongruity and struck out in a different way. Schleiermacher's dogmatic work is devoted to a study and analysis of the religious consciousness and of the doctrines therein implied. He does not deal with the doctrine of God connectedly, but only in fragments, and concludes his work with a discussion of the Trinity. His starting point is anthropological rather than theological. Some of the mediating theologians were influenced to such an extent by Schleiermacher that they logically began their dogmatic treatises with the study of man. Even in the present day this arrangement is occasionally followed. A striking example of it is found in the work of O. A. Curtis on *The Christian Faith*. This begins with the doctrine of man and concludes with the doctrine of God. Ritschlian theology might seem to call for still another starting point, since it finds the objective revelation of God, not in the Bible as the divinely inspired Word, but in Christ as the Founder of the Kingdom of God, and considers the idea of the Kingdom as the central and all-controlling concept of theology. However, Ritschlian dogmatists, such as Herrmann, Haering, and Kaftan follow, at least formally, the usual order. At the same time there are several theologians who in their works begin the discussion of dogmatics proper with the doctrine of Christ or of His redemptive work. T. B. Strong distinguishes between *theology* and *Christian theology*, defines the latter as "the expression and analysis of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ," and makes the incarnation the dominating concept throughout his *Manual of Theology*.

B. Scripture Proof for the Existence of God.

GLOSS *Sensus divinitatis*: the ineradicable human sense of the divine, though obscured and distorted by sin and therefore unable to serve as an independent saving knowledge.

For us the existence of God is the great presupposition of theology. There is no sense in speaking of the knowledge of God, unless it may be assumed that God exists. The presupposition

of Christian theology is of a very definite type. The assumption is not merely that there is something, some idea or ideal, some power or purposeful tendency, to which the name of God may be applied, but that there is a self-existent, self-conscious, personal Being, which is the origin of all things, and which transcends the entire creation, but is at the same time immanent in every part of it. The question may be raised, whether this is a reasonable assumption, and this question may be answered in the affirmative. This does not mean, however, that the existence of God is capable of a logical demonstration that leaves no room whatever for doubt; but it does mean that, while the truth of God's existence is accepted by faith, this faith is based on reliable information. While Reformed theology regards the existence of God as an entirely reasonable assumption, it does not claim the ability to demonstrate this by rational argumentation. Dr. Kuyper speaks as follows of the attempt to do this: "The attempt to prove God's existence is either useless or unsuccessful. It is useless if the searcher believes that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him. And it is unsuccessful if it is an attempt to force a person who does not have this *pistis* by means of argumentation to an acknowledgment in a logical sense." [Dict. Dogm., De Deo I, p. 77 (translation mine – L. B.).]

The Christian accepts the truth of the existence of God by faith. But this faith is not a blind faith, but a faith that is based on evidence, and the evidence is found primarily in Scripture as the inspired Word of God, and secondarily in God's revelation in nature. Scripture proof on this point does not come to us in the form of an explicit declaration, and much less in the form of a logical argument. In that sense the Bible does not prove the existence of God. The closest it comes to a declaration is perhaps in Heb. 11:6 . . . "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." It presupposes the existence of God in its very opening statement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Not only does it describe God as the Creator of all things, but also as the Upholder of all His creatures, and as the Ruler of the destinies of individuals and nations. It testifies to the fact that God works all things according to the counsel of His will, and reveals the gradual realization of His great purpose of redemption. The preparation for this work, especially in the choice and guidance of the old covenant people of Israel, is clearly seen in the Old Testament, and the initial culmination of it in the Person and work of Christ stands out with great clarity on the pages of the New Testament.

God is seen on almost every page of Holy Writ as He reveals Himself in words and actions. This revelation of God is the basis of our faith in the existence of God, and makes this an entirely reasonable faith. It should be remarked, however, that it is only by faith that we accept the revelation of God, and that we obtain a real insight into its contents. Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself," John 7:17. It is this intensive knowledge, resulting from intimate communion with God, which Hosea has in mind when he says, "And let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord," Hos. 6:3. The unbeliever has no real understanding of the Word of God. The words of Paul are very much to the

point in this connection: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this age (world)? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For, seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe," I Cor. 1:20,21.

C. Denial of the existence of God in its various forms.

GLOSS Atheism: the denial of God in theory or, more commonly, in practical life and disposition; it may be intellectual, moral, or simply habitual.

Students of Comparative Religion and missionaries often testify to the fact that the idea of God is practically universal in the human race. It is found even among the most uncivilized nations and tribes of the world. This does not mean, however, that there are no individuals who deny the existence of God altogether, nor even that there is not a goodly number in Christian lands who deny the existence of God as He is revealed in Scripture, a self-existent and self-conscious Person of infinite perfections, who works all things according to a pre-determined plan. It is the latter denial that we have in mind particularly here. This may and has assumed various forms in the course of history.

1. ABSOLUTE DENIAL OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. As stated above, there is strong evidence for the universal presence of the idea of God in the human mind, even among tribes which are uncivilized and have not felt the impact of special revelation. In view of this fact some go so far as to deny that there are people who deny the existence of God, real atheists; but this denial is contradicted by the facts. It is customary to distinguish two kinds, namely, practical and theoretical atheists. The former are simply godless persons, who in their practical life do not reckon with God, but live as if there were no God. The latter are, as a rule, of a more intellectual kind, and base their denial on a process of reasoning. They seek to prove by what seem to them conclusive rational arguments, that there is no God. In view of the *semen religionis* implanted in every man by his creation in the image of God, it is safe to assume that no one is born an atheist. In the last analysis atheism results from the perverted moral state of man and from his desire to escape from God. It is deliberately blind to and suppresses the most fundamental instinct of man, the deepest needs of the soul, the highest aspirations of the human spirit, and the longings of a heart that gropes after some higher Being. This practical or intellectual suppression of the operation of the *semen religionis* often involves prolonged and painful struggles.

There can be no doubt about the existence of practical atheists, since both Scripture and experience testify to it. Psalm 10:4b declares of the wicked, "All his thoughts are, There is no God." According to Ps. 14:1 "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." And Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were formerly "without God in the world," Eph. 2:12. Experience also

testifies abundantly to their presence in the world. They are not necessarily notoriously wicked in the eyes of men, but may belong to the so-called “decent men of the world,” though respectably indifferent to spiritual things. Such people are often quite conscious of the fact that they are out of harmony with God, dread to think of meeting Him, and try to forget about Him. They seem to take a secret delight in parading their- atheism when they have smooth sailing, but have been known to get down on their knees for prayer when their life was suddenly endangered. At the present time thousands of these practical atheists belong to the *American Association for the Advancement of Atheism*.

Theoretical atheists are of a different kind. They are usually of a more intellectual type and attempt to justify the assertion that there is no God by rational argumentation. Prof. Flint distinguishes three kinds of theoretical atheism, namely, (1) *dogmatic atheism*, which flatly denies that there is a Divine Being; (2) *sceptical atheism*, which doubts the ability of the human mind to determine, whether or not there is a God; and (3) *critical atheism*, which maintains that there is no valid proof for the existence of God. These often go hand in hand, but even the most modest of them really pronounces all belief in God a delusion.[*Anti-Theistic Theories*, p. 4 f.] In this division, it will be noticed, agnosticism also appears as a sort of atheism, a classification which many agnostics resent. But it should be borne in mind that agnosticism respecting the existence of God, while allowing the possibility of His reality, leaves us without an object of worship and adoration just as much as dogmatic atheism does. However the real atheist is the *dogmatic atheist*, the man who makes the positive assertion that there is no God. Such an assertion may mean one of two things: either that he recognises no god of any kind, sets up no idol for himself, or that he does not recognise the God of Scripture. Now there are very few atheists who do not in practical life fashion some sort of god for themselves. There is a far greater number who theoretically set aside any and every god; and there is a still greater number that has broken with the God of Scripture. Theoretical atheism is generally rooted in some scientific or philosophical theory.

Materialistic Monism in its various forms and atheism usually go hand in hand. Absolute subjective Idealism may still leave us the idea of God, but denies that there is any corresponding reality. To the modern Humanist “God” simply means “the Spirit of humanity,” “the Sense of wholeness,” “the Racial Goal” and other abstractions of that kind. Other theories not only leave room for God, but also pretend to maintain His existence, but certainly exclude the God of theism, a supreme personal Being, Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe, distinct from His creation, and yet everywhere present in it. Pantheism merges the natural and supernatural, the finite and infinite, into one substance. It often speaks of God as the hidden ground of the phenomenal world, but does not conceive of Him as personal, and therefore as endowed with intelligence and will. It boldly declares that all is God, and thus engages in what Brightman calls “the expansion of God,” so that we get “too much of God,” seeing that He also includes all the evil of the world. It excludes the God of Scripture, and in so far is clearly atheistic. Spinoza may be

called “the God-intoxicated man,” but his God is certainly not the God whom Christians worship and adore. Surely, there can be no doubt about the presence of theoretical atheists in the world. When David Hume expressed doubt as to the existence of a dogmatic atheist, Baron d’Holbach replied, “My dear sir, you are at this moment sitting at table with seventeen such persons.” They who are agnostic respecting the existence of God may differ somewhat from the dogmatic atheist, but they, as well as the latter, leave us without a God.

2. PRESENT DAY FALSE CONCEPTIONS OF GOD INVOLVING A DENIAL OF THE TRUE GOD. There are several false conceptions of God current in our day, which involve a denial of the theistic conception of God. A brief indication of the most important of these must suffice in this connection.

a. *An immanent and impersonal God.* Theism has always believed in a God who is both transcendent and immanent. Deism removed God from the world, and stressed His transcendence at the expense of His immanence. Under the influence of Pantheism, however, the pendulum swung in the other direction. It identified God and the world, and did not recognise a Divine Being, distinct from, and infinitely exalted above, His creation. Through Schleiermacher the tendency to make God continuous with the world gained a footing in theology. He completely ignores the transcendent God, and recognises only a God that can be known by human experience and manifests Himself in Christian consciousness as Absolute Causality, to which a feeling of absolute dependence corresponds. The attributes we ascribe to God are in this view merely symbolical expressions of the various modes of this feeling of dependence, subjective ideas without any corresponding reality.

His earlier and his later representations of God seem to differ somewhat, and interpreters of Schleiermacher differ as to the way in which his statements must be harmonized. Brunner would seem to be quite correct, however, when he says that with him the universe takes the place of God, though the latter name is used; and that he conceives of God both as identical with the universe and as the unity lying behind it. It often seems as if his distinction between God and the world is only an ideal one, namely, the distinction between the world as a unity and the world in its manifold manifestations. He frequently speaks of God as the “Universum” or the “Welt-All,” and argues against the personality of God; though, inconsistently, also speaking as if we could have communion with Him in Christ. These views of Schleiermacher, making God continuous with the world, largely dominated the theology of the past century, and it is this view that Barth is combatting with his strong emphasis on God as “the Wholly Other.”

b. *A finite and personal God.* The idea of a finite god or gods is not new, but as old as Polytheism and Henotheism. The idea fits in with Pluralism, but not with philosophical Monism or theological Monotheism. Theism has always regarded God as an absolute personal Being of infinite perfections. During the nineteenth century, when monistic philosophy was in the

ascendant, it became rather common to identify the God of theology with the Absolute of philosophy. Toward the end of the century, however, the term "Absolute," as a designation of God, fell into disfavor, partly because of its agnostic and pantheistic implications, and partly as the result of the opposition to the idea of the "Absolute" in philosophy, and of the desire to exclude all metaphysics from theology. Bradley regarded the God of the Christian religion as a part of the Absolute, and James pleaded for a conception of God that was more in harmony with human experience than the idea of an infinite God.

He eliminates from God the metaphysical attributes of self-existence, infinity, and immutability, and makes the moral attributes supreme. God has an environment, exists in time, and works out a history just like ourselves. Because of the evil that is in the world, He must be thought of as limited in knowledge or power, or in both. The condition of the world makes it impossible to believe in a good God infinite in knowledge and power. The existence of a larger power which is friendly to man and with which he can commune meets all the practical needs and experiences of religion. James conceived of this power as personal, but was not willing to express himself as to whether he believed in one finite God or a number of them. Bergson added to this conception of James the idea of a struggling and growing God, constantly drawing upon his environment. Others who defended the idea of a finite God, though in different ways, are Hobhouse, Schiller, James Ward, Rashdall, and H. G. Wells.

c. *God as the personification of a mere abstract idea.* It has become quite the vogue in modern liberal theology to regard the name "God" as a mere symbol, standing for some cosmic process, some universal will or power, or some lofty and comprehensive ideal. The statement is repeatedly made that, if God once created man in His image, man is now returning the compliment by creating God in his (man's) image. It is said of Harry Elmer Barnes that he once said in one of his laboratory classes: "Gentlemen, we shall now proceed to create God." That was a very blunt expression of a rather common idea. Most of those who reject the theistic view of God still profess faith in God, but He is a God of their own imagination. The form which He assumes at any particular time depends, according to Shailer Mathews, on the thought patterns of that day. If in pre-war times the controlling pattern was that of an autocratic sovereign, demanding absolute obedience, now it is that of a democratic ruler eager to serve all his subjects. Since the days of Comte there has been a tendency to personify the social order of humanity as a whole and to worship this personification.

The so-called Meliorists or Social Theologians reveal a tendency to identify God in some way with the social order. And the New Psychologists inform us that the idea of God is a projection of the human mind, which in its early stages is inclined to make images of its experiences and to clothe them with quasi-personality. Leuba is of the opinion that this illusion of God has served a useful purpose, but that the time is coming when the idea of God will be no more needed. A few

definitions will serve to show the present day trend. "God is the immanent spirit of the community" (Royce). He is "that quality in human society which supports and enriches humanity in its spiritual quest" (Gerald Birney Smith). "God is the totality of relations constituting the whole social order of growing humanity" (E. S. Ames). "The word 'god' is a symbol to designate the universe in its ideal forming capacity" (G. B. Foster). "God is our conception, born of social experience, of the personality-evolving and personally responsive elements of our cosmic environment with which we are organically related" (Shailer Mathews). It need hardly be said that the God so defined is not a personal God and does not answer to the deepest needs of the human heart.

D. The So-called Rational Proofs for the Existence of God.

GLOSS Natural theology: reflection upon God from creation and reason; in Reformed dogmatics it remains subordinate to Scripture and can never replace divine self-disclosure.

In course of time certain rational arguments for the existence of God were developed, and found a foothold in theology especially through the influence of Wolff. Some of these were in essence already suggested by Plato and Aristotle, and others were added in modern times by students of the Philosophy of Religion. Only the most common of these arguments can be mentioned here.

1. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT. This has been presented in various forms by Anselm, Descartes, Samuel Clarke, and others. It has been stated in its most perfect form by Anselm. He argues that man has the idea of an absolutely perfect being; that existence is an attribute of perfection; and that therefore an absolutely perfect being must exist. But it is quite evident that we cannot conclude from abstract thought to real existence. The fact that we have an idea of God does not yet prove His objective existence. Moreover, this argument tacitly assumes, as already existing in the human mind, the very knowledge of God's existence which it would derive from logical demonstration. Kant stressed the untenableness of this argument, but Hegel hailed it as the one great argument for the existence of God. Some modern Idealists suggested that it might better be cast into a somewhat different form, which Hocking called "the report of experience." By virtue of it we can say, "I have an idea of God, therefore I have an experience of God."

2. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT. This has also appeared in several forms. In general it runs as follows: Every existing thing in the world must have an adequate cause; and if this is so, the universe must also have an adequate cause, that is a cause which is indefinitely great. However, the argument did not carry general conviction. Hume called the law of causation itself in question, and Kant pointed out that, if every existing thing has an adequate cause, this also applies to God, and that we are thus led to an endless chain. Moreover, the argument does not

necessitate the assumption that the cosmos had a single cause, a personal and absolute cause, – and therefore falls short of proving the existence of God. This difficulty led to a slightly different construction of the argument, as, for instance, by B. P. Bowne. The material universe appears as an interacting system, and therefore as a unit, consisting of several parts. Hence there must be a unitary Agent that mediates the interaction of the various parts or is the dynamic ground of their being.

3. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT. This is also a causal argument, and is really but an extension of the preceding one. It may be stated in the following form: The world everywhere reveals intelligence, order, harmony, and purpose, and thus implies the existence of an intelligent and purposeful being, adequate to the production of such a world. Kant regards this argument as the best of the three which were named, but claims that it does not prove the existence of God, nor of a Creator, but only of a great architect who fashioned the world. It is superior to the cosmological argument in that it makes explicit what is not stated in the latter, namely, that the world contains evidences of intelligence and purpose, and thus leads on to the existence of a conscious, and intelligent, and purposeful being. That this being was the Creator of the world does not necessarily follow. “The teleological evidence,” says Wright, [*A Student’s Philosophy of Religion*, p. 341.] “merely indicates the probable existence of a Mind that is, at least in considerable measure, in control of the world process, – enough to account for the amount of teleology apparent in it.” Hegel treated this argument as a valid but subordinate one. The Social Theologians of our day reject it along with all the other arguments as so much rubbish, but the New Theists retain it.

4. THE MORAL ARGUMENT. Just as the other arguments, this too assumed different forms. Kant took his startingpoint in the categorical imperative, and from it inferred the existence of someone who, as lawgiver and judge, has the absolute right to command man. In his estimation this argument is far superior to any of the others. It is the one on which he mainly relies in his attempt to prove the existence of God. This may be one of the reasons why it is more generally recognised than any other, though it is not always cast into the same form. Some argue from the disparity often observed between the moral conduct of men and the prosperity which they enjoy in the present life, and feel that this calls for an adjustment in the future which, in turn, requires a righteous arbiter. Modern theology also uses it extensively, especially in the form that man’s recognition of a Highest Good and his quest for a moral ideal demand and necessitate the existence of a God to give reality to that ideal. While this argument does point to the existence of a holy and just being, it does not compel belief in a God, a Creator, or a being of infinite perfections.

5. THE HISTORICAL OR ETHNOLOGICAL ARGUMENT. In the main this takes the following form: Among all the peoples and tribes of the earth there is a sense of the divine, which reveals

itself in an external cultus. Since the phenomenon is universal, it must belong to the very nature of man. And if the nature of man naturally leads to religious worship, this can only find its explanation in a higher Being who has constituted man a religious being. In answer to this argument, however, it may be said that this universal phenomenon may have originated in an error or misunderstanding of one of the early progenitors of the human race, and that the religious cultus referred to appears strongest among primitive races, and disappears in the measure in which they become civilized.

In evaluating these rational arguments it should be pointed out first of all that believers do not need them. Their conviction respecting the existence of God does not depend on them, but on a believing acceptance of God's self-revelation in Scripture. If many in our day are willing to stake their faith in the existence of God on such rational arguments, it is to a great extent due to the fact that they refuse to accept the testimony of the Word of God. Moreover, in using these arguments in an attempt to convince unbelievers, it will be well to bear in mind that none of them can be said to carry absolute conviction. No one did more to discredit them than Kant. Since his day many philosophers and theologians have discarded them as utterly worthless, but to-day they are once more gaining favour and their number is increasing. And the fact that in our day so many find in them rather satisfying indications of the existence of God, would seem to indicate that they are not entirely devoid of value. They have some value for believers themselves, but should be called *testimonia* rather than arguments. They are important as interpretations of God's general revelation and as exhibiting the reasonableness of belief in a divine Being. Moreover, they can render some service in meeting the adversary. While they do not prove the existence of God beyond the possibility of doubt, so as to compel assent, they can be so construed as to establish a strong probability and thereby silence many unbelievers.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY. Why is modern theology inclined to give the study of man rather than the study of God precedence in theology? Does the Bible prove the existence of God or does it not? If it does, how does it prove it? What accounts for the general *sensus divinitatis* in man? Are there nations or tribes that are entirely devoid of it? Can the position be maintained that there are no atheists? Should present day Humanists be classed as atheists? What objections are there to the identification of God with the Absolute of philosophy? Does a finite God meet the needs of the Christian life? Is the doctrine of a finite God limited to Pragmatists? Why is a personified idea of God a poor substitute for the living God? What was Kant's criticism on the arguments of speculative reason for the existence of God? How should we judge of this criticism?

II. The Knowability of God

God cannot be fully comprehended by finite minds, but He can be truly known because He makes Himself known.

A. God Incomprehensible but yet Knowable.

GLOSS Incomprehensibility: God cannot be exhaustively comprehended by a finite mind, though He is truly known by His self-revelation and accommodated speech.

The Christian Church confesses on the one hand that God is the Incomprehensible One, but also on the other hand, that He can be known and that knowledge of Him is an absolute requisite unto salvation. It recognises the force of Zophar's question, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Job 11:7. And it feels that it has no answer to the question of Isaiah, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" Isa. 40:18. But at the same time it is also mindful of Jesus' statement, "And this is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ," John 17:3. It rejoices in the fact that "the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." I John 5:20. The two ideas reflected in these passages were always held side by side in the Christian Church. The early Church Fathers spoke of the invisible God as an unbegotten, nameless, eternal, incomprehensible, unchangeable Being. They had advanced very little beyond the old Greek idea that the Divine Being is absolute attributeless existence. At the same time they also confessed that God revealed Himself in the Logos, and can therefore be known unto salvation. In the fourth century Eunomius, an Arian, argued from the simplicity of God, that there is nothing in God that is not perfectly known and comprehended by the human intellect, but his view was rejected by all the recognised leaders of the Church. The Scholastics distinguished between the *quid* and the *qualis* of God, and maintained that we do not know what God is in His essential Being, but can know something of His nature, of what He is to us, as He reveals Himself in His divine attributes.

The same general ideas were expressed by the Reformers, though they did not agree with the Scholastics as to the possibility of acquiring real knowledge of God, by unaided human reason, from general revelation. Luther speaks repeatedly of God as the *Deus Absconditus* (hidden God), in distinction from Him as the *Deus Revelatus* (revealed God). In some passages he even speaks of the *revealed* God as still a *hidden* God in view of the fact that we cannot fully know Him even through His special revelation. To Calvin, God in the depths of His being is past finding out. "His essence," he says, "is incomprehensible; so that His divinity wholly escapes all human senses." The Reformers do not deny that man can learn something of the nature of God from His creation, but maintain that he can acquire true knowledge of Him only from special revelation, under the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit. Under the influence of the pantheizing theology of immanence, inspired by Hegel and Schleiermacher, a change came about. The transcendence of God is soft-pedaled, ignored, or explicitly denied. God is brought down to the level of the world,

is made continuous with it, and is therefore regarded as less incomprehensible, though still shrouded in mystery. Special revelation in the sense of a direct communication of God to man is denied. Sufficient knowledge of God can be obtained without it, since man can discover God for himself in the depths of his own being, in the material universe, and above all in Jesus Christ, since these are all but outward manifestations of the immanent God. It is over against this trend in theology that Barth now raises his voice and points out that God is not to be found in nature, in history, or in human experience of any kind, but only in the special revelation that has reached us in the Bible. In his strong statements respecting the hidden God he uses the language of Luther rather than of Calvin.

Reformed theology holds that God can be known, but that it is impossible for man to have a knowledge of Him that is exhaustive and perfect in every way. To have such a knowledge of God would be equivalent to comprehending Him, and this is entirely out of the question: "*Finitum non possit capere infinitum.*" Furthermore, man cannot give a definition of God in the proper sense of the word, but only a partial description. A logical definition is impossible, because God cannot be subsumed under some higher genus. At the same time it is maintained that man can obtain a knowledge of God that is perfectly adequate for the realization of the divine purpose in the life of man. However, true knowledge of God can be acquired only from the divine self-revelation, and only by the man who accepts this with childlike faith. Religion necessarily presupposes such a knowledge. It is the most sacred relation between man and his God, a relation in which man is conscious of the absolute greatness and majesty of God as the supreme Being, and of his own utter insignificance and subjection to the High and Holy One. And if this is true, it follows that religion presupposes the knowledge of God in man. If man were left absolutely in the dark respecting the being of God, it would be impossible for him to assume a religious attitude. There could be no reverence, no piety, no fear of God, no worshipful service.

B. Denial of the Knowability of God.

The possibility of knowing God has been denied on various grounds. This denial is generally based on the supposed limits of the human faculty of cognition, though it has been presented in several different forms. The fundamental position is that the human mind is incapable of knowing anything of that which lies beyond and behind natural phenomena, and is therefore necessarily ignorant of supersensible and divine things. Huxley was the first to apply to those who assume this position, himself included, the name "agnostics." They are entirely in line with the sceptics of former centuries and of Greek philosophy. As a rule agnostics do not like to be branded as atheists, since they do not deny absolutely that there is a God, but declare that they do not know whether He exists or not, and even if He exists, are not certain that they have any true knowledge of Him, and in many cases even deny that they can have any real knowledge of Him.

Hume has been called the father of modern agnosticism. He did not deny the existence of God, but asserted that we have no true knowledge of His attributes. All our ideas of Him are, and can only be, anthropomorphic. We cannot be sure that there is any reality corresponding to the attributes we ascribe to Him. His agnosticism resulted from the general principle that all knowledge is based on experience. It was especially Kant, however, who stimulated agnostic thought by his searching inquiry into the limits of the human understanding and reason. He affirmed that the theoretical reason knows only phenomena and is necessarily ignorant of that which underlies these phenomena, – the thing in itself. From this it followed, of course, that it is impossible for us to have any theoretical knowledge of God. But Lotze already pointed out that phenomena, whether physical or mental, are always connected with some substance lying back of them, and that in knowing the phenomena we also know the underlying substance, of which they are manifestations.

The Scotch philosopher, Sir William Hamilton, while not in entire agreement with Kant, yet shared the intellectual agnosticism of the latter. He asserts that the human mind knows only that which is conditioned and exists in various relations, and that, since the Absolute and Infinite is entirely unrelated, that is exists in no relations, we can obtain no knowledge of it. But while he denies that the Infinite can be known by us, he does not deny its existence. Says he, "Through faith we apprehend what is beyond our knowledge." His views were shared in substance by Mansel, and were popularized by him. To him also it seemed utterly impossible to conceive of an infinite Being, though he also professed faith in its existence. The reasoning of these two men did not carry conviction, since it was felt that the Absolute or Infinite does not *necessarily* exist outside of all relations, but can enter into various relations; and that the fact that we know things only in their relations does not mean that the knowledge so acquired is merely a relative or unreal knowledge.

Comte, the father of Positivism, was also agnostic in religion. According to him man can know nothing but physical phenomena and their laws. His senses are the sources of all true thinking, and he can know nothing except the phenomena which they apprehend and the relations in which these stand to each other. Mental phenomena can be reduced to material phenomena, and in science man cannot get beyond these. Even the phenomena of immediate consciousness are excluded, and further, everything that lies behind the phenomena. Theological speculation represents thought in its infancy. No positive affirmation can be made respecting the existence of God, and therefore both theism and atheism stand condemned. In later life Comte felt the need of some religion and introduced the so-called "religion of Humanity." Even more than Comte, Herbert Spencer is recognised as the great exponent of modern scientific agnosticism.

He was influenced very much by Hamilton's doctrine of the relativity of knowledge and by Mansel's conception of the Absolute, and in the light of these worked out his doctrine of the

Unknowable, which was his designation of whatever may be absolute, first or ultimate in the order of the universe, including God. He proceeds on the assumption that there is some reality lying back of phenomena, but maintains that all reflection on it lands us in contradictions. This ultimate reality is utterly inscrutable. While we must accept the existence of some ultimate Power, either personal or impersonal, we can form no conception of it. Inconsistently he devotes a great part of his *First Principles* to the development of the positive content of the Unknowable, as if it were well known indeed. Other agnostics, who were influenced by him, are such men as Huxley, Fiske, and Clifford. We meet with agnosticism also repeatedly in modern Humanism. Harry Elmer Barnes says: "To the writer it seems quite obvious that the agnostic position is the only one which can be supported by any scientifically-minded and critically-inclined person in the present state of knowledge." [*The Twilight of Christianity*, p. 260.]

Besides the forms indicated in the preceding the agnostic argument has assumed several others, of which the following are some of the most important. (1) *Man knows only by analogy*. We know only that which bears some analogy to our own nature or experience: "*Similia similibus percipiuntur*." But while it is true that we learn a great deal by analogy, we also learn by contrast. In many cases the differences are the very things that arrest our attention. The Scholastics spoke of the *via negationis* by which they in thought eliminated from God the imperfections of the creature. Moreover, we should not forget that man is made in the image of God, and that there are important analogies between the divine nature and the nature of man. (2) *Man really knows only what he can grasp in its entirety*. Briefly stated the position is that man cannot comprehend God, who is infinite, cannot have an exhaustive knowledge of Him, and therefore cannot know Him. But this position proceeds on the unwarranted assumption that partial knowledge cannot be real knowledge, an assumption which would really invalidate all our knowledge, since it always falls far short of completeness. Our knowledge of God, though not exhaustive, may yet be very real and perfectly adequate for our present needs. (3) *All predicates of God are negative and therefore furnish no real knowledge*.

Hamilton says that the Absolute and the Infinite can only be conceived as a negation of the thinkable; which really means that we can have no conception of them at all. But though it is true that much of what we predicate to God is negative in form, this does not mean that it may not at the same time convey some positive idea. The aseity of God includes the positive idea of his self-existence and self-sufficiency. Moreover, such ideas as love, spirituality, and holiness, are positive. (4) *All our knowledge is relative to the knowing subject*. It is said that we know the objects of knowledge, not as they are objectively, but only as they are related to our senses and faculties. In the process of knowledge we distort and colour them. In a sense it is perfectly true that all our knowledge is subjectively conditioned, but the import of the assertion under consideration seems to be that, because we know things only through the mediation of our senses and faculties, we do not know them as they are. But this is not true; in so far as we have any real knowledge of things,

that knowledge corresponds to the objective reality. The laws of perception and thought are not arbitrary, but correspond to the nature of things. Without such correspondence, not only the knowledge of God, but all true knowledge would be utterly impossible.

Some are inclined to look upon the position of Barth as a species of agnosticism. Zerbe says that practical agnosticism dominates Barth's thinking and renders him a victim of the Kantian unknowableness of the Thing-in-Itself, and quotes him as follows: "*Romans* is a revelation of the unknown God; God comes to man, not man to God. *Even after the revelation man cannot know God*, for He is always the unknown God. In manifesting Himself to us He is farther away than ever before. (Rbr. p. 53)".[*The Karl Barth Theology*, p. 82.] At the same time he finds Barth's agnosticism, like that of Herbert Spencer, inconsistent. Says he: "It was said of Herbert Spencer that he knew a great deal about the 'Unknowable'; so of Barth, one wonders how he came to know so much of the 'Unknown God'."[*Ibid*, p. 84.] Dickie speaks in a similar vein: "In speaking of a transcendent God, Barth seems sometimes to be speaking of a God of Whom we can never know anything."[*Revelation and Response*, p. 187.] He finds, however, that in this respect too there has been a change of emphasis in Barth. While it is perfectly clear that Barth does not mean to be an agnostic, it cannot be denied that some of his statements can readily be interpreted as having an agnostic flavor. He strongly stresses the fact that God is the hidden God, who cannot be known from nature, history, or experience, but only by His self-revelation in Christ, when it meets with the response of faith. But even in this revelation God appears only as the hidden God. God reveals Himself exactly as the hidden God, and through His revelation makes us more conscious of the distance which separates Him from man than we ever were before.

This can easily be interpreted to mean that we learn by revelation merely that God cannot be known, so that after all we are face to face with an unknown God. But in view of all that Barth has written this is clearly not what he wants to say. His assertion, that in the light of revelation we see God as the hidden God, does not exclude the idea that by revelation we also acquire a great deal of useful knowledge of God as He enters into relations with His people. When He says that even in His revelation God still remains for us *the unknown God*, he really means, *the incomprehensible God*. The revealing God is God in action. By His revelation we learn to know Him in His operations, but acquire no real knowledge of His inner being. The following passage in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, [p. 426.] is rather illuminating: "On this freedom (freedom of God) rests the *inconceivability* of God, the inadequacy of all knowledge of the revealed God. Even the three-in-oneness of God is revealed to us only in God's operations. Therefore the three-in-oneness of God is also inconceivable to us. Hence, too, the inadequacy of all our knowledge of the three-in-oneness. The conceivability with which it has appeared to us, primarily in Scripture, secondarily in the Church doctrine of the Trinity, is a creaturely conceivability. To the conceivability in which God exists for Himself it is not only relative: it is absolutely separate from it. Only upon the free grace of revelation does it depend that the former conceivability, in its

absolute separation from its object, is yet not without truth. In this sense the three-in-oneness of God, as we know it from the operation of God, is truth.”

C. Self-revelation the Prerequisite of all Knowledge of God.

GLOSS Self-revelation: God’s free act of making Himself known in His works and Word; without it, theology would be impossible.

1. GOD COMMUNICATES KNOWLEDGE OF HIMSELF TO MAN. Kuyper calls attention to the fact that theology as the knowledge of God differs in an important point from all other knowledge. In the study of all other sciences man places himself *above* the object of his investigation and *actively* elicits from it his knowledge by whatever method may seem most appropriate, but in theology he does not stand above but rather *under* the object of his knowledge. In other words, man can know God only in so far as the latter actively makes Himself known. God is first of all the subject communicating knowledge to man, and can only become an object of study for man in so far as the latter appropriates and reflects on the knowledge conveyed to him by revelation. Without revelation man would never have been able to acquire any knowledge of God. And even after God has revealed Himself objectively, it is not human reason that discovers God, but it is God who discloses Himself to the eye of faith.

However, by the application of sanctified human reason to the study of God’s Word man can, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gain an ever-increasing knowledge of God. Barth also stresses the fact that man can know God only when God comes to him in an act of revelation. He asserts that there is no way from man to God, but only from God to man, and says repeatedly that God is always the subject, and never an object. Revelation is always something purely subjective, and can never turn into something objective like the written Word of Scripture, and as such become an object of study. It is given once for all in Jesus Christ, and in Christ comes to men in the existential moment of their lives. While there are elements of truth in what Barth says, his construction of the doctrine of revelation is foreign to Reformed theology.

The position must be maintained, however, that theology would be utterly impossible without a self-revelation of God. And when we speak of revelation, we use the term in the strict sense of the word. It is not something in which God is passive, a mere “becoming manifest,” but something in which He is actively making Himself known. It is not, as many moderns would have it, a deepened spiritual insight which leads to an ever-increasing discovery of God on the part of man; but a supernatural act of self-communication, a purposeful act on the part of the Living God. There is nothing surprising in the fact that God can be known only if, and in so far as, He reveals Himself. In a measure this is also true of man. Even after Psychology has made a rather exhaustive study of man, Alexis Carrell is still able to write a very convincing book on *Man the Unknown*.

“For who among men,” says Paul, “knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.” I Cor. 2:11. The Holy Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God, and reveals them unto man. God has made Himself known. Alongside of the archetypal knowledge of God, found in God Himself, there is also an ectypal knowledge of Him, given to man by revelation. The latter is related to the former as a copy is to the original, and therefore does not possess the same measure of clearness and perfection. All our knowledge of God is derived from His self-revelation in nature and in Scripture. Consequently, our knowledge of God is on the one hand ectypal and analogical, but on the other hand also true and accurate, since it is a copy of the archetypal knowledge which God has of Himself.

2. INNATE AND ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (COGNITIO INSITA AND ACQUISTA).

A distinction is usually made between innate and acquired knowledge of God. This is not a strictly logical distinction, because in the last analysis all human knowledge is acquired. The doctrine of innate ideas is philosophical rather than theological. The seeds of it are already found in Plato’s doctrine of ideas, while it occurs in Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum* in a more developed form. In modern philosophy it was taught first of all by Descartes, who regarded the idea of God as innate. He did not deem it necessary to consider this as innate in the sense that it was consciously present in the human mind from the start, but only in the sense that man has a natural tendency to form the idea when the mind reaches maturity. The doctrine finally assumed the form that there are certain ideas, of which the idea of God is the most prominent, which are inborn and are therefore present in human consciousness from birth. It was in this form that Locke rightly attacked the doctrine of innate ideas, though he went to another extreme in his philosophical empiricism. Reformed theology also rejected the doctrine in that particular form. And while some of its representatives retained the name “innate ideas,” but gave it another connotation, others preferred to speak of a *cognitio Dei insita* (ingrafted or implanted knowledge of God).

On the one hand this *cognitio Dei insita* does not consist in any ideas or formed notions which are present in man at the time of his birth; but on the other hand it is more than a mere capacity which enables man to know God. It denotes a knowledge that necessarily results from the constitution of the human mind, that is inborn only in the sense that it is acquired spontaneously, under the influence of the *semen religionis* implanted in man by his creation in the image of God, and that is not acquired by the laborious process of reasoning and argumentation. It is a knowledge which man, constituted as he is, acquires of necessity, and as such is distinguished from all knowledge that is conditioned by the will of man. Acquired knowledge, on the other hand, is obtained by the study of God’s revelation. It does not arise spontaneously in the human mind, but results from the conscious and sustained pursuit of knowledge. It can be acquired only by the wearisome process of perception and reflection, reasoning and argumentation. Under the influence of the Hegelian Idealism and of the modern view of evolution the innate knowledge of

God has been over-emphasized; Barth on the other hand denies the existence of any such knowledge.

3. GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION. The Bible testifies to a twofold revelation of God: a revelation in nature round about us, in human consciousness, and in the providential government of the world; and a revelation embodied in the Bible as the Word of God. It testifies to the former in such passages as the following: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge," Ps. 19:1,2. "And yet He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness," Acts 14:17. "Because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity," Rom.

1:19, 20. Of the latter it gives abundant evidence in both the Old and the New Testament. "Yet Jehovah testified unto Israel, and unto Judah, by every prophet, and every seer, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets," I Kings 17:13. "He hath made known His ways unto Moses, His doings unto the children of Israel," Ps. 103:7. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him," John 1:18. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken to us in His Son," Heb. 1:1,2.

On the basis of these scriptural data it became customary to speak of natural and supernatural revelation. The distinction thus applied to the idea of revelation is primarily a distinction based on the manner in which it is communicated to man; but in the course of history it has also been based in part on the nature of its subject-matter. The mode of revelation is natural when it is communicated through nature, that is, through the visible creation with its ordinary laws and powers. It is supernatural when it is communicated to man in a higher, supernatural manner, as when God speaks to him, either directly, or through supernaturally endowed messengers. The substance of revelation was regarded as natural, if it could be acquired by human reason from the study of nature; and was considered to be supernatural when it could not be known from nature, nor by unaided human reason. Hence it became quite common in the Middle Ages to contrast reason and revelation. In Protestant theology natural revelation was often called a *revelatio realis*, and supernatural revelation a *revelatio verbalis*, because the former is embodied in things, and the latter in words. In course of time, however, the distinction between natural and supernatural revelation was found to be rather ambiguous, since all revelation is supernatural in origin and, as a revelation of God, also in content. Ewald in his work on *Revelation: its Nature and Record*[p.

5 f.] speaks of the revelation in nature as *immediate* revelation, and of the revelation in Scripture, which he regards as the only one deserving the name “revelation” in the fullest sense, as *mediate revelation*. A more common distinction, however, which gradually gained currency, is that of *general* and *special* revelation. Dr. Warfield distinguishes the two as follows: “The one is addressed generally to all intelligent creatures, and is therefore accessible to all men; the other is addressed to a special class of sinners, to whom God would make known His salvation. The one has in view to meet and supply the natural need of creatures for knowledge of their God; the other to rescue broken and deformed sinners from their sin and its consequences.”[*Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 6.] General revelation is rooted in creation, is addressed to man as man, and more particularly to human reason, and finds its purpose in the realization of the end of his creation, to know God and thus enjoy communion with Him. Special revelation is rooted in the redemptive plan of God, is addressed to man as sinner, can be properly understood and appropriated only by faith, and serves the purpose of securing the end for which man was created in spite of the disturbance wrought by sin. In view of the eternal plan of redemption it should be said that this special revelation did not come in as an after-thought, but was in the mind of God from the very beginning.

There was considerable difference of opinion respecting the relation of these two to each other. According to Scholasticism natural revelation provided the necessary data for the construction of a scientific natural theology by human reason. But while it enabled man to attain to a scientific knowledge of God as the ultimate cause of all things, it did not provide for the knowledge of the mysteries, such as the Trinity, the incarnation, and redemption. This knowledge is supplied by special revelation. It is a knowledge that is not rationally demonstrable but must be accepted by faith. Some of the earlier Scholastics were guided by the slogan “Credo ut intelligam,” and, after accepting the truths of special revelation by faith, considered it necessary to raise faith to understanding by a rational demonstration of those truths, or at least to prove their rationality.

Thomas Aquinas, however, considered this impossible, except in so far as special revelation contained truths which also formed a part of natural revelation. In his opinion the mysteries, which formed the real contents of supernatural revelation, did not admit of any logical demonstration. He held, however, that there could be no conflict between the truths of natural and those of supernatural revelation. If there appears to be a conflict, there is something wrong with one’s philosophy. The fact remains, however, that he recognised, besides the structure reared by faith on the basis of supernatural revelation, a system of scientific theology on the foundation of natural revelation. In the former one assents to something because it is revealed, in the latter because it is perceived as true in the light of natural reason. The logical demonstration, which is out of the question in the one, is the natural method of proof in the other.

The Reformers rejected the dualism of the Scholastics and aimed at a synthesis of God's twofold revelation. They did not believe in the ability of human reason to construct a scientific system of theology on the basis of natural revelation pure and simple. Their view of the matter may be represented as follows: As a result of the entrance of sin into the world, the handwriting of God in nature is greatly obscured, and is in some of the most important matters rather dim and illegible. Moreover, man is stricken with spiritual blindness, and is thus deprived of the ability to read aright what God had originally plainly written in the works of creation. In order to remedy the matter and to prevent the frustration of His purpose, God did two things. In His supernatural revelation He republished the truths of natural revelation, cleared them of misconception, interpreted them with a view to the present needs of man, and thus incorporated them in His supernatural revelation of redemption. And in addition to that He provided a cure for the spiritual blindness of man in the work of regeneration and sanctification, including spiritual illumination, and thus enabled man once more to obtain true knowledge of God, the knowledge that carries with it the assurance of eternal life.

When the chill winds of Rationalism swept over Europe, natural revelation was exalted at the expense of supernatural revelation. Man became intoxicated with a sense of his own ability and goodness, refused to listen and submit to the voice of authority that spoke to him in Scripture, and reposed complete trust in the ability of human reason to lead him out of the labyrinth of ignorance and error into the clear atmosphere of true knowledge. Some who maintained that natural revelation was quite sufficient to teach men all necessary truths, still admitted that they might learn them sooner with the aid of supernatural revelation. Others denied that the authority of supernatural revelation was complete, until its contents had been demonstrated by reason. And finally Deism in some of its forms denied, not only the necessity, but also the possibility and reality of supernatural revelation.

In Schleiermacher the emphasis shifts from the objective to the subjective, from revelation to religion, and that without any distinction between natural and revealed religion. The term "revelation" is still retained, but is reserved as a designation of the deeper spiritual insight of man, an insight which does not come to him, however, without his own diligent search. What is called revelation from one point of view, may be called human discovery from another. This view has become quite characteristic of modern theology. Says Knudson: "But this distinction between natural and revealed theology has now largely fallen into disuse. The present tendency is to draw no sharp line of distinction between revelation and the natural reason, but to look upon the highest insights of reason as themselves divine revelations. In any case there is no fixed body of revealed truth, accepted on authority, that stands opposed to the truths of reason. All truth to-day rests on its power of appeal to the human mind." [*The Doctrine of God*, p. 173.]

It is this view of revelation that is denounced in the strongest terms by Barth. He is particularly interested in the subject of revelation, and wants to lead the Church back from the subjective to the objective, from religion to revelation. In the former he sees primarily man's efforts to find God, and in the latter "God's search for man" in Jesus Christ. Barth does not recognise any revelation in nature. Revelation never exists on any horizontal line, but always comes down perpendicularly from above. Revelation is always God in action, God speaking, bringing something entirely new to man, something of which he could have no previous knowledge, and which becomes a real revelation only for him who accepts the object of revelation by a God-given faith. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, and only he who knows Jesus Christ knows anything about revelation at all. Revelation is an act of grace, by which man becomes conscious of his sinful condition, but also of God's free, unmerited, and forgiving condescension in Jesus Christ. Barth even calls it *the reconciliation*. Since God is always sovereign and free in His revelation, it can never assume a factually present, objective form with definite limitations, to which man can turn at any time for instruction. Hence it is a mistake to regard the Bible as God's revelation in any other than a secondary sense. It is a witness to, and a token of, God's revelation.

The same may be said, though in a subordinate sense, of the preaching of the gospel. But through whatever mediation the word of God may come to man in the existential moment of his life, it is always recognised by man as a word directly spoken to him, and coming perpendicularly from above. This recognition is effected by a special operation of the Holy Spirit, by what may be called an individual *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*. The revelation of God was given *once for all* in Jesus Christ: not in His historical appearance, but in the superhistorical in which the powers of the eternal world become evident, such as His incarnation and His death and resurrection. And if His revelation is also continuous – as it is –, it is such only in the sense that God continues to speak to individual sinners, in the existential moment of their lives, through the revelation in Christ, mediated by the Bible and by preaching. Thus we are left with mere flashes of revelation coming to individuals, of which only those individuals have absolute assurance; and fallible witnesses to, or tokens of, the revelation in Jesus Christ, – a rather precarious foundation for theology. It is no wonder that Barth is in doubt as to the possibility of constructing a doctrine of God. Mankind is not in possession of any infallible revelation of God, and of His unique revelation in Christ and its extension in the special revelations that come to certain men it has knowledge only through the testimony of fallible witnesses.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: In what sense can we speak of the hidden or unknown God in spite of the fact that He has revealed Himself? How did the Scholastics and the Reformers differ on this point? What is the position of modern theology? Why is revelation essential to religion? How does agnosticism differ theoretically from atheism? Is the one more favorable to religion than the other? How did Kant promote agnosticism? What was Sir William Hamilton's doctrine of the relativity of knowledge? What form did agnosticism take in Positivism? What other forms did it take? Why do some speak of Barth as an agnostic? How should this charge be met? Is "revelation" an active or a passive concept? Is theology possible without revelation? If not, why not? Can the doctrine of innate ideas be defended? What is meant by "cognitio Dei insita?" How do natural and supernatural

revelation differ? Is the distinction between general and special revelation an exact parallel of the preceding one? What different views were held as to the relation between the two? How does revelation differ from human discovery? Does Barth believe in general revelation? How does he conceive of special revelation?

III. Relation of the Being and Attributes of God

God's attributes reveal the one divine being; they are not separate parts added to God.

Some dogmaticians devote a separate chapter or chapters to the Being of God, before taking up the discussion of His attributes. This is done, for instance, in the works of Mastricht, Ebrard, Kuyper, and Shedd. Others prefer to consider the Being of God in connection with His attributes in view of the fact that it is in these that He has revealed Himself. This is the more common method, which is followed in the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, and in the works of Turretin, à Marck, Brakel, Bavinck, Hodge, and Honig. This difference of treatment is not indicative of any serious fundamental disagreement between them. They are all agreed that the attributes are not mere names to which no reality corresponds, nor separate parts of a composite God, but essential qualities in which the Being of God is revealed and with which it can be identified. The only difference would seem to be that some seek to distinguish between the Being and the attributes of God more than others do.

A. The Being of God.

GLOSS Aseity: God's self-existence and independence: the ground of His life is in Himself, not in any prior cause or creaturely support.

It is quite evident that the Being of God does not admit of any scientific definition. In order to give a logical definition of God, we would have to begin by going in search of some higher concept, under which God could be co-ordinated with other concepts; and would then have to point out the characteristics that would be applicable to God only. Such a *genetic-synthetic* definition cannot be given of God, since God is not one of several species of gods, which can be subsumed under a single genus. At most only an *analytical-descriptive* definition is possible. This merely names the characteristics of a person or thing, but leaves the essential being unexplained. And even such a definition cannot be complete but only partial, because it is impossible to give an exhaustive positive (as opposed to negative) description of God. It would consist in an enumeration of all the known attributes of God, and these are to a great extent negative in character.

The Bible never operates with an abstract concept of God, but always describes Him as the Living God, who enters into various relations with His creatures, relations which are indicative of several different attributes. In Kuyper's *Dictaten Dogmatiek*[*De Deo* I, p. 28.] we are told that God,

personified as Wisdom, speaks of His *essence* in Prov. 8:14, when He ascribes to Himself *tushiyach*, a Hebrew word rendered “wezen” in the Holland translation. But this rendering is very doubtful, and the English rendering “counsel” deserves preference. It has also been pointed out that the Bible speaks of the *nature* of God in II Pet. 1:4, but this can hardly refer to the essential Being of God, for we are not made partakers of the divine essence. An indication of the very essence of God has been found in the name Jehovah, as interpreted by God Himself, “I am that I am.” On the basis of this passage the essence of God was found in being itself, abstract being. And this has been interpreted to mean self-existence or self-contained permanence or absolute independence.

Another passage is repeatedly quoted as containing an indication of the essence of God, and as the closest approach to a definition that is found in the Bible, namely, John 4:24, “God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” This statement of Christ is clearly indicative of the spirituality of God. The two ideas derived from these passages occur repeatedly in theology as designations of the very Being of God. On the whole it may be said that Scripture does not exalt one attribute of God at the expense of the others, but represents them as existing in perfect harmony in the Divine Being. It may be true that now one, and then another attribute is stressed, but Scripture clearly intends to give due emphasis to every one of them. The Being of God is characterized by a depth, a fullness, a variety, and a glory far beyond our comprehension, and the Bible represents it as a glorious harmonious whole, without any inherent contradictions. And this fullness of life finds expression in no other way than in the perfections of God.

Some of the early Church Fathers were clearly under the influence of Greek philosophy in their doctrine of God and, as Seeberg expresses it, did not advance “beyond the mere abstract conception that the Divine Being is absolute attributeless Existence.” For some time theologians were rather generally inclined to emphasize the transcendence of God, and to assume the impossibility of any adequate knowledge or definition of the divine essence. During the trinitarian controversy the distinction between the one essence and the three persons in the Godhead was strongly emphasized, but the essence was generally felt to be beyond human comprehension. Gregory of Nazianze, however, ventures to say: “So far as we can discern, *ho on* and *ho theos* are somehow more than other terms the names of the (divine) essence, and of these *ho on* is the preferable.” He regards this as a description of absolute being. Augustine’s conception of the essence of God was closely akin to that of Gregory.

In the Middle Ages too there was a tendency, either to deny that man has any knowledge of the essence of God, or to reduce such knowledge to a minimum. In some cases one attribute was singled out as most expressive of the essence of God. Thus Thomas Aquinas spoke of His aseity or self-existence, and Duns Scotus, of His infinity. It became quite common also to speak of God as *actus purus* in view of His simplicity. The Reformers and their successors also spoke of the

essence of God as incomprehensible, but they did not exclude all knowledge of it, though Luther used very strong language on this point. They stressed the unity, simplicity, and spirituality of God. The words of the Belgic Confession are quite characteristic: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God." [Art. I.] Later on philosophers and theologians found the essence of God in abstract being, in universal substance, in pure thought, in absolute causality, in love, in personality, and in majestic holiness or the numinous.

B. The Possibility of Knowing the Being of God.

From the preceding it already appears that the question as to the possibility of knowing God in His essential Being engaged the best minds of the Church from the earliest centuries. And the consensus of opinion in the early Church, during the Middle Ages, and at the time of the Reformation, was that God in His inmost Being is the Incomprehensible One. And in some cases the language used is so strong that it seemingly allows of no knowledge of the Being of God whatsoever. At the same time they who use it, at least in some cases, seem to have considerable knowledge of the Being of God. Misunderstanding can easily result from a failure to understand the exact question under consideration, and from neglecting to discriminate between "knowing" and "comprehending." The Scholastics spoke of three questions to which all the speculations respecting the Divine Being could be reduced, namely: *An sit Deus?* *Quid sit Deus?* and *Qualis sit Deus?* The first question concerns the existence of God, the second, His nature or essence, and the third, His attributes.

In this paragraph it is particularly the second question that calls for attention. The question then is, What is God? What is the nature of His inner constitution? What makes Him to be what He is? In order to answer that question adequately, we would have to be able to comprehend God and to offer a satisfactory explanation of His Divine Being, and this is utterly impossible. The finite cannot comprehend the Infinite. The question of Zophar, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7) has the force of a strong negative. And if we consider the second question entirely apart from the third, our negative answer becomes even more inclusive. Apart from the revelation of God in His attributes, we have no knowledge of the Being of God whatsoever. But in so far as God reveals Himself in His attributes, we also have some knowledge of His Divine Being, though even so our knowledge is subject to human limitations.

Luther uses some very strong expressions respecting our inability to know something of the Being or essence of God. On the one hand he distinguishes between the *Deus absconditus* (hidden God) and the *Deus revelatus* (revealed God); but on the other hand he also asserts that in knowing the *Deus revelatus*, we only know Him in his hiddenness. By this he means that even in His revelation God has not manifested Himself entirely *as He is essentially*, but as to His essence

still remains shrouded in impenetrable darkness. We know God only in so far as He enters into relations with us. Calvin too speaks of the Divine essence as incomprehensible. He holds that God in the depths of His Being is past finding out.

Speaking of the knowledge of the *quid* and of the *qualis* of God, he says that it is rather useless to speculate about the former, while our practical interest lies in the latter. Says he: "They are merely toying with frigid speculations whose mind is set on the question of what God is (*quid sit Deus*), when what it really concerns us to know is rather what kind of a person He is (*qualis sit*) and what is appropriate to His nature." [*Inst.* I. 2.2.] While he feels that God cannot be known to perfection, he does not deny that we can know something of His Being or nature. But this knowledge cannot be obtained by *a priori* methods, but only in an *a posteriori* manner through the attributes, which he regards as real determinations of the nature of God. They convey to us at least some knowledge of what God is, but especially of what He is in relation to us.

In dealing with our knowledge of the Being of God we must certainly avoid the position of Cousin, rather rare in the history of philosophy, that God even in the depths of His Being is not at all incomprehensible but essentially intelligible; but we must also steer clear of the agnosticism of Hamilton and Mansel, according to which we can have no knowledge whatsoever of the Being of God. We cannot comprehend God, cannot have an absolute and exhaustive knowledge of Him, but we can undoubtedly have a relative or partial knowledge of the Divine Being. It is perfectly true that this knowledge of God is possible only, because He has placed Himself in certain relations to His moral creatures and has revealed Himself to them, and that even this knowledge is humanly conditioned; but it is nevertheless real and true knowledge, and is at least a partial knowledge of the absolute nature of God. There is a difference between an absolute knowledge, and a relative or partial knowledge of an absolute being. It will not do at all to say that man knows only the relations in which God stands to His creatures. It would not even be possible to have a proper conception of these relations without knowing something of both God and man.

To say that we can know nothing of the Being of God, but can know only relations, is equivalent to saying that we cannot know Him at all and cannot make Him the object of our religion. Dr. Orr says: "We may not know God in the depths of His absolute being. But we can at least know Him in so far as He reveals Himself in His relation to us. The question, therefore, is not as to the possibility of a knowledge of God in the unfathomableness of His being, but is: Can we know God as *He enters into relations* with the world and with ourselves? God has entered into relations with us in His revelations of Himself, and supremely in Jesus Christ; and we Christians humbly claim that through this Self-revelation we do know God to be the true God, and have real acquaintance with His character and will. Neither is it correct to say that this knowledge which we have of God is only a *relative knowledge*. It is in part a knowledge of the *absolute* nature of God as well." [*Side-Lights on Christian Doctrine*, p. 11.] The last statements are probably intended to

ward off the idea that all our knowledge of God is merely relative to the human mind, so that we have no assurance that it corresponds with the reality as it exists in God.

C. The Being of God Revealed in His Attributes.

GLOSS Divine simplicity: God is not composed of parts; His perfections are not additions to an underlying essence but are identical with His undivided being.

From the simplicity of God it follows that God and His attributes are one. The attributes cannot be considered as so many parts that enter into the composition of God, for God is not, like men, composed of different parts. Neither can they be regarded as something added to the Being of God, though the name, derived from *ad* and *tribuere*, might seem to point in that direction, for no addition was ever made to the Being of God, who is eternally perfect. It is commonly said in theology that God's attributes are God Himself, as He has revealed Himself to us. The Scholastics stressed the fact that God is all that He has. He *has* life, light, wisdom, love, righteousness, and it may be said on the basis of Scripture that He *is* life, light, wisdom, love, and righteousness. It was further asserted by the Scholastics that the whole essence of God is identical with each one of the attributes, so that God's knowing is God, God's willing is God, and so on. Some of them even went so far as to say that each attribute is identical with every other attribute, and that there are no logical distinctions in God. This is a very dangerous extreme. While it may be said that there is an interpenetration of the attributes in God, and that they form a harmonious whole, we are moving in the direction of Pantheism, when we rule out all distinctions in God, and say that His self-existence is His infinity, His knowing is His willing, His love is His righteousness, and vice versa.

It was characteristic of the Nominalists that they obliterated all real distinctions in God. They were afraid that by assuming real distinctions in Him, corresponding to the attributes ascribed to God, they would endanger the unity and simplicity of God, and were therefore motivated by a laudable purpose. According to them the perfections of the Divine Being exist only in our thoughts, without any corresponding reality in the Divine Being. The Realists, on the other hand, asserted the reality of the divine perfections. They realised that the theory of the Nominalists, consistently carried out, would lead in the direction of a pantheistic denial of a personal God, and therefore considered it of the utmost importance to maintain the objective reality of the attributes in God. At the same time they sought to safeguard the unity and simplicity of God by maintaining that the whole essence is in each attribute: God is All in all, All in each. Thomas Aquinas had the same purpose in mind, when he asserted that the attributes do not reveal what God is in Himself, in the depths of His Being, but only what He is in relation to His creatures.

Naturally, we should guard against separating the divine essence and the divine attributes or perfections, and also against a false conception of the relation in which they stand to each other.

The attributes are real determinations of the Divine Being or, in other words, qualities that inhere in the Being of God. Shedd speaks of them as “an analytical and closer description of the essence.” [*Dogm. Theol.* I, p. 334.] In a sense they are identical, so that it can be said that God’s perfections are God Himself as He has revealed Himself to us. It is possible to go even farther and say with Shedd, “The whole essence is in each attribute, and the attribute in the essence.” [*Ibid.* p. 334.] And because of the close relation in which the two stand to each other, it can be said that knowledge of the attributes carries with it knowledge of the Divine Essence. It would be a mistake to conceive of the essence of God as existing by itself and prior to the attributes, and of the attributes as additive and accidental characteristics of the Divine Being. They are essential qualities of God, which inhere in His very Being and are co-existent with it. These qualities cannot be altered without altering the essential Being of God. And since they are essential qualities, each one of them reveals to us some aspect of the Being of God.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: How can we distinguish between the being, the nature, and the essence of God? How do the philosophical views of the essential Being of God generally differ from the theological views? How about the tendency to find the essence of God in the absolute, in love, or in personality? What does Otto mean when he characterizes it as “the Holy” or “the Numinous”? Why is it impossible for man to comprehend God? Has sin in any way affected man’s ability to know God? Is there any difference between Luther’s and Barth’s conception of the “hidden God”? Does Calvin differ from them on this point? Did Luther share the Nominalist views of Occam, by whom he was influenced in other respects? How did the Reformers, in distinction from the Scholastics, consider the problem of the existence of God? Could we have any knowledge of God, if He were pure attributeless being? What erroneous views of the attributes should be avoided? What is the proper view?

IV. The Names of God

The biblical names of God reveal His character and His covenant relation to His people.

A. The Names of God in General.

GLOSS Nomen editum: the name God reveals; human names for God are faithful only as they answer to that revelation and its covenantal purpose.

While the Bible records several names of God, it also speaks of *the name* of God in the singular as, for instance in the following statements: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,” Ex. 20:7; “How excellent is thy name in all the earth,” Ps. 8:1; “As is thy name, O God, so is thy praise,” Ps. 48:10; “His name is great in Israel,” Ps. 76:2; “The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe,” Prov. 18:10. In such cases “the name” stands for the whole manifestation of God in His relation to His people, or simply for the person, so that it becomes synonymous with God. This usage is due to the fact that in oriental thought a name was never regarded as a mere vocable, but as an expression of the nature of the thing designated.

To know the name of a person was to have power over him, and the names of the various gods were used in incantations to exercise power over them. In the most general sense of the word, then, the name of God is His self-revelation. It is a designation of Him, not as He exists in the depths of His divine Being, but as He reveals Himself especially in His relations to man. For us the one general name of God is split up into many names, expressive of the many-sided Being of God. It is only because God has revealed Himself in His name (*nomen editum*), that we can now designate Him by that name in various forms (*nomina indita*). The names of God are not of human invention, but of divine origin, though they are all borrowed from human language, and derived from human and earthly relations. They are anthropomorphic and mark a condescending approach of God to man.

The names of God constitute a difficulty for human thought. God is the *Incomprehensible One*, infinitely exalted above all that is temporal; but in His names He descends to all that is finite and becomes like unto man. On the one hand we cannot name Him, and on the other hand He has many names. How can this be explained? On what grounds are these names applied to the infinite and incomprehensible God? It should be borne in mind that they are not of man's invention, and do not testify to his insight into the very Being of God. They are given by God Himself with the assurance that they contain in a measure a revelation of the Divine Being. This was made possible by the fact that the world and all its relations is and was meant to be a revelation of God. Because the Incomprehensible One revealed Himself in His creatures, it is possible for man to name Him after the fashion of a creature. In order to make Himself known to man, God had to condescend to the level of man, to accommodate Himself to the limited and finite human consciousness, and to speak in human language. If the naming of God with anthropomorphic names involves a limitation of God, as some say, then this must be true to an even greater degree of the revelation of God in creation. Then the world does not reveal, but rather conceals, God; then man is not related to God, but simply forms an antithesis to Him; and then we are shut up to a hopeless agnosticism.

From what was said about the name of God in general it follows that we can include under the names of God not only the appellatives by which He is indicated as an independent personal Being and by which He is addressed, but also the attributes of God; and then not merely the attributes of the Divine Being in general, but also those that qualify the separate Persons of the Trinity. Dr. Bavinck bases his division of the names of God on that broad conception of them, and distinguishes between *nomina propria* (proper names), *nomina essentialia* (essential names, or attributes), and *nomina personalia* (personal names, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In the present chapter we limit ourselves to the discussion of the first class.

B. The Old Testament Names and their Meaning.

1. 'EL, 'ELOHIM, and 'ELYON. The most simple name by which God is designated in the Old Testament, is the name '*El*, which is possibly derived from '*ul*, either in the sense of being first, being lord, or in that of being strong and mighty. The name '*Elohim* (sing. '*Eloah*) is probably derived from the same root, or from '*alah*, to be smitten with fear; and therefore points to God as the strong and mighty One, or as the object of fear. The name seldom occurs in the singular, except in poetry. The plural is to be regarded as intensive, and therefore serves to indicate a fulness of power. The name '*Elyon* is derived from '*alah*, to go up, to be elevated, and designates God as the high and exalted One, Gen. 14:19,20; Num. 24:16; Isa. 14:14. It is found especially in poetry. These names are not yet *nomina propria* in the strict sense of the word, for they are also used of idols, Ps. 95:3; 96:5, of men, Gen. 33:10; Ex. 7:1, and of rulers, Judg. 5:8; Ex. 21:6; 22:8-10; Ps. 82:1.

2. 'ADONAI. This name is related in meaning to the preceding ones. It is derived from either *dun* (*din*) or '*adan*, both of which mean to judge, to rule, and thus points to God as the almighty Ruler, to whom everything is subject, and to whom man is related as a servant. In earlier times it was the usual name by which the people of Israel addressed God. Later on it was largely supplanted by the name Jehovah (*Yahweh*). All the names so far mentioned describe God as the high and exalted One, the transcendent God. The following names point to the fact that this exalted Being condescended to enter into relations with His creatures.

3. SHADDAI and 'EL-SHADDAI. The name *Shaddai* is derived from *shadad*, to be powerful, and points to God as possessing all power in heaven and on earth. Others, however, derive it from *shad*, lord. It differs in an important point from '*Elohim*, the God of creation and nature, in that it contemplates God as subjecting all the powers of nature and making them subservient to the work of divine grace. While it stresses the greatness of God, it does not represent Him as an object of fear and terror, but as a source of blessing and comfort. It is the name with which God appeared unto Abraham, the father of the faithful, Ex. 6:2.

4. YAHWEH and YAHWEH TSEBHAOTH. It is especially in the name *Yahweh*, which gradually supplanted earlier names, that God reveals Himself as the God of grace. It has always been regarded as the most sacred and the most distinctive name of God, the incommunicable name. The Jews had a superstitious dread of using it, since they read Lev. 24:16 as follows: "He that nameth the name of *Yahweh* shall surely be put to death." And therefore in reading the Scriptures they substituted for it either '*Adonai* or '*Elohim*; and the Massoretes, while leaving the consonants intact, attached to them the vowels of one of these names, usually those of '*Adonai*. The real derivation of the name and its original pronunciation and meaning are more or less lost in obscurity. The Pentateuch connects the name with the Hebrew verb *hayah*, to be, Ex. 3:13,14. On

the strength of that passage we may assume that the name is in all probability derived from an archaic form of that verb, namely, *hawah*.

As far as the form is concerned, it may be regarded as a third person imperfect *qal* or *hiphil*. Most likely, however, it is the former. The meaning is explained in Ex. 3:14, which is rendered "I am that I am," or "I shall be what I shall be." Thus interpreted, the name points to the unchangeableness of God. Yet it is not so much the unchangeableness of His essential Being that is in view, as the unchangeableness of His relation to His people. The name contains the assurance that God will be for the people of Moses' day what He was for their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It stresses the covenant faithfulness of God, is His proper name *par excellence*, Ex. 15:3; Ps. 83:19; Hos. 12:6; Isa. 42:8, and is therefore used of no one but Israel's God. The exclusive character of the name appears from the fact that it never occurs in the plural or with a suffix. Abbreviated forms of it, found especially in composite names, are *Yah* and *Yahu*.

The name *Yahweh* is often strengthened by the addition of *tsebhaath*. Origen and Jerome regard this as an apposition, because *Yahweh* does not admit of a construct state. But this interpretation is not sufficiently warranted and hardly yields an intelligible sense. It is rather hard to determine to what the word *tsebhaath* refers. There are especially three opinions:

a. *The armies of Israel*. But the correctness of this view may well be doubted. Most of the passages quoted to support this idea do not prove the point; only three of them contain a semblance of proof, namely, I Sam. 4:4; 17:45; II Sam. 6:2, while one of them, II Kings 19:31, is rather unfavorable to this view. While the plural *tsebhaath* is used for the hosts of the people of Israel, the army is regularly indicated by the singular. This militates against the notion, inherent in this view, that in the name under consideration the term refers to the army of Israel. Moreover, it is clear that in the Prophets at least the name "Jehovah of hosts" does not refer to Jehovah as the God of war. And if the meaning of the name changed, what caused the change?

b. *The stars*. But in speaking of the host of heaven Scripture always uses the singular, and never the plural. Moreover, while the stars are called the host of heaven, they are never designated the host of God.

c. *The angels*. This interpretation deserves preference. The name *Yahweh tsebhaath* is often found in connections in which angels are mentioned: I Sam. 4:4; II Sam. 6:2; Isa. 37:16; Hos. 12:4,5, Ps. 80:1,4 f.; Ps. 89; 6-8. The angels are repeatedly represented as a host that surrounds the throne of God, Gen. 28:12; 32:2; Jos. 5:14; I Kings 22:19; Ps. 68:17; 103:21; 148:2; Isa. 6:2. It is true that in this case also the singular is generally used, but this is no serious objection, since the Bible also indicates that there were several divisions of angels, Gen. 32:2; Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17. Moreover, this interpretation is in harmony with the meaning of the name, which has no martial flavor, but is expressive of the glory of God as King, Deut. 33:2; I Kings 22:19; Ps. 24:10; Isa. 6:3;

24:23; Zech. 14:16. Jehovah of hosts, then, is God as the King of glory, who is surrounded by angelic hosts, who rules heaven and earth in the interest of His people, and who receives glory from all His creatures.

C. The New Testament Names and their Interpretation.

1. THEOS. The New Testament has the Greek equivalents of the Old Testament names. For 'El, 'Elohim, and 'Elyon it has *Theos*, which is the most common name applied to God. Like 'Elohim, it may by accommodation be used of heathen gods, though strictly speaking it expresses essential deity. 'Elyon is rendered *Hupsistos Theos*, Mark 5:7; Luke 1:32,35,75; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Heb. 7:1. The names *Shaddai* and 'El-*Shaddai* are rendered *Pantokrator* and *Theos Pantokrator*, II Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14. More generally, however, *Theos* is found with a genitive of possession, such as *mou, sou, hemon, humon*, because in Christ God may be regarded as the God of all and of each one of His children. The national idea of the Old Testament has made place for the individual in religion.

2. KURIOS. The name *Yahweh* is explicated a few times by variations of a descriptive kind, such as "the Alpha and the Omega," "who is and who was and who is to come," "the beginning and the end," "the first and the last," Rev. 1:4,8,17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13. For the rest, however the New Testament follows the Septuagint, which substituted 'Adonai for it, and rendered this by *Kurios*, derived from *kuros*, power. This name does not have exactly the same connotation as *Yahweh*, but designates God as the Mighty One, the Lord, the Possessor, the Ruler who has legal power and authority. It is used not only of God, but also of Christ.

3. PATER. It is often said that the New Testament introduced a new name of God, namely, *Pater* (Father). But this is hardly correct. The name Father is used of the Godhead even in heathen religions. It is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to designate the relation of God to Israel, Deut. 32:6; Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4,19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; 2:10, while Israel is called the son of God, Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; 32:19; Isa. 1:2; Jer. 31:20; Hos. 1:10; 11:1. In such cases the name is expressive of the special theocratic relation in which God stands to Israel. In the general sense of originator or creator it is used in the following New Testament passages: I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:15; Heb. 12:9; James 1:18. In all other places it serves to express either the special relation in which the first Person of the Trinity stands to Christ, as the Son of God either in a metaphysical or a mediatorial sense, or the ethical relation in which God stands to all believers as His spiritual children.

V. The Attributes of God in General

Berkhof explains how Christians may speak faithfully of God's perfections without reducing Him to creaturely terms.

A. Evaluation of the Terms Used.

The name “attributes” is not ideal, since it conveys the notion of adding or assigning something to one, and is therefore apt to create the impression that something is added to the divine Being. Undoubtedly the term “properties” is better, as pointing to something that is proper to God and to God only. Naturally, in so far as some of the attributes are communicable, the absolute character of the proprium is weakened, for to that extent some of the attributes are not proper to God in the absolute sense of the word. But even this term contains the suggestion of a distinction between the essence or nature of God and that which is proper to it. On the whole it is preferable to speak of the “perfections” or “virtues” of God, with the distinct understanding, however, that in this case the term “virtues” is not used in a purely ethical sense. By so doing we (a) follow the usage of the Bible, which uses the term *arete*, rendered *virtues* or *excellencies*, in I Pet. 2:9; and (b) avoid the suggestion that something is added to the Being of God. His virtues are not added to His Being, but His Being is the *pleroma* of His virtues and reveals itself in them. They may be defined as *the perfections which are predicated of the Divine Being in Scripture, or are visibly exercised by Him in His works of creation, providence, and redemption*. If we still continue to use the name “attributes,” it is because it is commonly used and with the distinct understanding that the notion of something added to the Being of God must be rigidly excluded.

B. Method of determining the attributes of God.

GLOSS *Via causalitatis*: the “way of causality,” which reasons from effects to a cause; compare the ways of negation and eminence in classical theological method.

The Scholastics in their attempt to construct a system of natural theology posited three ways in which to determine the attributes of God, which they designated as the *via causalitatis*, *via negationis*, and *via eminentiae*. By the *way of causality* we rise from the effects which we see in the world round about us to the idea of a first Cause, from the contemplation of creation, to the idea of an almighty Creator, and from the observation of the moral government of the world, to the idea of a powerful and wise Ruler. *By way of negation* we remove from our idea of God all the imperfections seen in His creatures, as inconsistent with the idea of a Perfect Being, and ascribe to Him the opposite perfection. In reliance on that principle we speak of God as independent, infinite, incorporeal, immense, immortal, and incomprehensible.

And finally, *by way of eminence* we ascribe to God *in the most eminent manner* the relative perfections which we discover in man, according to the principle that what exists in an effect, pre-exists in its cause, and even in the most absolute sense in God as the most perfect Being. This method may appeal to some, because it proceeds from the known to the unknown, but is not the proper method of dogmatic theology. It takes its startingpoint in man, and concludes from what it

finds in man to what is found in God. And in so far as it does this it makes man the measure of God. This is certainly not a theological method of procedure. Moreover, it bases its knowledge of God on human conclusions rather than on the self-revelation of God in His divine Word. And yet this is the only adequate source of the knowledge of God. While that method might be followed in a so-called natural theology, it does not fit in a theology of revelation.

The same may be said of the methods suggested by modern representatives of experimental theology. A typical example of this may be found in Macintosh's *Theology as an Empirical Science*. [p. 159 ff.] He also speaks of three methods of procedure. We may begin with our intuitions of the reality of God, those unreasoned certitudes which are firmly rooted in immediate experience. One of these is that the Object of our religious dependence is absolutely sufficient for our imperative needs. Especially may deductions be drawn from the life of Jesus and the "Christlike" everywhere. We may also take our starting point, not in man's certainties, but in his needs. The practically necessary postulate is that God is absolutely sufficient and absolutely dependable with reference to the religious needs of man. On that basis man can build up his doctrine of the attributes of God. And, finally, it is also possible to follow a more pragmatic method, which rests on the principle that we can learn to a certain extent what things and persons are, beyond what they are immediately perceived to be, by observing what they do. Macintosh finds it necessary to make use of all three methods.

Ritschl wants us to start with the idea that God is love, and would have us ask what is involved in this most characteristic thought of God. Since love is personal, it implies the personality of God, and thus affords us a principle for the interpretation of the world and of the life of man. The thought that God is love also carries with it the conviction that He can achieve His purpose of love, that is, that His will is supremely effective in the world. This yields the idea of an almighty Creator. And by virtue of this basic thought we also affirm God's eternity, since, in controlling all things for the realization of His Kingdom, He sees the end from the beginning. In a somewhat similar vein Dr. W. A. Brown says: "We gain our knowledge of the attributes by analysing the idea of God which we already won from the revelation in Christ; and we arrange them in such a way as to bring the distinctive features of that idea to clearest expression." [*Chr. Theol. in Outline*, p. 101.]

All these methods take their starting point in human experience rather than in the Word of God. They deliberately ignore the clear self-revelation of God in Scripture and exalt the idea of the human discovery of God. They who rely on such methods have an exaggerated idea of their own ability to find out God and to determine the nature of God inductively by approved "scientific methods." At the same time they close their eyes to the only avenue through which they might obtain real knowledge of God, that is, His special revelation, apparently oblivious of the fact that only the Spirit of God can search and reveal the deep things of God and reveal them unto us. Their very method compels them to drag God down to the level of man, to stress His immanence

at the expense of His transcendence, and to make Him continuous with the world. And as the final result of their philosophy we have a God made in the image of man. James condemns all intellectualism in religion, and maintains that philosophy in the form of scholastic theology fails as completely to define God's attributes in a scientific way as it does to establish His existence.

After an appeal to the book of Job he says: "Ratiocination is a relatively superficial and unreal path to the deity." He concludes his discussion with these significant words: "In all sincerity I think we must conclude that the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experiences is absolutely hopeless." [*Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 455] He has more confidence in the pragmatic method which seeks for a God that meets the practical needs of man. In his estimation it is sufficient to believe that "beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do, if it only be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite, it need not be solitary. It might conceivably even be only a larger and more godlike self, of which the present self would then be the mutilated expression, and the universe might conceivably be a collection of such selves, of different degree and inclusiveness, with no absolute unity realised in it at all." [*Ibid.*, p. 525.] Thus we are left with the idea of a finite God. [Cf. Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, p. 251 ff. on this matter.]

The only proper way to obtain perfectly reliable knowledge of the divine attributes is by the study of God's self-revelation in Scripture. It is true that we can acquire some knowledge of the greatness and power, the wisdom and goodness of God through the study of nature, but for an adequate conception of even these attributes it will be necessary to turn to the Word of God. In the theology of revelation we seek to learn from the Word of God which are the attributes of the Divine Being. Man does not elicit knowledge from God as he does from other objects of study, but God conveys knowledge of Himself to man, a knowledge which man can only accept and appropriate. For the appropriation and understanding of this revealed knowledge it is, of course, of the greatest importance that man is created in the image of God, and therefore finds helpful analogies in his own life. In distinction from the *a priori* method of the Scholastics, who deduced the attributes from the idea of a perfect Being, this method may be called *a posteriori*, since it takes its startingpoint, not in an abstract perfect Being, but in the fulness of the divine self-revelation, and in the light of this seeks to know the Divine Being. C. Suggested Divisions of the Attributes.

The question of the classification of the divine attributes has engaged the attention of theologians for a long time. Several classifications have been suggested, most of which distinguish two general classes. These classes are designated by different names and represent

different points of view, but are substantially the same in the various classifications. The following are the most important of these:

1. Some speak of natural and moral attributes. The former, such as self-existence, simplicity, infinity, etc., belong to the constitutional nature of God, as distinguished from His will. The latter, as truth, goodness, mercy, justice, holiness, etc., qualify Him as a moral Being. The objection to this classification is that the so-called moral attributes are just as truly natural (i.e. original) in God as the others. Dabney prefers this division, but admits, in view of the objection raised, that the terms are not felicitous. He would rather speak of moral and non-moral attributes.

2. Others distinguish between absolute and relative attributes. The former belong to the essence of God as considered in itself, while the latter belong to the divine essence considered in relation to His creation. The one class includes such attributes as self-existence, immensity, eternity; and the other, such attributes as omnipresence and omniscience. This division seems to proceed on the assumption that we can have some knowledge of God as He is in Himself, entirely apart from the relations in which He stands to His creatures. But this is not so, and therefore, properly speaking, all the perfections of God are relative, indicating what He is in relation to the world. Strong evidently does not recognise the objection, and gives preference to this division.

3. Still others divide the divine perfections into immanent or intransitive and emanent or transitive attributes. Strong combines this division with the preceding one, when he speaks of *absolute or immanent* and *relative or transitive* attributes. The former are those which do not go forth and operate outside of the divine essence, but remain immanent, such as immensity, simplicity, eternity, etc.; and the latter are such as issue forth and produce effects external to God, as omnipotence, benevolence, justice, etc. But if some of the divine attributes are purely immanent, all knowledge of them would seem to be excluded. H. B. Smith remarks that every one of them must be both immanent and transeunt.

4. The most common distinction is that between incommunicable and communicable attributes. The former are those to which there is nothing analogous in the creature, as aseity, simplicity, immensity, etc.; the latter those to which the properties of the human spirit bear some analogy, as power, goodness, mercy, righteousness, etc. This distinction found no favour with the Lutherans, but has always been rather popular in Reformed circles, and is found in such representative works as those of the Leyden Professors, [*Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*.] Mastricht and Turretin. It was felt from the very beginning, however, that the distinction was untenable without further qualification, since from one point of view every attribute may be called communicable. None of the divine perfections are communicable in the infinite perfection in which they exist in God, and at the same time there are faint traces in man even of the so-called incommunicable attributes of God. Among more recent Reformed theologians there is a tendency to discard this distinction in favour of some other divisions. Dick, Shedd, and Vos retain

the old division. Kuyper expresses himself as dissatisfied with it, and yet reproduces it in his *virtutes per antithesin* and *virtutes per synthesin*; and Bavinck, after following another order in the first edition of his Dogmatics, returns to it in the second edition. Honig prefers to follow the division given by Bavinck in his first edition. And, finally, the Hodges, H.

B. Smith, and Thornwell follow a division suggested by the Westminster Catechism. However, the classification of the attributes under two main heads, as found in the distinction under consideration, is really inherent in all the other divisions, so that they are all subject to the objection that they apparently divide the Being of God into two parts, that first God as He is in Himself, God as the absolute Being, is discussed, and then God as He is related to His creatures, God as a personal Being. It may be said that such a treatment does not result in a unitary and harmonious conception of the divine attributes. This difficulty may be obviated, however, by having it clearly understood that the two classes of attributes named are not strictly co-ordinate, but that the attributes belonging to the first class qualify all those belonging to the second class, so that it can be said that God is one, absolute, unchangeable and infinite in His knowledge and wisdom, His goodness and love, His grace and mercy, His righteousness and holiness. If we bear this in mind, and also remember that none of the attributes of God are incommunicable in the sense that there is no trace of them in man, and that none of them are communicable in the sense that they are found in man as they are found in God, we see no reason why we should depart from the old division which has become so familiar in Reformed theology. For practical reasons it seems more desirable to retain it.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What objections are there to the use of the term attributes as applied to God? Do the same objections apply to the German "Eigenschaften" and the Holland "eigenschappen"? What name does Calvin use for them? What objection is there to the conception of the attributes as parts of God or as additions to the Divine Being? What faulty conceptions of the attributes were current in the Middle Ages? Did the Scholastics in their search for the attributes follow an *a priori* or an *a posteriori*, a deductive or an inductive method? Why is their method inherently foreign to the theology of revelation? What classifications of the attributes were suggested in addition to those mentioned in the text? Why is it virtually out of the question to give a faultless division? What division is suggested by the Westminster Catechism?

VI. The Incommunicable Attributes

God alone is self-existent, unchanging, infinite, and one; these perfections distinguish Him from every creature.

(God as the Absolute Being)

It has been quite common in theology to speak of God as the absolute Being. At the same time the term "absolute" is more characteristic of philosophy than it is of theology. In metaphysics the term "the Absolute" is a designation of the ultimate ground of all existence; and because the theist also speaks of God as the ultimate ground of all existence, it is sometimes thought that the

Absolute of philosophy and the God of theism are one and the same. But that is not necessarily so. In fact the usual conception of the Absolute renders it impossible to equate it with the God of the Bible and of Christian theology. The term “Absolute” is derived from the Latin *absolutus*, a compound of *ab* (from) and *solvere* (to loosen), and thus means free as to condition, or free from limitation or restraint. This fundamental thought was worked out in various ways, so that the Absolute was regarded as that which is free from all conditions (the Unconditioned or Self-Existent), from all relations (the (Unrelated)), from all imperfections (the Perfect), or free from all phenomenal differences or distinctions, such as matter and spirit, being and attributes, subject and object, appearance and reality (the Real, or Ultimate Reality).

The answer to the question, whether the Absolute of philosophy can be identified with the God of theology, depends on the conception one has of the Absolute. If Spinoza conceives of the Absolute as the one Self-subsistent Being of which all particular things are but transient modes, thus identifying God and the world, we cannot share his view of this Absolute as God. When Hegel views the Absolute as the unity of thought and being, as the totality of all things, which includes all relations, and in which all the discords of the present are resolved in perfect unity, we again find it impossible to follow him in regarding this Absolute as God. And when Bradley says that his Absolute is related to nothing, and that there cannot be any practical relation between it and the finite will, we agree with him that his Absolute cannot be the God of the Christian religion, for this God does enter into relations with finite creatures.

Bradley cannot conceive of the God of religion as other than a finite God. But when the Absolute is defined as the First Cause of all existing things, or as the ultimate ground of all reality, or as the one self-existent Being, it can be considered as identical with the God of theology. He is the Infinite One, who does not exist in any *necessary* relations, because He is self-sufficient, but at the same time can *freely* enter into various relations with His creation as a whole and with His creatures. While the incommunicable attributes emphasize the absolute Being of God, the communicable attributes stress the fact that He enters into various relations with His creatures. In the present chapter the following perfections of God come into consideration.

A. The Self-Existence of God.

GLOSS Independentia: the Reformed emphasis on God’s independence in being, counsel, virtues, and works; all creaturely dependence therefore rests upon Him.

God is self-existent, that is, He has the ground of His existence in Himself. This idea is sometimes expressed by saying that He is *causa sui* (His own cause), but this expression is hardly accurate, since God is the uncaused, who exists by the necessity of His own Being, and therefore necessarily. Man, on the other hand, does not exist necessarily, and has the cause of his existence

outside of himself. The idea of God's self-existence was generally expressed by the term *aseitas*, meaning *self-originated*, but Reformed theologians quite generally substituted for it the word *independentia* (independence), as expressing, not merely that God is independent in His Being, but also that He is independent in everything else: in His virtues, decrees, works, and so on. It may be said that there is a faint trace of this perfection in the creature, but this can only mean that the creature, though absolutely dependent, yet has its own distinct existence. But, of course, this falls far short of being self-existent. This attribute of God is generally recognised, and is implied in heathen religions and in the Absolute of philosophy.

When the Absolute is conceived of as the self-existent and as the ultimate ground of all things, which voluntarily enters into various relations with other beings, it can be identified with the God of theology. As the self-existent God, He is not only independent in Himself, but also causes everything to depend on Him. This self-existence of God finds expression in the name Jehovah. It is only as the self-existent and independent One that God can give the assurance that He will remain eternally the same in relation to His people. Additional indications of it are found in the assertion in John 5:26, "For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself"; in the declaration that He is independent of all things and that all things exist only through Him, Ps. 94:8 ff.; Isa. 40:18 ff.; Acts 7:25; and in statements implying that He is independent in His thought, Rom. 11:33,34, and in His will, Dan. 4:35; Rom. 9:19; Eph. 1:5; Rev. 4:11. in His power, Ps. 115:3, and in His counsel, Ps. 33:11.

B. The Immutability of God.

GLOSS Immutability: God's constancy in being, perfections, purposes, and promises; it does not mean lifeless immobility or an absence of living action.

The Immutability of God is a necessary concomitant of His aseity. It is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises. In virtue of this attribute He is exalted above all becoming, and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. Even reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse. But in God, as the absolute Perfection, improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible. This immutability of God is clearly taught in such passages of Scripture as Ex. 3:14; Ps. 102:26-28; Isa. 41:4; 48:12; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 1:23; Heb. 1:11,12; Jas. 1:17. At the same time there are many passages of Scripture which seem to ascribe change to God. Did not He who dwelleth in eternity pass on to the creation of the world, become incarnate in Christ, and in the Holy Spirit take up His abode in the Church? Is He not represented as revealing and hiding Himself, as coming and going, as repenting and changing His intention, and as dealing differently with man before and

after conversion? Cf. Ex. 32:10-14; Jonah 3:10; Prov. 11:20; 12:22; Ps. 18:26,27. The objection here implied is based to a certain extent on misunderstanding. The divine immutability should not be understood as implying *immobility*, as if there were no movement in God.

It is even customary in theology to speak of God as *actus purus*, a God who is always in action. The Bible teaches us that God enters into manifold relations with man and, as it were, lives their life with them. There is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in His Being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises. The purpose to create was eternal with Him, and there was no change in Him when this purpose was realised by a single eternal act of His will. The incarnation brought no change in the Being or perfections of God, nor in His purpose, for it was His eternal good pleasure to send the Son of His love into the world. And if Scripture speaks of His repenting, changing His intention, and altering His relation to sinners when they repent, we should remember that this is only an anthropopathic way of speaking. In reality the change is not in God, but in man and in man's relations to God. It is important to maintain the immutability of God over against the Pelagian and Arminian doctrine that God is subject to change, not indeed in His Being, but in His knowledge and will, so that His decisions are to a great extent dependent on the actions of man; over against the pantheistic notion that God is an eternal becoming rather than an absolute Being, and that the unconscious Absolute is gradually developing into conscious personality in man; and over against the present tendency of some to speak of a finite, struggling, and gradually growing God.

C. The Infinity of God .

GLOSS Immensity: God's transcendence of spatial limitation together with His presence at every point of space, without being contained or divided by it.

The infinity of God is that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations. In ascribing it to God we deny that there are or can be any limitations to the divine Being or attributes. It implies that He is in no way limited by the universe, by this time-space world, or confined to the universe. It does not involve His identity with the sum-total of existing things, nor does it exclude the co-existence of derived and finite things, to which He bears relation. The infinity of God must be conceived as intensive rather than extensive, and should not be confused with boundless extension, as if God were spread out through the entire universe, one part being here and another there, for God has no body and therefore no extension. Neither should it be regarded as a merely negative concept, though it is perfectly true that we cannot form a positive idea of it. It is a reality in God fully comprehended only by Him. We distinguish various aspects of God's infinity.

1. HIS ABSOLUTE PERFECTION. This is the infinity of the Divine Being considered in itself. It should not be understood in a quantitative, but in a qualitative sense; it qualifies all the

communicable attributes of God. Infinite power is not an absolute quantum, but an exhaustless potency of power; and infinite holiness is not a boundless quantum of holiness, but a holiness which is, qualitatively free from all limitation or defect. The same may be said of infinite knowledge and wisdom, and of infinite love and righteousness. Says Dr. Orr: "Perhaps we can say that infinity in God is ultimately: (a) internally and qualitatively, absence of all limitation and defect; (b) boundless potentiality." [*Side-Lights on Christian Doctrine*, p. 26.] In this sense of the word the infinity of God is simply identical with the perfection of His Divine Being. Scripture proof for it is found in Job 11:7-10; Ps. 145:3; Matt. 5:48.

2. HIS ETERNITY. The infinity of God in relation to time is called His eternity. The form in which the Bible represents God's eternity is simply that of duration through endless ages, Ps. 90:2; 102:12; Eph. 3:21. We should remember, however, that in speaking as it does the Bible uses popular language, and not the language of philosophy. We generally think of God's eternity in the same way, namely, as duration infinitely prolonged both backwards and forwards. But this is only a popular and symbolical way of representing that which in reality transcends time and differs from it essentially. Eternity in the strict sense of the word is ascribed to that which transcends all temporal limitations. That it applies to God in that sense is at least intimated in II Pet. 3:8. "Time," says Dr. Orr, "strictly has relation to the world of objects existing in succession. God fills time; is in every part of it; but His eternity still is not really this being in time. It is rather that to which time forms a contrast." [*Ibid.*, p. 26.] Our existence is marked off by days and weeks and months and years; not so the existence of God. Our life is divided into a past, present and future, but there is no such division in the life of God. He is the eternal "I am." His eternity may be defined as *that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.* The relation of eternity to time constitutes one of the most difficult problems in philosophy and theology, perhaps incapable of solution in our present condition.

3. HIS IMMENSITY. The infinity of God may also be viewed with reference to space, and is then called His immensity. It may be defined as *that perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being.* It has a negative and a positive side, denying all limitations of space to the Divine Being, and asserting that God is above space and fills every part of it *with His whole Being.* The last words are added, in order to ward off the idea that God is diffused through space, so that one part of His Being is present in one place, and another part in some other place. We distinguish three modes of presence in space. Bodies are in space circumscriptively, because they are bounded by it; finite spirits are in space definitively, since they are not everywhere, but only in a certain definite place; and in distinction from both of these God is in space repletively, because He fills all space. He is not absent from any part of it, nor more present in one part than in another.

In a certain sense the terms “immensity” and “omnipresence,” as applied to God, denote the same thing, and can therefore be regarded as synonymous. Yet there is a point of difference that should be carefully noted. “Immensity” points to the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations, while “omnipresence” denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire Being. The former emphasizes the transcendence, and the latter, the immanence of God. God is immanent in all His creatures, in His entire creation, but is in no way bounded by it. In connection with God’s relation to the world we must avoid, on the one hand, the error of Pantheism, so characteristic of a great deal of present day thinking, with its denial of the transcendence of God and its assumption that the Being of God is really the substance of all things; and, on the other hand, the Deistic conception that God is indeed present in creation *per potentiam* (with His power), but not *per essentiam et naturam* (with His very Being and nature), and acts upon the world from a distance.

Though God is distinct from the world and may not be identified with it, He is yet present in every part of His creation, not only *per potentiam*, but also *per essentiam*. This does not mean, however, that He is equally present and present in the same sense in all His creatures. The nature of His indwelling is in harmony with that of His creatures. He does not dwell on earth as He does in heaven, in animals as He does in man, in the inorganic as He does in the organic creation, in the wicked as He does in the pious, nor in the Church as He does in Christ. There is an endless variety in the manner in which He is immanent in His creatures, and in the measure in which they reveal God to those who have eyes to see. The omnipresence of God is clearly revealed in Scripture. Heaven and earth cannot contain Him, I Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:48,49; and at the same time He fills both and is a God at hand, Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23,24; Acts 17:27,28.

D. The Unity of God.

GLOSS *Unitas simplicitatis*: the inner, qualitative unity of God’s being, distinct from numerical uniqueness; God is one without composition or internal division.

A distinction is made between the *unitas singularitatis* and the *unitas simplicitatis*.

1. THE UNITAS SINGULARITATIS. This attribute stresses both the oneness and the unicity of God, the fact that He is numerically one and that as such He is unique. It implies that there is but one Divine Being, that from the nature of the case there can be but one, and that all other beings exist of and through and unto Him. The Bible teaches us in several passages that there is but one true God. Solomon pleaded with God to maintain the cause of His people, “that all the peoples of the earth may know that Jehovah, He is God; there is none else,” I Kings 8:60. And Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we in Him,” I Cor. 8:6. Similarly he writes to

Timothy, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," I Tim.

2:5. Other passages do not stress the numerical unity of God as much as they do His uniqueness. This is the case in the well known words of Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel; Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." The Hebrew word *'echad*, translated by "one" may also be rendered "an only," the equivalent of the German "einig" and the Dutch "eenig." And this would seem to be a better translation. Keil stresses that fact that this passage does not teach the numerical unity of God, but rather that Jehovah is the only God that is entitled to the name Jehovah. This is also the meaning of the term in Zech. 14:9. The same idea is beautifully expressed in the rhetorical question of Ex. 15:11, "Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" This excludes all polytheistic conceptions of God.

2. THE UNITAS SIMPLICITATIS. While the unity discussed in the preceding sets God apart from other beings, the perfection now under consideration is expressive of the inner and qualitative unity of the Divine Being. When we speak of the simplicity of God, we use the term to describe the state or quality of being simple, the condition of being free from division into parts, and therefore from compositeness. It means that God is not composite and is not susceptible of division in any sense of the word. This implies among other things that the three Persons in the Godhead are not so many parts of which the Divine essence is composed, that God's essence and perfections are not distinct, and that the attributes are not superadded to His essence. Since the two are one, the Bible can speak of God as light and life, as righteousness and love, thus identifying Him with His perfections.

The simplicity of God follows from some of His other perfections; from His Self-existence, which excludes the idea that something preceded Him, as in the case of compounds; and from His immutability, which could not be predicated of His nature, if it were made up of parts. This perfection was disputed during the Middle Ages, and was denied by Socinians and Arminians. Scripture does not explicitly assert it, but implies it where it speaks of God as righteousness, truth, wisdom, light, life, love, and so on, and thus indicates that each of these properties, because of their absolute perfection, is identical with His Being. In recent works on theology the simplicity of God is seldom mentioned. Many theologians positively deny it, either because it is regarded as a purely metaphysical abstraction, or because, in their estimation, it conflicts with the doctrine of the Trinity. Dabney believes that there is no composition in the substance of God, but denies that in Him substance and attributes are one and the same. He claims that God is no more simple in that respect than finite spirits. [*Syst. and Polem. Theol.*, p. 43f.]

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY. What different conceptions of the Absolute do we meet with in philosophy? Can the Absolute of philosophy always be identified with the God of theology? How does Bradley distinguish between the two? How is the finite God of James, Schiller, Ward, Wells and others, related to the Absolute? How

do the incommunicable attributes of God link up with the Absolute? Does the immutability of God exclude all movement in God? In how far does it exclude changes of action and relations? Should the absolute perfection of God be regarded as an attribute? Why does the Bible represent God's eternity as endless duration? Is it possible to harmonize the transcendence and the immanence of God? How is transcendence frequently interpreted in modern theology? What is implied in the simplicity of God?

VII. The Communicable Attributes

God's spirituality, wisdom, holiness, goodness, and sovereignty are truly reflected in creatures, though they remain perfect in God alone.

(God as a Personal Spirit)

If the attributes discussed in the previous chapter stressed the absolute Being of God, those that remain to be considered emphasize His personal nature. It is in the communicable attributes that God stands out as a conscious, intelligent, free, and moral Being, as a Being that is personal in the highest sense of the word. The question has long engaged the attention of philosophers, and is still a subject of debate, whether personal existence is consistent with the idea of absoluteness. The answer to that question depends to a great extent on the meaning one ascribes to the word "absolute." The word has been used in three different senses in philosophy, which may be denominated as the agnostic, the logical, and the causal sense. For the agnostic the Absolute is the unrelated, of which nothing can be known, since things are known only in their relations. And if nothing can be known of it, personality cannot be ascribed to it. Moreover, since personality is unthinkable apart from relations, it cannot be identified with an Absolute which is in its very essence the unrelated. In the logical Absolute the individual is subordinated to the universal, and the highest universal is ultimate reality.

Such is the absolute substance of Spinoza, and the absolute spirit of Hegel. It may express itself in and through the finite, but nothing that is finite can express its essential nature. To ascribe personality to it would be to limit it to one mode of being, and would destroy its absoluteness. In fact, such an absolute or ultimate is a mere abstract and empty concept, that is barren of all content. The causal view of the Absolute represents it as the ultimate ground of all things. It is not dependent on anything outside of itself, but causes all things to depend on it. Moreover, it is not necessarily completely unrelated, but can enter into various relations with finite creatures. Such a conception of the Absolute is not inconsistent with the idea of personality. Moreover, we should bear in mind that in their argumentation philosophers were always operating with the idea of personality as it is realised in man, and lost sight of the fact that personality in God might be something infinitely more perfect. As a matter of fact, perfect personality is found only in God, and what we see in man is only a finite copy of the original. Still more, there is a tripersonality in God, of which no analogy is found in human beings.

Several natural proofs, quite similar to those adduced for the existence of God, have been urged to prove the personality of God. (1) Human personality demands a personal God for its explanation. Man is not a self-existent and eternal, but a finite being that has a beginning and an end. The cause assumed must be sufficient to account for the whole of the effect. Since man is a personal product, the power originating him must also be personal. Otherwise there is something in the effect which is superior to anything that is found in the cause; and this would be quite impossible. (2) The world in general bears witness to the personality of God. In its whole fabric and constitution it reveals the clearest traces of an infinite intelligence, of the deepest, highest and tenderest emotions, and of a will that is all-powerful.

Consequently, we are constrained to mount from the world to the world's Maker as a Being of intelligence, sensibility, and will, that is, as a person. (3) The moral and religious nature of man also points to the personality of God. His moral nature imposes on him a sense of obligation to do that which is right, and this necessarily implies the existence of a supreme Lawgiver. Moreover, his religious nature constantly prompts him to seek personal communion with some higher Being; and all the elements and activities of religion demand a personal God as their object and final end. Even so-called pantheistic religions often testify unconsciously to belief in a personal God. The fact is that all such things as penitence, faith and obedience, fellowship and love, loyalty in service and sacrifice, trust in life and death, are meaningless unless they find their appropriate object in a personal God.

But while all these considerations are true and have some value as *testimonia*, they are not the proofs on which theology depends in its doctrine of the personality of God. It turns for proof to God's Self-revelation in Scripture. The term "person" is not applied to God in the Bible, though there are words, such as the Hebrew *panim* and the Greek *prosopon*, that come very close to expressing the idea. At the same time Scripture testifies to the personality of God in more than one way. The presence of God, as described by Old and New Testament writers, is clearly a personal presence. And the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic representations of God in Scripture, while they must be interpreted so as not to militate against the pure spirituality and holiness of God, can hardly be justified, except on the assumption that the Being to whom they apply is a real person, with personal attributes, even though it be without human limitations. God is represented throughout as a personal God, with whom men can and may converse, whom they can trust, who sustains them in their trials, and fills their hearts with the joy of deliverance and victory. And, finally, the highest revelation of God to which the Bible testifies is a personal revelation. Jesus Christ reveals the Father in such a perfect way that He could say to Philip, "He who hath seen me hath seen the Father," John 14:9. More detailed proofs will appear in the discussion of the communicable attributes.

A. The Spirituality of God.

GLOSS Spirit: as applied to God, this denotes that He is not corporeal and possesses perfect personal life, knowledge, will, and self-consciousness.

The Bible does not give us a definition of God. The nearest approach to anything like it is found in the word of Christ to the Samaritan woman, "God is Spirit," John 4:24. This is at least a statement purporting to tell us in a single word what God is. The Lord does not merely say that God is a spirit, but that He is Spirit. And because of this clear statement it is but fitting that we should discuss first of all the spirituality of God. By teaching the spirituality of God theology stresses the fact that God has a substantial Being all His own and distinct from the world, and that this substantial Being is immaterial, invisible, and without composition or extension. It includes the thought that all the essential qualities which belong to the perfect idea of Spirit are found in Him: that He is a self-conscious and self-determining Being. Since He is Spirit in the most absolute, and in the purest sense of the word, there is in Him no composition of parts.

The idea of spirituality of necessity excludes the ascription of anything like corporeity to God, and thus condemns the fancies of some of the early Gnostics and medieval Mystics, and of all those sectarians of our own day who ascribe a body to God. It is true that the Bible speaks of the hands and feet, the eyes and ears, the mouth and nose of God, but in doing this it is speaking anthropomorphically or figuratively of Him who far transcends our human knowledge, and of whom we can only speak in a stammering fashion after the manner of men. By ascribing spirituality to God we also affirm that He has none of the properties belonging to matter, and that He cannot be discerned by the bodily senses. Paul speaks of Him as "the King eternal, immortal, invisible" (I Tim. 1:17), and again as "the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power eternal," I Tim. 6:15,16.

B. Intellectual Attributes.

GLOSS Omniscience: God's all-comprehensive knowledge of Himself and of all things possible and actual, immediate, perfect, and free from discovery or error.

God is represented in Scripture as Light, and therefore as perfect in His intellectual life. This category comprises two of the divine perfections, namely, the knowledge and the wisdom of God.

1. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. The knowledge of God may be defined as *that perfection of God whereby He, in an entirely unique manner, knows Himself and all things possible and actual in*

one eternal and most simple act. The Bible testifies to the knowledge of God abundantly, as, for instance, in I Sam. 2:3; Job 12:13; Ps. 94:9; 147:4; Isa. 29:15; 40:27,28. In connection with the knowledge of God several points call for consideration.

a. *Its nature.* The knowledge of God differs in some important points from that of men. It is *archetypal*, which means that He knows the universe as it exists in His own eternal idea previous to its existence as a finite reality in time and space; and that His knowledge is not, like ours, obtained from without. It is a knowledge that is characterized by *absolute perfection*. As such it is *intuitive* rather than demonstrative or discursive. It is *innate and immediate*, and does not result from observation or from a process of reasoning. Being perfect, it is also *simultaneous* and not successive, so that He sees things at once in their totality, and not piecemeal one after another. Furthermore, it is *complete and fully conscious*, while man's knowledge is always partial, frequently indistinct, and often fails to rise into the clear light of consciousness.

A distinction is made between the *necessary* and *free* knowledge of God. The former is the knowledge which God has of Himself and of all things possible, a knowledge resting on the consciousness of His omnipotence. It is called *necessary knowledge*, because it is not determined by an action of the divine will. It is also known as *the knowledge of simple intelligence*, in view of the fact that it is purely an act of the divine intellect, without any concurrent action of the divine will. *The free knowledge of God* is the knowledge which He has of all things actual, that is, of things that existed in the past, that exist in the present, or that will exist in the future. It is founded on God's infinite knowledge of His own all-comprehensive and unchangeable eternal purpose, and is called free knowledge, because it is determined by a concurrent act of the will. It is also called *scientia visionis*, knowledge of vision.

b. *Its extent.* The knowledge of God is not only perfect in kind, but also in its inclusiveness. It is called *omniscience*, because it is all-comprehensive. In order to promote a proper estimate of it, we may particularize as follows: God knows Himself and in Himself all things that come from Him (internal knowledge). He knows all things as they actually come to pass, past, present, and future, and knows them in their real relations. He knows the hidden essence of things, to which the knowledge of man cannot penetrate. He sees not as man sees, who observes only the outward manifestations of life, but penetrates to the depths of the human heart. Moreover, He knows what is possible as well as what is actual; all things that might occur under certain circumstances are present to His mind. The omniscience of God is clearly taught in several passages of Scripture. He is perfect in knowledge, Job 37:16, looketh not on outward appearance but on the heart, I Sam. 16:7; I Chron. 28:9,17; Ps. 139:1-4; Jer. 17:10, observes the ways of men, Deut. 2:7; Job 23:10; 24:23; 31:4; Ps. 1:6; 119:168, knows the place of their habitation, Ps. 33:13, and the days of their life, Ps. 37:18. This doctrine of the knowledge of God must be maintained over against all pantheistic tendencies to represent God as the unconscious ground of the phenomenal world,

and of those who, like Marcion, Socinus and all who believe in a finite God, ascribe to Him only a limited knowledge.

There is one question, however, that calls for special discussion. It concerns God's foreknowledge of the free actions of men, and therefore of conditional events. We can understand how God can foreknow where necessity rules, but find it difficult to conceive of a previous knowledge of actions which man freely originates. The difficulty of this problem led some to deny the foreknowledge of free actions, and others to deny human freedom. It is perfectly evident that Scripture teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events, I Sam. 23:10-13; II Kings 13:19; Ps. 81:14,15; Isa. 42:9; 48:18; Jer. 2:2,3; 38:17-20; Ezek. 3:6; Matt. 11:21. Moreover, it does not leave us in doubt as to the freedom of man. It certainly does not permit the denial of either one of the terms of the problem. We are up against a problem here, which we cannot fully solve, though it is possible to make an approach to a solution. God has decreed all things, and has decreed them with their causes and conditions in the exact order in which they come to pass; and His foreknowledge of future things and also of contingent events rests on His decree. This solves the problem as far as the foreknowledge of God is concerned.

But now the question arises, Is the predetermination of things consistent with the free will of man? And the answer is that it certainly is not, if the freedom of the will be regarded as *indifferentia* (arbitrariness), but this is an unwarranted conception of the freedom of man. The will of man is not something altogether indeterminate, something hanging in the air that can be swung arbitrarily in either direction. It is rather something rooted in our very nature, connected with our deepest instincts and emotions, and determined by our intellectual considerations and by our very character. And if we conceive of our human freedom as *libentia rationalis* (reasonable self-determination), then we have no sufficient warrant for saying that it is inconsistent with divine foreknowledge. Says Dr. Orr: "A solution of this problem there is, though our minds fail to grasp it. In part it probably lies, not in denying freedom, but in a revised conception of freedom. For freedom, after all, is not arbitrariness. There is in all rational action a *why* for acting – a reason which decides action. The truly free man is not the uncertain, incalculable man, but the man who is *reliable*. In short, freedom has its laws – spiritual laws – and the omniscient Mind knows what these are. But an element of mystery, it must be acknowledged, still remains." [*Side-Lights on Chr. Doct.*, p. 30.]

Jesuit, Lutheran, and Arminian theologians suggested the so-called *scientia media* as a solution of the problem. The name is indicative of the fact that it occupies a middle ground between the necessary and the free knowledge of God. It differs from the former in that its *object* is not all possible things, *but a special class of things actually future*; and from the latter in that its *ground* is not the eternal purpose of God, *but the free action of the creature as simply foreseen*. [A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theol.*, p. 147.] It is called *mediate*, says Dabney, "because they suppose

God arrives at it, not directly by knowing His own purpose to effect it, but indirectly by His infinite insight into the manner in which the contingent second cause will act, under given outward circumstances, foreseen or produced by God.”[*Syst. and Polem. Theol.*, p. 156.] But this is no solution of the problem at all. It is an attempt to reconcile two things which logically exclude each other, namely, freedom of action in the Pelagian sense and a *certain* foreknowledge of that action. Actions that are in no way determined by God, directly or indirectly, but are wholly dependent on the arbitrary will of man, can hardly be the object of divine foreknowledge. Moreover, it is objectionable, because it makes the divine knowledge dependent on the choice of man, virtually annuls the certainty of the knowledge of future events, and thus implicitly denies the omniscience of God. It is also contrary to such passages of Scripture as Acts 2:23; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 1:11; Phil. 2:13.

2. THE WISDOM OF GOD. The wisdom of God may be regarded as a particular aspect of His knowledge. It is quite evident that knowledge and wisdom are not the same, though they are closely related. They do not always accompany each other. An uneducated man may be superior to a scholar in wisdom. Knowledge is acquired by study, but wisdom results from an intuitive insight into things. The former is theoretical, while the latter is practical, making knowledge subservient to some specific purpose. Both are imperfect in man, but in God they are characterized by absolute perfection. God’s wisdom is His intelligence as manifested in the adaptation of means to ends. It points to the fact that He always strives for the best possible ends, and chooses the best means for the realization of His purposes. H. B. Smith defines the divine wisdom as “that attribute of God whereby He produces the best possible results with the best possible means.” We may be a little more specific and call it *that perfection of God whereby He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most*. It implies a final end to which all secondary ends are subordinate; and according to Scripture this final end is the glory of God, Rom. 11:33; 14:7,8; Eph. 1:11,12; Col. 1:16. Scripture refers to the wisdom of God in many passages, and even represents it as personified in Proverbs 8. This wisdom of God is seen particularly in creation, Ps. 19:1-7; 104:1-34; in providence, Ps. 33:10, 11; Rom. 8:28; and in redemption, Rom. 11:33; I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:10.

3. THE VERACITY OF GOD. Scripture uses several words to express the veracity of God: in the Old Testament *’emeth*, *’amunah*, and *’amen*, and in the New Testament *alethes* (*aletheia*), *alethinos*, and *pistis*. This already points to the fact that it includes several ideas, such as truth, truthfulness, and faithfulness. When God is called the truth, this is to be understood in its most comprehensive sense. He is the truth first of all in a metaphysical sense, that is, in Him the idea of the Godhead is perfectly realised; He is all that He as God should be, and as such is distinguished from all so-called gods, which are called vanity and lies, Ps. 96:5; 97:7; 115:4-8; Isa. 44:9,10. He is also the truth in an *ethical* sense, and as such reveals Himself as He really is, so that His revelation is absolutely reliable, Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4; Heb. 6:18. Finally, He is also the truth in a *logical*

sense, and in virtue of this He knows things as they really are, and has so constituted the mind of man that the latter can know, not merely the appearance, but also the reality, of things. Thus the truth of God is the foundation of all knowledge. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that these three are but different aspects of the truth, which is one in God.

In view of the preceding we may define the veracity or truth of God as *that perfection of His Being by virtue of which He fully answers to the idea of the Godhead, is perfectly reliable in His revelation, and sees things as they really are*. It is because of this perfection that He is the source of all truth, not only in the sphere of morals and religion, but also in every field of scientific endeavor. Scripture is very emphatic in its references to God as the truth, Ex. 34:6; Num. 23:19; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 25:10; 31:6; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 10:8, 10, 11; John 14:6; 17:3; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18; I John 5:20, 21. There is still another aspect of this divine perfection, and one that is always regarded as of the greatest importance. It is generally called His *faithfulness*, in virtue of which He is ever mindful of His covenant and fulfils all the promises which He has made to His people. This faithfulness of God is of the utmost practical significance to the people of God. It is the ground of their confidence, the foundation of their hope, and the cause of their rejoicing. It saves them from the despair to which their own unfaithfulness might easily lead, gives them courage to carry on in spite of their failures, and fills their hearts with joyful anticipations, even when they are deeply conscious of the fact that they have forfeited all the blessings of God. Num. 23:19; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 89:33; Isa. 49:7; I Cor. 1:9; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:17, 18; 10:23.

C. Moral Attributes.

GLOSS Holiness: God's majestic separateness from creatures and His absolute ethical purity, the perfection from which His opposition to sin proceeds.

The moral attributes of God are generally regarded as the most glorious of the divine perfections. Not that one attribute of God is in itself more perfect and glorious than another, but relatively to man the moral perfections of God shine with a splendor all their own. They are generally discussed under three heads: (1) the goodness of God; (2) the holiness of God; and (3) the righteousness of God.

1. THE GOODNESS OF GOD. This is generally treated as a generic conception, including several varieties, which are distinguished according to their objects. The goodness of God should not be confused with His kindness, which is a more restricted concept. We speak of something as good, when it answers in all parts to the ideal. 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." He is good in the metaphysical sense of the word, absolute perfection and perfect bliss in Himself. It is in this sense that Jesus said to the

young ruler: "None is good save one, even God," Mark 10:18. But since God is good in Himself, He is also good for His creatures, and may therefore be called the *fons omnium bonorum*. He is the fountain of all good, and is so represented in a variety of ways throughout the Bible. The poet sings: "For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light," Ps. 36:9. All the good things which the creatures enjoy in the present and expect in the future, flow to them out of this inexhaustible fountain. And not only that, but God is also the *summum bonum*, the highest good, for all His creatures, though in different degrees and according to the measure in which they answer to the purpose of their existence. In the present connection we naturally stress the ethical goodness of God and the different aspects of it, as these are determined by the nature of its objects.

a. *The goodness of God towards His creatures in general.* This may be defined as *that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all His creatures*. It is the affection which the Creator feels towards His sentient creatures as such. The Psalmist sings of it in the well known words: "Jehovah is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works. . . . The eyes of all wait for thee; and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing," Ps. 145:9,15,16. This benevolent interest of God is revealed in His care for the creature's welfare, and is suited to the nature and the circumstances of the creature. It naturally varies in degree according to the capacity of the objects to receive it. And while it is not restricted to believers, they only manifest a proper appreciation of its blessings, desire to use them in the service of their God, and thus enjoy them in a richer and fuller measure. The Bible refers to this goodness of God in many passages, such as Ps. 36:6; 104:21; Matt. 5:45; 6:26; Luke 6:35; Acts 14:17.

b. *The love of God.* When the goodness of God is exercised towards His rational creatures, it assumes the higher character of love, and this love may again be distinguished according to the objects on which it terminates. In distinction from the goodness of God in general, it may be defined as *that perfection of God by which He is eternally moved to self-communication*. Since God is absolutely good in Himself, His love cannot find complete satisfaction in any object that falls short of absolute perfection. He loves His rational creatures for His own sake, or, to express it otherwise, He loves in them Himself, His virtues, His work, and His gifts. He does not even withdraw His love completely from the sinner in his present sinful state, though the latter's sin is an abomination to Him, since He recognises even in the sinner His image-bearer. John 3:16; Matt. 5:44,45. At the same time He loves believers with a special love, since He contemplates them as His spiritual children in Christ. It is to them that He communicates Himself in the fullest and richest sense, with all the fulness of His grace and mercy. John 16:27; Rom. 5:8; I John 3:1.

c. *The grace of God.* The significant word "grace" is a translation of the Hebrew *chanan* and of the Greek *charis*. According to Scripture it is manifested not only by God, but also by men, and

then denotes the favour which one man shows another, Gen. 33:8,10,18; 39:4; 47:25; Ruth 2:2; I Sam. 1:18; 16:22. In such cases it is not necessarily implied that the favour is undeserved. In general it can be said, however, that grace is the free bestowal of kindness on one who has no claim to it. This is particularly the case where the grace referred to is the grace of God. His love to man is always unmerited, and when shown to sinners, is even forfeited. The Bible generally uses the word to denote *the unmerited goodness or love of God to those who have forfeited it, and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation*. The grace of God is the source of all spiritual blessings that are bestowed upon sinners. As such we read of it in Eph. 1:6,7; 2:7-9; Tit. 2:11; 3:4-7. While the Bible often speaks of the grace of God as saving grace, it also makes mention of it in a broader sense, as in Isa. 26:10; Jer. 16:13.

The grace of God is of the greatest practical significance for sinful men. It was by grace that the way of redemption was opened for them, Rom. 3:24; II Cor. 8:9, and that the message of redemption went out into the world, Acts 14:3. By grace sinners receive the gift of God in Jesus Christ, Acts 18:27; Eph. 2:8. By grace they are justified, Rom. 3:24; 4:16; Tit. 3:7, they are enriched with spiritual blessings, John 1:16; II Cor. 8:9; II Thess. 2:16, and they finally inherit salvation, Eph. 2:8; Tit. 2:11. Seeing they have absolutely no merits of their own, they are altogether dependent on the grace of God in Christ. In modern theology, with its belief in the inherent goodness of man and his ability to help himself, the doctrine of salvation by grace has practically become a "lost chord," and even the word "grace" was emptied of all spiritual meaning and vanished from religious discourses. It was retained only in the sense of "graciousness," something that is quite external. Happily, there are some evidences of a renewed emphasis on sin, and of a newly awakened consciousness of the need of divine grace.

d. *The mercy of God.* Another important aspect of the goodness and love of God is His mercy or tender compassion. The Hebrew word most generally used for this is *chesed*. There is another word, however, which expresses a deep and tender compassion, namely, the word *racham*, which is beautifully rendered by "tender mercy" in our English Bible. The Septuagint and the New Testament employ the Greek word *eleos* to designate the mercy of God. If the grace of God contemplates man as guilty before God, and therefore in need of forgiveness, the mercy of God contemplates him as one who is bearing the consequences of sin, who is in a pitiable condition, and who therefore needs divine help. It may be defined as *the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts*. In His mercy God reveals Himself as a compassionate God, who pities those who are in misery and is ever ready to relieve their distress.

This mercy is bountiful, Deut. 5:10; Ps. 57:10; 86:5, and the poets of Israel delighted to sing of it as enduring forever, I Chron. 16:34; II Chron. 7:6; Ps. 136; Ezra 3:11. In the New Testament it is often mentioned alongside of the grace of God, especially in salutations, I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:1;

Titus 1:4. We are told repeatedly that it is shown to them that fear God, Ex. 20:2; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 86:5; Luke 1:50. This does not mean, however, that it is limited to them, though they enjoy it in a special measure. God's tender mercies are over all His works, Ps. 145:9, and even those who do not fear Him share in them, Ezek. 18:23,32; 33:11; Luke 6:35,36. The mercy of God may not be represented as opposed to His justice. It is exercised only in harmony with the strictest justice of God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ. Other terms used for it in the Bible are "pity," "compassion," and "lovingkindness."

e. *The longsuffering of God.* The longsuffering of God is still another aspect of His great goodness or love. The Hebrew uses the expression *'erek 'aph*, which means literally "long of face," and then also "slow to anger," while the Greek expresses the same idea by the word *makrothumia*. It is *that aspect of the goodness or love of God in virtue of which He bears with the froward and evil in spite of their long continued disobedience*. In the exercise of this attribute the sinner is contemplated as continuing in sin, notwithstanding the admonitions and warnings that come to him. It reveals itself in the postponement of the merited judgment. Scripture speaks of it in Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 3:15. A synonymous term of a slightly different connotation is the word "forbearance."

2. THE HOLINESS OF GOD. The Hebrew word for "to be holy," *quadash*, is derived from the root *qad*, which means to cut or to separate. It is one of the most prominent religious words of the Old Testament, and is applied primarily to God. The same idea is conveyed by the New Testament words *hagiazō* and *hagios*. From this it already appears that it is not correct to think of holiness primarily as a moral or religious quality, as is generally done. Its fundamental idea is that of a *position* or *relationship* existing between God and some person or thing.

a. *Its nature.* The Scriptural idea of the holiness of God is twofold. In its original sense it denotes that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. So understood, the holiness of God is one of His transcendental attributes, and is sometimes spoken of as His central and supreme perfection. It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but if this were permissible, the Scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection. It is quite evident, however, that holiness in this sense of the word is not really a *moral* attribute, which can be co-ordinated with the others, such as love, grace and mercy, but is rather something that is co-extensive with, and applicable to, everything that can be predicated of God. 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 "majesty-holiness" of God, and is referred to in such passages as Ex. 15:11; I Sam. 2:2; Isa. 57:15; Hos. 11:9. It is this holiness of God which Otto, in his important work on *Das Heilige*, [Eng. tr. *The Idea of the Holy*.] regards as that which is most essential in God, and which he designates as "the *numinous*." He regards it as part of the non-rational in God, which cannot be

thought of conceptually, and which includes such ideas as “absolute unapproachability” and “absolute overpoweringness” or “aweful majesty.” It awakens in man a sense of absolute nothingness, a “creature-consciousness” or “creature-feeling,” leading to absolute self-abasement.

But the holiness of God also has a specifically ethical aspect in Scripture, and it is with this aspect of it that we are more directly concerned in this connection. The ethical idea of the divine holiness may not be dissociated from the idea of God’s majesty-holiness. The former developed out of the latter. The fundamental idea of the ethical holiness of God is also that of separation, but in this case it is a separation from moral evil or sin. In virtue of His holiness God can have no communion with sin, Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13. Used in this sense, the word “holiness” points to God’s majestic purity, or ethical majesty. But the idea of ethical holiness is not merely negative (separation from sin); it also has a positive content, namely, that of moral excellence, or ethical perfection. If man reacts to God’s majestic-holiness with a feeling of utter insignificance and awe, his reaction to the ethical holiness reveals itself in a sense of impurity, a consciousness of sin, Isa. 6:5. Otto also recognises this element in the holiness of God, though he stresses the other, and says of the response to it: “Mere awe, mere need of shelter from the ‘tremendum’, has here been elevated to the feeling that man in his ‘profaneness’ is not *worthy* to stand in the presence of the Holy One, and that his entire personal unworthiness might defile even holiness itself.” [*The Idea of the Holy*, p. 56.] This ethical holiness of God may be defined as *that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in his moral creatures.*

b. *Its manifestation.* The holiness of God is revealed in the moral law, implanted in man’s heart, and speaking through the conscience, and more particularly in God’s special revelation. It stood out prominently in the law given to Israel. That law in all its aspects was calculated to impress upon Israel the idea of the holiness of God, and to urge upon the people the necessity of leading a holy life. This was the purpose served by such symbols and types as the holy nation, the holy land, the holy city, the holy place, and the holy priesthood. Moreover, it was revealed in the manner in which God rewarded the keeping of the law, and visited transgressors with dire punishments. The highest revelation of it was given in Jesus Christ, who is called “the Holy and Righteous One,” Acts 3:14. He reflected in His life the perfect holiness of God. Finally, the holiness of God is also revealed in the Church as the body of Christ. It is a striking fact, to which attention is often called, that holiness is ascribed to God with far greater frequency in the Old Testament than in the New, though it is done occasionally in the New Testament, John 17:11; 1 Pet. 1:16; Rev. 4:8; 6:10. This is probably due to the fact that the New Testament appropriates the term more particularly to qualify the third Person of the Holy Trinity as the One whose special task it is, in the economy of redemption, to communicate holiness to His people.

3. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. This attribute is closely related to the holiness of God. Shedd speaks of the justice of God as “a mode of His holiness”; and Strong calls it simply “transitive holiness.” However, these terms apply only to what is generally called the *relative*, in distinction from the *absolute*, justice of God.

a. *The fundamental idea of righteousness.* The fundamental idea of righteousness is that of strict adherence to the law. Among men it presupposes that there is a law to which they must conform. It is sometimes said that we cannot speak of righteousness in God, because there is no law to which He is subject. But though there is no law above God, there is certainly a law in the very nature of God, and this is the highest possible standard, by which all other laws are judged. A distinction is generally made between the absolute and the relative justice of God. The former is *that rectitude of the divine nature, in virtue of which God is infinitely righteous in Himself*, while the latter is *that perfection of God by which He maintains Himself over against every violation of His holiness, and shows in every respect that He is the Holy One*. It is to this righteousness that the term “justice” more particularly applies. Justice manifests itself especially in giving every man his due, in treating him according to his deserts. The inherent righteousness of God is naturally basic to the righteousness which He reveals in dealing with His creatures, but it is especially the latter, also called the justice of God, that calls for special consideration here. The Hebrew terms for “righteous” and “righteousness” are *tsaddik*, *tsedhek*, and *tsedhakah*, and the corresponding Greek terms, *dikaio*s and *dikaio*sune, all of which contain the idea of conformity to a standard. This perfection is repeatedly ascribed to God in Scripture, Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:8; Ps. 119:137; 145:17; Jer. 12:1; Lam. 1:18; Dan. 9:14; John 17:25; II Tim. 4:8; I John 2:29; 3:7; Rev. 16:5.

b. *Distinctions applied to the justice of God.* There is first of all a *rectoral justice* of God. This justice, as the very name implies, is the rectitude which God manifests as the Ruler of both the good and the evil. In virtue of it He has instituted a moral government in the world, and imposed a just law upon man, with promises of reward for the obedient, and threats of punishment for the transgressor. God stands out prominently in the Old Testament as the Lawgiver of Israel, Isa. 33:22, and of people in general, Jas. 4:12, and His laws are righteous laws, Deut. 4:8. The Bible refers to this rectoral work of God also in Ps. 99:4, and Rom. 1:32.

Closely connected with the rectoral is the *distributive justice* of God. This term usually serves to designate God’s rectitude in the execution of the law, and relates to the distribution of rewards and punishments, Isa. 3:10,11; Rom. 2:6; I Pet. 1:17. It is of two kinds: (1) *Remunerative justice*, which manifests itself in the distribution of rewards to both men and angels, Deut. 7:9,12,13; II Chron. 6:15; Ps. 58:11; Micah 7:20; Matt. 25:21,34; Rom. 2:7; Heb. 11:26. It is really an expression of the divine love, dealing out its bounties, not on the basis of strict merit, for the creature can establish no absolute merit before the Creator, but according to promise and agreement, Luke 17:10; I Cor. 4:7. God’s rewards are gracious and spring from a covenant relation which He has

established. (2) *Retributive justice*, which relates to the infliction of penalties. It is an expression of the divine wrath.

While in a sinless world there would be no place for its exercise, it necessarily holds a very prominent place in a world full of sin. On the whole the Bible stresses the reward of the righteous more than the punishment of the wicked; but even the latter is sufficiently prominent. Rom. 1:32; 2:9; 12:19; II Thess. 1:8, and many other passages. It should be noted that, while man does not merit the reward which he receives, he does merit the punishment which is meted out to him. Divine justice is originally and necessarily obliged to punish evil, but not to reward good, Luke 17:10; I Cor. 4:7; Job 41:11. Many deny the strict punitive justice of God and claim that God punishes the sinner to reform him, or to deter others from sin; but these positions are not tenable. The primary purpose of the punishment of sin is the maintenance of right and justice. Of course, it may incidentally serve, and may even, secondarily, be intended, to reform the sinner and to deter others from sin.

D. Attributes of Sovereignty.

GLOSS **Decretive will:** God's eternal purpose by which all things come to pass, distinguished from His revealed precepts and never frustrated by creaturely action.

The sovereignty of God is strongly emphasized in Scripture. He is represented as the Creator, and His will as the cause of all things. In virtue of His creative work heaven and earth and all that they contain belong to Him. He is clothed with absolute authority over the hosts of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. He upholds all things with His almighty power, and determines the ends which they are destined to serve. He rules as King in the most absolute sense of the word, and all things are dependent on Him and subservient to Him. There is a wealth of Scripture evidence for the sovereignty of God, but we limit our references here to a few of the most significant passages: Gen. 14:19; Ex. 18:11; Deut. 10:14,17; I Chron. 29:11,12; II Chron. 20:6; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 22:28; 47:2,3,7,8; Ps. 50:10-12; 95:3-5; 115:3; 135:5,6; 145:11-13; Jer. 27:5; Luke 1:53; Acts 17:24-26; Rev. 19:6. Two attributes call for discussion under this head, namely (1) the sovereign will of God, and (2) the sovereign power of God.

1. THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD.

a. *The will of God in general.* The Bible employs several words to denote the will of God, namely the Hebrew words *chaphets*, *tsebhu* and *ratson* and the Greek words *boule* and *thelema*. The importance of the divine will appears in many ways in Scripture. It is represented as the final cause of all things. Everything is derived from it; creation and preservation, Ps. 135:6; Jer. 18:6; Rev. 4:11, government, Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:35, election and reprobation, Rom. 9:15,16; Eph. 1:11, the sufferings of Christ, Luke 22:42; Acts 2:23, regeneration, Jas. 1:18, sanctification, Phil. 2:13,

the sufferings of believers, I Pet. 3:17, man's life and destiny, Acts 18:21; Rom. 15:32; Jas. 4:15, and even the smallest things of life, Matt. 10:29. Hence Christian theology has always recognised the will of God as the ultimate cause of all things, though philosophy has sometimes shown an inclination to seek a deeper cause in the very Being of the Absolute. However, the attempt to ground everything in the very Being of God generally results in Pantheism.

The word "will" as applied to God does not always have the same connotation in Scripture. It may denote (1) the whole moral nature of God, including such attributes as love, holiness, righteousness, etc.; (2) the faculty of self-determination, i.e. the power to determine self to a course of action or to form a plan; (3) the product of this activity, that is, the predetermined plan or purpose; (4) the power to execute this plan and to realise this purpose (the will in action or omnipotence); and (5) the rule of life laid down for rational creatures. It is primarily the will of God as the faculty of self-determination with which we are concerned at present. It may be defined as *that perfection of His Being whereby He, in a most simple act, goes out towards Himself as the highest good (i.e. delights in Himself as such) and towards His creatures for His own name's sake, and is thus the ground of their being and continued existence*. With reference to the universe and all the creatures which it contains this naturally includes the idea of causation.

b. *Distinctions applied to the will of God*. Several distinctions have been applied to the will of God. Some of these found little favour in Reformed theology, such as the distinction between an *antecedent* and a *consequent* will of God, and that between an *absolute* and a *conditional* will. These distinctions were not only liable to misunderstanding, but were actually interpreted in objectionable ways. Others, however, were found useful, and were therefore more generally accepted. They may be stated as follows: (1) *The decretive and the preceptive will of God*. The former is that will of God by which He purposes or decrees whatever shall come to pass, whether He wills to accomplish it effectively (causatively), or to permit it to occur through the unrestrained agency of His rational creatures. The latter is the rule of life which God has laid down for His moral creatures, indicating the duties which He enjoins upon them. The former is always accomplished, while the latter is often disobeyed. (2) *The will of eudokia and the will of euestia*. This division was made, not so much in connection with the purpose to do, as with respect to the pleasure in doing, or the desire to see something done. It corresponds with the preceding, however, in the fact that the will of *eudokia*, like that of the decree, comprises what shall certainly be accomplished, while the will of *euestia*, like that of the precept, embraces simply what God is pleased to have His creatures do.

The word *eudokia* should not mislead us to think that the will of *eudokia* has reference only to good, and not to evil, cf. Matt. 11:26. It is hardly correct to say that the element of complacency or delight is always present in it. (3) *The will of the beneplacitum and the will of the signum*. The former again denotes the will of God as embodied in His hidden counsel, until He makes it known

by some revelation, or by the event itself. Any will that is so revealed becomes a *signum*. This distinction is meant to correspond to that between the decretive and the preceptive will of God, but can hardly be said to do this. The good pleasure of God also finds expression in His preceptive will; and the decretive will sometimes also comes to our knowledge by a signum. (4) *The secret and the revealed will of God*. This is the most common distinction. The former is the will of God's decree, which is largely hidden in God, while the latter is the will of the precept, which is revealed in the law and in the gospel. The distinction is based on Deut. 29:29. The secret will of God is mentioned in Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:17,25,32,35; Rom. 9:18,19; 11:33,34; Eph. 1:5,9,11; and His revealed will, in Matt. 7:21; 12:50; John 4:34; 7:17; Rom. 12:2. The latter is accessible to all and is not far from us, Deut. 30:14; Rom. 10:8. The secret will of God pertains to all things which He wills either to effect or to permit, and which are therefore absolutely fixed. The revealed will prescribes the duties of man, and represents the way in which he can enjoy the blessings of God.

c. *The freedom of God's will*. The question is frequently debated whether God, in the exercise of His will, acts necessarily or freely. The answer to this question requires careful discrimination. Just as there is a *scientia necessaria* and a *scientia libera*, there is also a *voluntas necessaria* (necessary will) and a *voluntas libera* (free will) in God. God Himself is the object of the former. He necessarily wills Himself, His holy nature, and the personal distinctions in the Godhead. This means that He necessarily loves Himself and takes delight in the contemplation of His own perfections. Yet He is under no compulsion, but acts according to the law of His Being; and this, while necessary, is also the highest freedom. It is quite evident that the idea of causation is absent here, and that the thought of complacency or self-approval is in the foreground. God's creatures, however, are the objects of His *voluntas libera*. God determines *voluntarily* what and whom He will create, and the times, places, and circumstances, of their lives. He marks out the path of all His rational creatures, determines their destiny, and uses them for His purposes. And though He endows them with freedom, yet His will controls their actions. The Bible speaks of this freedom of God's will in the most absolute terms, Job 11:10; 33:13; Ps. 115:3; Prov. 21:1; Isa.

10:15; 29:16; 45:9; Matt. 20:15; Rom. 9:15-18,20,21; I Cor. 12:11; Rev. 4:11. The Church always defended this freedom, but also emphasized the fact that it may not be regarded as absolute indifference. Duns Scotus applied the idea of a will in no sense determined to God; but this idea of a blind will, acting with perfect indifference, was rejected by the Church. The freedom of God is not pure indifference, but rational self-determination. God has reasons for willing as He does, which induce Him to choose one end rather than another, and one set of means to accomplish one end in preference to others. There is in each case a prevailing motive, which makes the end chosen and the means selected the most pleasing to Him, though we may not be able to determine what this motive is. In general it may be said that God cannot will anything that is contrary to His nature, to His wisdom or love, to His righteousness or holiness. Dr. Bavinck points out that we can seldom discern why God willed one thing rather than another, and that it is

not possible nor even permissible for us to look for some deeper ground of things than the will of God, because all such attempts result in seeking a ground for the creature in the very Being of God, in robbing it of its contingent character, and in making it necessary, eternal, divine.[*Geref. Dogm.* II, p. 241.]

d. *God's will in relation to sin.* The doctrine of the will of God often gives rise to serious questions. Problems arise here which have never yet been solved and which are probably incapable of solution by man.

(1) It is said that if the decretive will of God also determined the entrance of sin into the world, God thereby becomes the author of sin and really wills something that is contrary to His moral perfections. Arminians, to escape the difficulty, make the will of God to permit sin dependent on His foreknowledge of the course which man would choose. Reformed theologians, while maintaining on the basis of such passages as Acts 2:23; 3:8; etc., that God's decretive will also includes the sinful deeds of man, are always careful to point out that this must be conceived in such a way that God does not become the author of sin. They frankly admit that they cannot solve the difficulty, but at the same time make some valuable distinctions that prove helpful. Most of them insist on it that God's will with respect to sin is simply a will to permit sin and not a will to effectuate it, as He does the moral good. This terminology is certainly permissible, provided it is understood correctly. It should be borne in mind that God's will to permit sin carries certainty with it. Others call attention to the fact that, while the terms "will" or "to will" may include the idea of complacency or delight, they sometimes point to a simple determination of the will; and that therefore the will of God to permit sin need not imply that He takes delight or pleasure in sin.

(2) Again, it is said that the decretive and preceptive will of God are often contradictory. His decretive will includes many things which He forbids in His preceptive will, and excludes many things which He commands in His preceptive will, cf. Gen. 22; Ex. 4:21-23; II Kings 20:1-7; Acts 2:23. Yet it is of great importance to maintain both the decretive and the preceptive will, but with the definite understanding that, while they appear to us as distinct, they are yet fundamentally one in God. Though a perfectly satisfactory solution of the difficulty is out of the question for the present, it is possible to make some approaches to a solution. When we speak of the decretive and the preceptive will of God, we use the word "will" in two different senses. By the former God has determined what He will do or what shall come to pass; in the latter He reveals to us what we are in duty bound to do.[Cf.

Bavinck, *Geref. Dogm.* II, pp. 246 ff.; Dabney, *Syst. and Polem. Theol.*, p. 162] At the same time we should remember that the moral law, the rule of our life, is also in a sense the embodiment of the will of God. It is an expression of His holy nature and of what this naturally requires of all moral creatures. Hence another remark must be added to the preceding. The decretive and preceptive will of God do not conflict in the sense that in the former He does, and according to the latter He

does not, take pleasure in sin; nor in the sense that according to the former He does not, and according to the latter He does, will the salvation of every individual *with a positive volition*. Even according to the decretive will God takes no pleasure in sin; and even according to the preceptive will He does not will the salvation of every individual *with a positive volition*.

2. THE SOVEREIGN POWER OF GOD. The sovereignty of God finds expression, not only in the divine will, but also in the omnipotence of God or the power to execute His will. Power in God may be called the effective energy of His nature, or *that perfection of His Being by which He is the absolute and highest causality*. It is customary to distinguish between a *potentia Dei absoluta* (absolute power of God) and a *potentia Dei ordinata* (ordered power of God). However, Reformed theology rejects this distinction in the sense in which it was understood by the Scholastics, who claimed that God by virtue of His absolute power could effect contradictions, and could even sin and annihilate Himself. At the same time it adopts the distinction as expressing a real truth, though it does not always represent it in the same way. According to Hodge and Shedd absolute power is the divine efficiency, as exercised without the intervention of second causes; while ordinate power is the efficiency of God, as exercised by the ordered operation of second causes.[Shedd, *Dogm. Theol.* I, pp. 361f., Hodge, *Syst. Theol.* 1, pp. 410f.] The more general view is stated by Charnock as follows: "Absolute, is that power whereby God is able to do that which He will not do, but is possible to be done; ordinate, is that power whereby God doth that which He hath decreed to do, that is, which He hath ordained or appointed to be exercised; which are not distinct powers, but one and the same power. His ordinate power is a part of His absolute; for if He had not power to do everything that He could will, He might not have the power to do everything that He doth will."[*Existence and Attributes of God* II, p. 12. Cf. also Bavinck, *Geref. Dogm.* II, p. 252: Kuyper, *Dict.*

Dogm., *De Deo* I, pp. 412f.] The *potentia ordinata* can be defined as *that perfection of God whereby He, through the mere exercise of His will, can realise whatsoever is present in His will or counsel*. The power of God in actual exercise limits itself to that which is comprehended in His eternal decree. But the actual exercise of God's power does not represent its limits. God could do more than that, if He were so minded. In that sense we can speak of the *potentia absoluta*, or absolute power, of God. This position must be maintained over against those who, like Schleiermacher and Strauss, hold that God's power is limited to that which He actually accomplishes. But in our assertion of the absolute power of God it is necessary to guard against misconceptions. The Bible teaches us on the one hand that the power of God extends beyond that which is actually realised, Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:27; Zech. 8:6; Matt. 3:9; 26:53. We cannot say, therefore, that what God does not bring to realization, is not possible for Him. But on the other hand it also indicates that there are many things which God cannot do. He can neither lie, sin, change, nor deny Himself, Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18; Jas. 1:13,17. There is no absolute power in Him that is divorced from His perfections, and in virtue of which He can do

all kinds of things which are inherently contradictory. The idea of God's omnipotence is expressed in the name '*El-Shaddai*'; and the Bible speaks of it in no uncertain terms, Job 9:12; Ps. 115:3; Jer. 32:17; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Rom. 1:20; Eph. 1:19. God manifests His power in creation, Rom. 4:17; Isa. 44:24; in the works of providence, Heb. 1:3, and in the redemption of sinners, I Cor. 1:24; Rom. 1:16.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY. In what different senses can we speak of the foreknowledge of God? How do the Arminians conceive of this foreknowledge? What objections are there to the Jesuit idea of a *scientia media*? How must we judge of the modern emphasis on the love of God as the central and all-determining attribute of God? What is Otto's conception of "the Holy" in God? What objection is there to the position that the punishments of God simply serve to reform the sinner, or to deter others from sin? What is the Socinian and the Grotian conception of retributive justice in God? Is it correct to say that God can do everything in virtue of His omnipotence?

VIII. The Holy Trinity

The one God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: three distinct persons sharing the same divine essence.

A. The Doctrine of the Trinity in History.

GLOSS **Consubstantial:** of the same divine essence; the Son and Holy Spirit are fully God with the Father, equal in glory, power, and eternity.

The doctrine of the Trinity has always bristled with difficulties, and therefore it is no wonder that the Church in its attempt to formulate it was repeatedly tempted to rationalize it and to give a construction of it which failed to do justice to the Scriptural data.

1. THE PRE-REFORMATION PERIOD. The Jews of Jesus' days strongly emphasized the unity of God, and this emphasis was carried over into the Christian Church. The result was that some ruled out the personal distinctions in the Godhead altogether, and that others failed to do full justice to the essential deity of the second and third persons of the Holy Trinity. Tertullian was the first to use the term "Trinity" and to formulate the doctrine, but his formulation was deficient, since it involved an unwarranted subordination of the Son to the Father. Origen went even farther in this direction by teaching explicitly that the Son is subordinate to the Father *in respect to essence*, and that the Holy Spirit is subordinate even to the Son. He detracted from the essential deity of these two persons in the Godhead, and furnished a steppingstone to the Arians, who denied the deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit by representing the Son as the first creature of the Father, and the Holy Spirit as the first creature of the Son. Thus the consubstantiality of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father was sacrificed, in order to preserve the unity of God; and the three persons of the Godhead were made to differ in rank. The Arians still retained a semblance of the

doctrine of three persons in the Godhead, but this was sacrificed entirely by Monarchianism, partly in the interest of the unity of God and partly to maintain the deity of the Son.

Dynamic Monarchianism saw in Jesus but a man and in the Holy Spirit a divine influence, while Modalistic Monarchianism regarded the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, merely as three modes of manifestation successively assumed by the Godhead. On the other hand there were also some who lost sight of the unity of God to such an extent that they landed in Tritheism. Some of the later Monophysites, such as John Ascunages and John Philoponus, fell into this error. During the Middle Ages the Nominalist, Roscelinus, was accused of the same error. The Church began to formulate its doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century. The Council of Nicea declared the Son to be co-essential with the Father (325 A.D.), while the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) asserted the deity of the Holy Spirit, though not with the same precision. As to the interrelation of the three it was officially professed that the Son is generated by the Father, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. In the East the doctrine of the Trinity found its fullest statement in the work of John of Damascus, and in the West, in Augustine's great work *De Trinitate*. The former still retains an element of subordination, which is entirely eliminated by the latter.

2. THE POST-REFORMATION PERIOD. We have no further development of the doctrine of the Trinity, but only encounter repeatedly some of the earlier erroneous constructions of it after the Reformation. The Arminians, Episcopius, Curcellæus, and Limborgh, revived the doctrine of subordination, chiefly again, so it seems, to maintain the unity of the Godhead. They ascribed to the Father a certain pre-eminence over the other persons, *in order, dignity, and power*. A somewhat similar position was taken by Samuel Clarke in England and by the Lutheran theologian, Kahnis. Others followed the way pointed out by Sabellius by teaching a species of Modalism, as, for instance, Emanuel Swedenborg, who held that the eternal God-man became flesh in the Son, and operated through the Holy Spirit; Hegel, who speaks of the Father as God in Himself, of the Son as God objectifying Himself, and of the Holy Spirit as God returning unto Himself; and Schleiermacher, who regards the three persons simply as three aspects of God: the Father is God as the underlying unity of all things, the Son is God as coming to conscious personality in man, and the Holy Spirit is God as living in the Church. The Socinians of the days of the Reformation moved along Arian lines, but even went beyond Arius, by making Christ merely a man and the Holy Spirit but a power or influence. They were the forerunners of the Unitarians and also of the liberal theologians who speak of Jesus as a divine teacher, and identify the Holy Spirit with the immanent God.

Finally, there were also some who, since they regarded the statement of the doctrine of an ontological Trinity as unintelligible, wanted to stop short of it and rest satisfied with the doctrine of an economic Trinity, a Trinity as revealed in the work of redemption and in human experience,

as Moses Stuart, W. L. Alexander, and W. A. Brown. For a considerable time interest in the doctrine of the Trinity waned, and theological discussion centered more particularly on the personality of God. Brunner and Barth have again called attention to its importance. The latter places it very much in the foreground, discussing it in connection with the doctrine of revelation, and devotes 220 pages of his *Dogmatics* to it. Materially, he derives the doctrine from Scripture, but, formally and logically, he finds that it is involved in the simple sentence, "God speaks." He is Revealer (Father), Revelation (Son) and Revealedness (Holy Spirit). He reveals Himself, He is the Revelation, and He is also the content of the Revelation. God and His revelation are identified. He remains God also in His revelation, absolutely free and sovereign. This view of Barth is not a species of Sabellianism, for he recognises three persons in the Godhead. Moreover, he does not allow for any subordination. Says he: "Thus, to the same God who in unimpaired unity is Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness, is also ascribed in unimpaired variety in Himself precisely this threefold mode of being." [*The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 344.]

B. God as Trinity in Unity.

GLOSS Trinity: one undivided divine essence subsisting eternally in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, neither confounded nor divided.

The word "Trinity" is not quite as expressive as the Holland word "Drieenheid," for it may simply denote the state of being three, without any implication as to the unity of the three. It is generally understood, however, that, as a technical term in theology, it includes that idea. It goes without saying that, when we speak of the Trinity of God, we refer to a trinity in unity, and to a unity that is trinal.

1. THE PERSONALITY OF GOD AND THE TRINITY. As stated in the preceding, the communicable attributes of God stress His personality, since they reveal Him as a rational and moral Being. His life stands out clearly before us in Scripture as a personal life; and it is, of course, of the greatest importance to maintain the personality of God, for without it there can be no religion in the real sense of the word: no prayer, no personal communion, no trustful reliance and no confident hope. Since man is created in the image of God, we learn to understand something of the personal life of God from the contemplation of personality as we know it in man. We should be careful, however, not to set up man's personality as a standard by which the personality of God must be measured. The original form of personality is not in man but in God; His is archetypal, while man's is ectypal. The latter is not identical with the former, but does contain faint traces of similarity with it. We should not say that man is personal, while God is super-personal (a very unfortunate term), for what is super-personal is not personal; but rather, that what appears as imperfect in man exists in infinite perfection in God. The one outstanding difference between the two is that man is uni-personal, while God is tri-personal. And this tri-personal existence is a

necessity in the Divine Being, and not in any sense the result of a choice of God. He could not exist in any other than the tri-personal form. This has been argued in various ways.

It is very common to argue it from the idea of personality itself. Shedd bases his argument on the *general* self-consciousness of the triune God, as distinguished from the particular individual self-consciousness of each one of the Persons in the Godhead, for in self-consciousness the subject must know itself as an object, and also perceive that it does. This is possible in God because of His trinal existence. He says that God could not be self-contemplating, self-cognitive, and self-communing, if He were not trinal in His constitution.[*Dogm. Theol.*, I, pp. 393 f., 251 ff., 178ff.] Bartlett presents in an interesting way a variety of considerations to prove that God is *necessarily* tri-personal.[*The Triune God, Part Two.*] The argument from personality, to prove at least a plurality in God, can be put in some such form as this: Among men the ego awakens to consciousness only by contact with the non-ego. Personality does not develop nor exist in isolation, but only in association with other persons. Hence it is not possible to conceive of personality in God apart from an association of *equal* persons in Him. His contact with His creatures would not account for His personality any more than man's contact with the animals would explain his personality. In virtue of the tri-personal existence of God there is an infinite fulness of divine life in Him. Paul speaks of this *pleroma* (fulness) of the Godhead in Eph. 3:19 and Col. 1:9; 2:9. In view of the fact that there are three persons in God, it is better to say that God is personal than to speak of Him as a Person.

2. SCRIPTURAL PROOF FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY. The doctrine of the Trinity is very decidedly a doctrine of revelation. It is true that human reason may suggest some thoughts to substantiate the doctrine, and that men have sometimes on purely philosophical grounds abandoned the idea of a bare unity in God, and introduced the idea of living movement and self-distinction. And it is also true that Christian experience would seem to demand some such construction of the doctrine of God. At the same time it is a doctrine which we would not have known, nor have been able to maintain with any degree of confidence, on the basis of experience alone, and which is brought to our knowledge only by God's special self-revelation. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that we gather the Scriptural proofs for it.

a. *Old Testament proofs.* Some of the early Church Fathers and even some later theologians, disregarding the progressive character of God's revelation, gave the impression that the doctrine of the Trinity was completely revealed in the Old Testament. On the other hand Socinians and Arminians were of the opinion that it was not found there at all. Both were mistaken. The Old Testament does not contain a full revelation of the trinitarian existence of God, but does contain several indications of it. And this is exactly what might be expected. The Bible never deals with the doctrine of the Trinity as an abstract truth, but reveals the trinitarian life in its various relations as a living reality, to a certain extent in connection with the works of creation and providence, but

particularly in relation to the work of redemption. Its most fundamental revelation is a revelation given in facts rather than in words. And this revelation increases in clarity in the measure in which the redemptive work of God is more clearly revealed, as in the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And the more the glorious reality of the Trinity stands out in the facts of history, the clearer the statements of the doctrine become. The fuller revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament is due to the fact that the Word became flesh, and that the Holy Spirit took up His abode in the Church.

Proof for the Trinity has sometimes been found in the distinction of Jehovah and Elohim, and also in the plural Elohim, but the former is entirely unwarranted, and the latter is, to say the least, very dubious, though Rottenberg still maintains it in his work on *De Triniteit in Israels Godsbegrip*. [pp. 19ff.] It is far more plausible that the passages in which God speaks of Himself in the plural, Gen. 1:26; 11:7, contain an indication of personal distinctions in God, though even these do not point to a trinity but only to a plurality of persons. Still clearer indications of such personal distinctions are found in those passages which refer to the Angel of Jehovah, who is on the one hand identified with Jehovah, and on the other hand distinguished from Him, Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1-21; 19:1-28; Mal. 3:1; and also in passages in which the Word or Wisdom of God is personified, Ps. 33:4, 6; Prov. 8:12-31. In some cases more than one person is mentioned, Ps. 33:6; 45:6, 7 (comp. Heb. 1:8, 9), and in others God is the speaker, and mentions both the Messiah and the Spirit, or the Messiah is the speaker who mentions both God and the Spirit, Isa. 48:16; 61:1; 63:9, 10. Thus the Old Testament contains a clear anticipation of the fuller revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament.

b. *New Testament proofs.* The New Testament carries with it a clearer revelation of the distinctions in the Godhead. If in the Old Testament Jehovah is represented as the Redeemer and Saviour of His people, Job. 19:25; Ps. 19:14; 78:35; 106:21; Isa. 41:14; 43:3, 11, 14; 47:4; 49:7, 26; 60:16; Jer. 14:3; 50:14; Hos. 13:3, in the New Testament the Son of God clearly stands out in that capacity, Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:76-79; 2:17; John 4:42; Acts 5:3; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Phil. 3:30; Tit. 2:13, 14. And if in the Old Testament it is Jehovah that dwells among Israel and in the hearts of those that fear Him, Ps. 74:2; 135:21; Isa. 8:18; 57:15; Ezek. 43:7-9; Joel 3:17, 21; Zech. 2:10, 11, in the New Testament it is the Holy Spirit that dwells in the Church, Acts 2:4; Rom. 8:9, 11; I Cor. 3:16; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 2:22; Jas. 4:5. The New Testament offers the clear revelation of God sending His Son into the world, John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb.

1:6; I John 4:9; and of both the Father and the Son, sending the Spirit, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Gal. 4:6. We find the Father addressing the Son, Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22, the Son communing with the Father, Matt. 11:25, 26; 26:39; John 11:41; 12:27, 28, and the Holy Spirit praying to God in the hearts of believers, Rom. 8:26. Thus the separate persons of the Trinity are made to stand out clearly before our minds. At the baptism of the Son the Father speaks from heaven, and the Holy

Spirit descends in the form of a dove, Matt. 3:16,17. In the great commission Jesus mentions the three persons: “. . . baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Matt. 28:19. They are also named alongside of each other in I Cor. 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:14; and I Peter 1:2. The only passage speaking of tri-unity is I John 5:7 (Auth. Ver.), but this is of doubtful genuineness, and is therefore eliminated from the latest critical editions of the New Testament.

3. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY. The doctrine of the Trinity can best be discussed briefly in connection with various propositions, which constitute an epitome of the faith of the Church on this point.

a. *There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence (ousia, essentia).* God is one in His essential being or constitutional nature. Some of the early Church Fathers used the term “*substantia*” as synonymous with “*essentia*,” but later writers avoided this use of it in view of the fact that in the Latin Church “*substantia*” was used as a rendering of “*hypostasis*” as well as of “*ousia*”, and was therefore ambiguous. At present the two terms “*substance*” and “*essence*” are often used interchangeably. There is no objection to this, provided we bear in mind that they have slightly different connotations. Shedd distinguishes them as follows: “*Essence* is from *esse*, to be, and denotes energetic being. *Substance* is from *substare*, and denotes the latent possibility of being. . . . The term *essence* describes God as a sum-total of infinite perfections; the term *substance* describes Him as the underlying ground of infinite activities. The first is, comparatively, an active word; the last, a passive. The first is, comparatively, a spiritual, the last a material term. We speak of material substance rather than of material essence.”[*Dogm. Theol.*, I, p. 271.] Since the unity of God was already discussed in the preceding, it is not necessary to dwell on it in detail in the present connection. This proposition respecting the unity of God is based on such passages as Deut. 6:4; Jas. 2:19, on the self-existence and immutability of God, and on the fact that He is identified with His perfections as when He is called life, light, truth, righteousness, and so on.

b. *In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.* This is proved by the various passages referred to as substantiating the doctrine of the Trinity. To denote these distinctions in the Godhead, Greek writers generally employed the term *hypostasis*, while Latin authors used the term *persona*, and sometimes *substantia*. Because the former was apt to be misleading and the latter was ambiguous, the Schoolmen coined the word *subsistentia*. The variety of the terms used points to the fact that their inadequacy was always felt. It is generally admitted that the word “*person*” is but an imperfect expression of the idea. In common parlance it denotes a separate rational and moral individual, possessed of self-consciousness, and conscious of his identity amid all changes. Experience teaches that where you have a person, you also have a distinct individual essence.

Every person is a distinct and separate individual, in whom human nature is individualized. But in God there are no three individuals alongside of, and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically, one. Consequently many preferred to speak of three hypostases in God, three different modes, not of manifestation, as Sabellius taught, *but of existence or subsistence*. Thus Calvin says: "By person, then, I mean a subsistence in the Divine essence. – a subsistence which, while related to the other two, is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties." [*Inst.* I, XIII, 6] This is perfectly permissible and may ward off misunderstanding, but should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that the self-distinctions in the Divine Being imply an "I" and "Thou" and "He," in the Being of God, which assume personal relations to one another. Matt. 3:16; 4:1; John 1:18; 3:16; 5:20-22; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15.

c. *The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.* This means that the divine essence is not divided among the three persons, but is wholly with all its perfection in each one of the persons, so that they have a numerical unity of essence. The divine nature is distinguished from the human nature in that it can subsist *wholly* and *indivisibly* in more than one person. While three persons among men have only a *specific* unity of nature or essence, that is, share in the same kind of nature or essence, the persons in the Godhead have a *numerical* unity of essence, that is, possess the identical essence. Human nature or essence may be regarded as a species, of which each man has an individual part, so that there is a *specific* (from species) unity; but the divine nature is indivisible and therefore identical in the persons of the Godhead. It is numerically one and the same, and therefore the unity of the essence in the persons is a numerical unity. From this it follows that the divine essence is not an independent existence alongside of the three persons. It has no existence outside of and apart from the three persons.

If it did, there would be no true unity, but a division that would lead into tetratheism. The personal distinction is one within the divine essence. This has, as it is usually termed, three modes of subsistence. Another conclusion which follows from the preceding, is that there can be no subordination *as to essential being* of the one person of the Godhead to the other, and therefore no difference in personal dignity. This must be maintained over against the subordinationism of Origen and other early Church Fathers, and the Arminians, and of Clarke and other Anglican theologians. The only subordination of which we can speak, is a subordination in respect to order and relationship. It is especially when we reflect on the relation of the three persons to the divine essence that all analogies fail us and we become deeply conscious of the fact that the Trinity is a mystery far beyond our comprehension. It is the incomprehensible glory of the Godhead. Just as human nature is too rich and too full to be embodied in a single individual, and comes to its adequate expression only in humanity as a whole so the divine Being unfolds itself in its fulness only in its three fold subsistence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

d. *The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.* There is a certain order in the ontological Trinity. In personal subsistence the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. It need hardly be said that this order does not pertain to any priority of time or of essential dignity, but only to the logical order of derivation. The Father is neither begotten by, nor proceeds from any other person; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son from all eternity. Generation and procession take place within the Divine Being, and imply a certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence, but no subordination as far as the possession of the divine essence is concerned. This ontological Trinity and its inherent order is the metaphysical basis of the economical Trinity. It is but natural, therefore, that the order existing in the essential Trinity should be reflected in the *opera ad extra* that are more particularly ascribed to each one of the persons. Scripture clearly indicates this order in the so-called *praepositiones distinctionales*, *ek*, *dia*, and *en*, which are used in expressing the idea that all things are out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

e. *There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.* These are also called *opera ad intra*, because they are works within the Divine Being, which do not terminate on the creature. They are personal operations, which are not performed by the three persons jointly and which are incommunicable. Generation is an act of the Father only; filiation belongs to the Son exclusively; and procession can only be ascribed to the Holy Spirit. As *opera ad intra* these works are distinguished from the *opera ad extra*, or those activities and effects by which the Trinity is manifested outwardly. These are never works of one person exclusively, but always works of the Divine Being as a whole. At the same time it is true that in the economical order of God's works some of the *opera ad extra* are ascribed more particularly to one person, and some more especially to another. Though they are all works of the three persons jointly, creation is ascribed primarily to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. This order in the divine operations points back to the essential order in God and forms the basis for what is generally known as the economic Trinity.

f. *The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.* The Trinity is a mystery, not merely in the Biblical sense that it is a truth, which was formerly hidden but is now revealed; but in the sense that man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible. It is intelligible in some of its relations and modes of manifestation, but unintelligible in its essential nature. The many efforts that were made to explain the mystery were speculative rather than theological. They invariably resulted in the development of tritheistic or modalistic conceptions of God, in the denial of either the unity of the divine essence or the reality of the personal distinctions within the essence. The real difficulty lies in the relation in which the persons in the Godhead stand to the divine essence and to one another; and this is a difficulty which the Church cannot remove, but only try to reduce to its proper proportion by a proper definition of terms. It

has never tried to explain the mystery of the Trinity, but only sought to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in such a manner that the errors which endangered it were warded off.

4. VARIOUS ANALOGIES SUGGESTED TO SHED LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT. From the very earliest time of the Christian era attempts were made to shed light on the trinitarian Being of God, on the trinity in unity and the unity in trinity, by analogies drawn from several sources. While these are all defective, it cannot be denied that they were of some value in the trinitarian discussion. This applies particularly to those derived from the constitutional nature, or from the psychology, of man. In view of the fact that man was created in the image of God, it is but natural to assume that, if there are some traces of the trinitarian life in the creature, the clearest of these will be found in man.

a. Some of these illustrations or analogies were taken from inanimate nature or from plant life, as the water of the fountain, the creek, and the river, or of the rising mist, the cloud, and the rain, or in the form of rain, snow, and ice; and as the tree with its root, trunk, and branches. These and all similar illustrations are very defective. The idea of personality is, of course, entirely wanting; and while they do furnish examples of a common nature or substance, they are not examples of a common essence which is present, not merely in part, but in its entirety, in each of its constituent parts or forms.

b. Others of greater importance were drawn from the life of man, particularly from the constitution and the processes of the human mind. These were considered to be of special significance, because man is the image-bearer of God. To this class belong the psychological unity of the intellect, the affections, and the will (Augustine); the logical unity of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Hegel); and the metaphysical unity of subject, object, and subject-object (Olshausen, Shedd). In all of these we do have a certain trinity in unity, but no tri-personality in unity of substance.

c. Attention has also been called to the nature of love, which presupposes a subject and an object, and calls for the union of these two, so that, when love has its perfect work, three elements are included. But it is easy to see that this analogy is faulty, since it co-ordinates two persons and a relationship. It does not illustrate a tri-personality at all. Moreover, it only refers to a quality and not at all to a substance possessed in common by the subject and the object.

C. The Three Persons Considered Separately.

GLOSS Opera ad extra: the undivided outward works of the triune God in creation, providence, and redemption, though Scripture may fittingly appropriate them to one person.

1. THE FATHER OR THE FIRST PERSON IN THE TRINITY.

a. *The name "Father" as applied to God.* This name is not always used of God in the same sense in Scripture. (1) Sometimes it is applied to the Triune God as the origin of all created things, I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:15; Heb. 12:9; Jas. 1:17. While in these cases the name applies to the triune God, it does refer more particularly to the first person, to whom the work of creation is more especially ascribed in Scripture. (2) The name is also ascribed to the triune God to express the theocratic relation in which He stands to Israel as His Old Testament people, Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4; Mal. 1:6; 2:10; (3) In the New Testament the name is generally used to designate the triune God as the Father in an ethical sense of all His spiritual children, Matt. 5:45; 6:6-15; Rom. 8:16; I John 3:1. (4) In an entirely different sense, however, the name is applied to the first person of the Trinity in His relation to the second person, John 1:14,18; 5:17-26; 8:54; 14:12,13. The first person is the Father of the second in a metaphysical sense. This is the original fatherhood of God, of which all earthly fatherhood is but a faint reflection.

b. *The distinctive property of the Father.* The personal property of the Father is, negatively speaking, that He is not begotten or unbegotten, and positively speaking, the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit. It is true that spiration is also a work of the Son, but in Him it is not combined with generation. Strictly speaking, the only work that is peculiar to the Father exclusively is that of active generation.

c. *The opera ad extra ascribed more particularly to the Father.* All the *opera ad extra* of God are works of the triune God, but in some of these works the Father is evidently in the foreground, such as: (1) Designing the work of redemption, including election, of which the Son was Himself an object, Ps. 2:7-9; 40:6-9; Isa. 53:10; Matt. 12:32; Eph. 1:3-6. (2) The works of creation and providence, especially in their initial stages, I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 2:9. (3) The work of representing the Trinity in the Counsel of Redemption, as the holy and righteous Being, whose right was violated, Ps. 2:7-9; 40:6-9; John 6:37,38; 17:4-7.

2. THE SON OR THE SECOND PERSON IN THE TRINITY.

a. *The name "Son" as applied to the second person.* The second person in the Trinity is called "Son" or "Son of God" in more than one sense of the word. (1) *In a metaphysical sense.* This must be maintained over against Socinians and Unitarians, who reject the idea of a tri-personal Godhead, see in Jesus a mere man, and regard the name "Son of God" as applied to Him primarily as an honorary title conferred upon Him. It is quite evident that Jesus Christ is represented as the Son of God in Scripture, irrespective of His position and work as Mediator. (a) He is spoken of as the Son of God from a pre-incarnation standpoint, for instance in John 1:14,18; Gal. 4:4. (b) He is called the "only-begotten" Son of God or of the Father, a term that would not apply to Him, if He were the Son of God only in an official or in an ethical sense, John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; I John 4:9. Compare II Sam. 7:14; Job 2:1; Ps. 2:7; Luke 3:38; John 1:12. (c) In some passages it is abundantly evident from the context that the name is indicative of the deity of

Christ, John 5:18-25; Heb. 1. (d) While Jesus teaches His disciples to speak of God, and to address Him as "our Father," He Himself speaks of Him, and addresses Him, simply as "Father" or "my Father," and thereby shows that He was conscious of a unique relationship to the Father, Matt. 6:9; 7:21; John 20:17. (e) According to Matt.

11:27, Jesus as the Son of God claims a unique knowledge of God, a knowledge such as no one else can possess. (f) The Jews certainly understood Jesus to claim that He was the Son of God in a metaphysical sense, for they regarded the manner in which He spoke of Himself as the Son of God as blasphemy, Matt. 26:63; John 5:18; 10:36. — (2) *In an official or Messianic sense.* In some passages this meaning of the name is combined with the one previously mentioned. The following passages apply the name "Son of God" to Christ as Mediator, Matt. 8:29, 26:63 (where this meaning is combined with the other); 27:40; John 1:49; 11:27. This Messiah-Sonship is, of course, related to the original Sonship of Christ. It was only because He was the essential and eternal Son of God, that He could be called the Son of God as Messiah. Moreover, the Messiah-Sonship reflects the eternal Sonship of Christ. It is from the point of view of this Messiah-Sonship that God is even called the God of the Son, II Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3, and is sometimes mentioned as God in distinction from the Lord, John 17:3; I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5,6. — (3) *In a nativistic sense.* The name "Son of God" is given to Jesus also in view of the fact that He owed His birth to the paternity of God. He was begotten, according to His human nature, by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, and is in that sense the Son of God. This is clearly indicated in Luke 1:32,35, and may probably be inferred also from John 1:13.

b. *The personal subsistence of the Son.* The personal subsistence of the Son must be maintained over against all Modalists, who in one way or another deny the *personal* distinctions in the Godhead. The personality of the Son may be substantiated as follows: (1) The way in which the Bible speaks of the Father and the Son alongside of each other implies that the one is just as personal as the other, and is also indicative of a personal relationship existing between the two. (2) The use of the appellatives "only-begotten" and "firstborn" imply that the relation between the Father and the Son, while unique, can nevertheless be represented approximately as one of generation and birth. The name "firstborn" is found in Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:6, and emphasizes the fact of the eternal generation of the Son. It simply means that He was before all creation. (3) The distinctive use of the term "Logos" in Scripture points in the same direction. This term is applied to the Son, not in the first place to express His relation to the world (which is quite secondary), but to indicate the intimate relation in which He stands to the Father, the relation like that of a word to the speaker. In distinction from philosophy, the Bible represents the Logos as personal and identifies Him with the Son of God, John 1:1-14; I John 1:1-3. (4) The description of the Son as the image, or even as the very image of God in II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3. God clearly stands out in Scripture as a personal Being. If the Son of God is the very image of God, He too must be a person.

c. *The eternal generation of the Son.* The personal property of the Son is that He is eternally begotten of the Father (briefly called “filiation”), and shares with the Father in the spiration of the Spirit. The doctrine of the generation of the Son is suggested by the Biblical representation of the first and second persons of the Trinity as standing in the relation of Father and Son to each other. Not only do the names “Father” and “Son” suggest the generation of the latter by the former, but the Son is also repeatedly called “the only-begotten,” John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; Heb. 11:17; I John 4:9. Several particulars deserve emphasis in connection with the generation of the Son: (1) *It is a necessary act of God.* Origen, one of the very first to speak of the generation of the Son, regarded it as an act dependent on the Father’s will and therefore free. Others at various times expressed the same opinion. But it was clearly seen by Athanasius and others that a generation dependent on the optional will of the Father would make the existence of the Son contingent and thus rob Him of His deity. Then the Son would not be equal to and *homoousios* with the Father, for the Father exists necessarily, and cannot be conceived of as non-existent. The generation of the Son must be regarded as a necessary and perfectly natural act of God. This does not mean that it is not related to the Father’s will in any sense of the word. It is an act of the Father’s necessary will, which merely means that His concomitant will takes perfect delight in it. (2) *It is an eternal act of the Father.* This naturally follows from the preceding. If the generation of the Son is a *necessary* act of the Father, so that it is impossible to conceive of Him as not generating, it naturally shares in the eternity of the Father. This does not mean, however, that it is an act that was completed in the far distant past, but rather that it is a timeless act, the act of an eternal present, an act always continuing and yet ever completed. Its eternity follows not only from the eternity of God, but also from the divine immutability and from the true deity of the Son. In addition to this it can be inferred from all those passages of Scripture which teach either the pre-existence of the Son or His equality with the Father, Mic. 5:2; John 1:14,18; 3:16; 5:17,18,30,36; Acts 13:33; John 17:5; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3. The statement of Ps.

2:7, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee,” is generally quoted to prove the generation of the Son, but, according to some, with rather doubtful propriety, cf. Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5. They surmise that these words refer to the raising up of Jesus as Messianic King, and to the recognition of Him as Son of God in an official sense, and should probably be linked up with the promise found in II Sam. 7:14, just as they are in Heb. 1:5. (3) *It is a generation of the personal subsistence rather than of the divine essence of the Son.* Some have spoken as if the Father generated the essence of the Son, but this is equivalent to saying that He generated His own essence, for the essence of both the Father and the Son is exactly the same. It is better to say that the Father generates the personal subsistence of the Son, but thereby also communicates to Him the divine essence in its entirety. But in doing this we should guard against the idea that the Father first generated a second person, and then communicated the divine essence to this person, for that would lead to the conclusion that the Son was not generated out of the divine

essence, but created out of nothing. In the work of generation there was a communication of essence; it was one indivisible act. And in virtue of this communication the Son also has life in Himself. This is in agreement with the statement of Jesus, "For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself," John 5:26. (4) *It is a generation that must be conceived of as spiritual and divine.* In opposition to the Arians, who insisted that the generation of the Son necessarily implied separation or division in the divine Being, the Church Fathers stressed the fact that this generation must not be conceived in a physical and creaturely way, but should be regarded as spiritual and divine, excluding all idea of division or change. It brings *distinctio* and *distributio*, but no *diversitas* and *divisio* in the divine Being. (Bavinck) The most striking analogy of it is found in man's thinking and speaking, and the Bible itself seems to point to this, when it speaks of the Son as the Logos. (5) The following definition may be given of the generation of the Son: *It is that eternal and necessary act of the first person in the Trinity, whereby He, within the divine Being, is the ground of a second personal subsistence like His own, and puts this second person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation, or change.*

d. *The deity of the Son.* The deity of the Son was denied in the early Church by the Ebionites and the Alogi, and also by the dynamic Monarchians and the Arians. In the days of the Reformation the Socinians followed their example, and spoke of Jesus as a mere man. The same position is taken by Schleiermacher and Ritschl, by a host of liberal scholars, particularly in Germany, by the Unitarians, and by the Modernists and Humanists of the present day. This denial is possible only for those who disregard the teachings of Scripture, for the Bible contains an abundance of evidence for the deity of Christ.[This is very ably summed up in such works as Liddon's *The Divinity of Our Lord*, Warfield's *The Lord of Glory*, and Wm. C. Robinson's *Our Lord*.] We find that Scripture (1) *explicitly asserts the deity of the Son* in such passages as John 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Tit. 2:13; I John 5:20; (2) *applies divine names to Him*, Isa.

9:6; 40:3; Jer. 23:5,6; Joel 2:32 (comp. Acts 2:21); I Tim. 3:16; (3) *ascribes to Him divine attributes*, such as eternal existence, Isa. 9:6; John 1:1,2; Rev. 1:8; 22:13, omnipresence, Matt. 18:20; 28:20; John 3:13, omniscience, John 2:24,25; 21:17; Rev. 2:23, omnipotence. Isa. 9:6; Phil. 3:21; Rev. 1:8, immutability, Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8, and in general every attribute belonging to the Father, Col. 2:9; (4) *speaks of Him as doing divine works*, as creation, John 1:3,10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2,10, providence, Luke 10:22; John 3:35; 17:2; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3, the forgiveness of sins, Matt. 9:2-7; Mark 2:7-10; Col. 3:13, resurrection and judgment, Matt. 25:31,32; John 5:19-29; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Phil. 3:21; II Tim. 4:1, the final dissolution and renewal of all things, Heb. 1:10-12; Phil. 3:21; Rev. 21:5, and (5) *accords Him divine honour*, John 5:22,23; 14:1; I Cor. 15:19; II Cor. 13:13; Heb. 1:6; Matt. 28:19.

e. *The place of the Son in the economic Trinity.* It should be noted that the order of existence in the essential or ontological Trinity is reflected in the economic Trinity. The Son occupies the second place in the *opera ad extra*. If all things are *out of* the Father, they are *through* the Son, I Cor. 8:6. If the former is represented as the absolute cause of all things, the latter stands out clearly as the mediating cause. This applies in the natural sphere, where all things are created and maintained through the Son, John 1:3,10; Heb. 1:2,3. He is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, John 1:9. It applies also to the work of redemption. In the Counsel of Redemption He takes upon Himself to be Surety for His people, and to execute the Father's plan of redemption, Ps. 40:7,8. He works this out more particularly in His incarnation, sufferings, and death, Eph. 1:3-14. In connection with His function the attributes of wisdom and power, I Cor. 1:24; Heb. 1:3, and of mercy and grace, are especially ascribed to Him, II Cor. 13:13; Eph. 5:2,25.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT OR THE THIRD PERSON IN THE TRINITY.

a. *The name applied to the third person of the Trinity.* While we are told in John 4:24 that God is Spirit, the name is applied more particularly to the third person in the Trinity. The Hebrew term by which He is designated is *ruach*, and the Greek *pneuma*, both of which are, like the Latin *spiritus*, derived from roots which mean "to breathe." Hence they can also be rendered "breath," Gen. 2:7; 6:17; Ezek. 37:5, 6, or "wind," Gen. 8:1; I Kings 19:11; John 3:8. The Old Testament generally uses the term "spirit" without any qualification, or speaks of "the Spirit of God" or "the Spirit of the Lord," and employs the term "Holy Spirit" only in Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10,11, while in the New Testament this has become a far more common designation of the third person in the Trinity. It is a striking fact that, while the Old Testament repeatedly calls God "the Holy One of Israel," Ps. 71:22; 89:18; Isa. 10:20; 41:14; 43:3; 48:17, the New Testament seldom applies the adjective "holy" to God in general, but uses it frequently to characterize the Spirit. This is in all probability due to the fact that it was especially in the Spirit and His sanctifying work that God revealed Himself as the Holy One. It is the Holy Spirit that takes up His abode in the hearts of believers, that separates them unto God, and that cleanses them from sin.

b. *The personality of the Holy Spirit.* The terms "Spirit of God" or "Holy Spirit" do not suggest personality as much as the term "Son" does. Moreover, the person of the Holy Spirit did not appear in a clearly discernible personal form among men, as the person of the Son of God did. As a result the personality of the Holy Spirit was often called in question, and therefore deserves special attention. The personality of the Spirit was denied in the early Church by the Monarchians and the Pneumatomachians. In this denial they were followed by the Socinians in the days of the Reformation. Still later Schleiermacher, Ritschl, the Unitarians, present-day Modernists, and all modern Sabellians reject the personality of the Holy Spirit. It is often said in the present day that those passages which seem to imply the personality of the Holy Spirit simply contain personifications. But personifications are certainly rare in the prose writings of the New Testament

and can easily be recognised. Moreover, such an explanation clearly destroys the sense of some of these passages, e.g. John 14:26; 16:7-11; Rom. 8:26. Scripture proof for the personality of the Holy Spirit is quite sufficient: (1) *Designations that are proper to personality are given to Him.*

Though *pneuma* is neuter, yet the masculine pronoun *ekeinos* is used of the Spirit in John 16:14; and in Eph. 1:14 some of the best authorities have the masculine relative pronoun *hos*. Moreover, the name Parakletos is applied to Him, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, which cannot be translated by "comfort," or be regarded as the name of any abstract influence.

That a person is meant is indicated by the fact that the Holy Spirit as Comforter is placed in juxtaposition with Christ as the Comforter about to depart, to whom the same term is applied in I John 2:1. It is true that this term is followed by the neuters *ho* and *auto* in John 14:16-18, but this is due to the fact that *pneuma* intervenes. (2) *The characteristics of a person are ascribed to Him*, such as intelligence, John 14:26; 15:26; Rom. 8:16, will, Acts 16:7; I Cor. 12:11, and affections, Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30. Moreover, He performs acts proper to personality. He searches, speaks, testifies, commands, reveals, strives, creates, makes intercession, raises the dead, etc., Gen. 1:2; 6:3; Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8; Acts 8:29; 13:2; Rom. 8:11; I Cor. 2:10,11. What does all these things cannot be a mere power or influence, but must be a person. (3) *He is represented as standing in such relations to other persons as imply His own personality.* He is placed in juxtaposition with the apostles in Acts 15:28, with Christ in John 16:14, and with the Father and the Son in Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:13; I Pet. 1:1,2; Jude 20, 21. Sound exegesis requires that in these passages the Holy Spirit be regarded as a person. (4) *There are also passages in which the Holy Spirit is distinguished from His own power*, Luke 1:35; 4:14; Acts 10:38; Rom. 15:13; I Cor. 2:4. Such passages would become tautological, meaningless, and even absurd, if they were interpreted on the principle that the Holy Spirit is merely a power. This can be shown by substituting for the name "Holy Spirit" such a word as "power" or "influence."

c. *The relation of the Holy Spirit to the other persons in the trinity.* The early trinitarian controversies led to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit, as well as the Son, is of the same essence as the Father, and is therefore consubstantial with Him. And the long drawn dispute about the question, whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone or also from the Son, was finally settled by the Synod of Toledo in 589 by adding the word "Filioque" to the Latin version of the Constantinopolitan Creed: "*Credimus in Spiritum Sanctum qui a Patre Filioque procedit*" ("We believe in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son"). This procession of the Holy Spirit, briefly called spiration, is his personal property. Much of what was said respecting the generation of the Son also applies to the spiration of the Holy Spirit, and need not be repeated. The following points of distinction between the two may be noted, however: (1) Generation is the work of the Father only; spiration is the work of both the Father and the Son. (2) By generation the Son is enabled to take part in the work of spiration, but the Holy Spirit acquires no such power. (3) In logical order generation precedes spiration. It should be remembered, however, that all this

implies no essential subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Son. In spiration as well as in generation there is a communication of the whole of the divine essence, so that the Holy Spirit is on an equality with the Father and the Son. The doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son is based on John 15:26, and on the fact that the Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ and of the Son, Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6, and is sent by Christ into the world. Spiration may be defined as *that eternal and necessary act of the first and second persons in the Trinity whereby they, within the divine Being, become the ground of the personal subsistence of the Holy Spirit, and put the third person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation or change. The Holy Spirit stands in the closest possible relation to the other persons.* In virtue of His procession from the Father and the Son the Spirit is represented as standing in the closest possible relation to both of the other persons.

From I Cor. 2:10,11, we may infer, not that the Spirit is the same as the self-consciousness of God, but that He is as closely connected with God the Father as the soul of man is with man. In II Cor. 3:17, we read, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Here the Lord (Christ) is identified with the Spirit, not with respect to personality, but as to manner of working. In the same passage the Spirit is called "the Spirit of the Lord." The work for which the Holy Spirit was sent into the Church on the day of Pentecost was based on His unity with the Father and the Son. He came as the Parakletos to take the place of Christ and to do His work on earth, that is, to teach, proclaim, testify, bear witness, etc., as the Son had done. Now in the case of the Son this revelational work rested on His unity with the Father. Just so the work of the Spirit is based on His unity with the Father and the Son, John 16:14,15. Notice the words of Jesus in this passage: "He shall glorify me; for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that He taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you."

d. *The deity of the Holy Spirit.* The deity of the Holy Spirit may be established from Scripture by a line of proof quite similar to that employed in connection with the Son: (1) *Divine names are given to Him*, Ex. 17:7 (comp. Heb. 3:7-9); Acts 5:3,4; I Cor. 3:16; II Tim. 3:16 (comp. II Pet. 1:21). (2) *Divine perfections are ascribed to Him*, such as omnipresence, Ps. 139:7-10, omniscience, Isa. 40:13,14 (comp. Rom. 11:34); I Cor. 2:10,11, omnipotence, I Cor. 12:11; Rom. 15:19, and eternity, Heb. 9:14 (?). (3) *Divine works are performed by Him*, such as creation, Gen. 1:2; Job. 26:13; 33:4, providential renovation, Ps. 104:30, regeneration, John 3:5,6; Tit. 3:5, and the resurrection of the dead, Rom. 8:11. (4) *Divine honour is also paid to Him*, Matt. 28:19; Rom. 9:1; II Cor. 13:13.

e. *The work of the Holy Spirit in the divine economy.* There are certain works which are more particularly ascribed to the Holy Spirit, not only in the general economy of God, but also in the special economy of redemption. In general it may be said that it is the special task of the Holy Spirit to bring things to completion by acting immediately upon and in the creature. Just as He

Himself is the person who completes the Trinity, so His work is the completion of God's contact with His creatures and the consummation of the work of God in every sphere. It follows the work of the Son, just as the work of the Son follows that of the Father. It is important to bear this in mind, for if the work of the Holy Spirit is divorced from the objective work of the Son, false mysticism is bound to result. The work of the Holy Spirit includes the following in the natural sphere: (1) *The generation of life*. As being is out of the Father, and thought through the Son, so life is mediated by the Spirit, Gen. 1:3; Job. 26:13; Ps. 33:6 (?); Ps. 104:30. In that respect He puts the finishing touch to the work of creation. (2) *The general inspiration and qualification of men*. The Holy Spirit inspires and qualifies men for their official tasks, for work in science and art, etc., Ex. 28:3; 31:2,3,6; 35:35; I Sam. 11:6; 16:13,14.

Of even greater importance is the work of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of redemption. Here the following points may be mentioned: (1) *The preparation and qualification of Christ for His mediatorial work*. He prepared Christ a body and thus enabled Him to become a sacrifice for sin, Luke 1:35; Heb. 10:5-7. In the words "a body thou didst prepare for me," the writer of Hebrews follows the Septuagint. The meaning is: Thou hast enabled me by the preparation of a holy body to become a real sacrifice. At His baptism Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit, Luke 3:22, and received the qualifying gifts of the Holy Spirit without measure, John 3:24. (2) *The inspiration of Scripture*. The Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, and thus brought to men the special revelation of God, I Cor. 2:13; II Pet. 1:21, the knowledge of the work of redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (3) *The formation and augmentation of the Church*. The Holy Spirit forms and increases the Church, the mystical body of Jesus Christ, by regeneration and sanctification, and dwells in it as the principle of the new life, Eph. 1:22,23; 2:22; I Cor. 3:16; 12:4 ff. (4) *Teaching and guiding the Church*. The Holy Spirit testifies to Christ and leads the Church in all the truth. By doing this He manifests the glory of God and of Christ, increases the knowledge of the Saviour, keeps the Church from error, and prepares her for her eternal destiny, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13,14; Acts 5:32; Heb. 10:15; I John 2:27.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY. Does pagan literature contain any analogies of the doctrine of the Trinity? Does the development of the doctrine of the Trinity start from the ontological or from the economical Trinity? Can the economical Trinity be understood apart from the ontological? Why is the doctrine of the Trinity discussed by some as introductory to the doctrine of redemption? What is the Hegelian conception of the Trinity? How did Swedenborg conceive of it? Where do we find Sabellianism in modern theology? Why is it objectionable to hold that the Trinity is purely economical? What objections are there to the modern Humanitarian conception of the Trinity? Why does Barth treat of the Trinity in the Prolegomena to theology? What is the practical significance of the doctrine of the Trinity?