

# THE WAY OF SALVATION

[A Handbook of Lutheran (Biblical) Doctrine]

by John P. Meyer

NOTE: In the January 1948 issue of the *Quartalschrift* Prof. Joh. P. Meyer published the *Introduction* (*Prolegomena*) of his projected work on Dogmatics, which the Wisconsin Synod had requested him to write. In it he discussed the nature of Dogmatics and presented a five-part outline of the entire projected work. Because of fears which Prof. Meyer expressed in the *Preface* to his *Introduction* that publishing his “material on dogmatics” as a “textbook” would prove unsatisfactory, and because of the danger which he anticipated that such formulation of doctrinal propositions might lead eventually to a “dead orthodoxy” rather than to individual intensified study of the Scriptures themselves, he never completed the project.

However, among his effects in his study after his demise the manuscript of the first portion of this project was discovered, completely elaborated and carefully typewritten, ready for the printer. It is the section entitled “Of God, the Author of Salvation” or as it is commonly known, the doctrine of Theology Proper. The Editorial Staff of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* resolved to preserve this valuable manuscript for posterity by publishing it serially in the *Quarterly*. The first instalment on *The Revelation of God* is included in this issue. Others on *The Essence of God*, *Attributes of God*, *The Will of God*, and *The Holy Trinity* are to follow in subsequent issues of the *Quarterly*.

—Ed.

[All five installments mentioned above are included in this online version. – WLS Library Staff]

## Theology

The wealth of material which the Scriptures present to us concerning God, the Author of our salvation, we may conveniently group under the following heads:

- I. The Revelation of God.
- II. The Essence of God.
- III. The Attributes of God.
- IV. The Will of God.
- V. The Holy Trinity.

### I. The Revelation of God

#### A. The Fact

1. If God had not graciously revealed Himself to us, a knowledge of Him would be impossible: not merely incomplete, indistinct, inadequate, tinged with error, but utterly impossible. God is a hidden God, “dwelling in a light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see” (I Tim. 6:16). If He had not revealed Himself, we should ever be groping for Him in vain. “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him” (Job 23:8, 9).

When God reveals Himself to us we can know Him just so far as He pleases to show Himself. Zophar was right when he dared Job: “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto

perfection?” (chap. 11:7). Not even “can the number of his years be searched out” (chap. 36:26). When Moses desired to see the glory of God, he was denied his request: “Thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen” (Exod. 33:18–23).

2. We have a revelation of God, sufficient for our salvation, in the Scriptures. The Scriptures never, under no circumstances, undertake to prove the existence of God. Scripture, rather, throughout proceeds on the assumption that God is, He is a reality, He is dealing with us, He is speaking to us. It is folly to question the existence of some one, or to demand proof of his existence, when you find it impossible to evade his powerful influence. The very first verse of the Bible posits God’s existence: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” There is a powerful, awe-inspiring activity recorded: creation. On the active end, antedating, originating, planning, carrying out this act, is God. The world is passive in this matter, on the receptive end of the transaction. Shall the world question the existence of a God without whose creative activity it itself would be nonexistent? So throughout the entire Scriptures, the existence of God is presupposed.

3. A picture of the existence of God is given occasionally. Moses asked for the name of God, and He stated it as אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, I am that I am (Exod. 3:14). Of no created being can such a statement be made. Every created being is what God made it, unable to add to its own stature, or even to change the color of a single hair. But God *is*, in the sense that He “hath life in himself” (John 5:26).

God reveals Himself as the only being which has this kind of existence. He claims a position above that of every other being: “Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord” (Ps. 86:8). “For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (Ps. 95:3). “The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King” (Jer. 10:10). “Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord: and beside me there is no Savior” (Isa. 43:10, 11).

The Gentiles had a faint idea of the situation when they spoke about an “absolute being,” τὸ ὄν, sometimes ascribing personality to it: ὁ ὄν. They also felt that the existence of God was of an altogether different kind from ours, or that of any creature. They called Him τὸ μὴ ὄν. Yet note the vagueness of these terms when compared with the vivid statements of Scripture. It is no improvement over the philosophical term τὸ μὴ ὄν when modern theologians call God *den ganz anderen*.

4. Although the Scriptures never attempt to prove the existence of God, they at times set forth the folly of idolatry in bold relief by using the magnificent deeds of God as a foil, showing the glaring impotence of idols; vice versa. This is a warning against idolatry, and a comfort to all believers in the true God. “God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not.... They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Ps. 115:3–8). See also Isaiah 44:6–20 (“They that make a graven image are all of them vanity.... He will take thereof—cedar, cypress, oak, ash—and warm himself ... baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god and worshippeth it ... a lie... ”); Isaiah 45:21 (“Let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient times? ... have not I the Lord?”); Isaiah 46:5–11 (“To whom will ye liken me?... he maketh it a god.... They bear him upon the shoulder ... and set him in a place ... from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him... ”).

## B. The Purpose

1. The craving to know something about God is natural to the human mind. Greek philosophers with their speculations tried to satisfy this craving by developing an acceptable concept of God. When God reveals Himself in the Scriptures His aim is higher. Our intellect, even in its most highly developed form, is not able to grasp God. He remains a hidden God. The fact cannot be changed that God is the powerful Creator, and we are impotent creatures. There is a gap between us and God that cannot be bridged. God is in a class by Himself, and we on our side lack all the prerequisite organs, physical or mental, to apperceive Him. It remains forever true that “the world by wisdom knew not God” (I Cor. 1:21).

2. When God, therefore, reveals Himself to us in the Scriptures, He does so, not in order to satisfy our curiosity, nor to give us a correct and comprehensive idea of Himself—He knows that we are not capable of

it—but to enable us to enjoy His blessings and to be happy in union and communion with Him. He aims at our salvation, and He reveals Himself sufficiently for our salvation. In fact, His revelation of Himself is the basis of our salvation and carries salvation with itself. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). A *γνώσις* of God, an experiential knowledge of Him, a “tasting” of Him, is the essence of real life, begun here on earth, surviving death, and lasting throughout eternity. This is not a revelation to be grasped by the intellect. To the “wise and prudent” these things will forever remain “hidden” (Matt. 11:25). A different organ is required to receive it.

3. In Matthew 11:27 Jesus declares that “no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son; and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” A revelation of God takes place through the mediation of the Son. Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life.” To know Him is to know the Father. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:6–9). “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). Jesus is the “Word of God” (John 1:1, 2). He is “the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). He is the sum and substance of all the thoughts of God; in Him they become personified. Through His appearance and work on earth they become manifest to us.

This is not an independent revelation of God, parallel to that in the Scriptures. It is the quintessence of God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. “Search the Scriptures; ... they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and they become a dark and incoherent book, and likewise Christ without the Scriptures is a figure in history unintelligible. Christ and the Scriptures belong together.

4. This is not yet the highest revelation of God, but it is the highest to be expected here on earth. A fuller revelation is to follow in heaven. “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known” (I Cor. 13:12). See also I John 3:2 (“Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ... for we shall see him as he is”). The revelation which God will grant us in heaven is not suitable for us on earth. Paul in a trance heard *ἄρρητα ῥήματα* in Paradise, which is not *ἔχόν* for man to utter. On earth we have God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures.

5. The proper organ for receiving this revelation is faith. Jesus ever demanded that people should believe in Him. “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47). “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). He pleaded: “Though ye believe not me, believe the works” (John 10:38; 14:11). He never offered Himself to be grasped with the intellect. When the people in Capernaum asked for explanations, eg., “How is it that he saith, I am come down from heaven?” or: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:42, 52), He did not accede to their wishes, but all the more earnestly demanded faith. He told Peter that it is not necessary to understand everything that He did, but it is necessary to yield to Him (John 13:7). To doubting Thomas He gave the assurance: “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Such believing includes a conscious and deliberate entering upon the will of the Father that through the sacrifice of His Son, without any merit or worthiness on our part, we have everlasting life. Jesus says that such faith is the proper organ for receiving the revelation of God and for attaining a knowledge of it. “If any man will (*θέλη*) do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17).

6. We briefly add two facts concerning this faith. The first is that it is a gift of God. “No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed; and no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (I Cor. 12:3). The second is that God incites this faith by His very revelation of Himself in the Word. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? ... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:14, 17). More of this in the chapters on Soteriology.

## C. Natural Knowledge of God

### 1. Its Nature

There are those who deny that man is endowed by nature with a connate knowledge of some divine being, by whose power all things in the world are controlled. Socinus says: “We on our part consider this opinion to be false.”<sup>1</sup> Even the staunch Lutheran Flacius Illyricus says: “It cannot be conceded that there still are in man some true elements or remnants of knowledge of the one God and of His government.”<sup>2</sup> While Socinians declare the human soul to be *tabula rasa*, in agreement with their rationalistic standpoint, the denial of the natural knowledge of God was with Flacius a corollary of his peculiar views on original sin (substance of man).

Yet the fact that all Gentiles try to serve God in some form indicates that they are aware of His existence. Cicero, who made use of this fact when he argued for the existence of God *e consensu gentium*, said, “One does not see God, nevertheless one recognizes Him from His works,”<sup>3</sup> thus expressing in Latin Aristotle’s thought that “Although He is by nature invisible to every mortal being, He is observed from His works.”<sup>4</sup>

The Scriptures confirm this view by saying that “the invisible things of him (God) from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20). Yes, “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). When Paul addressed Gentiles, he could assume that they were convinced of the existence of God; cf. Acts 14:17 (in Lystra); 17:24–28 (on Areopagus in Athens).

Yet this knowledge, based on an observation of nature and developed by a meditation on the observed facts (which form was admitted also by Flacius), is not the whole natural knowledge. Paul, in speaking of the origin of it, does not trace it purely to observation, but says *ὁ θεὸς ἐφανερώσεν*. Men’s knowledge of what is morally good or bad he traces to a law *γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις*. This testimony concerning God as the author of the inscribed law is corroborated by the testimony of conscience, which also points to a coming day of judgment (Rom. 1:19; 2:15, 16). If the knowledge of God were based merely on observation, and the moral code on convention, it could hardly be called *ἀλήθεια τοῦ θεοῦ* (Rom. 1:25), and men could not be said to be *ἐπιγινόντες τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ* (Rom. 1:32), since man in his observations and deductions is always subject to error.

This natural knowledge of God we should not consider, as e.g. Quenstedt does, as a remnant of God’s image in man. The image was lost through the fall and is restored in Christians through the activity of the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ’s redemption; the natural knowledge of God is an indestructible endowment of the human soul, which was affected, distorted, by the fall just like all other natural endowments of man. Calov is more guarded in his description of both the implanted and the cultivated natural knowledge: “The natural knowledge of God is partly innate, partly acquired. The former is that whereby man by nature perceives God, by reason of the remnants of the aptitude for wisdom implanted in the mind of man in the first creation. The latter is that whereby from a consideration of creation and from the universal control of the world it is concluded by a process of discursive thinking that God is the creator, preserver, and ruler of creation.”<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Its Use

The value of the natural knowledge of God is unduly overestimated when, eg., the Jesuit Maldonatus says on Matthew 11:21: “Since, as is admitted by all, the law of nature has been preserved, the Gentiles could

1 *Praelect. theol.*, cap. II, p. 3. *Hanc sententiam falsam nos esse arbitramur.*

2 *Clav. scrip.*, sub voce “legis,” p. 374. *Quod aliqua vera principia aut notitiae unius Dei ejusque gubernationis sint adhuc in homine, concedi non potest.*

3 *Tuscul. Disputt. I*, 28. *Deum non vides, tamen Deum agnoscis ex operibus ejus.*

4 *De Mundo*, cap. VI. *πάσῃ θνητῇ φύσει γενόμενος ἀθεώρατος ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων θεωεῖται.*

5 *Theol. pos.*, cap. I, thes. III, p. 48. *Naturalis Dei notitia est partim insita, partim acquisita. Illa, qua homo per naturam Deum cognoscit, vi reliquiarum habitus sapientiae in prima creatione menti hominis implantatae. Haec, qua e consideratione rerum creaturarum ac universali gubernatione mundi discursus beneficio colligitur, Deum creatorem, conservatorem ac moderatorem esse rerum creaturarum.*

be saved, and, to be sure, apart from the written law.”<sup>6</sup> Bellarmin says: “Add to this the fact that the fathers teach that the Gentiles, although in public they worshiped more gods, nevertheless were able to perceive the one God by nature, just as in fact the philosophers recognized the one God and from that point of view were, so to speak, Christians by nature.”<sup>7</sup>

This militates against such statements of the Scriptures as that not even “the princes of this world” could grasp the wisdom of God, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.” Even when the natural knowledge is developed to the highest degree possible, “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him” (I Cor. 2:8, 9, 14). Chemnitz says correctly: “Rightly speaking, it (the natural knowledge of God) is either nil, or imperfect, or weak; nil, because the whole of philosophy knows nothing about the free promise of the forgiveness of sins; imperfect, because the heathen know only some small part of the law, but about the innermost acts of worship of the first table reason neither knows nor believes anything certain; weak, because, although it has been impressed on human minds that God exists and prescribes obedience in accordance with the distinction between things which are honorable and things which are base, nevertheless the assent is not only weak but is often shaken off because of fearful uncertainties.”<sup>8</sup>

When not stifled by the unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18), the natural knowledge of God will stimulate a search after God, that they “seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him” (Acts 17:27). But under the existing condition of sin it can serve only the secondary purpose of rendering man without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). “For the Apostle indicates what through attendant circumstances the consequences of those concepts were on account of the abuse and neglect of men, namely, that they are without excuse; and he wishes to convict all nations of not having glorified God as God, although the knowledge of God was manifest in them... For although those concepts are not sufficient for a perfect cognition of God, nor are by themselves efficacious for conversion, they are, nevertheless, sufficient to prove conclusively the impiety of men, namely, that they did not even do that which those concepts dictated, but rather abused them” (Quenstedt).<sup>9</sup>

It is often acclaimed as a notable mark of spiritual excellence if some one outside the Church acknowledges the existence of God and His world government. He is considered as much superior to an atheist. Because of the fact of the natural knowledge Scripture approaches the situation from the opposite angle and calls him a fool who “hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). God did not create any atheists. Atheists are such by self-mutilation. “There are atheists in theory only, not by nature, but through a just withdrawal of God and a blinding action of the devil; not through a total eradication of the light of nature as far as it is something which man has, but through a suffocation as far as its activity and exercise are concerned; not through the whole span of life and permanently, but only during a transient paroxysm for a certain period of time. For neither does the law of nature permit the opinion to inhere in any one as being valid and confirmed: God does not exist. For although the mind of an impious man is, as it were, doped by lethargy so that he does

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6 Quoted by Joh. Gerhard in *Loci Theologici, Tom. I, Loc. II, cap. IV, p. 280. Gentiles poterant servata lege naturae omnium confessione salvi esse, absque scripta lege.*

7 *Disp., tom. I., de Christo, loc. I., cap. III, 14, p. 139. Adde, quod Patres docent gentiles, etsi vulgo plures deos colerent, tamen unum Deum naturaliter cognoscere potuisse, sicut reipsa philosophi unum Deum recognoverunt, et ea ex parte quasi naturaliter Christiani fuerunt.*

8 *Loci, pars I, De Deo, cap. I, II, p. 20. Vere loquendo: aut nulla aut imperfecta, aut languida est (notitia Dei naturalis). Nulla, quia de gratuita promissione remissionis peccatorum nihil novit tota philosophia. Imperfecta, quia gentes aliquam tantum particulam legis noverunt, de interioribus vero cultibus primae tabulae nihil certi vel novit vel statuit ratio.... Languida, quia, etiamsi impressum est humanis mentibus esse Deum et praecipere obedientiam juxta discrimen honestorum et turpium, tamen assensio non tantum languida est, sed horrendis dubitationibus saepe excutitur.*

9 *Theol. did. pol., pars I, cap. VI, thes. III, obs. 3, p. 251. Indicat enim apostolus, quid per accidens ad notitias istas ob hominum abusum et neglectum consecutum sit, scil. ut sint inexcusabiles; vultque omnes gentes convincere, quod Deum non glorificarint ut Deum, etsi γνωστών τοῦ θεοῦ manifestum in illis fuerit.... Licet enim notitiae illae naturales non sint sufficientes ad perfectam Dei cognitionem, neque per se sint efficaces ad conversionem, sunt tamen sufficientes ad convincendam hominum impietatem, quod, scil., ne id quidem, quod notitiae illae dictitabant, fecerint, sed potius illis abusi fuerint.*

not think about God, there can, nevertheless, be no one in whom conscience does not finally vindicate itself and, at least in the very hour of death, accuse him of the neglect of God” (Hollaz).<sup>10</sup>

The value of the natural knowledge then lies in this, not that it brings a man nearer to the kingdom of God, so that the Church can take over where the natural knowledge leaves off, but that it accuses and condemns the natural man, and in this way provides a point of contact for the Gospel. “But if the natural law were not written and given into (man’s) heart by God, one would have to preach for a long time, before the consciences would be stricken. One would have to preach a hundred thousand years to a donkey, a horse, an ox, or a cow, before they would perceive the Law, although they have ears, eyes, and a heart as man has; they can hear it, but it does not enter into the heart. Why? Where is the defect? The soul is not fashioned and created in such a manner that it can receive such things. But when man is confronted with the Law, he says immediately, Yes, it is so, I cannot deny it. It would not be possible to persuade him of this so easily, if it were not previously written in his heart” (Luther, St. L., III, 1053).<sup>11</sup>

#### D. Philosophical Arguments for the Existence of God

1. An evidence of the presence in man of the natural knowledge of God are the many attempts to prove the existence of God scientifically. A brief consideration of the fact referred to above (that God is the independent Creator of the universe) will make it evident that no cogent argument for the existence of God may be expected. Were the existence of God capable of demonstration, then His independence would be limited to that extent, i.e., it would cease. God would no longer be dwelling in a “light which no man can approach unto” (I Tim. 6:16).

A priori it must be conceded that no argument for the existence of God can be conclusive, silencing all doubts. The doctrine concerning God remains an article of faith.

2. An argument that attained great fame in theology is the so-called *ontological* argument presented by Anselm of Canterbury in his *Proslogium*. Briefly stated it is this: Our mind harbors the concept of a supreme being perfect in every respect, i.e., God. This being must exist, else it would lack one attribute, and hence would no longer be perfect. Another being might be found which in addition to the other perfections would possess also that of existence.

The weakness of the argument is apparent at once. It is a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*, concluding from the sphere of thinking to that of being. God must be thought of as existing; but whether He exists in reality is another question. Existence is not an attribute of a thing but the position of it in reality. Thus the argument involves a logical *quaternio*; it is begging the question.

We can readily understand why Descartes, whose great principle was: *Cogito, ergo sum*, should favor the ontological argument. He presented it in the following form: The concept of a perfect being cannot have originated in me, an imperfect, finite being. Hence there must exist a God who implanted it.

At first blush this argument, in either form, appears to be about the weakest that could be advanced for the existence of God; yet in reality it carries great weight, as a little reflection will show.

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10 *Examen Theol. Acroam.*, pars I, cap. I, qu. 5, ant. VIII, p. 216. *Possunt dari athei speculative (This is a euphemism.) tales, non per naturam, sed per justam Dei desertionem et diaboli excaecationem; non per totalem eradicationem luminis naturae quoad habitum, sed per suffocationem quoad actum et exercitium; non per totum vitae spatium et permanentem, sed tantum per paroxysmum transeuntem ad aliquod tempus. Neque enim lex naturae patitur, ut rata et firma sententia alicui inhaereat: non esse Deum. Quamquam enim mens hominis impii lethargo quasi sopiatur, ut de Deo non cogitet, nullus tamen potest dari, in quo tandem conscientia se non vindicet et vel in ipsa morte neglecti Dei ipsum accuset.*

11 Luther, St. L., III, 1053. *Wenn abet das natuerliche Gesetz nicht von Gott in das Herz geschrieben und gegeben waere, so muesste man lange predigen, ehe die Gewissen getroffen wuerden. Man muesste einem Esel, Pferde, Ochsen, Rinde hunderttausend Jahre predigen, ehe sie das Gesetz annaehmen, wiewohl sie Ohren, Augen und Herz haben wie ein Mensch; sie koennen es auch hoeren, es faellt aber nicht in das Herz. Warum? Was ist der Fehler? Die Seele ist nicht darnach gebildet und geschaffen, dass solches darein falle. Aber ein Mensch, so ihm das Gesetz vorgehalten wird, spricht er bald: Ja, es ist also, ich kann es nicht leugnen. Des koennte man ihn so bald nicht ueberreden, es waere denn zuvor in seinem Hezren geschrieben.*

There are certain ideas that inevitably come into our consciousness as our mind develops in its reaction to the world in which we live, Such ideas are, eg., those of time, space, causality, and others. If we adjust our conduct to these ideas, we fare comparatively well; anybody who ignores them will get himself into trouble. Hence these ideas must be objectively valid, and actually correspond to the world in which we live, vice versa. Else our minds would be so constituted that we were compelled to think falsehoods. In other words, rationality would become irrational.

Besides the metaphysical ideas mentioned above, we have also those of the beautiful, the true, the good—ethical and esthetical ideas. By observing them we fare well. There must then be somewhere an absolutely valid standard, conceivable only as existing in an absolutely perfect personal being. In other words, God Himself becomes one of the inevitable concepts with all the implications of such concepts.

Yet the flaws mentioned above are not removed. To which must be added the following consideration: These inevitable concepts, whether metaphysical or ethical, apply only to our natural life and dare not be transferred to the field of theology. What would become of the doctrine of Christology if we admitted the two ideas: “Every true body occupies space; the finite can not contain the infinite”?<sup>12</sup> Either Calvinism or Synergism would result, if we admitted the idea of the excluded third in the doctrines of conversion and election. And what would become of the Gospel itself if it had to submit to our inborn *opinio legis*?

3. It will be sufficient to state the other arguments briefly.

The *historical* argument (*e consensu gentium*): All nations believe in a supreme being. Hence it must exist.

The *cosmological* argument: Everything in this world has an adequate cause, which in turn is the effect of a previous cause. The chain of cause and effect cannot reach back indefinitely our mind will not tolerate that. Hence we must ultimately reach a prime cause of everything, a *primum movens*, *πρῶτον κινῶν*.

Granting the presupposed causality, this argument is weighty. We reproduce it as Carпов presented it: “Even the world can be nonexistent; the world has a conditioned existence. Inasmuch as it is contingent, it does not have within itself the cause of its own existence.... But since, because this would be an absurdity, the regression of causes can not take place into infinity so that that one has the cause of its antecedence in this in and own one thing, one another, so on in turn, and since, nevertheless, nothing exists without a cause, that entity, essentially different from the world, has the cause of its own existence in its own self; it is called the ‘Being from itself.’ Therefore that entity in which is found the sufficient cause of the whole universe is the ‘Being from itself.’ ... And since we call this “God,” the existence of God must be conceded.”<sup>13</sup>

The *teleological* argument appears in two forms. The physico-theological: All things unmistakably serve some purpose. Hence there must be a supreme intelligence which arranged nature systematically. —The historico-theological: History evidently takes its course according to certain ethical principles. There must, then, be a supreme being which laid down these principles. — Yet is suitableness, purposefulness, something objective and absolute?

The *moral* argument does not carry us beyond a postulate, and being based on the *opinio legis* is dangerous to Christianity. No man, not even the most debased, can rid himself entirely of conscience and the inscribed law. Hence there must be a supreme author of this law. —This form of the argument is permissible. — Im. Kant gave it the following form: The categorical imperative pays no regard to happiness. Practical reason, however (that is the reason of man as blinded by Satan through the *opinio legis*), demands a compensation, for good deeds as well as for evil. Hence there must be a supreme lawgiver and judge.

4. Although these arguments are not conclusive and do not lead to a true knowledge of God, yet they have some value, as Gerhard points out: “It could seem to some one that that question is superfluous in the

12 *Omne corpus verum in loco est, and Finitum non est capax infiniti.*

13 *Theol. rev.*, I, §498. *Mundus etiam non-esse potest, mundus est ens contingens. Dum est contingens, rationem existentiae suae non habet in se.... Cum vero propter absurditatem regressus causarum in infinitum fieri nequeat, ut illud rationem sui ulterius in alio, hoc in alio et ita porro habeant, et nihil tamen sine ratione sit, ens illud, essentialiter a mundo diversum, rationem existentiae suae in se ipso habet, dicitur ens a se. Ergo ens illud, in quo ratio sufficiens totius universi deprehenditur, ens a se est.... Et quia hoc vocamus Deum, Dei existentia est concedenda.*

Church, since it is known to all and conceded that there is a God; nor is there any nation so barbarian which denies that God exists and that the same ought to be worshiped, although it may not know how He is to be worshiped.... But nevertheless we must maintain that τὸ ὄν, or, the fact that God exists, is to be proved 1) for the confutation of those who deny the existence of God.... 2) for the confirmation of our faith.... But this faith must be drawn from the Word of God and must be confirmed by a meditation on the same. In grave and serious temptations, says Chemnitz, we are all either Epicureans or Stoics; therefore the heart must be strengthened by a consideration of the statements which testify that God exists and that as such He carries out His provident administration of human affairs; 3) for the perfection of the natural knowledge.”<sup>14</sup>

## II. The Essence of God

A. Since, as was pointed out above, God is altogether different from any being we know on earth, also from any being about which we have information as living in the spirit world, it will be impossible to formulate a definition of God’s essence. In a proper definition a statement of the *genus proximum* would be given first, and then by stating a *differentia specifica* the thing under discussion would be distinguished from other objects belonging to the same *genus*. But God is in a class by Himself: He is the Creator, while all other beings have only a created existence.

The rhetorical question which Moses asks in his song of praise to the Lord requires no answer: “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exod. 15:11). The evident answer is voiced by David when he was overwhelmed by the wonderful promise of a Son in whom his “throne shall be established for ever” (II Sam. 7:16); “Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears” (vs. 22). —The rhetorical question of Moses is frequently repeated; cf., eg., Psalm 89:6; Isaiah 40:18, 25.—One purpose of God’s dealing with Pharaoh in the plagues was to impress this fact upon him, and upon all the people, striking terror into the hearts of the Egyptians and reviving the faith of fainthearted Israelites. Pharaoh having challenged God: “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” (Exod. 5:2), Moses hammered in the truth: “That thou mayest know that there is none like unto the Lord our God” (Exod. 8:10).

B. When the Psalmists and other holy writers call God a “rock,” as in Deuteronomy 32:3, 4: “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock” (see also Ps. 18:2; 31:2, 3; 42:9; 71:3; Isa. 26:4, “rock of ages”): no one will make the mistake of considering this as stating a *genus proximum*. It is a metaphor, to impress on our hearts the strong protection which our God provides for us.

Similar statements, however, containing other figurative expressions, have been mistaken for proper definitions.

God is called *Life*. John says of Christ: “This is the true God, and eternal life” (I John 5:20). God appeals to Himself in confirming His Word because He is the living God: “As truly as I live” (Num. 14:21). He was recognized by Hagar as the *Living One*, when she named the well “Beerla-hai-roi” (Gen. 16:14). “As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). And “in him was life” (John 1:4). God is simply “the living God” (Josh. 3:10; Ps. 42:2; 84:2).

It is evident that *Life* in the proposition that God is Life does not denote some general class of beings of which God is a species or an individual member, but life is an outstanding characteristic of God. Viewed from a certain angle, God simply appears as vitality, as indestructible life, as lifegiving and life-preserving energy. We quote a word of Jesus in this connection, which refers to the restoration of life: “I am the resurrection and the

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14 *Loci*, loc. II, cap. IV, §58, p. 266. *Videri alicui poterat, questionem illam in ecclesia esse otiosam, cum omnibus notum et concessum sit, esse Deum, nec ulla gens tam barbara sit, quae Deum esse eundemque colendum esse, neget, licet, quomodo colendus sit, ignoret.... Sed nihilominus statuendum τὸ ὄν, sive quod sit Deus, probandum esse: 1) ad eorum, qui Deum esse negant, confutationem.... 2) ad fidei nostrae confirmationem.... At haec fides ex verbo Dei haurienda, et ejusdem meditatione confirmanda. In gravibus et seriis tentationibus, inquit Chemnitius, omnes sumus vel Epicuræi, vel Stoici; confirmandus igitur animus consideratione dictorum, quae testantur esse Deum, et providam rerum humanarum curam eundem gerere; 3) ad naturalis notitiae perfectionem.*



life” (John 11:25). In a way, the proposition, God is Life, may be called a metonymy of *causa pro effectu*: God is the source and author of all life.

What has been said about Life applies *mutatis mutandis* also to such statements as that God is Love (I John 4:8, 16) and that God is Light. When Ezekiel saw the glory of God in a vision, it was “as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about” (Ezek. 1:27). Compare with this the statement of Paul that God is “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto” (I Tim. 6:16). John says concerning the Son of God: “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4); and he continues: “The light shineth in darkness.”

The metaphorical meaning of *Light* in the Scriptures is not so much knowledge and understanding as rather hope and cheer. The opposite, outer darkness, is an expression, not for ignorance, but for utter despair. The Psalmist sings: “The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps. 27:1). Note the highly poetic language of Malachi 4:2: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” and the drastic figure for exuberant joy in the continuation: “and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall.” A fuller discussion of the spiritual meaning of light in the Scriptures must be deferred to the paragraph on *Illumination* (Enlightenment); but compare at this time also Job 29:3; 33:28; Micah 7:8; I John 1:4, 5; James 1:17.

**C.** While a definition of God cannot be given, yet such terms as mentioned above (rock, life, light, love) serve to describe Him and thus to bring Him closer to our heart and mind. They represent states or conditions in the created world of which God is the Creator. Although they do not adequately express the state of God, yet they reflect His nature and serve to give us a correct, though limited, conception of His Being.

We remind ourselves once more that an exhaustive description of God is impossible. “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7). “Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out” (Job 37:23). “Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out” (Job 36:26). If we do not even know what is going on in the heart of a man, “even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God, ... For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?” (I Cor. 2:11, 16).

Yet a certain knowledge of God’s essence and attributes is necessary. We are to fear God; we are to serve Him; we are to call upon Him, even to the extent of swearing by His name. “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name” (Deut. 6:13. Compare also Deut. 10:20; Josh. 24:14). In the great temptation in the wilderness Jesus repulsed the devil by referring to the passages just quoted. “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). With this compare the pointed question of Paul: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14). And remember the sharp rebuke Jesus gave the Samaritan woman: “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). It is not a matter of indifference whom we worship as God and how we try to worship Him. Life and death hang in the balance. Paul chid the Athenians, whose sincere devotion he acknowledged, that they worshiped God “ignorantly,” and he called them “to repent” (Acts 17:23, 30).

A certain knowledge of God’s essence is possible. God had revealed Himself in His Son in whom “all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily” (Col. 2:9), “in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins” (Col. 1:14). That is the way in which God promised to give us a taste of Himself. “They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34).

**D.** Since very much concerning the essence and characteristics of God is revealed in expressive names which God adopts for Himself, a brief survey of such names may serve to prepare for a later brief summary of what can be said concerning God’s essence.

1. When Moses was called to lead the children of Israel out of the bondage they suffered in Egypt, he asked of God by what name He desired to be called. God had given wonderful promises to Abraham that his seed should possess the land of Canaan, a very desirable country flowing with milk and honey; but now centuries had passed, and Israel was still dwelling in a foreign country where they were made to slave and were threatened with extermination. Through Israel, blessing was promised to all the families of the earth, the redemption, which was to be procured by the Seed of the woman. Now the blessing seemed more remote than ever. God apparently had forgotten, or had changed His mind. By what name was Moses to call Him before the Israelites, who felt frustrated in their hopes?

On this occasion God chose the name יהוה. (We need not bother about the pointing, nor about the pronunciation.) This name was the most reassuring under the circumstances. “And God said unto Moses אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֶיךָ. And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel אֱלֹהֵינוּ hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, יהוה the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you. This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exod. 3:14, 15). God is what He is and what He wants to be; He wants to be what He is. He is dependent on nothing; time means nothing to Him; to Him a thousand years and a single day amount to the same; the same applies to space. He is supreme, immutable, the author and master of all things. To us, whose thinking and working is confined by time, space, and causality, a Being such as Jehovah is beyond conception. But as to Moses and the Israelites, so to all that trust in Him this aspect of His Being is most assuring (cf. Exod. 6:2–8).

When God told Moses (in the last named passage) that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know Him by His name Jehovah, He did not mean to say that the word itself was unknown to them, but that they did not get to taste Him as the faithful Savior in the same measure as they experienced His power. Note that He says, “I *appeared* unto them.”

The same thought which is contained in the name Jehovah is expressed in the Book of Revelation in these words: He “which is, and which was, and which is to come”; or “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (chaps. 1:4, 8, 11, 17; 22:13). Similarly by Isaiah (chaps. 44:6; 48:12).

As Moses was instructed to comfort Israel with this name of God, so he used it to stimulate assurance in all hearts of men: “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God” (Ps. 90:1, 2). He is “God of gods and Lord of lords” (Deut. 10:17), “the blessed and only Potentate” (I Tim. 6:15, 16).

2. אֱלֹהִים (singular אֱלֹהִי) both according to its number and its widely accepted derivation from אָוַל (to be strong) indicates greatness and power. Isaiah 44:8, using the singular, brings out the same idea by substituting צוֹר (rock) for God: “Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God (rock): I know not any.”—“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god (pl.) with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand” (Deut 32:39). —The same idea of greatness is set forth when judges and magistrates are called gods metaphorically. See Psalm 82:6; Exodus 22:8.

3. In אֲדֹנָי note the artificial lengthening of the vowel in the pronominal suffix, distinguishing this name for God from an ordinary “my lord.” In Genesis 18:3 and 27 the form might be translated “My Lord,” but in I Kings 3:10, and particularly Ezekiel 13:9, the force of the original pronominal suffix is lost altogether: “Ye shall know that I am the Lord God” (“I am *my* Lord God” would be absurd).

4. The simple name אֱלֹהִים has the nature of a class name, distinguishing God from other beings, particularly humans. “Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord (אֲדֹנָי) God (יהוה): Because thine heart is lifted up and thou hast said, I am אֱלֹהִים, I sit in the seat of אֱלֹהִים, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art *a man* and not אֱלֹהִים, though thou set thine heart as the heart of אֱלֹהִים” (Ezek. 28:2). A similar contrast is found in Hosea 11:9, while Job 5:8, contains אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים in synonymous parallelism.

In the great majority of cases אֱלֹהִים is found coupled with some adjective or genitive modifier:

אֱלֹהֵי —cf. Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:3(2); 84:3 (2).

אֱלֹהֵינוּ —cf. Genesis 14:18–20, 22; Psalm 78:35.

אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם —cf. Genesis 17:1 (to “walk before God, means to trust in His unlimited ability to bless and to protect); 28:3; 35:11; Exodus 6:3; Ezekiel 10:5.—אֱלֹהֵינוּ and אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם appear substantivized, e.g., in Genesis 49:25; Numbers 24:4, 16; Psalm 91:1; Isaiah 13:6.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ occurs, e.g., in Genesis 21:33; while אֱלֹהֵינוּ is found also in other combinations that refer to God.—Cf. Isaiah 40:28 (אֱלֹהֵינוּ); Daniel 12:7 (אֱלֹהֵינוּ); Jeremiah 10:10 (“everlasting king”).

We finally note the expression אֱלֹהֵינוּ, Daniel 11:36.

**E.** To God must be ascribed, according to His Essence, absolute independence. He is not only under no restraint in His volitions and actions as to space, time, and causality, His very Being is independent of any causes outside of God. Our teachers call this independence the *aseitas Dei*.

This term must not be understood in the positive sense, as though God were engaged in a continuous process of producing Himself out of nonexistence into existence. It must be understood in a purely negative sense, warding off the error as though God’s Essence came into being by the action of some outside cause or causes. Hence terms that might be understood as describing positively the inscrutable mystery of God’s independent existence must be used with great care, such as, when God is called *causa sui*.

Origen was right when he spoke of an “eternal birth” of the Son out of the Essence of the Father. The *opus ad intra* which distinguishes the Son from the Father is *γεννησιᾶ*, to the Father being ascribed *generatio activa* and to the Son *generatio passiva*. This is not an act which once took place in the dim past of eternity, nor is it an incomplete process, but it is the timeless *actus personalis* which distinguishes the Son from the Father. It was proper to call it an “eternal birth.”—But it is altogether different when Luthardt defines the *aseitas Dei* as an *ewige Geburt*: God’s Essence does not come into being by means of a birth.

It is well to note here some powerful words of Luther: “He (God) has His essence from no one, nor has He beginning or end, but exists from eternity in and of Himself, so that of His essence it cannot be said that He ‘was’ or ‘became,’ for He never had a beginning, and cannot begin to become; He has never ended and cannot cease to exist, but of Him it must ever be said, ‘He is’ or ‘He exists,’ that is, Jehovah.”<sup>15</sup>

That God is not dependent on anything outside Himself, neither for His being nor for His wellbeing, is underscored in the Scriptures by pointing to the fact that He is the Creator and Preserver of all things. Paul chides the Athenian philosophers for ignoring this truth: “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24, 25). Speaking of Christ Paul emphasizes that all things were created by Him, including the highest angel orders in highest heaven: “Thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16, 17). “He has life in Himself” (John 5:26).

To sum up, Quenstedt defines the *aseitas Dei* in these words: “God’s existence has its source in His very Self, not in a positive sense, through a positive influx, as if He brought Himself out of nonexistence into existence, but in a negative sense, through the negation of an influx from some one else, sc, that He was not produced by some other entity.”<sup>16</sup>

15 Luther, St. L. XX, 2058, 77. *Er (Gott) hat sein Wesen von niemand, hat auch keinen Anfang noch Ende, sondern ist von Ewigkeit her, in und von sich selbst, dass also sein Wesen nicht kann heissen “gewest” oder “werden,” denn er hat nie angefangen, kann auch nicht anfahren zu werden, hat auch hie aufgehoert, kann auch nicht aufhoeren zu sein, sondern es heisst mir ihm eitel “Ist” oder “Wesen,” das ist, Jehovah.*

sc Synodical Conference; *Scilicet*, namely; Theodotion

16 *Theol. did. pol.*, I, cap. VIII, § I, thes. XVI, p. 287. *Est Deus a se ipso, non positive per positivum influxum, quasi se ipsum produxerit a non-esse ad esse; sed negative per negationem influxus ab alio, quod scil. non sit ab alio ente productus.*

**F.** Implied in the independence of God is His *infinity*; for anything that is limited in any way is in so far dependent. Hollaz defines *infinitas Dei* thus: “That the essence and attributes of God have no limits.”<sup>17</sup> The Psalmist calls the *greatness of the Lord* “unsearchable” (145:3). Mark the graphic description of God’s infinity in Job 11:7–9: “Can you find out the limits of God? Or can you attain unto the boundary of the Almighty? It is higher than the heavens—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Longer than the earth is its extent, and broader than the sea” (translation by J. M. P. Smith). If “the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain” God (I Kings 8:27), if the heaven is merely the “throne” on which God is sitting, while the earth is His “footstool” (Isa. 66:1), who would not be staggered by the immensity, by the infinity of God! Naturally neither I Kings nor Isaiah wish to be understood as speaking of corporeal expansion, a conception against which Quenstedt warns: “God is infinite not by reason of quantitative extension, since He is independent of all quantitateness, but by reason of essence and attribute. Of His greatness there is no end.”<sup>18</sup>

Some special forms of relation may be mentioned to which all human beings are subject, but which do not affect God, neither in His essence nor in His actions.

Human beings are subject to time; we live in time and are regulated by time. There is a fleeting present; there is an ir retrievable past; there is a dark future. Philosophers may disagree as to the proper definition of time, yet every normal human being is time-conscious. God is independent of time. He who established the time relation for us when He created the world, can also accommodate Himself to the time idea, without becoming subject to it. He “inhabiteth eternity” (Isa. 57:15), which is not the same as endless time, but timeless time, the absence of the time relation, the absence of beginning and end, the absence of succession, without transition from a past to the present, and again to the future. The idea of independence from time is frequently expressed in the Scriptures by adverbial phrases like “for ever and ever” (cf. Rev. 4:9; 11:15).

Humans are subject to space. Every object occupies a certain amount of space in three dimensions. A portion of space occupied by a certain Object at a given time cannot at the same time contain a second object; nor can the same object be in two different places simultaneously. God is independent of the space relation. He who created space for us can accommodate Himself to it, but He is not subject to it. The 139th Psalm makes the application of God’s spacelessness for us in a twofold way: no one can escape from God’s presence, and everywhere we can be sure of God’s sustaining presence (vs. 7–12).

Humans are subject to laws, to the law of cause and effect, and other laws of nature. We need not be overpowered or destroyed by these laws; we may direct them and let nature “work for us”; but we cannot escape them, we cannot do anything independently of them. God, who established these laws in the beginning, can use them, as He does, in His maintenance and government of the world. He can also work independently of them, as witness His countless miracles.

We must extend the infinity of God to include also His independence from the laws of logic, the law of identity, of the excluded third, etc. Compare the Person of Christ (“The finite can not contain the infinite”<sup>19</sup>); the three Persons of the Trinity; conversion by grace alone, non-conversion through man’s fault; election is unilateral, not bifurcate; etc.

Gerhard is right when he says: “By infinity is meant that God can be limited in respect neither to time, nor to place, nor to any thing else, but that He by His own nature and essence, actually, without any qualification, of Himself and absolutely is infinite.”<sup>20</sup>

Only to a superficial conception of God’s infinity can it appear that God by the creation of the world, particularly by the creation of personal beings, placed a limitation on His own infinity. We are not able to comprehend infinity, much less personal infinity or infinite personality, yet, granted infinity, also the ability of God to place personal beings beside Himself must be conceded as included in infinity. Creating the world

17 *Examen*, pars I, cap. I, qu. 30, p. 274. *Quod essentia et perfectiones (attributes) Dei nullos habent terminos.*

18 *Theol. did. pol.*, I, cap. VIII, thes. II, p. 284. *Infinitus est Deus non ratione quantitativae extensionis, cure omnis quantitatis expers sit, sed ratione essentiae ac perfectionis. Magnitudinis eius non est finis.*

19 *Finitum non est capax infiniti.*

20 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VI, § VII, § 162, p. 317. *Per infinitatem intelligitur ... quod Deus nec tempore, nec loco, nec ulla re alia finiri possit, sed sua natura et essentia, actu, simpliciter, per se et absolute sit infinitus.*

shows God's power, but does not imply a selflimitation. Without any trace of pantheism (which considers the world as a part of God, an emanation from God) St. Paul expresses the situation in these words: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

**G.** From the independence and infinity of God there naturally follows His numerical and essential unity. To speak of two infinite beings, or two independent beings, would entail a contradiction in terms. Gerhard says tersely: "Just as God is the highest Entity, so also is He in the highest degree One,"<sup>21</sup> and he quotes Luther with approval, who, on Genesis 1, speaks of an *unissima unitas* in God. It has been pointed out already that, because of the relation of God as Creator to other beings as His creatures, who live and move and have their being only in Him, the existence of created beings (men, angels, devils) in no wise affects the independence and infinity of God. Nor does it modify His unity. Mark a word by Quenstedt: "The unity of God is that by reason of which He is not only undivided in essence, but also simply and absolutely indivisible and incommunicable through any multiplication of Himself. And so God is one by reason of an essential unity, altogether unique and wholly perfect, or by reason of an undivided utterly indivisible unity."<sup>22</sup> God's essence was not communicated to the creatures. They are in themselves nothing and exist only by divine fiat. Hence their existence cannot modify the divine unity.

As has been indicated, the unity of God includes His simplicity of being. "By reason of which God is devoid of absolutely all composition, by whatever term that concept may be expressed"<sup>23</sup> (Quenstedt). Gerhard adds: "He is dissociated from all admixture and division, and even from all attributes."<sup>24</sup> The question on which Gerhard touches with his remark about the absence of *accidentia* in God will come up for further discussion in the chapter on God's attributes.

Scripture is very emphatic in stressing the absolute unity of God. There are not only passages which say that there is one God, and that God is one (cf. I Tim. 2:5; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; I Cor. 8:4–6; John 5:44), but this was one of the elementary instructions given to Israel: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). Immediately the application is made that if there is one God, one Jehovah, one faithful Savior, *in fine*, one *Summum Bonum*: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (vs. 5). And furthermore: "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (vs. 7) by having the whole life centered in this truth. Isaiah uses the unity of God both to comfort and to exhort: "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first and with the last; I am he" (41:4). "Ye are my witnesses (i.e., who can testify from experience), saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord: and beside me there is no savior" (43:10, 11). Therefore, "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine" (43:1; cf. 44:2, 8, 9ff.).

When registering the self-evident fact that polytheism in any form conflicts with the unity of God, we are careful to reject also the evolutionistic notion that polytheism represents a lower stage of development in religion, and that in monotheism a higher level has been attained. This assumption denies the fact of the fall. Because of the fall men "professing themselves to be wise, became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" ... "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:22, 23, 25—Compare also Acts 14:15, 16).

Equally opposed to the unity of God is dualism, the assumption of the eternal coexistence with God of an evil principle in opposition to Him.

Monotheism must not be confused with monism, which in fact is a direct denial of the unity of God. There is first the form of pantheism which identifies God with the world. God unfolds himself in the world,

21 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VI, §96, p. 288. *Deus ut est Summum Ens, ita quoque maxime unum.*

22 *Theol. did. pol.*, I, cap. VIII, thes. X, p. 285. *Unitas Dei est qua ipse essentia indivisus non tantum, sed et ἀπλῶς et absolute indivisibilis est ac incommunicabilis per quandam sui multiplicationem. Atque ita Deus unus est unitate essentiali, singularissima et perfectissima, sive unitate indivisa indivisibili prorsus.*

23 *Theol. did. pol.*, I, cap. VIII, thes. XI, p. 286. *Qua Deus omnis omnino compositionis, quocumque illa veniat nomine, expers est.*

24 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VI, § 129, p. 305. *Expers omnis ... admixtionis ac divisionis, adeoque omnium accidentium.*

which in turn is absorbed by the godhead. Compare the four stages as presented by Scotus Erigena: 1. “An uncreated creative being,” which is God; 2. “A created creative being,” which are the productive ideas in God; 3. “A noncreating created being,” which is matter as such; 4. “A being neither created nor creating,” which is God as the final aim of the whole process.<sup>25</sup> Concerning the present stage in this process Michael Servetus claimed that “In a stone God is a stone, in the trunk of a tree He is a tree trunk.”<sup>26</sup>

Materialists, though they deny the existence of God, yet by claiming indestructibility for matter, which, according to their view, is endowed with equally eternal resident forces, practically elevate matter to the position of God.

The seeming conflict between the numerical unity and simplicity of God and His tri-personality will come up for discussion in the chapter on the Trinity.

**H.** Personality, implying self-consciousness and self-determination, or, as the Augsburg Confession defines it: “That which subsists of itself”<sup>27</sup> (Art. I) is ascribed to God when spirituality is predicated of Him (“God is a Spirit,” John 4:24) and appears in all places where God speaks of Himself in the first person, “I” (cf. Gen. 1:29; 3:15; etc.). Bearing in mind the aseity of God, His infinity and independence, human personality may be regarded as only a faint reflection of God’s personality, which far transcends our conception. If our mind, therefore, finds it impossible to predicate infinity and personality of the same Being, this is no reason to drop one or the other in our description of God, since the Scriptures teach both truths.

Opposed to pure spirituality would be both anthropomorphism and anthropopathism in the literal sense. Reformed theology is guilty of anthropomorphism when it denies the omnipresence of the human nature of Christ because He “sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty.” When the Scriptures speak anthropomorphically or anthropopathically of God, this is an accommodation to our limited ability of conception, in order to bring the inscrutable God a little closer to our heart. Compare, eg., the statement of Psalm 34:15: “The *eyes* of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his *ears* are open to their cry” with Psalm 94:9: “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?” In this light must be viewed statements like Psalm 110:1; Isaiah 66:1; and others. Or, compare Genesis 6:6: “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” with Numbers 23:19: “God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent,” and Acts 15:18: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” In this light must be viewed passages about the wrath of God being kindled, and the like (eg., Num. 11:33; 22:22). The matter will come up for further discussion under the “Immutability” of God.

**I.** It must be borne in mind that Scripture offers us these glimpses of God’s nature, not in a vein of abstract, purely theoretical speculation, but always in an attempt to reach our heart with a practical reference to some phase of our salvation. Note particularly the following passages: Exodus 3:15; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Psalm 145:3–7; Isaiah 44:6–8; John 4:24; Acts 17:25.

### III. Attributes of God

#### A. General Remarks

**1.** When speaking of a man we ordinarily distinguish between the person and his character, between his nature and his attributes, both regarding the body and the mind. The same body may from time to time differ in the state of its health, etc., and the functions of the mind, intelligence, emotion, volition, may differ in degree. Thus, popularly, the substance of a thing is considered as the bearer of the attributes, while, more strictly speaking, we might say that a thing is equal to the sum of its attributes.

<sup>25</sup> *De Divisione Naturae*. 1. *Natura creatrix non creata*; 2. *Natura creatrix creata*; 3. *Natura creata non creans*; 4. *Natura nec creata nec creans*.

<sup>26</sup> *Epistula VI ad Calvinum*. *Deum in lapide lapidem, in trunco truncum esse*.

<sup>27</sup> *Augsburg Confession*. *Quod proprie subsistit*.

2. God, being absolutely One in essence and in number (*numero et substantia unus*), cannot be conceived as so constituted. When the Scriptures ascribe attributes to God, they do so in accommodation to our human mode of conception (*anthropomorphice*). We may accept the presentation of Quenstedt: “The divine attributes do not denote anything superadded to the divine essence, but are only inadequate concepts of an infinitely perfect essence. The divine essence is like an incomprehensible Ocean of all the infinite attributes which the human intellect does not suffice to drain in a single and simple concept, and therefore by means of various concepts, sip by sip as it were, it draws something out of that infinity.”<sup>28</sup>

3. From the foregoing it is clear already that there can be no objective difference between the various attributes. God’s attributes are not distinct from His essence, but are merely inadequate concepts on our part of the incomprehensible, indivisible essence of God. They are His essence, because, as Calov puts it, if there were an objective difference between essence and attributes in God, then the attributes “would not be predicated in an abstract sense of God, who, in the abstract, is called truth, life, love.”<sup>29</sup> Just so there can be no objective difference between the attributes themselves.

To insist on the objective identity in God of His essence and His attributes, and of His attributes among themselves, is not idle speculation. We quote Thomasius, who maintains that there is a real difference between God’s basic essence (existence, consciousness, will) together with His immanent attributes (eternity, independence) on the one hand, and the transitive attributes on the other (omnipotence, omniscience): “For Christology our view is of importance inasmuch as thereby a relinquishment of relative divine attributes can be maintained without endangering the essential attributes.”<sup>30</sup> Thus maintaining an objective difference between essence and attributes paves the way to kenoticism.

4. The objection that, if the attributes of God were not objectively distinct one from the other, the names of the various attributes would be reduced to mere synonyms, as e.g., sword and saber, is met by Quenstedt: “The argumentation is not on the same logical plane: sword and saber are distinguished by an active thinking process, the divine attributes by a receptive thinking process which has its foundation in the subject matter itself.”<sup>31</sup> Just as it would be an error to assume an objective difference in the attributes, so also to reduce them to mere names. Hollaz states it in these words: “The divine attributes are distinguished from the divine essence and mutually from one another not in name only nor objectively, but essentially (or: subjectively, because of the limited scope of our human capacity to reason about God), according to our way of thinking, not without a definite basis for the distinction.”<sup>32</sup>

5. To bring the matter of a *certum distinctionis fundamentum in re* a little closer to our grasp we draw an illustration from the Scriptures themselves. God makes the rain. The rain is always the same but, depending on our approach, we perceive different attributes of God in it. Job 36:22: “Behold, God exalteth by *his power*.” Elihu here has reference to the rain; see vs. 27. —Again, Job 28:20, 23: “Whence then cometh *wisdom*... God understandeth the way thereof.” The reference again is to the rain, vs. 26. —Again, Acts 14:17: God “left not himself without witness, in that he did *good*, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Thus our different concepts of God’s power, wisdom, and goodness have a *fundamentum* in the single act of God when He sends us rain. Yet these words are by no means mere names, nor are they synonyms. Thus it remains true, as Quenstedt puts it, that “the divine attributes (are not) two or more characteristic differences of one and the same simple thing, ... but are distinguished only by a process of

28 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. VIII, § II, qu. II, ecthes. IV, p. 297. *Attributa divina non notant aliquid essentiae divinae superadditum, sed sunt tantum inadaequati conceptus essentiae perfectae. Est essentia divina instar incomprehensibilis infinitarum perfectionum omnium Oceani, ad quem uno simplicique conceptu exhauriendum non sufficit intellectus humanus, ideoque conceptibus variis sorbillatim quasi haurit aliquod ex illa infinitate.*

29 *Systema*, II, cap. IV, p. 222. *Non in abstracto praedicantur de Deo, qui dicitur in abstracto veritas, vita, caritas.*

30 *Christi Person u. Werk*, 2. Aufl. B. 1, S. 54. *Fuer die Christologie ist unsere Ansicht in so fern von Wichtigkeit, als hierdurch eine Aufhebung relativer goettlicher Eigenschaften ohne Gefaehrung der wesentlichen gar wohl behauptet werden kann.*

31 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. VIII, § II, qu. III, f. s. X, p. 303. *Non est par ratio: gladius et ensis distinguuntur ratione ratiocinante, attributa divina ratione ratiocinata, quae habet fundamentum in re.*

32 *Examen*, pars I, cap. I, qu. 23, p. 263. *Attributa divina ab essentia divina et a se invicem distinguuntur non nominaliter, neque realiter, sed formaliter, secundum nostrum concipiendi modum non sine certo distinctionis fundamento.*

reasoning.”<sup>33</sup> With a dash of rhetoric Augustine in various places describes God as “good without quality, great without quantity, Creator without indigence, present without any local position, everywhere in His totality without any locality,” and says, He is “reigning without effort, encompassing the world without difficulty,” yes, “comprehending the whole creation in Himself like a point.”<sup>34</sup>

6. Before taking up a grouping and detailed study of the several attributes of God revealed to us in the Scriptures, it will be well to remember that for a strengthening of our faith we learn to consider all attributes of God as vehicles and instruments of His saving love. When Ezekiel saw the wonderful appearance of God on His throne as “fire” and “brightness,” this unapproachable light (cf. I Tim. 6:16) became pleasant and soothing to his eyes because it was screened through the “bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain” (Ezek. 1:27, 28). So also the majestic and aweinspiring attributes of God become a source of life and joy for us when viewed through God’s saving love. God not only loves or has love, as many passages testify, He identifies Himself with love: “God is love” (I John 4:8, 16). Paul describes Christian love in glowing terms (I Cor. 13:4–7), which is merely a response to and a reflection of God’s love. God commends His love toward us in that He sacrificed His Son for our redemption, when we were yet His enemies (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). His love moves Him to have the Gospel of salvation preached “in due time” (I Tim. 2:6), and to continue this preaching in spite of human ingratitude till “the end come” (Matt. 24:14).

## B. Grouping

1. Although the various attributes of God are presented to us in the Scriptures and although the distinction between them has a *fundamentum in re*, yet, since God is *unus substantia et numero* and accordingly the attributes denote the complete divine essence only as perceived from a different viewpoint, it is evident that a logically flawless classification is not possible. In fact, if any one would attempt a classification as on the basis of an objective difference between the attributes, he would thereby be paving the way to erroneous conceptions. A grouping may be made only for convenience *docendi causa*. The impossibility of achieving an all around satisfactory classification is shown by the many attempts made by our theologians.

2. An enumeration of some attempted classifications may serve to illustrate the above.

a. Baier has two classes.

- 1.) “*Negative*: Those which either by virtue of the terms or of their meaning denote a certain negation or an elimination of some one of those imperfections which are found in creatures; eg., immutability, infinity, etc. unity, simplicity, etc.
- 2.) “*Positive*: Those which are conceived with reference to attributes which we perceive in the creatures, and through their manner, although in a more eminent degree; eg., knowledge, holiness, power, etc.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet: Are the first pure negations? Do the second imply no negation?

b. Gerhard also has two classes.

- 1.) “Incommunicable (attributes ascribed to God in the proper sense), eg., independence, eternity, etc.

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33 Theol. did. pol., pars I, cap. VIII, § II, qu. III, thes. p.300. *Attributa divina non unius ejusdemque simplicis rei duae pluresve quidditates ... sed ratione tantum distinguuntur.*

34 *De Trin.*, L. V. *Sine qualitate bonum, sine quantitate magnum, sine indigentia creatorem, sine situ praesentem, sine loco ubique totum; ... sine labore regens, sine onere continens mundum, ... omnem creaturam instar puncti in se continens.*

35 *Comp. theol. pos.*, Vol. II, pars I, cap. I, § 7, p. 16. a) *Negativa: quae vel vi vocum vel vi significationis negationem quandam aut remotionem imperfectionis alicuius ex his quae in creaturis occurrunt important; eg., immutabilitas, infinitas, etc.; unitas, simplicitas, etc.* b) *Positiva: quae cum respectu ad perfectiones, quas in creaturis deprehendimus, et per modum illarum, licet in eminentiore gradu, concipiuntur; eg., scientia, sanctitas, potentia, etc.*



- 2.) “Communicable: (attributes ascribed to God in an improper sense or anthropomorphically), eg., mind, will, righteousness, etc.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet: Although the Scriptures contain the doctrine of the divine image in man, does this image in the strict sense include all the attributes which God gave to man? And did the loss of the image effect the loss of communicated similarities to God, eg., personality, intelligence, will, etc.?

**c.** Frank and Luthardt have classifications that closely resemble each other.

Frank:

- 1.) God’s *absolute* being in relation to the world; eg., infinity, eternity, etc.—And
- 2.) God’s *personal* being in relation to the world; eg., omnipotence, holiness, etc.

Luthardt:

- 1.) Metaphysical.
- 2.) Moral.

Yet: Is not God’s essence always a personal essence? And is not, eg., His omnipotence a holy omnipotence?

**d.** Philippi has three classes.

- 1.) Absolute substance, eg., eternity, omnipresence, etc.
- 2.) Absolute subject, eg., omnipotence, omniscience, etc.
- 3.) Absolute love, eg., wisdom, justice, goodness, etc.

Yet: This is no improvement over Frank’s classification. And is not *c* already contained in *b*?

**e.** We present the classification by an American theologian somewhat in detail, J. A. Singmaster. A *principium dividendi* is conspicuous by its absence.

- 1.) Attributes of personality, eg., spirituality, life, unity.
- 2.) Attributes of absoluteness, eg., self-existence, eternity, immutability, infinity (omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, wisdom).
- 3.) Attributes of holiness. 1. Definition: infinite moral perfection. 2. Several aspects: righteousness, justice, purity, majesty. 3. Divine standard.
- 4.) Attributes of love. 1. Its nature. 2. Its manifestation. 3. Its form: complacency, benevolence, grace.

**f.** Also Calov uses four classes.

- 1.) Of being (*entis*): “Perfection, unity, truth, goodness.”
- 2.) Of infinity: “Immensity, eternity.”
- 3.) Of spirituality (personality): “Immortality, life; mind, will.”
- 4.) Of working (*operativa*): “Omnipresence, omni-science, righteousness, etc.”<sup>37</sup>

**g.** The most convenient division seems to be into:

- 1.) Immanent (also: intransitive, quiescent, absolute)—and
- 2.) Transitive (also: operative, relative).

The first group considers God without any relation to the world, purely in Himself. The second considers Him in His relation to the world. Yet it must not be assumed that the latter are dependent, if not for

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36 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VII, § 105, p. 296. a) Incommunicabilia (*proprietates proptie Deo ascripta*), eg. *independentia, aeternitas, etc.* b) Communicabilia (*Aproprietas improprie sive anthropomorphice Deo ascripta*) eg., *intellectus, voluntas, iustitia, etc.*

37 *Systema*, tom. II, cap. IV, p. 223 sq. a) Of being (*entis*): *perfectio, unitas, veritas, bonitas*. b) Of infinity: *immensitas, aeternitas*. c) Of spirituality (personality): *immortalitas, vita; intellectus, voluntas*. d) Of working (*operativa*): *omnipraesentia, omniscientia, iustitia, etc.*

their very presence, at least for their application, on the existence of the world, or that they came into being together with the world. Note the slip of Quenstedt in his comparison of *immensitas* and *omnipraesentia*: “The former is eternal, the latter certainly not, but it began together with the creatures.”<sup>38</sup>

We append Quenstedt’s exposition of this classification: “There are two classes of attributes: some describe the divine essence absolutely and in itself without reference to any activity, and they are called immanent, inoperative, or quiescent, which, sc, are not directed toward some actions, such as immensity, eternity, spirituality, etc. Others describe the divine essence relatively, by reason of an activity, and they are called energetic or operative and extending to the outside of the divine essence, or those which are recognized to be directed toward definite activities, as are power, knowledge, righteousness, mercy.”<sup>39</sup>

### C. The Immanent Attributes

These are four in number: Immutability, Eternity, Love, and Perfection.

**1. IMMUTABILITY**—*Immutabilitas Dei*—is defined by our theologians in the following manner: “Immutability is the perpetual identity of the divine essence and of all its attributes, negating altogether all change, both physical and moral (Quenstedt).”<sup>40</sup> Quenstedt adds by way of explanation: “A rational being can be changed in five ways: with respect to its existence, to its location, to its properties, to its knowledge, to the decrees or purpose of its will. But God is changed in none of these ways.”<sup>41</sup> Baier embodies these remarks in his very definition of immutability: “Immutability consists in this that God is subject to no mutation, neither according to His essence (by reason of which God is immortal and incorruptible), nor according to His properties, nor according to His position, nor according to His will or purpose.”<sup>42</sup>

The Scriptures, though they describe the immutability of God to us in various ways, particularly stress the immutability of His counsels and decrees, in order to strengthen our faith. This is the case in the very passage in which the word *immutable* occurs, Hebrews 6:17, 18: “God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.” That is the honor we owe God, that we trust in His Word: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (I Tim. 1:17; see also 6:16). Men show themselves to be fools when they change the glory of the incorruptible God (Rom. 1:22, 23). Psalm 102 shows the immutability of God in bold relief on the background of the deterioration to which even the heavens are subject, though they are the work of God’s hands (vs. 25–27). Consider also that James adds that there is “no variableness neither shadow of turning” with our heavenly Father from whom every good and perfect gift comes down (ch. 1:17).

We list a few more passages which emphasize the immutability of God’s decrees. Numbers 23:19: “God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” Similarly I Samuel 15:29. See also Psalm 33:11 (“The counsel of the Lord standeth forever”); Proverbs 19:21 (contrasting the stability of the Lord’s counsel with the

38 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. VIII, § I, thes. XIX, p. 288. *Illa aeterna est, haec nequaquam, sed cum creaturis coepit.* sc Synodical Conference; *Scilicet*, namely; Theodotion

39 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. VIII, § I, thes. IV, p. 284. *Attributorum duo sunt genera: quaedam essentiam divinam describunt absolute et in se citra respectum ad operationem, dicunturque immanentia, ἀνεργητα seu quiescentia quae scil. non sunt ordinate ad aliquos actus, ut immensitas, aeternitas, spiritualitas, etc. Quedam essentiam divinam describunt respective, ratione ἐνεργείας, discunturque ἐνεργητικά seu operative et ad extra exserentia, sive quae ad certas operationes directa esse cognoscuntur, ut sunt potentia, scientia, iustitia, misericordia.*

40 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. VIII, § I, thes. XX, p. 288. *Immutabilitas est perpetua essentiae divinae et omnium eius perfectionum identitas, negans omnem omnino motum, cum physicum tum ethicum.*

41 *Ibid.*, nota, p. 288. *Natura rationalis quinque modis mutari potest: quoad existentiam, quoad locum, quoad accidentia, quoad cognitionem, quoad decreta seu propositum voluntates. Sed Deus nullo horum modorum mutatur.*

42 *Comp. theol. pos.*, Vol. II, pars I, cap. I, § 10, p. 18. *Immutabilitas in eo consistit, quod Deus nulli mutationi neque secundum esse (qua ratione Deus est immortalis et incorruptibilis) neque secundum accidentia, nec secundum locum, nec secundum voluntatem aut propositum est obnoxius.*

many devices in a man's heart). Even our unbelief shall not make the faith of God without effect (Rom. 3:3). "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). See also II Timothy 2:13 ("faithful, he cannot deny himself"); I John 1:9.

When we, who as human beings are subject to time and to the fluctuations of time, experience joy, disappointment, grief, repentance, we undergo changes, the effect of which will be cumulative; but how these same emotions can be predicated of God, who is not subject to time, without implying a change, either momentary or permanent, is beyond conception. It will not help our understanding to say that such emotions are ascribed to God only anthropopathically, or to say, "God changes His deeds while His will remains immutable (Gerhard)."<sup>43</sup> The Scriptures, which emphatically deny that God may repent like a man, nevertheless record that He repented of having created man (Gen. 6:6) and of having made Saul king of Israel (I Sam. 15:11). These statements are true, and yet it remains a fact that "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). He changes not.

An objection to the immutability of God is drawn from the fact that God created the world. This act of God certainly produced a great change in the world, which was called out of a state of non-existence into existence, as Paul expresses it, God calls *τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα* (Rom. 4:17; see also Ps. 102:11, 12, 26, 27); but God did not by creating the world emerge from a state of inactivity into one of action, nor did He by creating the forms of space, time, and causality, and by dealing with men according to these forms, Himself become subject to them.

It does not indicate a change in God that some of His prophecies never were fulfilled. Jonah may have been very angry when his prophecy announcing the destruction of Nineveh within forty days (ch. 3:4, 10) was not fulfilled; but God cannot be charged with inconsistency, even humanly speaking, because His prediction was based on a condition, viz., the repentance, or refusal, of the Ninevites. Conditional prophecies, with the condition expressed or implied, do not affect the immutability of God. See also II Kings 20:1–7 (Hezekiah's life extended for 15 years in answer to his prayer).

When Job complains that God had become cruel to him (ch. 30:21), this was plainly not an objective change in God, but subjectively a change in Job's mind, his conception and feeling in the matter. At first he felt differently about his misfortunes, ch. 1:21, 22.

Insoluble for our understanding is the apparent conflict between God's immutability and His free personality. Is not God's freedom limited by the fact of His immutability? We must not conceive of God's immutability in the fashion of the Greek and Roman *Fatum*, to which even the gods were helplessly subject. God is not immutable because of some outside coercion; in perfect independence He decrees His own immutability. I AM THAT I AM, He says, Exodus 3:14.

**2. ETERNITY**—*aeternitas Dei*—Although the word is quite frequently used for long duration, yet in the strict sense it does not denote a long period of time, or perhaps endless time, but expresses the very opposite of time. With God there is no time. Neither in His essence, nor in His will, nor in His actions does He experience any succession of events. There is with Him no transition from a past, nor a transition to a future, but He views all things in a never changing, absolute present. "God's eternity, absolutely so called, signifies the permanent existence or duration of God, without beginning and end and all progression and change." Baier adds: "For it is not taken here in the sense of a very long time; it does not concede that the duration has a beginning and is lacking only an end, but it is taken in the strictest sense, which Boethius defined as being the total and at the same time perfect possession of never-ending life."<sup>44</sup>

43 Gerhard, *Loci theol.*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § V, § 155, p. 315. *Mutat Deus facta sua immutabili manenti ipsius voluntate.* viz. *videlicet*

44 Baier, *Comp. theol. pos.*, Vol. II, pars I, cap. I, § 13, p. 27. *Aeternitas Dei, absolute sic dicta, significat existentiam seu durationem Dei permanentem, sine principio et fine omnique successione aut vicissitudine. ... Non enim hoc loco accipitur pro tempore diuturno, non pro duratione initium agnoscit ac tantum fine caret, sed sensu strictissimo; quam Boethius definivit, quod sit interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio.*

A few samples may illustrate the use of “for ever” in a looser sense. If a Hebrew slave declined his release in the seventh year, “then thou shalt take an awl . . . and he shall be thy servant *for ever*” (Deut. 15:17), meaning for life. Similarly Paul wrote to Philemon concerning Onesimus: “Perhaps he therefore departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him *forever*” (vs. 15). When God commanded concerning the Passover: “Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons *for ever*” (Exod. 12:24), the duration is limited to the time of shadows and will automatically be terminated when the time of realities arrives (cf. Col. 2:16, 17).

Concerning God’s timeless eternity the second Psalm has the word *today*. —Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee (vs. 7)—in the sense of (Quenstedt) “a perpetual present, and that fixed, not in flux, (in which as) in some most immense sea that fluid drop of time floats about, whose various aspects are the present, the past, and the future, in such a way that the present, or the ‘now,’ is not, properly speaking, time, but the beginning of the future and the end of the past, with all of which eternity coexists,”<sup>45</sup> the latter being God’s changeless *today*. God simply “inhabits eternity” (Isa. 57:15).

To impress on our minds, which are bound by the concept of time, the incomprehensibility of eternity, the Scripture uses expressions as “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2), or “from generation to generation” (Dan. 4:3), or simply “everlasting” (Dan. 4:3; 7:14, 27); or says that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (II Pet. 3:8).

From our standpoint the decrees of God and their execution are separated often by vast distances of time, but not so with the eternal God. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). “He spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9) because “the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (vs. 11). Before God “the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8; so the word order in Greek; if the last phrase is referred to the verb “written,” this does not change the picture, since this “writing” is made possible only by the blood of the Lamb and thus presupposes the slaying.) Because of His eternity God views the future resurrection as a present fact and calls Himself the God of (dead) Abraham (Matt. 22:32).

Hence God is our “dwelling place,” our place of refuge, rest, and comfort at all times (Ps. 90:1). We must not grow impatient when He apparently delays to help us, nor accuse Him of slackness when He does not immediately punish the wicked (II Pet. 3:9).

**3. IMMANENT LOVE**—*amor Dei internus*—has been questioned on the ground that self-love is immoral. But is it? How then could God make our self-love the standard for the love we owe our neighbor (Mark 12:31)? Self-love becomes immoral when indulged in to excess (eg., selfishness). Any form of love will become immoral when it overestimates the value of its object; it will become a form of idolatry. Father and mother are to be loved by us, but not in preference to Jesus (Matt. 10:37).

God is *summum bonum*. He demands a love of us toward Him above all things (First Commandment); should He not love Himself? *Gerhard*: “Since God is the consummate good, therefore He loves Himself as the consummate good. In man the love of oneself is wicked and damnable (Yet, see above) because man is not the consummate good, but one ought to seek the consummate good in God and to cling to Him alone. God, however, loves Himself, yet not in so far as He is Himself but in as much as He is the consummate good. For if there were any other greater and more excellent good, then He would love that, not Himself, as for instance *Theologia Germanica* treats of this matter at length.”<sup>46</sup> Pointing out that in true love all *Selbstheit, Ichheit, Ich und Mir* and the like is dropped, and a thing is regarded only in as far as it is *gut*, the quoted *Theologia Deutsch* continues: “So it is good and just and right that the Good should be loved before God. And thus God loved not

45 *Quenstedt*, Theol. did. pol., pars I, cap. VIII, thes. XVII, nota I, p. 287. *Perpetuum vōv, idque fixum non fluxum, ... in vastissimo quodam Oceano natat fluxa illa temporis gutta, cuius differentiae sunt praesens, praeteritum et futurum, ita ut praesens, sive τὸ vōv non sit proprie tempus, sed initium futuri et finis praeteriti, quibus omnibus coexistit aeternitas.*

46 *Gerhard*, *Loci theol.*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XI, § 223, p. 344. *Deus cure sit summum bonum, ideo amat se ipsum ut summum bonum. In homine amor sui ipsius est vitiosus et damnabilis, quia homo non est summum bonum, sed in Deo debet quaerere summum bonum eique unice adhaerere. Deus autem se ipsum amat, non tamen ut est ipse, sed ut est summum bonum. Si enim aliud esset maius et praestantius bonum, tum illud, non se, deligeret, sicut “Theologia Germanica” hac de re late disserit.*

Himself as Himself, but as the Good. And if there were, and He knew, ought better than God. He would love that and not Himself. So wholly is I-hood and selfhood sundered from God.”<sup>47</sup>

God is Love (I John 4:8, 16). In love He desires companionship with Himself, and He enjoys such companionship. He is “blessed” (*μακάριος*), dwelling in an unapproachable “light” (*φῶς*, as a metaphor expressing joy, cheer, hope, etc.—I Tim. 6:15, 16). This is a “glory,” as Jesus calls it in His highpriestly prayer. Negatively, Paul says God does not need anything (Acts 17:25). He is self-sufficient, and the source of all blessing.

Naturally, the Immanent Love of God stands in close relation to the Trinity. The above quotation from Gerhard continues: “In the Deity the Father loves the Son as His own substantial image (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 3:35; 5:20; 17:24). The Son loves the Father since He was born of His heart from eternity (John 14:31). The Holy Ghost, who proceeds from both, is the essential love of the Father and of the Son.”<sup>48</sup> Jesus is called the “express image” of God in Hebrews 1:3; and the Holy Ghost is described as the Spirit of love, e.g., in II Timothy 1:7 and Galatians 5:22.

It may be well to remember at this point that the Scriptural concept of love never presents an inactive, idle emotion. Love is always active, manifesting itself, not in word, but in deed and in truth. God’s jealous concern for His own honor is an indication of His immanent love.

**4. PERFECTION**—*bonitas Dei*—may well be described in the words of Gerhard: “That nothing is lacking to Him, that He stands in need of nothing else outside of Himself, that He is in want neither of counsel, nor of aid, nor of wisdom, nor of power in acting, that He is dependent on some one else neither in respect to His existence nor to His activity.”<sup>49</sup> To be sure, this is a purely negative description of an attribute which it is impossible for us to comprehend, and for which a positive description cannot be given.

When the Scriptures ascribe goodness or perfection to God, this pertains not only to His essence, His intelligence, His will, but also to His actions, making Him the fountain of all goodness. Jesus pointedly told the rich young ruler, who flattered himself that he could produce some worth while good thing: “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matt. 19:17; Luke 18:19). “Good and upright is the Lord” (Ps. 25:8). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). —Note the negative way in which the Scriptures picture the perfection of God to us. “Can a man be profitable unto God? Or can he that is wise be profitable unto Him? Is it any advantage to the Almighty that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to Him that thou makest thy way blameless?” (Job 22:2, 3; Jewish translation). Compare this passage with Jesus’ answer to the young ruler (above). —“If I were hungry I would not tell thee: for the world is mine and the fulness thereof” (Ps. 50:12. — Compare Acts 17:25). “Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?” (Isa. 40:13; see also vs. 14).

A note by Cotta (on Gerhard’s thesis: “God is truly good; He is the only good; He is the source of all goodness”<sup>50</sup>) is worth considering: “When the goodness of God is under discussion, His essential and metaphysical goodness ought to be distinguished from His moral goodness, as it is called. By God’s essential goodness is meant His very perfection, namely, as far as in God one may find all those things which pertain to the most perfect Being. But by moral goodness the zeal or inclination of the supreme Godhead to confer any

47 *Theologia Deutsch*, Palmsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Erlangen, 1827, p. 72. (Quoted from translation by Susanna Winkworth, Pantheon Books, Inc., 1949, p. 171.) *Und waere Ichtes besser denn Gott, so muesste es lieb gehabt werden vor Gott. Und darum hat sich Gott selbst nicht lieb als sich selber, sondern als Gut. Und waere und wuesste Gott Etwas Besseres denn Gott, das haette er lieb und nicht sich selber. Also gar ist Ichheit und Selbstheit von Gott geschieden.*

48 Loc. cit. *Pater in divinis diligit filium ut substantialem suam imaginem* (Matt. 3, 17; 17, 5; Jh. 3, 35; 5, 20; 17, 24). *Filius diligit Patrem utpote ex cuius corde ante saecula natus* (John 14, 31). *Spiritus sanctus est substantialis Patris et Filii amor, qui procedit ab utroque.*

49 *Loci theol.*, tom I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XVII, § 291, p. 364. *Quod nihil illi desit, quod nulla alia re extra se opus habeat, quod nec consilio, nec auxilio, nec sapientia, nec potentia in agendo indigeat, nec in essendo, nec in operando ab alio dependeat.*

50 Loc. cit., § X, § 208, p. 338. *Deus est vere bonus est solus bonus, est omnis bonitatis causa.*

and all good things on His creatures is denoted.”<sup>51</sup> The latter is sometimes called *bonitas intrinseca* and is closely related to God’s holiness and love.

As corollaries of God’s perfection we mention His majesty and His serene bliss (*beatitudo*). His majesty is proclaimed in all passages which call Him the Most High dwelling in the heavens, with this implication: “Thou shalt not be affrighted at them (cf. vs. 1): for the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible” (Deut. 7:21). Perfect bliss is expressed in the word *ὁ μακάριος θεός* (I Tim. 1:11). We hear a brief description with additional passages from Calov: “A consequence of the divine perfection is majesty, because it is so perfect that God truly is great—Deuteronomy 7, 21; Numbers 24, 16; Psalms 7, 17 (17); 18, 14 (13); Acts 7, 32. — Blessedness also ensues, whereby He is most blessed, nay rather blessedness itself.”<sup>52</sup>

The question has been asked: Does God decree the good because it is good? Or is the good good because God decreed it? The answer must be: Neither. God is not subject to any standard or idea of good over and above Himself; nor does He arbitrarily decree that anything should be good, while He might perhaps just as well declare the very opposite to be good (Duns Scotus). Rather, God, who is, is perfection in every respect.

#### D. The Transitive Attributes

These may be divided into three orders: of essence, *Omnipresence*; of knowledge, *Omniscience*, *Wisdom*; and of will, *Love*, *Holiness*, *Justice*, *Omnipotence*. The will of God itself will be discussed in a separate chapter.

**1. OMNIPRESENCE**—A few Scripture passages may serve to give us the basic conception of God’s characteristics which are summed up in the term *omnipraesentia*. Psalm 139:7–10: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” Jeremiah 23:23, 24: “Am I a God (near) at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. De not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.” Acts 17:27, 28: “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live and move and have our being.”

It is evident that God, although He is one in number and essence and is present only once in the entire universe, yet essentially and operatively penetrates each and every thing in the universe. Thus, eg., in the Jeremiah passage it is always the same “I,” that is, God with His whole majesty, who is operatively present both in the entire universe and at every point near and far.

It is evident that God’s omnipresence must not be conceived as corporeal in any sense. He is a spirit (John 4:24), and His presence is a spiritual presence. Nor is God locally circumscribed, not even by the universe. “The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him” (II Chron. 2:6; 6:18). Gerhard tries to ward off misconceptions by saying, “That God is everywhere present not by reason of a multiplication of His essence, for He is something wholly whole, an entity of the highest simplicity, and hence wherever He is, He is in His entirety; neither through a division of His essence ...; nor through an extension and rarefaction ...; nor by an intermingling.”<sup>53</sup>

51 *Loci*, ed. Cotta, Vol. III, loc. II, § 208, p. 159. *Quando de bonitate Dei sermo est, distingui debet bonitas eius essentialis ac metaphysica a morali, quam vocant. Per bonitatem Dei essentialem intelligitur ipsa eius perfectio, quatenus scil. in Deo ea omnia, quae enti perfectissimo conveniunt, deprehendere licet. Per bonitatem vero moralem denotatur studium seu inclinatio supremi Numinis creaturis bona quaevis conferendi.*

52 Theol. pos., §178, p. 60. *Ex perfectione divina consequitur majestas, quia ita perfectus est, ut vere magnus sit Deus—Deut. 7, 21; Num. 24, 16; Ps. 7, 17(17); 18, 14(13); Act. 7, 32.—Consequitur et beatitudo, qua beatissimus est, immo ipsa beatitudo—Ps. 73, 25.26; I Tim. 1, 11; 6, 15.*

53 *Loci*, tom. III. loc. II, § 172, p. 122, 3: *Quod Deus ubique praesens sit non per essentiae suae multiplicationem, est enim ὅλος ὅλον τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἐπιπέδω, ac proinde ubicunque est, totus est; nec per essentiae suae divisionem ...; nec per extensionem et rarefactionem ...; nec per commixtionem.*

In passing we note how Tertullian in groping for an acceptable description used some rather awkward expressions, “Everything that is, is a corporeal being of its own kind: nothing is incorporeal except that which does not exist...” And again, “Who will deny that God is a corporeal being, although God is a spirit? For a spirit is a corporeal being of its own kind in its own likeness.”<sup>54</sup> *Corpus* certainly is not a very serviceable term when speaking of the omnipresence of God. Nor will the distinction between *praesentia circumscriptiva* (or *circumspectiva*); *praesentia definitiva*; and *praesentia impletiva* bring the concept of God’s omnipresence any closer to our grasp. The first one, said of bodies, is something we know from our daily experience, but the second one, applied to the presence of angels, already is beyond our ken; while the third, said of God, leaves the matter as incomprehensible as it was before. How easy it is to fall into a misleading expression, the warning example of Quenstedt may show us, who in comparing *immensitas* and *omnipraesentia* said, “The former is eternal, the latter certainly not, but had its beginning together with the creatures.”<sup>55</sup>

The incomprehensibility of God’s omnipresence is vividly set forth by Luther, “We say that God is no such extended, long, broad, thick, high, deep being. He is a supernatural, inscrutable being who exists at the same time in every little seed, whole and entire, and yet also in all and above all and outside all created things. There is no need to enclose him here, as this spirit dreams, for a body is much, much too wide for the Godhead; it could contain many thousand Godheads. On the other hand, it is also far, far too narrow to contain one Godhead. Nothing is so small but God is still smaller, nothing so large but God is still larger, nothing is so short but God is still shorter, nothing so long but God is still longer, nothing is so broad but God is still broader, nothing so narrow but God is still narrower, and so on. He is an inexpressible being, above and beyond all that can be described and imagined.”<sup>56</sup>

From the general omnipresence of God the Scriptures distinguish a twofold *praesentia specialis*. One is His gracious presence with His children, the so-called *unio mystica*. “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto him*, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23; coll. Acts 17:28). Christians are called the temple of God (I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16). See also the comforting promise in Isaiah 57:15. The other is His glorious presence with the blessed redeemed in heaven. “*Come, ye blessed of my Father,*” etc. (Matt. 25:34). “And so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:17).

Opposed to the Scriptural concept of God’s omnipresence is Pantheism, which substitutes for the operative presence of God His identity with the universe. “In a stone God truly and properly is a stone, in the trunk of a tree a tree trunk, and similarly in other things” (Servetus).<sup>57</sup> A more refined Pantheism was that of the ancient Stoics, who assumed that the human soul is an emanation, a ray from God.

Opposed also is Deism, which denies the essential presence of God and ascribes to Him one only of knowledge, will, and operation. “Nowhere do we read a written statement that God is an essence simply immeasurable and actually present in its entirety in all places; on the contrary, not a few passages occur here and there which seem to have the contrary sense. From this it is already evident that the immensity or ubiquity of the divine essence can not be positively proved from the Scriptures.... It is, to be sure, true that in all cases God effects all things; nevertheless, it does not follow that God is in an immediate way there present with His essence wherever He is active, since He can be active through secondary causes, whether physical or

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54 *De carne Christi*, cap. XI: *Omne quod est, corpus est sui generis: nihil est incorporale, nisi quod non est.* And again: *Quis negabit, Deum corpus esse, etsi Deus spiritus est? Spiritus enim corpus sui generis in sua effigie.*

55 Theol. did pol.; pars I, cap. VIII, § I, thes. XIX, p. 288, Nota.: *Illa aeterna est, haec nequaquam, sed cum creaturis coepit.*

56 *Luther’s Works*, Am. Ed., Vol. 37, p. 288 (St. L. XX, 961, 170): *Wir sagen, dass Gott nicht ein solch ausgereckt, lang, breit, dick, hoch, tief Wesen sei, sondern ein uebernatuerlich, unerforschlich Wesen, das zugleich in einem jeglichen Koernlein ganz und gar, und dennoch in allen, und ueber allen, und ausser allen Kreaturen sei; darum darf’s keines Umzaeunens hie, wie der Geist traemt. Denn ein Leib ist der Gottheit viel, viel zu weit, und koennten viel tausend Gottheit drinnen sein; wiederum auch viel, viel zu enge, dass nicht eine Gottheit drinnen sein kann. Nichts ist so klein, Gott ist noch kleiner; nichts ist so gross, Gott ist noch groeser; nichts ist so kurz, Gott ist noch kuerzer; nichts ist so land, Gott ist noch laenger; nichts ist so breit, Gott ist noch breiter; nichts ist so schmal, Gott ist noch schmaeler; und so fortan ist’s ein unaussprechlich Wesen ueber und ausser allem, das man nennen oder denken kann.*

57 *Epistula VI ad Calvinum: Deum in lapide esse vere et proprie lapidum, et in trunco truncum, et sic in aliis.*

hyperphysical, just as any king through his ministers” (Vorstius).<sup>58</sup> As we saw above, the Scriptures ascribe both an operative and essential presence to God.

Closely related concepts are: spirituality, illocality, immensity, immateriality (*incorporeitas*), invisibility. ( Cf. Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17.)

The inseparable connection between God’s operative and essential presence is vividly set forth by Luther: “On the other hand, it (the right of God) must be essentially present at all places, even in the tiniest tree leaf. The reason is this: It is God who creates, effects, and preserves all things through his almighty power and right hand, as our Creed confesses. For he dispatches no officials or angels when he creates or preserves something, but all this is the work of his divine power itself. If he is to create or preserve it, however, he must be present and must make and preserve his creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects. —Therefore, indeed, he himself must be present in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power. For it is he who makes the skin, and it is he who makes the bones; it is he who makes the hair on the skin, and it is he who makes the marrow in the bones; it is he who makes every bit of the hair, it is he who makes every bit of the marrow. Indeed, he must make everything, both the parts and the whole. Surely, then, his hand which makes all this must be present; that cannot be lacking.”<sup>59</sup>

**2. OMNISCIENCE**—*scientia, intelligentia, omniscientia*—God’s knowledge differs widely from human knowledge, not only in extent, in exactness and trustworthiness, but above all in its very nature. All human knowledge is acquired. The human mind is passive, receptive, although it may be active in searching for knowledge, in developing and clarifying the knowledge it possesses, in fixing it more firmly. With God it is different. Knowledge does not enter His mind from without, seeing that all things which are in the world had their origin in God’s mind. Even the creative fancy of an artist, in whose fertile brain the conception of some work of art had its first beginning, is only a pale copy of God’s completely active *scientia*.

This fundamental difference we bear in mind when the Scriptures picture God to us as a “God of knowledge” (I Sam. 2:3) who “knoweth all things” (I John 3:20), before whose eyes “all things are naked and open” (Heb. 4:13), whose “understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5), because “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Calov describes the *modus scientiae* of God: “God sees and knows all things with an infinite and immutable knowledge, not only in time but from eternity, not in a discursive or progressive way but by one simple and eternal act of perception.”<sup>60</sup>

The knowledge of God may be described as *intuitiva*. Jesus “needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man” (John 2:25). See also Proverbs 15:3 and Hebrews 4:13 above. —It is *simultanea*, i.e., comprehensive, not acquired successively. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). “Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?” (Isa.

58 *De Deo et attributis divinis*, p. 233, 235: *Nusquam scriptum legimus, Deum substantiam simpliciter immensam et totam reipsa in omnibus locis praesentem esse, imo non pauca, quae contrarium sensum habere videntur, passim occurrunt. Unde iam patet, ex Scripturis immensitatem aut ubiuitatem essentiae divinae solide probari non posse. ... Verum guidem est, Deum omnia in omnibus operari; non tamen sequitur, Deum immediate illic sua substantia adesse ubicunque operatur, quia per causas medias, sive physicas, sive hyperphysicas, operari potest, ut rex aliquis per suos ministros.*

59 *Luther’s Works*, Am. Ed. Vol; 37, pp. 57–58 (St. L. XX, 804, 99–100): *Wiederum muss sie (Gottes rechte Hand) an allen Orten wesentlich und gegenwaertig sein, auch in dem geringsten Baumblatt. Ursach ist die: denn Gott ist’s, der alle Dinge schafft, wirkt und erhaelt durch seine allmaechtige Gewalt und rechte Hand, wie unser Glaube bekennt. Denn er schickt keine Amtleute oder Engel aus, wenn er etwas schafft oder erhaelt, sondern solches alles ist seiner goettlichen Gewalt selbst eigen Werk. Soll er’s aber schaffen und erhalten, so muss er daselbst sein, und seine Kreatur sowohl im Allerinwendigsten als im Allerauswendigsten machen und erhalten.—Darum muss er ja in einer jeglichen Kreatur in ihrem Allerinwendigsten, Auswendigsten, um und um, durch und durch, unten und oben, vorn und hinten selbst da sein, dass nichts Gegenwaertigeres noch Innerlicheres sein kann in allen Kreaturen denn Gott selbst mit seiner Gewalt. Denn er ist’s, der die Haut macht; er ist’s, der auch die Gebeine macht; er ist’s, der die Haare auf der Haut macht; er ist’s auch, der das Mark in den Gebeinen macht; er ist’s der ein jeglich Stuecklein am Haar macht; er ist’s, der ein jeglich Stuecklein am Mark macht. Er muss ja alles machen, beide, Stuecke und Ganzes: so muss ja seine Hand da sein, die es mache. Das kann nicht fehlen.*

60 *Theol. Pos.*, par 196: *Deus videt novitque omnia scientia infinita et immutabili, non in tempore demum, sed ab aeterno; non discursive aut successive, sed uno simplici et aeterno intelligendi actu.*



40:13.)—It is *distinctissima*, clear and distinct. He knows such little details as a person’s “downsitting” and “uprising” and “lying down,” even his “thoughts afar off” and every “word” (Ps. 139:1–4), so that nothing can hide us from Him (vss. 11, 12. See also Jer. 23:24). He “seeth in secret” (Matt. 6:4) and knows the exact number of hair on our head (Matt. 10:30). His knowledge is like a well-kept record book (Rev. 20:12).—It is finally *verissima*, exact and absolutely correct. God is not deceived by outward appearance. He “looketh on the heart” (I Sam. 16:7. Compare also I Kings 8:39). He “searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts” (I Chron. 28:9) and cannot be “mocked” (Job 13:9. See also Isa. 29:15; Jer. 17:10; I Cor. 4:4, 5).

It may seem comparatively easy to grasp that the knowledge of God as just described applies to past events, and even to the present. We may speak of God’s *reminiscentia*. The record books mentioned in Revelation 20 refer to the memory of God, as do all passages that speak of God as the final judge who will judge the world in righteousness, and who will not “forget” (Cf. Job 34:20–22; Ps. 10:11; Amos 8:7). See particularly the description of the Judgment as given in Matthew 25:35, 36, 42, 43, where both the righteous and the unrighteous have forgotten their good deeds, or their neglect, respectively, but the Judge convincingly refutes them. —We may also speak of a *visio* of God, a knowledge of the present. “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth” (II Chron. 16:9). “His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men” (Ps. 11:4; cf. 33:13, 14). His “eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men” (Jer. 32:19).

What baffles us more, who are subject to the concept of time, is that God’s knowledge embraces the things that to us are future, as well as the present and the past, God’s *praescientia*. God emphasizes His foreknowledge, eg., in Isaiah 42:9: “Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.” And He uses it as an irrefutable evidence of His Godhead. He challenges the idols to “show us what shall happen... Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods” (Isa. 41:22, 23). Thus the foreknowledge of Jesus to us becomes a proof of His deity. See Matthew 17:25; Mark 11:2–6; John 6:64; 13:19; 14:29; 16:4.

Yet we must bear in mind that as far as God is concerned, who inhabits eternity, there is no succession of time, but that He views all in an absolute present. Thus only anthropomorphically speaking foreknowledge is ascribed to Him. “The fact that foreknowledge is ascribed to God occurs with regard to our point of view; for in His sight all those things are present which for us are still future” (Gerhard).<sup>61</sup> For this reason Augustine prefers not to use the term *praescientia*: “What is foreknowledge except a knowledge of future events? What, however, is future in the sight of God, who transcends all concepts of time? For if He has the events themselves in the scope of His knowledge, they are not future as far as He is concerned but present; and by this very fact it can no longer be called foreknowledge but only knowledge.”<sup>62</sup>

We are discussing God’s omniscience as a transitive attribute; hence God’s self-consciousness should not come into consideration here. We mention, however, that the Scriptures expressly state, both that the Son knows the Father (John 1:18) and that the Spirit “searcheth ... the deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:10, 11). Moreover, since God knows Himself as the Author of all things, His knowledge of Himself at once includes a knowledge of all things. This knowledge is called *necessaria, absoluta, abstracta, naturalis, scientia simplicis intelligentiae*, and is defined by Gerhard as “That whereby He knows Himself and all things possible.”<sup>63</sup>

In distinction from this knowledge the knowledge of the creatures is called *libera*. He knows the “ordinances of heaven” and “can number the clouds” (Job 38:33, 37). He knows “the time when the wild goats bring forth,” etc. (Job 39:1, 2). He knows that Aaron, Moses’ brother, “can speak well,” and also that “he cometh forth to meet” Moses (Exod. 4:14). He also knows “that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand” (Exod. 3:19).

61 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, § 243, p. 350: *Quod praescientia Deo tribuitur, id fit respectu nostri; ipsi enim omnia sunt praesentia, quae nobis adhuc futura.*

62 *De divers. quaest. ad Simplic.*, cap. II: *Quid est praescientia nisi scientia futurorum? Quid autem futurum est Deo, qui omnia supergreditur tempora? Si enim in scientia res ipsas habet, non sunt ei futurae sed praesentes; ac per hos non iam praescientia, sed tantum scientia dici potest.*

63 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II § 244, p. 351: *Qua se ipsum et omnia possibilia novit.*

Besides the two classes of God's foreknowledge mentioned so far, *scientia necessaria* and *libera*, there is a third class, called *media* by our theologians, which name is not very suggestive of its nature. A more significant name would be *scientia de futuro conditionato*, also *scientia hypothetica*, or *futuribulum*.—When David was in Keilah and heard that Saul knew his hiding place and would come to take him, he asked two questions of the Lord, first, Will Saul really come: and secondly, Will the men of Keilah deliver me? When the Lord answered both questions in the affirmative, David departed from Keilah, Saul did not come, and the citizens of Keilah had no opportunity to betray David (I Sam. 23:9–13). God knew what would surely happen under certain conditions. This is the *scientia media*. Another instance is the announcement of three different plagues, from which David was to choose one (I Chron. 21:9–14). According to Jeremiah 38:17–23, Zedekiah had the promise of the Lord that he and Jerusalem would be spared if he surrendered to the Chaldeans. See also Matthew 11:21, 23. God, thus, knows things that will take place under certain conditions, things that are possible; also their limitations, the impossible. Ezekiel 14 emphatically repeats the threat: “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it (the land), as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness” (vss. 14, 16, 18, 20). Compare also Jeremiah 13:23; Matthew 7:16, 18.

A controversy among Catholic theologians on this form of God's knowledge was suppressed by Pope Sixtus V in 1588. He imposed silence on both parties. This form of God's knowledge, clearly contained in the Scripture passages cited above, must be upheld because a denial would lead to determinism. Yet its application must be clearly limited to the field to which it is applied in the Scriptures. It has no place, eg., in the doctrine of election. There is no election *de futuro conditionato*, no election in view of faith.

All these divisions and classifications of God's knowledge, far from bringing it any closer to our comprehension, rather serve to overawe us with its immensity, terrifying the sinner out of his security, comforting the afflicted believer. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Ps. 139:6). “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

If we cultivate the attitude toward the knowledge of God expressed in the above passages, we shall not be troubled by a seeming clash between God's absolute omniscience (*praescientia*) and a sinner's responsibility for his evil conduct. The evil that God foresees, the sinner will commit as God foresees it. How can God hold the sinner accountable? If he had not sinned, God's foreknowledge would have failed in this instance. Does not then the infallibility of God's foreknowledge practically force the sinner to sin, leaving him no other choice?

Faustus Socinus offers the solution that God knows *omnia quae sua natura scibilia sunt*, that is to say, after the event has taken place and has become a matter of record. At least, so Socinus maintains, God has no foreknowledge of sinful acts. “All things which by their very nature are perceptible.... No argument, no testimony of Scripture can be adduced from which the conclusion can clearly be drawn that God had a knowledge of wicked deeds which were dependent on the decisions of men before they were committed.”<sup>64</sup> But limiting God's omniscience is denying it. And did not Jesus foreknow and foretell the betrayal of Judas? the denial of Peter? Did not God foreknow Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart? Rightly our Formula of Concord says, “The foreknowledge of God (*praescientia*) foresees and foreknows also that which is evil” (S.D. XI, 6).

R. Rothe suggested: “God has made a plan for the world. but only in bold general outline, because God knows in advance only the significant important free decisions of man, but not those in each unimportant matter.”<sup>65</sup> The latter God fits into His plans when He finds out about them that they have happened.—Again, this limits God's foreknowledge. Moreover, it leaves the problem untouched so far as important decisions of men are concerned. Who is to decide what is important? Small events often have far-reaching consequences. (A

64 *Praelect. theol.*, cap. VIII, p. 264: *Nulla ratio, nullum Scripturae testimonium proferri potest, ex quo aperte colligitur, Deum mala ex voluntatibus hominum dependentia scivisse antequam fierent.*

65 *Ethik*, I, § 42, p. 123: *Gott hat einen Weltplan gemacht, aber nur in grossen allgemeinen Umrissen, weil Gott nur die bedeutenden, wichtigen freien Entscheidungen des Menschen, nicht aber die in jeder unwichtigen Sache vorausweiss.*

kingdom was lost because of the neglect of a horseshoe nail.) And again, how can the important events be selected without a knowledge of the less important and unimportant ones?

Calvin solves (?) the difficulty with his theory of God's absolute decree: "Nor does He foresee those things which are in the future for any other reason except because of the fact that He has decreed that they should happen."<sup>66</sup>—No matter how these words and thoughts may be twisted, they ultimately make God the author of evil and reduce the decisions and actions of man to sham.

In all the Scripture passages quoted above on the foreknowledge of God there is not the slightest hint that God is troubled by any discrepancy between His *praescientia* and His holding the sinner responsible for his sin. Nor does our faith feel any constraint. We rejoice in the liberty which God has granted us; we feel responsible for our sins; and on the other hand we trust and rejoice in God's unerring foreknowledge. With our Confession we may distinguish between God's foreknowledge and His fore-ordination, between certainty and necessity. —The distinction of our dogmatists between *necessitas consequentis* (or *absoluta, praecedens, simplex*) and *necessitas consequentiae* (or *hypothetica, sequens, comitans, conditionalis, ex suppositione*) is rather cumbersome, and hence not very serviceable. —Augustine's remark that just as our memory may know a fact as certain, but does not therefore necessitate it, so God's foreknowledge may know something for certain without thereby necessitating it, rests on the fact that foreknowledge is ascribed to God, who dwells in timeless eternity, only anthropomorphically speaking. Augustine adds that God's foreknowledge includes a knowledge of man's free decisions. "And so (God), who foreknew the causes of all things, could certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our decisions also, which He foreknew to be the causes of our actions. How then does the succession of causes, which is definite in the sight of the prescient God, produce this effect that nothing happens in our will, when our decisions have an important place in the very order of causes?"<sup>67</sup>

**3. WISDOM**—*sapientia Dei*—on the one hand, is very closely related to omniscience, on the other, it covers an altogether different territory. Moreover, it is the wisdom of God which devised ways and means for our salvation.

What are we to understand by wisdom? When Proverbs 8:19, speaking in the person of wisdom, says: "My fruit is better than gold," it points with this metaphor to the aim which wisdom has set out to achieve. It is a precious, a salutary aim. The same thought is expressed in chap. 12:18, under a different figure: "The tongue of the wise is health." And again chapter 13:14: "The law of the wise is a fountain of life."

While the passages just cited speak of the salutary aim which wisdom selects and sets out to achieve, passages like Proverbs 8:20: "I lead in the way of righteousness," point out that wisdom is concerned also about the way to achieve its purpose. The means which wisdom selects are adequate, holy, and salutary. The same thought is expressed in a different way in chap. 15:2: "The tongue of the wise (which according to chap. 12:18, is the source of health) uses knowledge aright." And chap. 16:20, speaks about handling a matter wisely. The Preacher adds that "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment" (chap. 8:5). We conclude with the wonderful description of wisdom found in James 3:17: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

Thus injecting the two factors of aim and means, wisdom might be defined as applied knowledge governed by goodness.

The same truth is set forth by synonyms of wisdom. We adduce a few passages, italicizing the synonymous word. Genesis 41:33: "Let Pharaoh look out a man *discreet* and wise." Exodus 35:31: The Lord "hath filled him (Bezaleel) with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in *understanding*, and in *knowledge*, and in all manner of workmanship." Proverbs 16:21: "The wise in heart shall be called *prudent*." Daniel 1:4, speaks about children who were "*skilful* in all wisdom, and *cunning in knowledge*, and *understanding science*, and such as had *ability* in them."

66 *Institutiones III*, 23, 6: *Nec alia ratione quae futura sunt praevideat, nisi quia ut fierent decreverit.*

67 *De civitate Dei*, cap. IX: *Atque ita (Deus), qui omnium rerum causas praescivit, profecto in eis causis etiam nostras voluntates ignorare non potuit, quas nostrorum operum causas esse praescivit. Quomodo ergo ordo causarum, qui praescienti Deo certus est, id efficit, ut nihil fiat in nostra voluntate, cum in ipso causarum ordine magnum habeant locum nostrae voluntates?*

The opposite of wisdom is, not ignorance, but foolishness or folly, as Proverbs 14:24, tersely says: “The foolishness of fools is folly.”

The wisdom of God is *omnisapientia*, which always sets for itself the highest goals and is never at a loss about the most wonderful ways and means for attaining them. Job says of God: “With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding” (chap. 12:13); and Paul calls Him “the only wise God” (I Tim. 1:17; Rom. 16:27). Isaiah (40:13) asks the question which Paul repeats in Romans 11:34: “Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?” Compared with human wisdom “the foolishness of God is wiser than men,” just as “the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 1:25).

It behooves us then, not to criticize the ways of God, but to bow our heads in humble admiration before the unsearchable wisdom of God. “O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep” (Ps. 92:5). For, says the Lord, “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). See also Job 28:12–15, 20–23. Only in this way can we get to appreciate God’s wisdom to some extent. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10). “The Scriptures ... are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15).

Although the wisdom of God shines most brilliantly in His plan of salvation for sinners, it would be wrong to limit it to just that. The creation manifests His wisdom in that it serves the happiness of man and the honor of God. Many a time do the Scriptures proclaim that God “hath established the world by his wisdom” (Jer. 51:15; 10:12). See also Psalms 104:24; 136:5; Proverbs 3:19, 20.

Likewise God’s government of the world, particularly under the ravages of sin, shows us His wisdom. In general, passages like the following speak of some phase or other of world government and connect this with the wisdom of God. Isaiah 28:23–29; Daniel 2:20–23; Acts 17:26, 27; Job 12:12–25. The last named passage already points to a special manifestation of God’s wisdom in ordering the affairs of the sin-infested world and bringing beneficial results even out of evil deeds. “As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20). “Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us” (Isa. 8:10). And “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). See also Isaiah 29:14; Job 5:12, 13.

Nevertheless, the wisdom of God shines forth with its greatest glory in the plan of redemption, in the work of the Savior, in the power of the Gospel unto salvation, in the gathering and preservation of the Church; “which things the angels desire to look into” (I Pet. 1:12) “that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). See also Romans 11:33–36; I Corinthians 2:6–9; Ephesians 1:7–9.

For that reason it is a practical denial of the wisdom of God and an actual yielding to the *κρυπτὰ τῆς αἰσχύνης* (secret shame) if we try to win people to church by offering them inducements in addition to the Gospel, if we try to reenforce the power of the Gospel by the weight of numbers, or by the strength that lies in external union. For since the world in its wisdom knew not God, “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (I Cor. 1:21). That wisdom of God may not be violated with impunity.

A problem which has ever baffled human intelligence is how to harmonize the presence of sin and evil in the world with the wisdom of God. The question is not, whether God deals wisely under the existing circumstances with the evil that is present, always working towards His high goal and using adequate means; the question is, how could God permit the entrance of sin and evil without violating His own wisdom?

The solution offered, e.g., by Bretschneider, therefore, misses the mark, when he says that we must abandon the question because we cannot completely and correctly survey the whole course of history.

Likewise, the solution of, eg., William King must be rejected, who said that it would have been unworthy of God to prevent the fall of Adam by denying him a free will in the first place, or by restraining his will with force from yielding to the temptation, or by precluding the temptation altogether.—Contra: It would be presumption on our part to prescribe to God what He can or cannot do without violating His own dignity. And what about the fact that we hope to be *confirmati in bono* without the remotest possibility of another fall when we reach heaven, just as the good angels are already?

It is evading the issue to lay the blame on Adam for having abused the freedom which God granted him by creating him in His own image.

Atheism cuts the knot by denying the existence of God. Similarly dualism, by assuming the eternal coexistence of evil with God. Not much different is the stand taken by philosophical pessimism (represented by men like Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Nietzsche), namely that the present world is the worst conceivable.

The opposite view of philosophical optimism, brilliantly championed by Leibniz (*Theodicee*) proceeds on the assumption that the present world must be the best conceivable, for otherwise God either would not have known how, or would not have been able, or would not have been willing to produce a better one. Evil is considered as a lower stage of development on the way to perfection. It is a “not-yet,” something negative.—Contra: According to the creation story God declared all His works to be very good. Moreover, sin, although in the formal definition it is something negative, a non-conformity with God’s standard (ἀνομία), yet in its concrete occurrence in man is positive enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). Thus God’s wisdom is vindicated by optimism at the expense of toning down evil.

Fatalism, represented in the Church by Calvinism, destroys the wisdom of God by assuming that He resorted to horrible means in order to attain His aim. We quote from the *Presbyterian* for January 17, 1929: “According to Calvinism, God’s eternal purpose included the permission of evil acts, in order that God’s whole nature might be manifested, and that his righteousness, justice and love might all be fully revealed in his dealings with sinful man. The *ultimate responsibility for the permission of the evil acts rests with God*, though the immediate responsibility rests upon the created beings who chose to sin.”

From the Scriptures it is clear 1) that God is wise; 2) that sin originated against His will; 3) that the fulness of God’s wisdom appears in His plan of salvation, and that thus also sin and evil must serve His praise and glory.

**4. LOVE**—*amor transitivus*—is the attribute of God without which all His other perfections would give Him the appearance of a fierce ogre: but when viewed—as the vision of Ezekiel presented Him—through the screen of His love, He becomes to us a truly faith-and-love-inspiring God, and all His awesome perfections appear as offering Him different opportunities for promoting our happiness, for communicating Himself to us and establishing a union with us in which He delights.

How it is love by which difficulties and frictions are obviated among Christians and which imparts real value to acts of Christian service, is vividly, and with great warmth, portrayed by St. Paul in I Corinthians 13. “Faith worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6); love is the “bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14), is a “desire to see,” to be united (I Thess. 3:6). Likewise the love of God says to us: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). God is love, and He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Our Savior received the name *Emmanuel*, God with us. Rightly Quenstedt says: “The love of God is that whereby He on His part joins Himself in a winsome way with a lovable object.”<sup>68</sup>

From the foregoing it is clear that God’s striving for union and communion with us does not spring from a desire thus to enhance His own happiness. God does not need anything; He is blessed in Himself, and it simply is not true what the mystic Angelus Silesius says of Him:

“I am as great as God, As small as I is He;  
Above me He can’t be, Nor I lower than He.  
I know that without me God cannot live entire;  
If I should come to naught, He must of needs expire.”<sup>69</sup>

Great care must be had that in eulogizing the love of God such mystic elements are not admitted.

68 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, thes. XXX, p. 291: *Amor Dei est quo ipse cum obiecto amabili se suaviter unit.*

69 Johann Scheffler (Angelus Silesius):

*Ich bin als Gott so gross, er ist als ich so klein:  
Er kann nicht ueber mir, ich unter ihm nicht sein.  
Ich weiss, dass ohne mich Gott nicht ein Nu kann leben;  
Werd ich zu nicht, er muss von Not den Geist aufgeben.*

Whom does God love? He loves all His creatures (*amor universalis*). Among all His creatures He loves particularly man, the crown and head of His creation (*amor particularis, specialis*), and above all His Christians (*amor specialissimus*).

The love of God will express itself in different ways according to the nature of its object. His love toward the creatures is described by the Psalmist in these words: “The Lord shall *rejoice* in his works.” (*amor complacentiae*) (Ps. 104:31), and out of mercy and love He provides for their needs. See Psalms 104:10–18, 27, 28; 136:1–9, 25, 26; 147:9; Matthew 6:26–30. God’s love toward man in general is experienced also by Gentiles (*amor benevolentiae*), for “He left not himself without witness in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, *filling our hearts with food and gladness*” (Acts 14:17). And this He does regardless of whether men appreciate it or not, both to the evil and to the good, to the just and to the unjust (Matt. 5:45). For the benefit of man He made the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). God’s love toward man found its highest expression in the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4, 5; I Thess. 5:9; I John 4:9–11). The Christians, being His dear children, God loves with a love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*). “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him” (Ps. 147:11); He takes “pleasure in his people” (Ps. 149:4). He calls them by their name, cherishes them as His own (Isa. 43:1); thinks of them more than a mother does of her sucking child (Isa. 49:15, 16); calls them “dear son,” “pleasant child,” is “troubled in His bowels” for them (Jer. 31:20). For further expressions of endearment see Deuteronomy 33:3; Hosea 2:19, 20; Matthew 7:11; John 13:1; 14:21, 23; Romans 5:8, 9; I Corinthians 6:19; II Corinthians 6:18; I John 3:1; Hebrews 1:14.

These three forms of God’s love are briefly defined by Quenstedt (in a note on the above quoted thesis): “With the love of pleasure God loves all created things, or rather His own goodness which He has shared with them; with the love of benevolence He loves men in particular, for whose sake He sent His Son into the flesh and delivered Him into death—in one word it is termed philanthropy; with the love of friendship, however, He attends upon believers and those who have been received into His grace.”<sup>70</sup> Although Quenstedt traces this distinction to the Scholastics, we may well use it to impress on our hearts the riches of God’s love.

The same purpose is served by noting a number of expressions which the Scriptures use in describing the various reactions of God’s love to the different circumstances in which He finds people. We can here but list them and merely refer to some passages in which they occur.

**a.** —Kindness, *φιλανθρωπία* (*humanitas*) was mentioned in the quotation from Quenstedt. It occurs but once, Titus 3:4. Applied to human relations it is found in Acts 28:2; compare 27:3.

**b.** —Goodness, kindness, *χρηστότης*, *בונות* (*bonitas, dulcitus*). This is love in general. In particular it is applied to God’s clemency, His willingness to cancel punishment. Romans 2:4; 11:22; Ephesians 2:7; Titus 3:4; Psalm 31:19. Psalm 25:7; 145:7–9. It is ascribed to men as *benignitas, suavitas*. Romans 3:12; II Corinthians 6:6; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:12.

**c.** —Mercy, compassion, *ἔλεος, οἰκτιρισμός, σπλάγχνα, מִחֶנֶךְ, רַחֲמִים* (*misericordia*). This is God’s love as moved by man’s misery. The words occur singly or in combinations. Matthew 9:13; 12:7; 23:23; Luke 1:54, 71, 72; Ephesians 2:4; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 4:16. Romans 12:1; II Corinthians 1:3; Hebrews 10:28. Luke 1:78; Philippians 2:1; Colossians 3:12; James 5:11. Deuteronomy 30:3; II Samuel 24:14; Nehemiah 9:27; Psalm 77:9; Isaiah 9:17; 49:13; Jeremiah 12:15; Proverbs 12:10. Proverbs 14:21, 31.

**d.** —Grace, *χάρις* *חַסֵּד* (*gratia*). This important word, which shows God’s love in its efforts to save man from sin and its effects, will be discussed repeatedly in subsequent parts of dogmatics, particularly in connection with the article on justification. Here only a few passages: Acts 15:11; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 11:6; Ephesians 1:6, 7; 2:8, 9; Titus 3:7. Psalm 89:1, 2, 30–33; 103:10, 11.

**e.** —Forbearance, longsuffering, *ἀνοχή, μακροθυμία, יְרֵכָה, אֲפָיִם* (*patientia, longanimitas, sustentatio*). This is God’s love as it postpones punishment and extends the time of grace. Romans 2:4; 3:25; 9:22; II Peter 3:9. Exodus 34:6, 7; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:16–21; Psalm 86:14–16; 103:8; 145:8; Jonah 4:2.

<sup>70</sup> *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, thes. XXX, p. 291, nota: *Amore complacentiae amat Deus omnes res creatas, vel potius bonum suum quod cum illis communicavit; amore benevolentiae peculiariter amat homines, propter quos filium suum in carnem misit et in mortem tradidit*—*vocatur uno verbo φιλανθρωπία; amore autem amicitiae prosequitur fideles et in gratiam receptos.*

Great care must be taken not to overlook the fact that God's love, being genuine, is a holy love, not incompatible with the sternest justice. This point will come up for special consideration in the paragraph on punishment, particularly eternal punishment in hell. Our love, which is to be patterned after God's, is described in Romans 12:9 in these words: "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Amos 5:15: "Hate the evil, and love the good." Psalm 97:10. Already Tertullian remarked: "Goodness, unless it be governed by justice in order that it may be just, will not be goodness if it is unjust. For nothing which is unjust is good; everything which is just, however, is good."<sup>71</sup>

Nor must it be forgotten that for the purpose of training us under the conditions of sin, and for the purpose of establishing an example of the power of His grace, God may out of fatherly love lay on us a cross, inflict bitter chastisement, and that, as He Himself remarked in the case of Job, "without cause" (chap. 2:3). More of this under sanctification.

**5. HOLINESS**—*sanctitas*—is usually thought of by us in negative terms as the freedom from sin. It is much more, as a look at Isaiah 6 will readily show. Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple on a high and exalted throne, by Himself filling the room. Before His splendor the great seraphim shaded their eyes with their wings. These pure beings covered their feet, as though they were soiled before the piercing eyes of this lofty King and Priest. From the glorious majesty which they beheld their hearts were filled with irrepressible joy so that they burst forth into loud singing. They know of only one word that will adequately express their feeling: Holy. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah also should sing the praises of this holy King and Priest; but being a man born with unclean lips, he realized that any word of praise would immediately turn into blasphemy as it crossed his lips. But the holy One Himself provides a purification, so thorough, that Isaiah is ready to take even the word of the Holy One Himself into his mouth.

In sublime, awe-inspiring majesty God loves the ethically good and hates the evil, filling the hearts of the pure with exquisite joy. When God, after creation, sanctified and blessed the seventh day (Gen. 2:3), He filled the whole earth with this glorious rest-giving power. "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, ... *glorious in holiness*, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exod. 15:11). "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy" (Ps. 99:9). "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy" (Rev. 15:4). To sinners it is said: "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God" (Josh. 24:19).

Since man's holiness is to be patterned after God's, we can see in a faint way from the demands made on man what the holiness of God is like.

The will of God is stated, eg., in Leviticus 11:44, 45: "I am the Lord your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy, for I am holy.... Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." This is reiterated in chapter 19:2. And St. Peter repeats it in his First Epistle, chapter 1:15, 16.

Holiness, which implies a complete separation from anything vile, was set forth in God's orders to the Children of Israel not to "eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field" (Exod. 22:31); such meat was fit for dogs. Note the exhortation of Paul: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 7:1). Note also how in several variations holiness and blamelessness are paired, e.g., Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; I Thessalonians 3:13; 4:7; II Timothy 2:21. On the other hand, a love of the good and hatred of the evil is demanded of man (Rom. 12:9; Amos 5:14, 15).

On the basis of such considerations our theologians define holiness as Quenstedt does: "The holiness of God is in God His purity, perfect and utterly free from any and every blot or blemish, demanding from His creatures the due cleanness and purity; or, that by which God is perfectly pure, clean, and holy, and the author of all purity and holiness in His creatures."<sup>72</sup>

71 *Adv. Marc.*, lib. II, cap. II: *Bonitas, nisi iustitia regatur ut iusta sit, non erit bonitas, si iniusta sit. Nihil enim bonum quod iniustum; bonum autem omne quod iustum.*

72 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, thes. XXXIV, p. 292: *Sanctitas Dei est summa omnisque omnino labis aut vitii expers in Deo puritas; munditiam et puritatem debitam exigens a creaturis; sive, quo Deus summe purus, mundus et sanctus est, omnisque puritatis et sanctitatis in creaturis autor.*

In proclaiming God's holiness we must guard against the impression as though God were declared holy only after a comparison with some standard of holiness, His attitude and His actions having been found to be in conformity with it. God is independent; He is under no law or idea of holiness; He is Himself the *Summum Bonum*. It is really not doing full justice to the independence of God if we present Him the way Baier does as being a law to Himself: "God, who has no law given Him by a superior authority, is a law unto Himself."<sup>73</sup>

For our holiness God's decalog is the standard, so that whatever God commands is good, what He forbids is evil; whatever God did not forbid is not evil, what He did not command is not good (but ethically indifferent). See Romans 7:12; Deuteronomy 4:2; II Peter 2:21 ("holy commandment"); Matthew 15:9; Micah 6:8.

A few words must be said on the point that God's holiness is a *transitive* attribute. This is apparent from two facts. One is that God's holiness is represented as destroying unholy things; the other, that God according to His holiness cleanses us from our sin.

In Ezekiel 38:14–23, we have a vivid description of God's judgment on Gog. Then God concludes: "Thus will I magnify myself and sanctify myself." And again in chapter 39:7, He says: "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and will not let them pollute my holy name any more. And the heathen shall know (i.e., experience) that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel." Compare also Psalm 5:4, 5 with Isaiah 10:17.

In Ezekiel 36:21–28, God comforts His people that "for His holy name's sake" He will "sprinkle clean water upon them, and they shall be clean" (vs. 25). Moreover, He will give them a "new heart" and a "new spirit" (vs. 26). And He will shower them with His blessings. Compare also Leviticus 22:32. Note how the "holy arm" of the Lord prepares salvation, Psalm 98:1–3; 111:9; Isaiah 52:10. Remember Isaiah 6:5–7; and in this light read Ephesians 5:26, 27; Hebrews 9:13, 14; Deuteronomy 28:9; and others.

Holiness is not identical with righteousness; but it is not a very fortunate way of expressing the distinction by calling the former *iustitia interna* and the latter *iustitia externa*.

As a special manifestation of God's holiness the Scriptures emphasize His veracity (truth, faithfulness). There are many passages which ascribe truthfulness to God. II Samuel 7:28; Psalm 33:4; 146:6; Isaiah 25:1; Jeremiah 42:5; John 3:33; 7:28; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; Revelation 3:14; 19:9.

Frequently truthfulness and holiness (or righteousness) are paired. Psalm 19:9; 89:35; 105:42; Amos 4:2; John 17:17; Revelation 3:7; 6:10; 15:3.

It is evident, on the other hand, that truthfulness is also closely related to immutability, particularly immutability of decree, which presupposes and implies veracity. Note the fact that God swears by Himself, Genesis 22:16; Jeremiah 51:14; Hebrews 6:13, 17, 18.

Note also the close relation between truthfulness and love. Because God is Love, He will not deceive. Yes, the Scriptures practically identify God's truth and His love. The two are paired, frequently in synonymous parallelism, while in John 1:17 they are treated as forming one compound concept: "Grace and truth (as opposed to the law which was given by Moses) came by Jesus Christ." See the following passages: Genesis 24:27; Psalm 25:10; 31:5; 36:5; 40:10, 11; 89:1, 2, 14, 24, 33, 49; 100:5; 43:3. (In the last passage salvation is expressed by the metaphor "light.")

**6. JUSTICE—RIGHTEOUSNESS**—*iustitia*—must from the very beginning be distinguished as *iustitia legalis* and *iustitia evangelica*. The fact that Luther under his Roman Catholic training was unable to make this distinction caused him endless heartache and drove him to the brink of despair.

**a. *Iustitia legalis*** consists in this that God adequately rewards the good which He demands and punishes the evil.

This meaning of righteousness is evident in the confession of Pharaoh: "I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Exod. 9:27). A similar confession by Nehemiah expresses the same truth: "Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly" (chap. 9:33). Compare also the pertinent question of Bildad: "Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty

<sup>73</sup> *Comp. Theol. Pos.*, Pars I, cap. I, § 23, b, p. 40: *Deus, qui legem a superiore latam non habet, ipsi sibi lex est.*



pervert justice?” (Job 8:3). “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces” (Dan. 9:7).—Attention has been called already (above under *e*) to the close connection between righteousness and holiness. They are paired in Psalm 145:17: “The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” Righteousness manifests the holiness of God according to Isaiah 5:16: “God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.”

This righteousness of God is described as retributive, *executiva*, either *remunerativa* or *punitiva*, *vindicativa*, *ultrix*. Abraham, in his plea for Sodom and Gomorrah, is horrified by the thought that God should “slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked” (Gen. 18:25). The Psalmist prayed: “O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins” (Ps. 7:9). In speaking of the final judgment Paul declares that God “will render unto every man according to his deeds,” namely, “glory and honor and immortality” to them that “by patient endurance in well-doing” seek “eternal life”; and “unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:6–8). And again he says that “it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (II Thess. 1:6). Compare also Jeremiah 11:20; II Timothy 4:8; Revelation 16:5–7. Calov sums up the matter in the words: “The Righteousness of God is that according to which the just God is the one who rewards the good and punishes the wicked.”<sup>74</sup>

In connection with His providence God instituted government among men, including among its functions “to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4). Thus God’s retributive justice is reflected in the justice of human rulers and judges. David, in his last words, says also this: “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (II Sam. 23:3). Jehoshaphat admonished the judges whom he appointed: “Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be with you ... for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (II Chron. 19:6, 7). See also Proverbs 16:10–12; 29:4.—Human rulers are in a position to dispense justice because of the inscribed law. They themselves know by nature what constitutes and what violates civic righteousness, and their subjects know the same. However, as Gerhard remarks, this knowledge is imperfect and weak. “Although both from the naturally implanted distinction between that which is just and that which is unjust as well as from the punishments accompanying the more serious offenses human reason recognizes in some measure that God is just, which is attested by the statements of the Gentiles concerning the righteousness of God: nevertheless that recognition is imperfect and weak.”<sup>75</sup>

A discussion of the punishments which the justice of God inflicts will come up in connection with the study of sin. Here it will suffice that two classes may be distinguished: *poenae naturales*, which appear to be the natural result of the sin committed according to physical and psychological laws, according to the common saying: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7);—and *poenae positivae*, which appear to have been imposed arbitrarily, as was the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11).

Since man’s natural understanding of righteousness is a sickly thing, and since also a Christian does not have detailed information of God’s plans in His world government, it will often happen that we do not understand the righteousness of God. The doubts that may trouble a Christian on this account, and the proper answer, are fully presented in the 73rd Psalm. Job was troubled in a similar way: “The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly” (chap. 12:6). “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?” (chap. 21:7). See also Ecclesiastes 7:15; Jeremiah 12:1–4;—Ezekiel 18:25–32; II Peter 3:9; Romans 9:22.

It is a misunderstanding of both God’s love and His punitive righteousness when men pretend to find a clash between the two. Is not the love of Christians, which is patterned after God’s (see Matt. 5:44–48; Luke 6:36), described as a holy love which by its very nature includes an abhorrence of evil? (See Rom. 12:9; I Thess. 5:21, 22; I Pet. 2:11). Moreover, the Christians’ love for their enemies does not prevent them from

<sup>74</sup> *Systema*, tom. II, p. 565: *Iustitia Dei est qua Deus iustus est retributor boni atque vindex mali.*

<sup>75</sup> *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, sect. XII § 223, p. 347: *Quamvis tum ex naturaliter insito iusti et iniusti discrimine, tum ex poenis graviora delicta comitantibus ratio humana quodammodo agnoscat Deum esse iustum, quod testantur dicta gentilium de Dei iustitia: tamen cognitio illa est imperfecta et languida.*

praying for the destruction of confirmed representatives of sin and evil. The imprecatory Psalms may be sung with a heavy heart, yet to connive at the inveterate hatred of the enemies would violate both love and righteousness. See Psalm 58:1–11; 59:5, 13; 79:6, 7; 83:13–18.—Sin is enmity against God, rebellion, aiming at God’s dethronement and destruction. Can God love Himself as *Summum Bonum*, as the fountain whence all goodness flows on His creatures, and at the same time condone the attempts at His complete annihilation?—In passing we remind ourselves that since God is *One*, and all His attributes are really the same, presenting God only as viewed in different relations, any contradiction can be only apparent.

**b. *Iustitia evangelica*** is an expression of God’s scrupulous fidelity to Himself and to His covenant promises, its formal sense being something like absolute correctness. In essence it is synonymous to salvation.

The prophet Isaiah, although he did not coin the term, used it extensively and unfolded its meaning. It abounds in the Psalms. Jeremiah has it, though not so often. St. Paul uses it to sum up the contents of the Gospel. “Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17).

Isaiah uses the term in this way: “Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee *with the right hand of my righteousness*” (chap. 41:10). And again: “Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed” (chap. 45:24). See also chapter 42:6, 21; 45:20–25; 51:5, 6, 8 (note particularly the juxtaposition of *righteousness* and *salvation*); 59:16, 17; and many others.

The best known passages from Jeremiah are chapter 23:6, and 33:16, where both the Lord Himself and Jerusalem at the time that the Lord raises a “righteous Branch” unto David are called by the name “*The Lord Our Righteousness*.”

For a coupling of righteousness and salvation in the Psalms see 132:9, 16: “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.... I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.” Or 71:15: “My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day.” The Psalmist confesses in 31:1 that he puts his trust in the Lord, and prays: “Let me never be ashamed, deliver me in thy righteousness.” Compare also 5:8; 17:15; 119:40.

From the wealth of material contained in the Scriptures on this righteousness of God, we select the following passages: Psalm 22:31; 24:5; 40:9–11; 85:10; 89:13–18; 116:5; Isaiah 1:27; Romans 3:26; 10:4; I John 1:9; 2:29; Revelation 15:3, 4.

For a man who has found salvation in the Gospel righteousness of the Lord, also God’s punitive righteousness not only has lost its terror but has become a source of strength for his faith, assuring him of God’s protection against the unjust oppressors. Note the prayer of the Psalmist: “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” (82:3). See also Psalm 103:6; 129:4; Zephaniah 3:8.

**7. OMNIPOTENCE**—*omnipotentia*—Power, eternal power, is mentioned by Paul in the first place as an attribute of God which natural man recognizes as he observes the works of creation (Rom. 1:20). This attribute is terrifying to the enemies of God and comforting to His children. The greater the power the greater also the comfort, or the terror respectively.

We may arrange the statements of Scripture regarding the power of God in such an order that they gradually lead up to a realization that God in unlimited power can do whatever does not conflict with His perfections; in other words: that He can do whatsoever He pleases.

We find statements which simply ascribe power to God, indicating, however, implicitly that His is an unusual power. “Thou reignest over all, and in thy hand is power and might” (I Chron. 29:12). “God hath power to help and to cast down” (II Chron. 25:8). “He divideth the sea with his power” (Job 26:12). See also Psalm 62:11; 65:6.—God’s ability by far exceeds human ability. “If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people ... should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 8:6). “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27). See also Matthew 19:26.—The previous passages already indicated that God’s ability surpasses human comprehension. Paul says of God that He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). The Psalmist uses figurative language, singing that “the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters,

yea, than the mighty waves of the sea” (93:4). The prophet paints a vivid picture of God’s power: He “hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are (but) the dust of his feet” (Nah. 1:3). And John the Baptist warned his unrepentant hearers that “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Luke 3:8).—From these statements it is only a very short step to the full truth that God’s ability is unbounded. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). “Thou canst do everything” (Job 42:2). “Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3). “I will work, and who shall let it?” (Isa. 43:13). “The Lord omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 19:6). For similar statements see Psalm 33:9; 135:6; Jeremiah 32:17; Mark 14:36; Luke 1:37.

Our theologians add a few thoughts by way of explanation to set forth the omnipotence of God more clearly. Brochmand: “When I attribute omnipotence to God, I am ascribing to Him power so great that He is able to do by far more than any creature is able to grasp, indeed that whatever He wishes to do He can do with no effort and difficulty, though even the whole creation were to oppose Him.”<sup>76</sup> Gerhard adds: “God’s power is infinite 1) in itself and by itself or by its very nature, just as God Himself, of whom it is an essential characteristic that He is called infinite; 2) with reference to its objects, which not only have already been produced in great variety and countless number but also could be made still infinitely different by Him, if that should please His wisdom; 3) by reason of His way of doing things, because God never does anything so intensively and effectually that He could not do it in a more intensive and more effectual way.”<sup>77</sup>

It is no denial nor limitation of God’s omnipotence that He will not do anything that would conflict with His perfections. Gerhard reports that Pliny: “... denies that God is omnipotent in view of the fact that He cannot die and deceive, nor can He make that which has been done undone.”<sup>78</sup> This argument Augustine met as follows: “The power of God is not diminished when it is said that He cannot die or be deceived. For this is impossible from this point of view that, rather, if it were possible, He would assuredly be of inferior power... For He is called omnipotent because He does what He wills, not because He suffers what He does not will; if this were to happen to Him, He would certainly not be omnipotent.—The great power of God is his inability to lie.—I am surprised that Pliny ... cavils so against the omnipotence of God.”<sup>79</sup>

It is sufficient that the Scriptures maintain that God “cannot deny himself” (II Tim. 2:13), and that it is “impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18). See also Titus 1:2.—Schertzer points out the fallacy in Pliny’s argument as follows: “There are sophisms by which the definition of the subject is annulled: For if God would deceive, would die, would sin, He would not be God” (since God in His essence is truth, life, holiness). “If a creature would have infinite perfection, it would not be a creature; if the past would not have passed, it would not be the past; if tomorrow would be here today, it would not be today.”<sup>80</sup>—Hollaz phrases our statement at the head of this paragraph in the following way, calling omnipotence “a divine attribute by virtue of which God can effect everything which ... does not imply any imperfection in God.”<sup>81</sup>

76 *Systema*, tom. I, art. III, cap. I, § III, 7, p. 105: *Omnipotentiam Deo ubi tribuo, tantam potentiam ipsi assigno, ut multo plura quam ulla creatura capere possit facere queat, adeo ut quicquid facere vult hullo labore et negotio facere possit, invitis etiam omnibus rebus creatis.*

77 *Loci*, tom. I, sec. II, cap. VIII, sect. IX, § 197, p. 334: *Infinita est potentia Dei 1) in se et per se seu natura sua, sicut Deus ipse, cuius essenziale idioma est quod infinitus appellatur; 2) respectu obiectorum, quae non tantum iam facta varia sunt et innumera, sed etiam infinita adhuc alia ab ipso fieri possent si sapientiae eius placeret; 3) ratione modi agendi, quia nunquam tam intensive et efficaciter agit Deus ut non intensius et efficacius agere possit.*

78 *Hist. natur.*, lib. II, cap. VII: *Deum omnipotentem esse negat ex eo quia mori et fallere non potest, nec factum infectum reddere potest.*

79 *De civitate Dei*, lib. V, cap. X: *Potestas Dei non minuitur cum dicitur mori fallique non posse. Sic enim hoc non potest ut potius si posset minoris esset utique potestatis. ... Dicitur enim omnipotens faciendo quod vult, non patiendo quod non vult, quod si ei acederet nequaquam omnipotens esset—Magna Dei potentia est non posse mentiri—Miror Plinium ... sic contra omnipotentiam Dei cavillare.*

80 *Systema*, p. 55: *Sunt sophismata quibus definitio rei tollitur: Si enim Deus mentiretur, moreretur, peccaret, Deus non esset. Si creatura infinitam perfectionem haberet, creatura non esset; si praeteritum non praeteriisset, praeteritum non esset; si dies crastina bodie existeret, bodie non esset.*

81 *Examen*, pars I, cap. I, qu. 48, p. 301: *Attributum divinum quo Deus efficere potest omne quod ... in Deo nullam importat imperfectionem.*

Gerhard points out that it would be bordering dangerously close on illegitimate anthropomorphism to consider the omnipotence of God as being an organ of His will: “From the simplicity of the divine essence it is evident that power is not in reality distinguished from will: but the question is whether it may be distinguished logically.... It is more correctly established that in God His power is distinguished from His will not even logically, 1) because the holy Scripture depicts the will of God to us as the cause of all things (Ps. 115:3; 148:5; Isa. 46:10); 2) it is a mark of imperfection that in a creature endowed with intellect its power to execute its decisions is distinguished from its will, but every imperfection must be dismissed from God.”<sup>82</sup>

The absoluteness of God’s omnipotence would be impaired if we adopted Abelard’s line of thought: “God can do only that which He has foreknown and decreed from eternity that He would at some time or other do. But only those things which He at some time or other does has He foreknown and decreed that He would do.”<sup>83</sup> Over against this limitation of God’s omnipotence we hold with Gerhard (cf. quotation above) that God never does anything so great, that He could not do something greater.

Regarding the manner of operation of God’s omnipotence we observe that He either performs His works in accordance with certain laws which He Himself has established, be they the physical laws of nature or the natural laws of logic, or He performs His work independently of such laws.

In the first case the power of God is called *ordinata*, in the second *absoluta*. God refers to His *potentia ordinata* when, eg., He comforted Noah after the flood: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). We see the *potentia ordinata* in operation when every plant reproduces “after his kind” (Gen. 1:12), and when He uses the sun, moon, and stars to rule over day and night, and to give rise to seasons, days, and years (Gen. 1:14–18). At the end of time “the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:26).—The *potentia Dei absoluta* appears in every miracle which He performs; eg., when He made a dry path for Israel through the Red Sea (Exod. 14:22). when Elisha made the iron swim (II Kings 6:6), when the shadow on Ahaz’ sundial went backward ten degrees (Isa. 38:8), when the fire was prevented from singeing even a hair of the three friends of Daniel (Dan. 3:27), when Jesus was conceived without human father by the Virgin Mary (Matt. 1:25), and many others.

No matter, however, in which manner the omnipotence of God operates, it is always the same infinite power of the same independent God, no less wonderful when working through natural causes according to natural laws, which this very omnipotence sustains, than when operating directly, independently of natural laws and causes.

#### IV. The Will of God

**Preliminary remarks**—While modern psychology assigns the activities and experiences of the human soul to three fields, viz., of intellect, emotion, and volition, older psychology distinguished but two functions of the soul: intellect and will (thus combining emotion with volition in the latter). This must be kept in mind when reading our older dogmaticians. Although their presentations of the will of God often leave the impression as though God reached His decisions by means of cool, disinterested calculation, yet they also refer to God’s *beatitudo* in connection with His will.

When speaking of the will of God we must carefully avoid the idea as though the will were something *essentiae divinae superadditum*, or something essentially distinct from His intellect. Will is not the basic essence of God; however, it is identical with God when He is conceived from this particular angle: *Deus volens*.

The Scriptures in speaking of God’s will present the matter to us anthropomorphically.

<sup>82</sup> *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, § 198, p. 335: *Realiter potentiam a voluntate non distingui manifestum est ex essentiae divinae simplicitate: quaestio veto est, an ratione distinguatur? ... Rectius statuitur nequidem ratione potentiam a voluntate in Deo distingui 1.) quia Scriptura sacra voluntatem Dei nobis proponit ut causam omnium rerum (Ps. 115, 3; 148, 5; Isa. 46, 10); 2.) imperfectionis est quod in creatura intellectuali distinguitur potentia executiva a voluntate, sed a Deo removenda omnis imperfectio.*

<sup>83</sup> *Epistula 190 ad Bernhardum*: (Gerhard, *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, § 192, p. 332.) *Deus solum potest facere quod ab aeterno praescivit et decrevit se aliquando facturum. Sed illa solum quae aliquando facit praescivit et decrevit se facturum.*

viz. videlicet

In discussing God's attributes of holiness, righteousness, omnipotence, love, we have seen various manifestations of God's will. It will suffice now to add a few general observations on God's striving to realize whatever according to His wisdom is good, and to prevent whatever is evil.

**A.** In common usage the term *will* has a threefold application: it is used for the faculty of volition, for an individual act of this faculty, and, by metonymy, for the content of a volition. The Scriptures apply the term in the same way to God.

When Paul in Ephesians 1:5, 11, speaks of "the good pleasure of his will" and "the counsel of his own will," then "pleasure" and "counsel" refer to the individual volitions of the *Deus volens*.

Such individual decisions are called "will," eg., in Daniel 4:32: "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he *will*." Romans 1:10: "I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." See also I Samuel 2:25; Psalm 115:3; Romans 9:19; I Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 1:9; 3:11; I Peter 4:19.

A metonymy is found, eg., in Psalm 40:8: "I delight to do *thy will*, O my God." Matthew 12:50: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father." See also Psalm 103:21; Matthew 6:10; 7:21; Romans 12:2.

**B.** God being the absolutely Independent Being, this implies that His will is free and acting with spontaneity. When our theologians speak of the freedom of God's will, they do not merely mean to say that there is nothing to hamper, hinder, or impede it at any stage; they also maintain that no causes are required to set it in motion, *causae formaliter causantes*; while anthropomorphically speaking *causae virtualiter causantes* must be allowed to the Scriptures. They rightly reject the opinion of Rationalists: "That God is coerced by nothing else than by the force of reason,"<sup>84</sup> because this would import an imperfection into God. Quenstedt says: "The foremost attribute of His will is freedom", but then he limits this to the *opera ad extra*, where God's will is free "to an extent that He can even be non-willing," while he calls God's will concerning Himself "necessary in a natural and simple way."<sup>85</sup> This is unfortunate. In view of God's own emphatic *I AM THAT I AM* and of Paul's statement that all things are ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν (Rom. 11:36), also God's will concerning Himself and His perfections must be considered as free, however not in the sense as though God's will were, so to say, the root of His being.

Scripture speaking of God's will anthropomorphically presents it as set in motion by *causae moventes*, some being *internae*, as, love, compassion, wrath, etc., some *externae*, as, human conduct, man's condition of misery, etc.

In the great work of our redemption God's will appears as love and mercy. While John 3:16 traces our redemption to the *love* of God, Paul in Galatians 1:4 says that it took place "according to *the will* of God and our Father." Speaking of our "redemption through Christ's blood" (Eph. 1:7), Paul says that thereby God "made known unto us the mystery of his will" (v. 9). Compare also John's statement that "God is love" (I John 4:8, 16). But God's mercy is completely autonomous and spontaneous. "I will have mercy (simple future) on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15; Exod. 33:19). Paul then adds: "So it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy"; for which he thus vindicates absolute spontaneity. And in verse 18 he sums up: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will (*θέλει*) have mercy." Compare also on God's will as being set on our salvation I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11; and on its spontaneity, Romans 11:5, 6.

**C.** The free will of God manifests itself in different ways over against the different creatures according to the different natures which the very will of God, acting in perfect freedom, imparted to them. Thus with reference to irrational creatures, no difference between God's will and His omnipotence is discernible. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that he did in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6; see also 83:6, 9, and many others).

A difficulty arises, and the manifestations of God's free will present phases which our intellect cannot grasp, when we observe God's attitude over against man whom He created in His own image (Gen. 1:26, 27),

84 Doederlein, *Institutiones*, I, p. 320: *quod Deus nulla re alia quam rationis vi cogatur*.

85 Theol. did. pol., pars I, cap. VIII, thes. XXVIII, p. 290: *Praecipuum voluntatis attributum libertas est ... ita ut possit etiam non-velle ... naturalis et simpliciter necessaria*.

whom He endowed with the faculty of volition, to whom He granted dominion over the earth, and whom, even after he had fallen into sin, He appointed to maintain order on earth to the extent that he may inflict capital punishment (Gen. 9:6). He treats him as a personal being, uses moral suasion to influence his decisions, but refrains from applying coercion.

It was God's free will to grant man liberty of choice (Gen. 2:16, 17), and although man abused that liberty and disobeyed God, introducing sin into the world (Rom. 5:12), God did not deprive man of personality nor reduce him to the level of beasts. He may at times make it physically impossible for man to carry out his evil designs (Gen. 3:22), but He keeps on dealing with man through commandments, promises, threats, invitations, exhortations, admonitions, warnings, and the like. Compare Deuteronomy 31:19, 21; Isaiah 65:2; Jeremiah 31:3; Matthew 23:37; Romans 10:16; I Corinthians 1:21.

The situation now is this that man, by yielding to sin, has forfeited his freedom and has become a slave of sin. See Proverbs 5:22; John 8:34; Acts 8:23; Romans 5:10; 6:16; 7:23; II Peter 2:19. Yet "not unwillingly is he such";<sup>86</sup> he willingly yields his "members servants to uncleanness" (Rom. 6:19); he stiffens his neck and hardens his heart (Acts 7:51, Heb. 3:15) and refuses the aid of God (Matt. 23:37). He is responsible for his sin, which is disobedience to the will of God (Rom. 2:12; 6:23). Because of this self-incurred bondage of the will under sin man is utterly unable to produce anything of spiritual value, or to contribute in the least to its production, as, for instance, conversion, faith, love, etc. "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). "No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12:3). See also Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-10. Whatever of good there is found in man is produced entirely by a free creative act of God, who "worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Yet, God does not do so by an act of "irresistible grace," i.e., by coercion. Here we have the logically insoluble contradiction in the Scripture doctrine of conversion: when a sinner comes to faith, his conversion is due entirely to the grace of God; when a sinner rejects the Gospel in unbelief, the fault is entirely his own.

This whole matter will come up for detailed study in the part of dogmatics presenting Soteriology.

Regarding the physical life of man, including also his natural soul life in the three spheres of intellect, volition, and emotion, it was the will of God to subject it to the laws of nature, which He Himself established and maintains. See Genesis 2:7; 8:22; Psalm 104:14; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Matthew 6:32. A man may misuse these laws for doing evil, but God does not suspend them in that case. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). God does not thereby Himself become responsible for the sinful act. He concurs in producing it only *quoad materiam* (the act as such, physical and mental); *quoad formam* (motive, aim, etc.) the sinner alone is responsible. God hates and punishes evil, Psalm 5:4; 50:21; James 1:13.

This matter will receive further discussion in the chapter on God's providence.

**D.** Since our faculty of volition is a gift from our Creator, who limited it according to the good pleasure of his own will; since His own will is perfectly free, not only in its decisions but also in their execution: does not then God's will really neutralize human freedom? In other words, does not human freedom become a fond dream, an illusion? This is an objection which Paul himself raises to his doctrine of free grace. "Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19). Instead of answering the question Paul rejects it as impertinent. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (v. 20). A child of God will not ask the question but will rejoice in, and be thankful for, the freedom which God has granted us. A child of God will always remember, moreover, that true liberty consists in the harmony of our will with God's, that liberty, on the one hand, and servitude of God, on the other, are interchangeable terms (John 8:36; Rom. 6:18).

In connection with this problem we set forth a few pertinent Scripture truths.

First, it dare not be questioned that God's will under all circumstances will accomplish its purpose. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). It will stand in spite of the fiercest opposition on the part of man (and of the devil). "There are many devices in a man's heart;

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<sup>86</sup> *Non invitatus talis est.*

nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Prov. 19:21). See also Isaiah 14:27; Jeremiah 4:28; Daniel 4:35.

Secondly, since God knows the evil decisions and actions of man in advance, He makes allowance for them in His plans. Note how the Psalmist speaks of God’s knowledge “afar off,” i.e., far in advance, of the minutest details of our plans and actions (Ps. 139:1–4), and observe how God embodied the future disobedience of Israel in His calculations (Deut. 31:16–21). At times He will turn the evil designs of men to serve His purposes, as He did in the sale of Joseph into Egypt (Gen. 50:20); at times He will curb them or frustrate them altogether. For examples and statements see Genesis 11:8; Job 5:12; Psalm 33:10; Isaiah 41:11; 44:25; Jeremiah 20:11.

Thirdly, God also shapes the purposes of man. Even “the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). See also Psalm 33:15.

Fourthly, we remember that in all this God employs means that are adapted to man as a personal being: He uses suasion; He permits a person to be carried away by his passions; He allows him to see things in a wrong light; He withholds information and the like. See, eg., how God frustrated Absalom’s plans against his father, II Samuel 15:31; 17:1ff. For other instances see I Kings 22:20ff.; Jeremiah 20:7. See also Deuteronomy 11:26; 30:19.

Gerhard, taking into consideration some dogmatical distinctions and classifications of the will of God, presents this matter in the following words: “Some things God wills absolutely, others conditionally. Those things which God wills absolutely, necessarily occur, but those which He wills conditionally do not take place unless the condition is fulfilled. God’s will, therefore, does not preclude in man the liberty of free choice in external matters, because it does not exclude but includes the subsidiary causes, among which is the liberty of free choice, nor does it predetermine the human will in any one direction by a certain physical necessity, but it allows it that freedom which is naturally implanted in it, nor does it bring a certain antecedent and *a priori* necessity to bear on its choice of action, but by a general cooperation toward producing the result it grants and preserves the power to act.”<sup>87</sup> Gerhard quotes Thomas with approval: “Although God on His part immutably wills all things which He wills, nevertheless from an objective point of view He wills the very variability and mutability of things.”<sup>88</sup>

**E.** God’s will is one, just as His essence is one, but with regard to its object and to the manner in which its operation appears, certain distinctions and classifications have been attempted. We list some with a few explanatory remarks.

**1. *Voluntas naturalis (necessaria)*,** God’s will as He wills and loves Himself as *Summum Bonum*—and *Voluntas libera*, God’s will regarding His creatures, which might be other than it is, yes, might be even the very opposite of what it is. Compare Matthew 20:15; Romans 9:20, 21.

This distinction was briefly evaluated above.

**2. *Voluntas (libera) efficax* and *inefficax*.** Gerhard reports Augustine’s definition in the following statement: “He calls that the efficacious or unalterable and very omnipotent will of God according to which He determines to reward those who live a righteous life and to punish sinners, which, he asserts, is always carried out. He calls that inefficacious according to which He wills that all men lead a good life and that no one sin.”<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XV, § 282, p. 362: *Quaedam Deus vult absolute, quaedam conditionaliter. Quae absolute Deus vult, necessario fiunt, quae veto conditionaliter, non nisi conditione posita. Voluntas ergo Dei non excludit arbitrii libertatem in rebus externis in homine, quia causas inferiores, inter quas est arbitrii libertas, non excludit sed includit, nec praedeterminat voluntatem kumanam physica quadam necessitate ad partem unam; sed libertatem eidem naturaliter insitam relinquit, nec affert eius motui necessitatem quandam antecedentem et a priori, sed generali concursu ad agendum vires agendi donat et conservat.*

<sup>88</sup> *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XV, § 282, p. 362: *Quamvis Deus immutabiliter ex parte sua velit omnia quae vult, vult rameh ipsam rerum variabilitatem et mutabilitatem obiective.*

<sup>89</sup> *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XV, § 272, p. 359: *Efficacem seu invictam et omnipotentissimam Dei voluntatem vocat eam qua statuit bene agentes remunerare et peccantes punire, quam semper impleri asserit. Inefficacem vocat qua vult omnes bene vivere et neminem peccare.*

According to the definition God's inefficacious will would be a mere sham; an ineffective will, predicated of God, is a contradiction in terms. That men do evil contrary to the command of God is due to an abuse on their part of their God-willed freedom.

**3. *Voluntas (efficax) absoluta***—(cf. Ps. 115:3; Isa. 46:10; Rom. 9:19)—and ***conditionata*** (cf. Deut. 28:1, 15, 58; Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51).

**4. *Voluntas ordinata***. In the physical world, God decreed to perform His works ordinarily according to the laws of nature; in the spiritual field through His means of grace.—*Voluntas absoluta*—cf. Joshua 10:13 and miracles in general.

Note the different use of the word *absoluta* in points 3 and 4.

**5. *Voluntas antecedens* (προηγούμενον) and *consequens* (ἐπόμενον)**. Gerhard aptly presents this classification in the following words: “The antecedent will is that whereby God, as our most gracious Father, wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The consequent will is that according to which God, as the most righteous judge, wills that those who are impenitent to the end and unbelievers be damned.”<sup>90</sup>

Although Francis Pieper approves of this distinction, referring to John 3:17, compared with v. 18, and wishes to see it retained over against the Calvinistic absolute decree (*Christian Dogmatics*, I, p. 454), we rather agree with Hoenecke, who calls it *verunglueckt* (*Dogmatik* II, p. 129), because it presents God as a person who first decides on some aim, but later sees fit to amend his first decision according to the course events may have been taking. The distinction lends itself easily to Pelagian and Synergistic views and was extensively used by Pelagians and advocates of an election *intuitu fidei*.—This classification is a sample of how a subordinate mark may be made the basis of a distinction which then in turn is used to support a major error (cf. a similar process in the distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship).

**6. *Voluntas arcana*** (cf. Job 5:9; 11:7; 33:13; 37:23; Prov. 25:2; Eccl. 3:11; 8:17)—and ***revelata*** (cf. Ps. 103:7; 147:19; John 15:15; Rom. 16:26; I Cor. 2:9, 10; Eph. 1:9; 3:5; Col. 1:26).

Concerning matters of world government Jesus says to His disciples *οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι* because the Father has reserved them to Himself (Acts 1:7). Also concerning God's conduct of the affairs of the church on earth we must say: “How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33.—See FC, S.D., XI, 57ff.) Also in our personal experiences God often says to us: “What I do thou knowest not now” (John 13:7). But concerning our salvation God has, as the above cited passages abundantly show, hidden nothing from us that is essential.

The distinction must be rejected, however, if made in the Calvinistic sense that by a *secret* decree God has ordained certain men to salvation, others to eternal damnation; while in His *revealed* will He speaks of universal grace, contrary to His actual (hidden) will. Gerhard: “We most emphatically deny, nay rather, we pronounce that very assumption to be impious and blasphemous that in those things which concern the matter of salvation a certain secret will, not only differing from the revealed will in its verbal form but even contrary to the same, is to be posited.”<sup>91</sup>

**7. *Voluntas signi***—a metonymy, will here denoting the desired thing—and ***beneplaciti***—an appositional genitive, denoting will itself.

In its native sense this distinction is purely grammatical without any theological value. It is used by Calvinists, however, in the sense that the *voluntas beneplaciti* is identical with their *voluntas arcana*, while the *voluntas signi* is the same as their *voluntas revelata*. The revealed will of God is reduced to a mere *signum*, i.e., sham.

90 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XV, § 271, p. 359: *Antecedens voluntas est, qua Deus, ut benignissimus pater, omnes homines vult salvos fieri et ad agnitionem veritatis venire. Consequens voluntas est, qua Deus, ut iustissimus iudex, finaliter impenitentes et incredulos vult damnari.*

91 *Loci*, tom. I, loc. II, cap. VIII, § XV, § 269, p. 358: *In illis quae negotium salutis concernunt voluntatem quandam arcanam a revelata in verbo non solum diversam sed eidem etiam adversam statuendam esse, totis viribus negamus, imo id ipsum impium ac blasphemum esse pronuntiamus.*



**8. *Voluntas efficiens*:** God’s will as the source of all life and activity; *voluntas approbans*: God’s will with reference to the good deeds of man; and *voluntas permittens*: God’s will, as He for valid reasons does not prevent a sinful act.

God’s *permissio* will come up for further discussion in the chapter on *gubernatio*; here the point is the relation of His will to the evil which He permits. The explanation that *permissio* is not *actio*, but *suspensio actionis* does not solve the mystery, because even *suspensio actionis* presupposes an act of the will. Calov makes a nice distinction, which also does not bring us closer to the solution: “Furthermore, although God permits sin willingly, not unwillingly, nevertheless His will and permission are concerned with different objects: for His will is with reference to permission, but His permission is with reference to sin.”<sup>92</sup> Great care must be had that we do not reduce God’s attitude to mere passivity; also *permissio* is a manifestation of active will.

**9. *Voluntas legalis*** (cf. Exod. 20)—and *evangelica* (cf. John 3:16; Ezek. 33:11; I Tim. 2:4).

The clear distinction between *voluntas legalis* and *voluntas evangelica*, and the proper combination of the two, is the heart of all theology.

## V. Holy Trinity

The terms used in presenting this doctrine are not conained literally in the Scriptures, nor did the Church find them ready for use when it became necessary to define the doctrine during the early Christological and Trinitarian controversies. Nor can it be said that these terms present the divine mystery fully and adequately. Why then use such terms? Let Augustine, as quoted in Chemnitz’ *Loci* on this point, answer the question: “In short, human speech labors under a great inadequacy. Nevertheless we speak of ‘three Persons,’ not that that adequately expresses the truth, but so as not to pass over the matter in complete silence. For the ineffable grandeur of the subject can not be explained by this term.”<sup>93</sup>

### A. Some Terms Used in Presenting This Doctrine

A study of these terms, in the sense in which the Church gradually came to accept them, must be undertaken first, before the doctrine itself is presented.—There are chiefly two: Essence and Person.

**1. Essence or Nature**, *essentia*, *natura*, *οὐσία*, *φύσις*, *γένεσις*. *Οὐσία*, literally, *being*, occurs in the Scriptures in the sense only of property or possession. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Prodigal demands his share of the *οὐσία* and then squanders his *οὐσία* in a distant country (Luke 15:12, 13).—*Φύσις*. Paul speaks of the Gentiles as doing the things contained in the law *φύσει* (Rom. 2:14), of a wild olive tree as being such *κατὰ φύσιν* (Rom. 11:24), and of branches grafted into a good olive tree *παρὰ φύσιν*. He speaks of himself and Peter as Jews *φύσει* (Gal. 2:15) and of gods as not being such *φύσει* (Gal. 4:8). See also Romans 1:26; 2:27; 11:21; I Corinthians 11:14; Ephesians 2:3. In all these passages *φύσις* denotes a natural characteristic. This applies also to II Peter 1:4: “... that by these (promises) ye might be partakers of the divine nature,” *θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως*. In James 3:7, the word is used metonymically, *abstractum pro concreto*.—*Γένεσις* in the sense of “nature” (not as in Matthew 1:1) is found only twice in James 1:23 and 3:6: a man’s “natural face,” and the tongue setting on fire “the course of nature.”

In what sense the Church, on the basis of the Scriptures, came to understand the term essence or nature in the doctrine of the Trinity, a word of Chemnitz and Gerhard may show us. Chemnitz: “The church, therefore, does not understand under the term ‘essence’ a universal term, as the philosophers speak of the human essence, but the divine Essence which actually exists, which is communicable and common to the three Persons, Father,

<sup>92</sup> *Systema*, tom. II, p. 455: *Porto licet Deus peccatum permittat volens, non invitus, voluntas tamen et permissio circa diversa versantur obiecta: voluntas enim circa permissionem, at permissio circa peccatum est.*

<sup>93</sup> *Loci*, cap. II, *De Tribus Personis Divinitatis*, p. 39: *Magna prorsus inopia humanum laborat eloquium. Dictum est tamen “Tres Personae, non ut illud diceretur sed ne taceretur omnino. Non enim rei ineffabilis eminentia hoc vocabulo explicari valet.*

Son, and Holy Ghost, and is present in its entirety in each one.”<sup>94</sup> Gerhard: “The essence of men is a universal term (i.e., an abstraction), which does not in itself have an actual existence but is only obtained by reflection and grasped by the mind. But, the Essence of the Godhead is not something imaginary, like a genus or species, but actually exists, although it is communicable.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, essence and nature are not class names which summarize the characteristics common to a group of things; they are concrete names of an individual Being, God, *substantia et numero unus*.

## 2. Person, *persona*, ὑπόστασις.

The Church for obvious reasons hesitated to use the word *πρόσωπον* for Person in the doctrine of the Trinity. Being the technical name for the mask which actors wore, it suggested impersonation rather than person, the Sabellian error. Literally the word means face, and occurs in many passages in this sense. See Matthew 6:16, 17; 17:2, 6; etc. By an easy metonymy, *pars pro toto*, it is used for person, also pronominally. See II Corinthians 1:11; 4:6; Colossians 2:1; etc. Revelation 20:11; etc. It was applied to inanimate things (surface), Luke 12:56; Acts 17:26; James 1:11; etc.; and in prepositional phrases conveyed the idea: before; on; in the presence of; etc. See Matthew 11:10; Luke 2:31; Acts 3:13; 13:24; 25:16; —Luke 21:35; —Acts 3:20 (19); 5:41; —II Corinthians 5:12; 10:7;—2:10—In a special sense it was used for person with reference to social, financial, political, etc., standing, as in Matthew 22:16; Galatians 2:6; Jude 16. This meaning is found particularly in the compound *προσωπολημπτέω* and its derivations. See James 2:9; —Acts 10:34; —Romans 2:11; James 2:1, etc.

The word ὑπόστασις was adopted by the Church and, although originally it was practically interchangeable with οὐσία, in the course of time its application was limited to the three Persons in the Trinity. In the sense of οὐσία it occurs once in the New Testament, Hebrews 1:3, where the Son is called *χαρακτήρ* of God’s ὑπόστασις (translated by the King James with “person,” by Luther, more correctly, *Wesen*). Literally meaning as much as *suppositum*, *fundamentum*, *Unterlage*, the word easily lends itself to a metonymical use, *causa pro effectu*: *id quod fundamentum habet*, as opposed to ἔμφρασις, *φαντασία* (e.g., *φαντασλιαν μὲν ἔχειν πλούτου ὑπόστασιν δὲ μὴ*), or as denoting *animi stabilitas*, *confidentia*. In this sense it is found several times in the New Testament. In Hebrews 11:1 it is used as a synonym of ἔλεφος in a description of faith. Cf. also chapter 3:14; II Corinthians 9:4; 11:17 (“venture”).

For a definition of the term *person* in Church use we have a statement in Article I of the *Augsburg Confession*: “That which subsists of itself,”<sup>96</sup> as opposed to *pars in alio* or *qualitas in alio*. Person may be described as center of self-consciousness and self-determination. But even so we must be careful not to carry any idea of plurality (of knowledge or of will) into the essence of God, as Chemnitz warns us: “But in the Trinity the Persons are not so distinguished as one angel is from another, one man from another man, nor do they differ in respect to time, will, power, operation; but in the Persons of the Trinity there is coeternity, one will, one power, one operation.”<sup>97</sup>

## B. The Doctrine Is Found in Both Testaments

1. The doctrine of the Trinity, that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three distinct Persons in the one divine Essence and Nature, are one God, is found in both the Old and the New Testament.

94 *Loci*, cap. II, *De Tribus Personis Divinitatis*, p. 39: *Intelligit ergo Ecclesia nomine essentiae non nomen universale, ut philosophi nominant essentiam humanam, sed naturam divinam revera existentem, quae communicabilis est et communis tribus personis, Patri, Filio, et Spiritu sancto, et est tota in singulis.*

95 *Loci*, tom. III, loc. III, cap. II § XLIX, p. 239: *Essentia hominum est nomen universale, quod per se revera non existit, sed cogitatione tantum colligitur et intellectu comprehenditur. Essentia vero in divinis non est quiddam imaginarium, ut genus vel species, sed revera existit, quamvis sit communicabilis.*

96 *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 43: *quod proprie subsistit.*

97 *Loci*, cap. II, *De Tribus Personis Divinitatis*, p. 39: *In Trinitate vero non ita distinguuntur personae, sicut angelus ab angelo, homo ab homine, neque differunt tempore, voluntate, potentia, operatione, sed in personis Trinitatis est coaeternitas, una voluntas, una potentia, una operatio.*

In the New Testament there are two direct enumerations of the three Persons, both given on very solemn occasions, in the final summary commission of Jesus to His disciples, Matthew 28:19, 20: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”; and in Paul’s greeting to the Corinthians, II Corinthians 13:14. (The different order of the Persons will be discussed later.)—The enumeration in I John 5:7 seems to be a later interpolation.

Besides, there are many clear references to the three Persons, prominent among which is the manifestation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost at the baptism of Jesus by John. Matthew 3:16, 17; John 1:29–34.—See also Luke 1:35; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 10:38; I Corinthians 12:3, 4–6; Ephesians 2:18; 4:4–6; I Peter 1:2.

2. It is often asserted emphatically that the doctrine of the Trinity is not contained in the Old Testament, at least not revealed unmistakably, although faint traces and veiled references may be found. While we readily grant that the Old Testament references are *obscuriora*, relatively dim by comparison with the brightness of the New Testament passages, yet we cannot concede that the Jews did not know or believe in a Triune God.

To mention only a few instances recorded in the New Testament, we find that when Jesus called God His Father, the Jews did not protest that God has no Son, but they charged Him with blasphemy because He claimed to be that Son and thus to be equal with God, John 5:18; cf. Matthew 26:63–66; John 19:7.—The Jews in Jerusalem raised no objections when Peter on Pentecost referred to the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:17, 33), nor did the Jews in Rome when Paul traced a word of Isaiah to the Holy Ghost (Acts 28:25). They were familiar with, and accepted, the three Persons, while, on the other hand, they held fast to the unity of Essence: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4).

Turning now to the Old Testament itself we find several direct references to the three Persons of the Trinity in Isaiah. In chapter 11:1, 2, the prophet speaks of the “rod out of the stem of Jesse” and says that “the Spirit of the Lord” shall rest upon Him. Here then is the Son of God, the Spirit of God, and the Lord Himself. See also chapter 42:1; 48:16; 61:1 (coll Luke 4:16–21).—References to the Trinity in Genesis 1:1–3; II Samuel 23:2; Psalm 33:6, can be understood only in the light of John 1:1; while a clear mention of two Persons can be found in many passages. Thus the Father and the Son are spoken of in Genesis 19:24; Psalm 2:7; 45:6, 7; 110:1; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Hosea 1:7; Micah 5:2. The Father and the Spirit occur in Isaiah 63:10, 14; and the Son and the Spirit in Zechariah 12:10; while the following passages mention merely the Lord or God and the Spirit without indicating which Person in particular the Lord represents: Numbers 11:25, 29; I Samuel 10:6; Isaiah 44:1–3; Joel 2:28; Numbers 24:2; Job 33:4; Psalm 51:11.

The application of this truth we present in the words of Gerhard: “We do not assert this that there is the same clarity and certainty in the testimonies concerning the Trinity in the Old and New Testament, since the clearer revelation of this mystery was reserved for the New Testament.—Nor do we mean this that in a dispute against an obstinate opponent the initial argument should be taken from the more obscure statements of the Old Testament. But we make merely this assertion that in order to strengthen the doctrine of the Trinity certain testimonies can be and should be advanced from the Old Testament, since God always from the beginning revealed Himself in such a way that the Church at all times so recognized, addressed, and worshiped Him—that in one undivided Essence there are three distinct Persons.”<sup>98</sup>

3. The following passages do not by themselves establish the doctrine of the Trinity, but after that doctrine has been firmly established in other places they receive a most welcome light from it and in turn yield a deeper understanding of it. These are passages which in three different ways refer to God in the plural.

First there are pronouns, either proper or contained in the verb form: “And God said, Let us make (נַעֲשֶׂה) in our image” (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ) etc. (Gen. 1:26), while the next verse has בְּצַלְמִי the singular. In Genesis 3:22,

98 *Loci*, loc. III, cap. I, § 20; p. 377: *Non hoc dicimus quod testimoniorum de trinitate in Vetere et Novo Testamento sit eadem claritas et evidentia, quia clarior huius mysterii revelatio Novo Testamento fuit reservata.—Nec hoc volumus quod in disceptatione contra pertinacem adversarium ab obscurioribus Veteris Testamenti dictis faciendum sit initium. Sed hoc duntaxat asserimus quod ex Vetere Testamento pro adstruendo trinitatis dogmate quaedam testimonia afferri possint et debeant, cum Deus semper ab initio sese sic patefecerit, ut ecclesia omnibus temporibus Deum ita agnoverit, invocaret et celebraret—quod in una indivisa essentia sint tres distinctae personae.*

God says, “Behold, the man is become **מִן־אֱנוֹשׁ**. In Genesis 11:7, He says, “Let *us* go down”; and in Isaiah 6:8: “Who will go for *us*?”

The second indication of plurality is found in verbs, adjective modifiers, and participles. Abraham says, “God caused me to wander.” **הִתְעַו** (Gen. 20:13). To translate the plural Hebrew verb with a plural would make a polytheist out of Abraham. “There God appeared unto him,” Jacob, **נִגְלוּ** (Gen. 35:7). “God went (**הִלְכֵנוּ**) to redeem” Israel (II Sam. 7:23).—A plural participle occurs in Psalm 58:11, where God is praised as a “God that judgeth (**שֹׁפֵטִים**) in the earth.”—A plural adjective is met in Joshua 24:19, where Joshua says to God: “He (note the singular) is a holy (**קֹדֶשִׁים**) God.” In I Samuel 17:26, David calls Him “the living (**חַיִּים**) God.”—As a rule, the verb is used in the singular, also the adjective, as, eg., in Psalm 7:10, “the righteous God,” **אֱלֹהִים צְדִיק**.

The third are the well known repetitions in the Aaronitic blessing (Num. 6:23–27) and the Trishagion of Isaiah 6:3.

4. As an indication of the Trinity must be considered also the manifestations of the special “Angel of the Lord” (of God, of the Covenant). It is true that not all students of the Bible are agreed on the nature of the Angel of the Lord; some assume Him to be one of the created angels, while others are convinced that He is a Person (the second Person) of the Trinity. If the arguments against this identification are based on the assumption that the doctrine of the Trinity is not contained in the Old Testament, and that hence a special manifestation of any Person in the form of the Angel of the Lord would not have been in keeping with the general stage of development, then they require no special refutation. The question concerning the nature of the Angel of the Lord is a purely exegetical one, and must be decided on sound exegetical grounds according to sound exegetical procedure.

It must be kept in mind from the start that angel of the Lord is not in itself a proper noun, the specific name of any Person in the Trinity. Angel, or messenger, is a common noun, which is the official title of a certain group of creatures, and which may be applied also to human beings (Hag. 1:13; Mal. 2:7). Investigating the cases in the New Testament in which an angel of the Lord is mentioned, we find that in every case there is no need to go beyond an ordinary created angel. When preceded by the definite article, it refers to an angel just mentioned before. Cf. Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13; Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 8:26; 10:3; 12:7; etc. There is also a period in the Old Testament when the term “Angel of the Lord” clearly refers to one of the heavenly host. Cf. I Samuel 29:9; II Samuel 14:17; 24:16; I Kings 19:5, 7; II Kings 19:35. Some cases may be doubtful, as, eg., Psalm 34:7.

In the New Testament, when the Son of God had appeared in the flesh (John 1:14), through whom God “in these last days spoke unto us” (Heb. 1:2); and in the Old Testament during the time of prophetism, when God had this special institution to make His will known to the people: there was no occasion for any Person of the Trinity to appear in the peculiar manner as the “Angel of the Lord.” But there are several instances before the rise of prophetism (and at its close) where “Angel of the Lord” evidently denotes more than a created angel, the Son of God Himself.

According to Exodus 3:2, “the Angel of the Lord appeared” unto Moses in the burning bush. Then in verse 4 we are told that *God* called to Moses out of the bush, and in verse 6 He identifies Himself as the God of Abraham.—In Genesis 31:11, Jacob relates how “the angel of God” spoke to him, and in verse 13 this angel identifies Himself as the “God of Bethel,” who was the “Lord,” the “Lord God of Abraham” (Gen. 28:13–15).—According to Exodus 14:19, the “Angel of God went before the camp of Israel” in a pillar of a cloud; but according the chapter 13:21, it was the Lord Himself who thus went before them.—There are other passages in which the Angel of the Lord speaks as though he were God without indicating that he is merely delivering a message from God. See Genesis 16:7–13; 21:17, 18; 22:11, 15–18; Judges 6:11–24; 13:3–23; Zechariah 3:1–4 (cf. Josh. 5:13–6:2).

According to Exodus 33:2, 3, the Lord clearly distinguishes between Himself and an angel; He will not go with Israel personally, but will send an angel. Then, upon the earnest plea of Moses He promises that His “presence” will go with him. Compare with this the remark of Isaiah, chapter 63:7–9, where he says that “the Angel of his presence” saved them.—In Malachi 3:1, two “messengers” (angels) of God are mentioned, the one being John the Baptist, the other the Savior Himself.

### C. Deity of the Son; Deity and Personality of the Spirit

1. Since the deity of the Father is never questioned, except by outspoken atheists, rather, whatever the Scriptures predicate of God is taken for granted as referring to the Father, it is not necessary to demonstrate from the Scriptures that the Father is God. A bitter controversy, however, raged in the Church concerning the Godhead of the Son. The Scriptures were searched most thoroughly, and the wealth of testimony it offers was assembled under various heads.

Very important, first of all, is what Jesus Himself maintained about His own person. There can be no doubt that He considered Himself to be equal with God, yes, one with God. Although the Jews charged Him with blasphemy, He did not withdraw His claim, but upheld it most emphatically even in the face of death.

In his solemn high priestly prayer He throughout addressed God as His Father and called Himself God's Son (John 17:1), who had been in glory with the Father before the world was (vs. 5), who was one with the Father (vs. 22), the Father in Him and He in the Father (vs. 21). The Jews understood well that by calling God His Father He made Himself equal with God (John 5:17, 18). Jesus did not correct their views but rather emphasized His complete equality with God (vs. 19ff.). He often called God His Father; see Matthew 11:27; Mark 14:61, 62; John 3:16; 9:35–38; 14:9–11.

Jesus also maintained that He possessed divine attributes. Eternity has already been mentioned above. See also John 8:58; Revelation 1:11, 17, 18.—In His parting word He claimed “all power,” divine omnipotence (Matt. 28:18).—On the same occasion He promised to be with His disciples at all times, to carry out which promise He must be in possession of omnipresence (Matt. 28:20). See also Matthew 18:20.—He has life in Himself like the Father, an uncreated, independent life, which He can lay down and take again at will (John 5:26; 10:18; 14:6).

Jesus often appealed to His works as corroborating His oral testimony, and maintained that they established His deity, that “the Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:37, 38; 14:11; 15:24). In particular He maintained that He would raise the dead and judge the world (John 5:21, 22; 6:39, 40; 11:25), that He is the “light,” the only hope of a world lost in darkness (John 8:12; 12:46).

In His high priestly prayer Jesus referred to the “glory” which He had with the Father from eternity. This was divine glory. He also demanded that men confer divine honor on Him, not a whit less than the honor which they accord the Father (John 5, 23).

There can be no doubt that Jesus Himself announced Himself officially to be God, in every respect equal to the Father. What was the Father's attitude toward Him? At the baptism of Jesus and at His transfiguration He declared from heaven, “This is my beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). In answer to Jesus' prayer that the Father glorify His name, the Father for the sake of the people answered from heaven, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again” (John 12:28–30). God “testified of His Son” (I John 5:9; see also Heb. 1:5). Jesus frequently appealed to the testimony of His Father (see John 5:32, 37; 8:18).

The apostles whom Jesus sent forth into the world proclaimed Him as God. They did this, as the old Church established, in a fourfold way: *Ὄνοματικῶς*, by calling Him God. See the following passages: Matthew 14:33; 16:16; John 1:14, 18, 49; 6:69; 20:28; Acts 8:37; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; I Timothy 3:16. (If instead of θεός the relative pronoun should be the original in this passage, the identification of Jesus Christ with God would still be manifest. See context.); I John 5:20.—*Ἰδιοματικῶς*, by predicating divine attributes of Him: eternity and immutability, John 1:1, 2; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 13:8; omniscience, John 2:25; 21:17; power and authority, I Peter 3:22.—*Ἐνεργητικῶς*, by ascribing divine works to Him: creation, John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; preservation, I Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 11:15; resurrecting the dead, Philippians 3:21; judging the living and the dead, Acts 10:42; Romans 2:16; II Corinthians 5:10.—*Δατρευτικῶς*, by demanding divine service and adoration for Him, Acts 5:31; 7:55, 56; Ephesians 1:20; Philippians 2:10, 11; angels also are to worship Him, Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:11–14.

To this evidence may be added the fact that Messianic prophecies spoke of Him as God. See Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2. His forerunner, John the Baptist, proclaimed Him as God, John 1:27, 30, 34. In the story of His

birth, angels announce Him as God, Luke 1:35; 2:11, 14. Even the demons recognized Him as such, Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:24; 3:11; Luke 4:41.

2. Regarding the Holy Spirit two points must be established, not only His deity, but also His personal nature.

Over against such as would reduce the Holy Ghost to some spiritual energy or influence emanating from God the Scriptures emphatically declare the personality of the Spirit. The incongruity of an enumeration, Father, Son and Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14), if the Spirit were not a person, is apparent. Jesus places the Holy Spirit on a level with Himself by calling Him *another Comforter*, ἄλλον παράκλητον (John 14:16; see also vs. 26; 15:26, and compare with I John 2:1); or names Himself and the Spirit as objects of men's blasphemy (Matt. 12:31, 32). Moreover, mind (*φρόνημα*) and will (*βούλεται*) are ascribed to the Spirit (Rom. 8:27; I Cor. 12:11); also many personal activities such as conceiving, leading, speaking, teaching, testifying, reproving, guiding, searching, dwelling, etc. Matthew 1:18; 4:1; 10:20; Luke 4:18; 12:12; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 8, 13; Acts 8:29; 20:28; Romans 8:26; I Corinthians 2:10; 3:16; I John 5:6. Finally the Spirit is a being that can be lied to, can be opposed, can be grieved (Acts 5:3; 7:51; Eph. 4:30).

In establishing the deity of the Spirit the Church used the same scheme that it had developed and found serviceable in defending the doctrine of the deity of the Son. Only for the fourth rubric no specific Scripture statement can be found, and the teachers were content to refer to enumerations which place the Spirit on the same level with the Father and the Son (see above).

The Scriptures teach the deity of the Spirit *ὀνοματικῶς*. See Acts 5:3, 4; 28:25 (compared with Isa. 6:8); I Corinthians 3:16; II Samuel 23:2, 3.—*ἰδιοματικῶς*, ascribing to Him omniscience (I Cor. 2:10, 11); eternity (Heb. 9:14).—*ἐνεργητικῶς*. He was active in the work of creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6; 104:30) and in the work of our redemption (Matt. 3:16; 4:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Heb. 9:14). In particular He is concerned with appointing and directing God's ministers, with creating faith, and administering the affairs of the Church (Neh. 9:30; Zech. 7:12; Matt. 10:20; John 15:26, 27; 20:22, 23; Acts 2:4; 13:2–4; 20:28; I Pet. 1:11, 12—John 3:5; Acts 15:28; I Cor. 3:16; 12:1–11; Eph. 2:22; 4:3, 4).

#### D. Notae Internae

1. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are really three distinct persons in the one divine essence. These names may not be considered as indicating assumed characters, or mere modes of appearance and operation of the one God. Each one is subsisting individually.

A study of John 14:16, 17, 23, 26, 28, is very instructive in this respect. Here Jesus speaks of Himself as praying to the Father, as going to the Father, comparing Himself with the Father, and speaking of Himself and the Father in the plural as "we." At the same time Jesus distinguishes the Holy Ghost from Himself as another Comforter, and from the Father as one whom the Father gives and sends. A modalistic view of the Trinity is barred by such language.

The same truth appears in passages in which only two of the Persons are mentioned. In John 5:19–24, where Jesus emphatically maintains His equality with the Father, He at the same time distinguishes Himself from the Father as one who observes the Father, is loved by the Father, is by the Father accorded like honor with Himself, is sent by the Father. According to John 8:49, 54, Jesus honors the Father, and is honored by Him. See for similar distinctions John 12:26; 14:13; 16:15; Heb. 1:5, 6.—Just like in John 14:16, 26, so also according to Galatians 4:6, God (that is in this case the Father as distinguished from the Son, who is also named) sends forth the Spirit.—God promised His Spirit, and according to Luke 24:49, Jesus sends this very promise. See also John 16:7; Acts 2:33. In His teaching activity the Spirit takes of Jesus' truths and shows them to us; He does not speak of Himself (John 16:13–15).

We sum up the distinction of the three Persons in the words of Hafenreffer: "The plurality in the unity of the Godhead is hypostatic, or a plurality of persons; for the Essence of the Deity is indeed one, but there are several Persons: and so in the mystery of the Godhead there is, to be sure, one Person and another, but not one

thing and another. For one Person is that of the Father, another that of the Son, another that of the Holy Ghost; but there is not one Essence and another Essence, but only one Essence of all the Persons.”<sup>99</sup>

Great care must be taken, however, not to present the plurality of Persons as a *pluralitas accidentalis* (reducing the Persons to mere personifications of divine attributes), nor as a *pluralitas multiplicativa* (as though the divine Essence were divided into three parts). Quenstedt warns us: “The true and real distinction of the divine Persons does not imply a division or multiplication of the divine Essence. For God is not divided into three Persons, but the three Persons, distinct from one another, share without division that one in number, undivided, and infinite Essence in such a way that each and every Person has the same Essence without any multiplication or division of it. For in this mystery there is the one and the other as far as the Person is concerned, but not the one and the other as far as the Essence is concerned. And so those three actually distinct Persons are and remain identical in Essence.”<sup>100</sup>

Although Gerhard rightly protests: “We speak of God as triune, but we are prohibited by the Christian religion from speaking of Him as threefold,”<sup>101</sup> we need not for that reason condemn German hymns like *O heilige Dreifaltigkeit* (#609, Wis. Syn. *Gesangbuch*). The reason is evident.

2. Each of the divine Persons has its own mode of subsistence, its personal characteristics, *notae internae, actus personales, opera ad intra*, which are peculiar to it alone and by which it is distinguished from the other two.

The First Person in relation to the Second is invariably called the Father, the Second the Son. To express this relation the Church adopted the term *generate* from Psalm 2:7, although the “begetting” in this passage does not refer to the internal relation between Father and Son, but rather to the act which Jesus calls His “sending,” eg., John 5:36: “The Father hath *sent* me.” A study of the line of thought running through the Psalm will show this, and the use which the New Testament makes of the statement corroborates it. See Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5.

This begetting is a spiritual thing, and the fact that the Son is also called the Word suggests a comparison with the way in which a thought arises in a human mind. A description which Quenstedt attempts merely serves to show how far this *opus ad intra* transcends human conception: “This generation of the Son does not take place by derivation or transfusion, nor by an action which begins or ends, but takes place by way of an unceasing emanation, to which nothing similar can be found in the realm of nature. For God the Father has from eternity begotten and ever begets and will never cease to beget His Son. For if the generation of the Son would have an end, it would also have a beginning, and thus would not be eternal. And still this generation can not on this account be called imperfect or progressive, for the process of generation in the Father and the Son is considered perfect in respect to the act, perpetual in respect to the activity.”<sup>102</sup>

The *actus personalis* which distinguishes the Father from the Holy Ghost is called *spirare*. Jesus says that the Spirit “proceedeth” (*ἐκπορεύεται*) from the Father (John 15:26), and in John 20:22, He Himself illustrated the sending of the Spirit by breathing on His disciples (*ἐνεφύσησεν*). Naturally, this breathing dare not be understood in a coarse external sense, nor does it give us a real understanding of this transcendent act

99 *Loci*, lib. I, loc. I, p. 48: *Pluralitas in divinitatis unitate est hypostatica seu personarum; nam essentia quidem divinitatis est una, sed personae sunt plures: adeoque in mysterio divinitatis est quidem alius et alius, sed non aliud et aliud. Alia namque persona est Parris, alia Filii, alia Spiritus Sancti; sed non alia et alia, verum una est omnium personarum essentia.*

100 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. IX, § I, thes. XX, p. 328: *Vera et realis personarum divinarum distinctio non infert essentiae divinae divisionem aut multiplicationem. Deus enim non dividitur in tres personas, sed tres personae inter se distinctae unam illam numero essentiam indivisam et infinitam indivisim participant, ita ut quaelibet persona eandem essentiam habeat sine eius multiplicatione aut divisione. In hoc enim mysterio datur alius atque alius ὑποστατικῶς, non aliud et aliud οὐσιωδῶς. Atque ita tres illae realiter distinctae personae sunt et manent ὁμοούσιοι.*

101 *Loci*, loc. III, cap. II, § 64, p. 254: *Trinum Deum dicimus, sed triplicem dicere christiana religione prohibemur.*

102 *Theol. did. pol.*, pars I, cap. IX, thes. XXIX, nota I, p. 330: *Haec generatio Filii non fit derivatione aut transfusione, nec actione quae incipiat aut desinat, sed fit indesinente emanatione, cui simile nihil habetur in rerum natura. Deus Pater enim Filium suum ab aeterno genuit et semper gignit nec unquam desinet gignere. Si enim generatio Filii finem haberet, haberet etiam initium, et sic aeterna non esset. Nec tamen propterea generatio haec dici posset imperfecta aut successiva, actus namque generationis in Patre et Filio consideratur in opere perfectus, in operatione perpetuus.*

within the Trinity. Hollaz says: “Spiration is understood not as something external, such as the breathing of Christ on His disciples was, but as something internal and immanent, since it takes place within the bosom of the Deity; not as something transitory and evanescent, as is the breath of men, but eternal and permanent, because the Holy Spirit proceeds from eternity ... ; not an attribute but an essential spiration.”<sup>103</sup>

When Jesus promises His disciples that the Father will *send* or *give them* the Spirit, this does not refer to an *opus ad intra*, but indicates an act of the Father in His dispensation of grace (John 14:16, 26).

The Son, who is distinguished from the Father by having been “begotten from eternity,” being the *μονογενής, πρωτότοκος* (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; I John 4:9; Col. 1:15), is distinguished from the Spirit by the *actus personalis* of *spirare*. Just as the Third Person is called “the Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:9), so He is also called “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19) or “the Spirit of the Son” (Gal. 4:6). Since this Spirit of the Father and this Spirit of the Son are one and the same Person of the Trinity, Father and Son are considered as *unum agens* in this *opus ad intra*.—The Western churches were right in adding *Filioque* to the *Nicaenum*. (By the way, Apostolos Makrakis, who in the name of the Greek Orthodox Church rejects the *filioque* as the “first innovation” of the Roman Church, suggests that for *spirare* the English word *yield* be substituted as more fitting; but this does not bring the mystery any nearer to our understanding.)

The Son also shares in the dispensational act of the Father when He sends His Spirit into the hearts of believers. He not only prayed the Father to send the Comforter (John 14:16), but Himself sent Him (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33).

3. While the *actus personales* concerning the Father and the Son are not found verbatim in the Scriptures, except that the Son is called *μονογενής* and *πρωτότοκος*, but were adopted by the Church as best expressing the relation between the Persons as the Scriptures present it, regarding the relation of the Spirit to the Father the very word occurs, *procedere, τὸ πνεῦμα..παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται* (John 15:26). Note the inadequacy of human speech in the following definition by Hollaz: “The eternal origin of the Holy Spirit, whereby He is brought into being within the bosom of the Deity by the Father and the Son as the common breath of both by a communication of the Essence, one and the same in number.”<sup>104</sup>

The Church expressed the *actus personales* also in the form of participles.

The Father is *ἀγέννητος, non-genitus, non-generatus; non-spiratus*—but *generans; spirans*.

The Son is *γέννητος; spirans*—but *non-spiratus*.

The Spirit is *non generans; non-generatus*—but *spiratus, πνευστός; procedens*.

Also abstract nouns are used: a) *ἀγεννησία; paternitas, generatio activa; spiratio activa*.—b) *γεννησία, generatio passiva, filiatio, spiratio activa*.—c) *ἐκπόρευσις, processio, spiratio passiva, emissio*. The word *passiva* is here taken, as Hollaz reminds us, in the strictly grammatical sense: “It is called a passive spiration not in the physical sense, as if it implied a passive power or an imperfection, but in the grammatical sense, because the Holy Spirit is not said to breathe forth but to be breathed forth.... In other respects it is the purest emanation of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son.”<sup>105</sup>

## E. Notae Externae

1. Each one of the divine Persons appears also in a particular relation to the world (*notae externae, opera ad extra*). Thus to the Father is ascribed the work of creation, to the Son the work of redemption, to the Spirit the work of sanctification, yet only preeminently, not exclusively. “The activities in relation to the outside

103 Exam. theol. acroa., pars I, cap. II, qu. 48, obs. 2, p. 367: *Intelligitur spiratio non externa, qualis erat insufflatio Christi ad discipulos, sed interna et immanens, cure fiat inter deitatis sinum; non transitoria et evanescens, qualis est hominum spirantium, sed aeterna et permanens, quia Spiritus Sanctus ab aeterno procedit ... ; non spiratio accidentalis sed substantialis.*

104 Exam. theol. acroam., pars I, cap. II, qu. 48, p. 366: *Aeterna Spiritus Sancti origo, qua ipse intra sinum deitatis a Patre et Filio, unius eiusdemque numero essentiae communicatione, ut commune utriusque spiraculum producitur.*

105 Exam. theol. acroam., pars I, cap. II, qu. 48, obs. 1, p. 367: *Dicitur spiratio passiva non physice, quasi inferat potentiam passivam aut imperfectionem, sed grammaticae, quia Spiritus Sanctus non spirare seel spirari dicitur.... Ceteroqui purissima est emanatio Spiritus Sancti a Patre et Filio.*



world are undivided or common,<sup>106</sup> as a consideration of the following groups of passages will clearly reveal: John 1:3, 10; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3; —Job 33:4; Psalm 33:6; 104:30; —John 17:17; —Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 2:11. Our theologians summed up this truth in the axiom: “When one Person is mentioned in activities pertaining to the outside world, the whole Trinity is meant.”<sup>107</sup>

However, the *opera ad intra*, expressing the very *character hypostaticus* of each Person, are *divisa*. Quenstedt: “Divine actions pertaining to the inner relation (of the Persons in the Trinity) are personal, which are so defined in relation to God Himself that they do not, however, recognize as the originator of the action the divine Essence, inasmuch as this is common to all three Persons, but corresponding to the way in which it is determined by definite characteristics and personal properties. Whence these activities pertaining to the personal inner relation are divided, i.e., they are not common to the three Persons but peculiar to only one Person or to two Persons.”<sup>108</sup>

2. Without detracting in the least from the perfect equality of the three Persons, Scripture yet observes a certain order, an order which is indicated by both the *opera ad intra* and the *opera ad extra*. The Father is the First Person, the Son the Second, the Holy Ghost the Third. The most concise summary of this fact is found in the words of institution for Baptism: “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). Note how this order is observed by Jesus in John 5:19, concerning Himself and the Father; and in John 16:13–15, concerning all three Persons. The three prepositions in Romans 11:36 do not refer to the relation existing between the Persons.—In the apostolic benediction, II Corinthians 13:14, the Second Person is named in the first place because He is the Mediator, and only through His redemption have we access to the fellowship of the Father.

This order does not introduce the idea of inequality, or even of subordination, into the Trinity. From eternity the Deity subsisted in three distinct Persons, and as the Son is not without the Father, neither is the Father without the Son, nor is either of these two without the Holy Ghost. Quenstedt says: “Out of the real difference of the Persons arises their order, both in their personal subsistence as well as in their activity. Nevertheless a distinction must be made between the order 1) of essence, 2) of time, 3) of rank, 4) of origin and relation. Among the Persons of the Godhead there is no order of essence, because they are identical in substance, of the same nature and essence; nor of time, since they are coetaneous, coeternal; nor of rank, since they are equal in glory, of the same honor; but there is among them an order of origin and relation, since the Father originates from no one, the Son from the Father, and the Holy Spirit from both.”<sup>109</sup>

3. It is incomprehensible to human reason how three distinct persons, three centers of consciousness, can be found in one and the same essence without division; nor does it relieve the tension in the least to say that God is so rich in personality that it fills three centers of consciousness. Yet on the basis of some Scripture statements our theologians have ventured to make further pronouncements regarding the three Persons. The old fathers already spoke about a mutual permeation and in-existence of the Persons (*περιχώρησις*, *immanentia*, *inexistentia mutua*).

They add that this must not be limited to an intellectual penetration, so that each Person fully grasps the mind of every other Person. This is predicated of the Spirit in I Corinthians 2:11; but *περιχώρησις* means more. Nor is it a mere harmony of will. Such harmony certainly exists, but that again is not *περιχώρησις*. Jesus asserted *περιχώρησις* concerning Himself and the Father when He said, “The Father is in me, and I in him” or,

106 *Opera ad extra sunt indivisa aut communia.*

107 *Una persona in operibus ad extra nominata intelligitur tota trinitas.*

108 Theol. did. pol., pars I, cap. X, thes. II, p. 414: *Actiones divinae ad intra personales sunt, quae ad ipsum Deum ita terminantur ut tamen pro principio agendi non agnoscant essentiam divinam, quatenus ea omnibus tribus personis communis est, sed prout certis eharacteribus et proprietatibus hypostaticis est determinata. Unde haec opera ad intra personalia sunt divisa, h.e., non sunt tribus personis divinis communia, sed uni tantum personae vel duabus personis propria.*

109 Theol. did. pol., pars I, cap. IX, § I, thes. XVII, p. 327: *Ex discrimine personarum reali oritur earum ordo, cure in subsistendo tum in operando. Distinguendum tamen inter ordinem 1. naturae, 2. temporis, 3. dignitatis, 4. originis. Non datur inter personas divinas ordo naturae, quia sunt ὁμοούσιοι, eiusdem naturae et essentiae; neque temporis, quia sunt ὁμαίωνιοι, coaeterni; neque dignitatis, quia sunt ἰσότιμοι, eiusdem honoris; sed datur inter illas ordo originis et relationis, quia Pater a nullo est, Filius a Patre, et Spiritus Sanctus ab utroque.*

“I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (John 10:38; 14:10). See also John 14:11, 20; 17, 21. He also said (John 10:30), “I and my Father are one” (ἓν, not εἷς). See also John 17:11, 22.—This *περιχώρησις* must not be conceived as a perpetual process, which would violate the immutability of God; rather the words which Quenstedt used about the *generatio* of the Son may be applied here also: *in opere perfectus, in operatione perpetuus*.

4. We merely list a few unanswerable questions that will persist in coming up.

Since the Essence of God is Spirit and as such personal, what is the relation of the personal Godhead to the three Persons in God?—How can Father and Son, being two Persons, function as a single agent in sending forth the Spirit?—Since the Godhead is absolutely and indivisibly One, did not then when the Son assumed human nature also the other two share in the same act?

## F. Antitheses

Since the doctrine of the Holy Trinity contains so many elements that are totally incomprehensible to human reason, men have from the beginning yielded to the temptation of trying to resolve the mystery. Every attempt in this direction is doomed to run into error.

The antithesis against the Trinity, as a rule, takes on one of three forms.

Either the unity of Essence is overemphasized at the expense of the Persons, leading to Unitarianism in some form or other. Compare Dynamic Monarchianism (eg., Paul of Samosata), which reduced the Son to a mere power of God.—Compare Modalistic Monarchianism (eg., Sabellius), which explained the three Persons as three different roles which the Deity plays. Compare Arianism, which made out of the Son a *ποίημα* of God, although antedating the creation of the world.

Or the trinity of Persons is overemphasized at the expense of the unity of Essence, resulting in Tritheism (eg., John Philoponus, Roscellinus), even in Tetratheism when God as a person was coordinated with Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Or the mutual relation of the three Persons is misrepresented, the second and third being subordinated to the first. Subordinationism is in substance a form of Unitarianism.

## G. Analogies

1. It is not only impossible, it is positively dangerous to attempt a construction of the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of other sources than Scripture. People who try to arrive at the Trinity in a speculative way from analogies in natural sciences not only ignore the fact that the doctrine itself was first known from Scripture before any seeming analogies were discovered in nature or otherwise, but their speculations must inevitably lead to false conceptions of the Trinity.

It is a different thing when a Christian, who trusts in the Trinity, looks for possible analogies. However, he will do it in the spirit which Gerhard indicates in the following. Of such arguments from analogy he writes: “They merely illustrate; they do not prove.—There is more in them of dissimilarity than of similarity.—They are sought *a posteriori*, not *a priori*; they are not the parents of perception but the offspring; they do not contribute to perception, but they are contributed to represent that which has been perceived.—One must use them soberly and carefully.—They can not be adduced against an opponent; they can please only a believer.”<sup>110</sup> Add to this a word of Hafenreffer: “Can not this plurality of the Unity nevertheless be illustrated at least to some extent by certain similes or very crude sketches? Nothing can be found in the whole universe of things

110 *Loci*, Locus III, cap. I, § 28, p. 380: *Illustrant tantum, non probant.—Plus in illis dissimilitudinis quam similitudinis.—A posteriori petita sunt, non a priori; non sunt cognitionis parentes, sed soboles; non adducunt ad cognoscendum, sed adducuntur ad cognitum repraesentandum.—Sobrie ac caute illis utendum.—Adversario opponi nequeunt, credentem oblectare possunt.*

which expresses the mystery of the Deity before whom we must humbly bow. For God, the Creator, transcends His creatures by immeasurable degrees of difference.”<sup>111</sup>

2. Numerous analogies present a *pluralitas multiplicativa*; most would consistently lead to a modalistic conception of the Trinity.—Artists vie with one another in the symbolical presentation of the Trinity. We mention the shamrock, fleur-de-lis, triangle, trefoil, triquetra, with variations and combinations. Among the church fathers who made use of analogies we mention Luther, Augustine, Melanchthon; and then also the philosopher Leibnitz.

Some of the more common analogies are the following. Taken from nature: Root, stem, and branches constitute a tree. Spring, container, and overflow make a well. In a flower are combined form, odor, and medical virtue; while a body having form, light, and heat may be the sun.—In mathematics three sides constitute a triangle.—In music three tones make up a chord.—In our mind are merged *memoria, intellectus, voluntas*, or also *mens, notitia eius, amor*. We may speak of a subject of love, the object of love, and love itself as found in one person.

Speaking of God directly, the Trinity is construed along the following lines: God (the Father) perceiving Himself produces His own image (the Son), and both are united in mutual love (the Spirit). Or: The hidden God (Father) reveals Himself (Son), both of these Persons being united in the Spirit.

### H. The Trinity and Our Salvation

The Scriptures, which on the one hand emphasize the absolute unity of God and on the other just as emphatically the plurality of Persons in the one divine Essence, nowhere even remotely hint at the mathematical puzzle which such trinity in unity presents. It cannot, then, be our task to solve the problem. Our attitude must be that of a disciple who is willing to hear (I Sam. 3:10; Ps. 85:8; Prov. 8:34), proclaiming faithfully both the unity and the trinity without additions, subtractions, or alterations (Deut. 4:2). In doing so we must remember that even our terms: Essence, Person, Trinity, etc., are no more than approximations, adopted by the Church, chiefly, to draw heretics out of their hiding.

Following the example of the Apostolic Creed, we must present the doctrine of the Trinity in the spirit and in the fashion in which Scripture reveals it: that the Triune God and each Person of the Trinity is interested in just one thing, namely our salvation. See John 3:16; Matthew 18:11; John 10:10, 11; Isaiah 11:2; John 14:26; Romans 8:10, 11; II Corinthians 3:17.

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<sup>111</sup> *Loci*, lib. I, loc. I, p. 44: *Annon tamen similitudinibus quibusdam ceu rudissimis lineamentis haec unitatis pluralitas vel aliquatenus adumbrari potest? Quod adorandae divinitatis mysterium exprimat, nihil in omni rerum universitate reperire licet. Creaturas enim Deus Creator immensis gradum intervallis excedit.*