

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY: GREGORY OF NAZIANZEN AND JOHN CALVIN

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In the fourth century Gregory Nazianzen was given the honour<sup>1</sup> of being called "Gregory the Theologian" in recognition of his outstanding defence of the Nicene Faith against tritheists and modalists alike, and in particular appreciation of his exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which he set out in the great *Theological Orations* delivered in the Church of the Anastasis in Constantinople in 380 A.D. In the sixteenth century John Calvin was likewise given the honour of being called "Calvin the Theologian," in recognition of his stalwart defence of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the face of renewed attacks against the orthodox faith by tritheists and modalists, but in particular realisation of the close affinity of his teaching with that of Gregory Nazianzen. Gregory the Theologian and Calvin the Theologian together build a firm bridge in Christian doctrine between East and West. It is, I believe, when Greek Patristic Theology is studied and interpreted in the strong biblical perspective restored through the Reformation of the Church in the West that its permanent place in the foundations of Evangelical Theology may be appreciated in a new way. But I also believe that, when Reformed Theology is reassessed and interpreted in the light of its ancient roots in the evangelical theology of the early centuries, its essential catholicity and its unifying force are to be understood. I hope that this lecture on the trinitarian doctrine of the two "Theologians" will make a modest contribution to that end.

Before we proceed further, let me say something about the relation of Calvin to Augustine. It is certainly true that Calvin cites Augustine far more than any other all through his writings, and refers to him time and again in what he says about the Trinity. However, I find that at every essential point the basic conceptions that Calvin wants to adduce come from Gregory, and from Gregory's theological hero, Athanasius the Great. Augustine was said not to know much Greek, but there is no doubt that his *De Trinitate*, surely one of the greatest works on theology ever written, is steeped in the teaching of the Greek fathers, which he got to know not only through Hilary, who did have a good knowledge of Greek and was well versed in Athanasian and Cappadocian theology. Calvin seems to me to direct his readers to Augustine for two main reasons: because Augustine was the acknowledged *magister theologiae* in the West so that appeal to him had great debating value for Reformed theology, but also because the basic teaching of Gregory Nazianzen was given its most extended Latin interpretation in Augustine's *De Trinitate*. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Philip Melancthon quickly discerned the inner connection between Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity and that of Gregory, in spite of the Augustinian overlay, when he put forward the idea that Calvin should also be entitled "the Theologian."

Although they were rather different in character, natural inclination, and personal choices, both Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin were retiring, scholarly people who were reluctant to enter the holy ministry but who became studied orators and courageous defenders of the faith once delivered to the saints. They were both very alike in the devoutness of their daily life fed by constant meditation upon the Holy Scriptures, and in

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper we have retained the capitalization and British spelling of the author.

their reverential approach to the ineffable mystery of the Holy Trinity. With Gregory this had a more mystical and joyous quality bound up with liturgical worship, which summoned into divine service his poetic instincts. For him, worship of the Trinity was the only true and saving doctrine, in tune with the hymns and praises of God Above, but he could only give expression to his understanding of God with trembling in tongue and mind and thought.<sup>1</sup> With Calvin it was bound up with undisguised awe at the sublime majesty of God before which he could not but prostrate himself in wonder and adoration, but it was also accompanied by astonishment that God has disclosed himself familiarly to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, together with a dread lest in his thoughts he should presume to tread upon forbidden ground.<sup>2</sup> Gregory could be much bolder than Calvin, as when he could speak of "God put to death" or of "God crucified,"<sup>3</sup> while Calvin preferred to keep strictly within the confines of biblical statements,<sup>4</sup> but the thought of both was governed from beginning to end by the Athanasian teaching about the vicarious humanity of the incarnate Son of God. Moreover, for both Gregory and Calvin the teaching of the Lord that *God is Spirit* made them think of the Trinity in as completely a spiritual and imageless way as possible,<sup>5</sup> with a sense of the inadequacy and even dangerous impropriety of the human terms which a doctrine of the Holy Trinity had to employ in order to give clear expression to the truth and to take away all ground for heretical distortion.<sup>6</sup> The Athanasian association of godliness (*eusebeia*) with orthodoxy, and impiety (*asebeia*) with heresy, played a significant role with both of them, for used in a godly sense even improper theological terms can be made to serve the truth.<sup>7</sup>

I should now like to focus attention upon some of the main features in the doctrine of the Trinity which are common to the teaching of our two Theologians.

1) For both Gregory and Calvin it was the *homoousios to Patri* that provided the key to the divine Triunity—everything hinged upon the Deity of Christ, for it was only with the coming of Christ as God manifest in the flesh that God has become known in three distinct Persons who are yet of one and the same eternal Being. Gregory Nazianzen was closer to Athanasius than his fellow Cappadocians in adopting a more soteriological and ontological approach to the Deity of Christ governed by the evangelical import of the *homoousion* which, unlike Basil, he had no hesitation in applying to the Holy Spirit as well as to the Son.<sup>8</sup> While Calvin was no less concerned for the fact that our salvation depends on the oneness in being and agency between Christ and the Father, his approach was more explicitly biblical, although he would have nothing to do with a narrow biblicism that rejected the use of non-biblical terms such as the *homoousios* in the interpretation and explanation of the reality of Christ's saving activity.<sup>9</sup> His argument centres on the New Testament application to Christ as well as to the Father of the ineffable name of God who has proclaimed himself as "I am, who I am,"<sup>10</sup> here taking his cue from both Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen,<sup>11</sup> who had been followed in this argument by Augustine.<sup>12</sup> While other names of God are what Calvin calls "epithets," this name, *Yahweh*, expresses the essential and eternal Being of God. It is due to that oneness in being and power between Christ and the self-existent God that his healing, renewing, and saving work is continuous with the work of the Father. Thus there is an unbroken relation of being and act between what Christ is and does, for example, in the forgiveness of our sins and the imparting of eternal life, and what God the Father is and does. Christ dispenses divine salvation, not as something he passes on, but as something he imparts from his own being as God in complete and inseparable relation to the Father.

Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin both apply the same arguments to establish the Deity and the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> If he were not one in being and agency with God the Father, his renewing and sanctifying acts could not be divine or

therefore saving acts, and we could not believe in him or worship him with the Father and the Son as we do. The Holy Spirit, argues Gregory, must certainly be considered as himself self-existent Being and not as a derivative of self-existent Being—hence the Spirit is to be regarded by us as Being in the same full sense as God the Father and the Son.<sup>14</sup> Calvin laid great stress at this point on the fact that God is Spirit, and hence that the Holy Spirit is to be regarded not only as a distinct hypostasis of the whole Being of God but as himself the Being and the kind of Being that God is. As such the Holy Spirit does not act from outside but from within the whole Being and Nature of the Godhead, for he constitutes one spiritual Being with the Father and the Son.<sup>15</sup> The presence and activity of the Spirit are the immediate presence and activity of God—to which Gregory Nazianzen and his fellow Greek theologians referred in what they called *theosis*, the downright activity of God himself upon us. Argument along this line was Calvin's biblical and spiritual way of asserting with the orthodox fathers the doctrine of intrinsic consubstantiality of the Trinity, for the three divine Persons have one and the same spiritual Being.

2) Although there is no Greek word for "Triunity," it was certainly upon the ultimate triune Nature and Reality of God that both Gregory and Calvin concentrated: the Trinity is intrinsically and essentially a Unity, and the Unity is intrinsically and essentially Trinitarian. As Gregory expressed it: "The Godhead is one in three and three in one, in whom the Godhead is, or to be more precise, who are the Godhead."<sup>16</sup> Or again: "When I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>17</sup>

That is to say, the one God is not to be known except as he who is three Persons. While God speaks sparingly about his own Being, Calvin says,

he designates himself in a special way by which he may be known and by which he can be peculiarly distinguished, for he proclaims himself as the one in such a way that he presents himself to be contemplated in three Persons. Unless we hold fast to these it is merely a bare and empty name of God, apart from the true God, that flutters in our brain.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the "Trinity" is not just a way of thinking about God, for the one God cannot be conceived otherwise—apart from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, God cannot be known in the truth and reality of his Being. "Say there is a Trinity of Persons in the one Being of God, and you will have said in a word what the Scriptures say."<sup>19</sup> Calvin tells us a number of times that he was immensely delighted with the statement of Gregory Nazianzen: "I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One."<sup>20</sup> Gregory goes on in that passage to reinforce his understanding of the intrinsic triunity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with analogical reference to three suns whose shining so mingles together that one cannot divide or separate out their undivided light. The three divine Persons shine forth as one Light. Certainly so far as Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin are concerned there can be no question of characterising the approaches to the mystery of the Trinity in the East and the West by saying that while Greek theology passed from a consideration of the three Persons to the oneness of their Being, Latin theology passed from their consideration of the oneness of God's Being to the three Persons, for the knowledge of the Three and of the One, or of the One and of the Three, is perfectly coincident, being given through one illuminating flash of God's self-revelation.<sup>21</sup>

3) When we turn to the conception of the "person" and the way in which the divine Persons are interrelated in the one Being of God, we find a similar consensus between the

two Theologians. Gregory Nazianzen declined to have anything to do with St Basil's and Amphilochius' notion of *tropos hyparxeos* (mode of being or mode of existence) or with a generic notion of *ousia*. In this he was followed closely by John Calvin, although with some help from St Augustine. Of crucial significance is Gregory's interpretative reference to the three divine Persons as *relations* or *scheseis* eternally and hypostatically subsisting in God which are strictly beyond all time, beyond all beginning, and beyond all cause.<sup>22</sup> He evidently avoided the expression "mode of existence" as inadequate to express "hypostasis," for the Persons are not just modes of existence but substantial relations subsisting intrinsically in the eternal Being of God, but on the other hand he was anxious lest one should think of the Father so much in terms of *ousia* as not to think of him in terms of *hypostasis*.<sup>23</sup> The term "Father," he pointed out, is not a name for being (*ousia*) but for the relation that subsists between the Father and the Son.<sup>24</sup>

Let me set alongside of this account of Gregory's views a statement from Calvin:

I call "Person" a subsistence in God's Being, which in being related to others (*quae ad alios relata*) is distinguished by an incommunicable property. By the term "subsistence" we wish to be understood something different from "being." . . . Although conjoined with the Being of God by an indivisible bond and inseparable from it . . . each of the three subsistences, while related to the others, is distinguished by his own special property. This relation is particularly expressed for when simple and indefinite mention is made of God, the name applies no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. At the same time, however, when the Father is considered in his relation to the Son, the special property of each distinguishes one from the other.<sup>25</sup>

Thus for Calvin a distinction must be drawn between speaking of the Father or the Son relatively (*relative*), which is to refer to them as Persons, and speaking of the Father or the Son or the Spirit absolutely or simply (*absolute, simpliciter*) in which reference is being made to their divine Being or Deity (*essentia, or deitas*).<sup>26</sup> That is to say, Calvin distinguishes between *subsistentia* = *hypostasis* and *essentia*, for *subsistentia* = *hypostasis* refers to being-in-relation (*existere ad alios*), but *essentia* refers to being-in-itself (*esse in se ipso, a se ipso*). This is a way of understanding being and person that clearly reflects the Athanasian distinction adopted by Gregory Nazianzen between *ousia* as referring to being in its internal relations and *hypostasis* as being in its objective relations.<sup>27</sup> It is in this sense that Calvin speaks of the three divine Persons in the one Being of God, who are what they are as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their consubstantial relations with one another. Hence the Persons are to be understood as more than distinctive relations, for they really subsist, and coexist hypostatically, in the one Being of God without being confused with one another, for they are *other* than one another.<sup>28</sup> "There truly subsist in one God, or, what is the same thing, in the Unity of God, a Trinity of Persons."<sup>29</sup>

4) What did Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin think of the idea that the Father is the *Arche Theotetos* or *Principium Deitatis*, or indeed that he is the *mia Arche* or *unum Principium*? Calvin points out that there were apparent divergences in the statements of the Church Fathers about this with which he seeks to come to terms. What lay at the bottom of the difficulty was a relic of Origenist subordinationism that came to the surface in debates with the Eunomians, and which reappeared during the Reformation in Calvin's debates with Servetus and Caroli. Calvin offered a way of coping with the problem by reverting to the point made by Gregory Nazianzen (to which we have already alluded) that "Father" is not a name for being (*ousia*) but for relation (*schesis*), an idea to which Augustine had also appealed.<sup>30</sup> "When we speak simply of the Son without respect to the Father, we rightly

and properly assert him to be of himself (*a se*) and so call him *unicum principium* [i.e. *mia arche*]; but when we refer to his relation to the Father, we justly make the Father *fili principium*.<sup>31</sup> Behind the problem addressed here lay a difference between the teaching of Gregory Nazianzen and the other Cappadocians. In their attempt to guard against a charge of tritheism, Basil and his brother taught that the unity of God is anchored in the Father as the one Principle or Origin (*arche*) and Cause (*aitia*) of the Son and the Spirit, not only of their mode of existence (*tropos hyparxeos*) but of their being (*to einai*), and even thought of the interrelations between the divine Persons as building a causal series or a chain of dependence.<sup>32</sup> At first Gregory Nazianzen went along with this teaching,<sup>33</sup> although with a more Athanasian sense of the oneness of the Godhead complete in all three divine Persons as well as in all of them,<sup>34</sup> but then he became anxious and drew back. What alarmed him was the application of the concept of "principle" or *arche* to the Father alone in distinguishing him from the Son and the Spirit, for that appeared to import the impossible idea of precedence in honour and even of unequal degrees of Deity within the Holy Trinity. Gregory Nazianzen felt strongly that to subordinate any of the three divine Persons to another was to overthrow the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>35</sup> He was thus returning to the more unified conception of the divine *arche* advocated by Athanasius,<sup>36</sup> who had also rejected any idea of degrees of Deity in the Trinity.<sup>37</sup>

When basically the same issues reappeared in the sixteenth century, John Calvin upheld the trinitarian doctrine of Gregory Nazianzen, with an unreserved acceptance of the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the three Divine Persons,<sup>38</sup> which, as we have seen, he sought to establish on biblical grounds, not least through the New Testament designation of the Son and the Spirit as *Kyrios = Yahweh*, the ineffable Name of the one eternal self-existent God. Calvin therefore objected to any diluted conception of the Nicene *homoousios*, which made the Father alone truly and properly God, and distinguished him from the Son and the Spirit as the sole "essentiator" or the deifying source of their being, thereby misinterpreting the Nicene "God of God." It had the effect of importing into the Trinity an impossible distinction between a wholly underived or uncaused Deity and a derived or caused Deity even if the being (*esse = to einai*) of this Deity was regarded as eternally derived or caused. Moreover, to refer the Deities of the Son and the Spirit to a single Principle, Origin, or Cause in the Father implied that it was the Person or *Hypostasis*, not the Being or *ousia*, of the Father that was the source of their Deity, a heretical notion which Calvin castigated as absurd.<sup>39</sup>

Two questions arise out of this which Calvin had to face.

First, if the Son considered absolutely is God in the most unreserved sense, then is he not also consociated with the Father in the *Mia Arche* or *Monarchia* or *Unicum Principium* of the Godhead? There cannot be more than one *Principium*, for there is only one Lord God, and so we must think of the Son, and likewise of the Spirit, as constituting the *Principium* together with the Father.<sup>40</sup> Here again Calvin echoes the truth pointed out by Gregory the Theologian that the *Monarchia* is not limited to one Person.<sup>41</sup> "To us," Gregory declared,

there is one God, and one Godhead, and all that issues from him is referred back to him so as to be one with him, although we believe that there are three. And one is not more and another less God, nor is one before and another after. They are neither divided in will nor separated in power; nor are any of the distinguishing marks of separated individualities to be found there, but differentiated as the Persons are, the entire and undivided Godhead is One in each Person.<sup>42</sup>

Second, if the Son is considered relatively as Son of the Father, then the Father is rightly held to be the sole *Principium* of the Son, and of the Spirit likewise. There is therefore within the interrelations of the divine Persons in the Trinity a principle of order (*ratio ordinis*): the Father first, the Son second, and the Spirit third. This is an order grounded in the irreversible relation of the Father and the Son, which means that the Father is to be regarded as the *Fons et Principium Deitatis*. This does not apply to the Being (*essentia*) of the divine Persons which they have wholly and perfectly in common, but only to the order of their relations which they have with one another within the unity of the Godhead.<sup>43</sup> Thus the Principium of the Father does not import an ontological priority, or some *prius aut posterius* in God, but has to do solely with a "form of order" or "economy" in the inner-Trinitarian relations grounded on the Father/Son relationship. "The Father is the *fons Deitatis*, with respect, not to being," Calvin insists, "but to order."<sup>44</sup> The oneness of Holy Trinity is mysteriously disposed in a Trinity of three Persons "not in status but in position, not in substance but in form, not in power but in sequence," for they are fully and perfectly equal.<sup>45</sup> Thus while Calvin, like Gregory Nazianzen, seeks to give full weight to the biblical order in the relations between the three divine Persons, he makes sure that this is not allowed to carry over into his thought any element of subordinationism.<sup>46</sup> Thus like Cyril of Alexandria he interprets the words of Jesus, "the Father is greater than I," not ontologically but soteriologically and economically.<sup>47</sup>

5) For Gregory Nazianzen, as for Athanasius, the concept of the *homoousios* carries with it the concept of the coinherence of the three divine Persons in the one identical Being of God.<sup>48</sup> Particularly fine expression of it is found in Hilary's work on the Trinity,<sup>49</sup> but it is to Gregory Nazianzen that theology owes the terminology for *perichoretic* relations in which the Divine Persons mutually contain and interpenetrate one another while completely retaining their incommunicable differences as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> The account that Gregory the Theologian thereby offers us of the Holy Trinity represents a dynamic development of the Athanasian doctrine of the real relations dwelling consubstantially within the unitary Being or *ousia* of God. In the Holy Trinity all subsistent relations are in eternal movement mutually containing and interpenetrating one another in such a way that in and through their distinctive properties they constitute a perfectly homogeneous communion in one Being as Three in One and One in Three.<sup>51</sup>

Each of the divine Persons is entirely one with those with whom he is conjoined, as he is in himself, because of the identity of being and power that is between them. This is the reason for the Oneness (*hotes henoseos logos*) so far as we have apprehended it. If this reason has force, thanks be to God for the insight; if it is not let us seek for a stronger one.<sup>52</sup>

This principle of the indivisible coinherence of eternally subsistent relations in the one Being of God, and thus of the interpenetration of the divine Unity and Trinity, naturally sets the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from God the Father (that is, from the Father considered absolutely as *God*) in a rather different light than of one governed by the notion that the *Monarchia* is limited to the *Person* of the Father.<sup>53</sup> The procession of the Holy Spirit is to be understood strictly in the light of the completely mutual relations of the three divine Persons with one another. Thus while the Holy Spirit certainly proceeds from the Father, due to the Oneness of the Holy Trinity in which each Person is wholly and perfectly God, he issues from the midst of the relation between the Father and the Son as he who is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son and who with them shares one indivisible eternal Being.<sup>54</sup>

Calvin's account of the manifold of mutually coexisting Persons, or of real hypostatic relations subsisting within the one indivisible Being of the Godhead, is very similar to that of Gregory Nazianzen, although he does not use the explicit language of *perichoresis*<sup>55</sup> or its Latin equivalent (*circumincessio*). After citing Gregory Nazianzen in support he says:

Let us not imagine a Trinity of Persons in such a partitive way that our thought is not immediately brought back to that Unity. The words "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" certainly import a real distinction—let us not think they are mere epithets by which God is variously designated from his works—it is a distinction, however, not a division.<sup>56</sup>

Although it is only with the advent of Christ that the distinctions between the Persons are revealed, they are to be understood as existing antecedently and inherently in the Godhead who may not be known otherwise than as three distinct Persons coexisting in one Being.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, he accepts, like Gregory Nazianzen, that while there is no *before* or *after* in these Trinitarian relations, there is a significant order within them: "the Father first, then the Son from him, and then the Spirit from both . . . the Son is said to exist from the Father only, the Spirit from both the Father and the Son (*a Patre simul et Filio*)."<sup>58</sup> Thus Calvin evidently accepts a somewhat Western understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit, but he hastens to add that "far from interfering with the utterly simple unity of God, it serves to prove that the Son is one with God the Father, because he constitutes one spiritual Being with him, while the Spirit is not something other than the Father and different from the Son, because he is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son."<sup>59</sup> Quite clearly Calvin is not restricting the word "Spirit" to the Person of the Holy Spirit, but is referring to "the whole spiritual Being of God (*tota spiritualis Dei essentia*), in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are comprehended."<sup>60</sup> The Holy Spirit belongs to the eternal Being of the one God, and to the constitutive internal relations of the Godhead as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means that for Calvin the procession of the Holy Spirit must be thought of as from the whole spiritual Being of God the Father which the Holy Spirit has in common with the Father and the Son. That is to say, it is his conception of the whole Trinity comprising three inseparable consubstantial Persons indwelling one another and constituting the *Monarchia* that lies behind his view of the procession. The total Being (*tota essentia*) and the total nature (*tota natura*) of the one God are in each Person.<sup>61</sup> This takes Calvin's thought out of the orbit of the usual Western notion of the *filioque* added to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Thus it is in essential agreement with the position advocated by Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen that he declares:

In each *hypostasis* the whole divine Nature is understood, it being understood that each has his own subsistent property. The Father is wholly in the Son and the Son is wholly in the Father, as he himself declares: "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." Nor is there any other difference of Being separating one from the other, as Church writers agree.<sup>62</sup>

In the mysterious communion of the eternal Persons in the Godhead Father, Son and Holy Spirit wholly indwell one another as one God, without ceasing to be what each personally and distinctively is in relation to the others, so that the fullness of the Godhead applies unrestrictedly to each divine Person as well as to all of them together. This is surely why Calvin considered it impossible to think of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the *Person* or *hypostasis* of the Father, rather than from the Being of God the Father.

It is distinctive of Calvin's account of the mysterious economy in the mutual relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit coexisting hypostatically and consubstantially in God that he adapts an unusual expression used by Cyprian to express the corporate nature of the episcopate which is held *in solidum* by one bishop and all bishops alike. The one episcopate belongs to each bishop only as it belongs to all.<sup>63</sup> In his doctrine of the Holy Trinity Calvin adapts this idea to help him express the way in which the three divine Persons interrelate with one another in the one Being of God in such a way that they lose nothing of either their difference or their complete equality as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of the three divine Persons *in solidum* is God, and the Being of God is totally and *in solidum* common to the divine Persons, such that with respect to their Being there is no inequality between the one and the other.<sup>64</sup> That is to say, all three divine Persons, who do not share with one another their distinguishing properties, do share together completely and equally, not partially, in the one indivisible Being of God—the whole Being of God belongs to each of them as it belongs to all of them. Thus through the expression *in solidum* Calvin fills out the Nicene and Athanasian conception of *ousia*, taken over by Gregory Nazianzen, as self-existent being considered in its internal relations (*in se*), and of *hypostasis* as subsistent being considered in its objective otherness (*ad alios*). And so while he thought of the whole Being of God as dwelling in each Person, he thought of each Person, and of all three Persons in their differentiating properties and mutual interrelations, as dwelling hypostatically and consubstantially in the one indivisible Being of God. The whole Being of God belongs to each Person as it belongs to all three Persons, and so the Unity of God, utterly simple though it is, is to be understood, not in some abstract generic way, but as the indivisible consubstantial union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the fullness of God dwells in each Person, and the fullness of each Person dwells in God, such that God is intrinsically and completely *Personal*, the eternal *I am who I am*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To say that God is "Personal" does not mean that he is *a* Person in the relational sense of the three divine Persons who are Persons *ad alios*, but rather that the one God is a fullness of Personal Being within himself, for the whole God dwells in each Person, and each Person is the whole God. Thus in his *Oration on Peace*, Gregory the Theologian spoke of

adoring the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, knowing the Father in the Son and the Son in the Holy Spirit . . . not receiving them as one Person (for they are not impersonal nor the names of one Person), nevertheless receiving the Three as One. For they are One, not in Person, but in Deity, *Monas* adored in *Trias* and *Trias* summed up in *Monas*.<sup>65</sup>

6) Both Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin agree that we cannot know *what God is*, for his Being or Essence as such is utterly incomprehensible, but this does not mean that we may not really know God himself, since he has actually made himself known to us personally and familiarly as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For neither theologian, therefore, is a merely apophatic approach acceptable, that is, one in which we strictly know only what God is not. In any case, as Gregory pointed out, we cannot know what God is not without knowing something of what he is.<sup>66</sup> It is precisely in our knowing of God who has made himself comprehensible to us through Jesus Christ and his Spirit that we know that he infinitely exceeds what we can ever conceive or say of him. To say that we do not know what God is, is not to say that we cannot know who he is or know what he is like in himself. As Calvin expresses it, we cannot know what God is (*quid Deus sit*), for the *Being* of God (his *essentia* or *ousia*) is incomprehensible *per se*. However, we may know what kind of God he is (*qualis Deus sit*) and who God is (*quis sit Deus*) in accordance with what he is toward us (*erga nos*) in his revealing and saving acts, for what he is toward us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit he is inherently and eternally in himself (*in se, or apud semet ipsum*).<sup>67</sup>



We only know God as he is clothed with his self-revelation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but what God is in himself and what he is in his self-revelation are not to be sundered from one another—the identity of God with his self-revelation in the incarnate Son belongs to the essential truth of the Nicene *homoousios to Patri* which is not to be diluted without wrecking the basis of the Christian Faith.

It is significant that neither Gregory Nazianzen nor John Calvin explicitly refers to the idea put forward by Basil that it is only through God's divine energies that we may know him, for his energies descend to us but his Being remains inaccessible to us.<sup>68</sup> The implication is that we cannot know God through the immediate activity of his Being, or according to what he is in himself, but only through mediating forces emanating from him, and not according to what he is in himself. It is sometimes held that Gregory Nazianzen agreed with this idea, on the ground of a statement of his paraphrased by John of Damascus to the effect that "what we say *kataphatically* about God indicates not his nature but only what relates to his nature."<sup>69</sup> This is hardly borne out by Gregory's actual words, which may well be interpreted to mean that we can think or speak of God only as he is clothed with his revealing and saving operations, and not according to what he is apart from them of which we can have but a clouded and scanty notion.<sup>70</sup> Those divine operations, however, are not extrinsic but intrinsic to the Being of God. Elsewhere, in fact, Gregory questions the notion of powers of God existing but not subsisting in him.<sup>71</sup> Expressed otherwise, we cannot know God behind his back, but may know him face to face with Jesus Christ in whom he reveals himself to us through himself. Knowledge of God, as he and Calvin alike understood it, derives from God himself, as through his incarnate Word he makes himself comprehensible to us, and through the Holy Spirit who, sent to us from the Father through the Son, brings us into communion with the Holy Trinity and thereby enables us in some measure really to know God as he is in himself.

What is ultimately at stake here is the unqualified application of the *homoousios*, not only to the Lord Jesus Christ, but to the Holy Spirit, who, when considered absolutely, as both Gregory Nazianzen and Calvin agreed, is to be identified with the self-existent Being of God, for God *is* Spirit. Hence they could not but think that in and through the presence of the Holy Spirit God himself is directly present to us in the sheer reality of his own transcendent Being, for what the Holy Spirit gives us is identical with himself the Lord and Giver of life.<sup>72</sup> Unless that is the case our knowledge of God in and through the Spirit does not terminate upon the Being of God himself. The *homoousios*, however, expresses oneness in agency as well as in being between the Spirit and God, so that the activity of the Spirit, like that of the consubstantial Son, is understood to be inherent in the divine Being.<sup>73</sup> In this event, the two Theologians could have little interest in differentiating between the energies or operations of God and the immediate activity of his Being, for that would cast doubt upon the real presence of God to us in his Spirit and seriously compromise the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity, by introducing an economic reserve into an understanding of the relation between what God is toward us and what he is in himself. Thus it is hardly surprising that Gregory Nazianzen should have had hesitations about Basil's doctrine of the Spirit.<sup>74</sup>

The firm conviction that the Holy Spirit, like the Son, is perfectly consubstantial with the Father brought the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to its completion in the mind of the Catholic Church, but at the same time it made clear the awesome truth that God has opened up for mankind a way of communion with himself, whereby he may be known in the inner-Trinitarian relations of his eternal Being. This is the understanding of the Holy Trinity which called forth from Gregory the Theologian and Calvin the Theologian alike ceaseless wonder, meditation, and worship.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 39.11; 43.30.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.5, 16-17, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 44.28-29.

<sup>4</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.3,5,21.

<sup>5</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 24.4; 28.12; 29.2,8; 30.17; 31.3-7, 31-33; Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.1,8,19-20. See also Athanasius, *Con. Ar.* 1.15,21; *De decr.* 24; *De syn.* 42 and 51; *Ad Ser.* 1.19,30. Much the same view was held by Basil, Gregory Nyssen, Didymus, Epiphanius, and others.

<sup>6</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.4-5.

<sup>7</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.5; cf. 1.1.3,5,18,21 and 4.19.1; Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 42.16.

<sup>8</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.9-10. See also *Ep.* 38.

<sup>9</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.3-4.

<sup>10</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.10.2; 1.13.9-11.

<sup>11</sup>Athanasius, *Con. Ar.* 3.6;4.1; *De syn.* 34-35; *De decr.* 22; Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 29.12,16-17; 30.18-19; 31.23; 38.7-9; 45.3-4,9.

<sup>12</sup>Augustine, *De fide et symbolo*, 6.

<sup>13</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31 *passim*; Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.14-15.

<sup>14</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.6-7; 33.16.

<sup>15</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.19-21.

<sup>16</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 39.11.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.8; 45.4.

<sup>18</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.2.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.13.5.

<sup>20</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.41; see also *Or.* 31.4; Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.17; *Comm. on John* 1.1; *Ep.* 607, etc.

<sup>21</sup>Thus Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 39.11.

<sup>22</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 23.8,11; 29.2-4,16; 30.11,19-20; 31.9,14,16; 42.15-17. Cf. Athanasius, *De syn.* 16.

<sup>23</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.32.

<sup>24</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 23.8,11; 29.2-4,16; 30.11,19-20; 31.9,14,16,32; 42.15-17.

<sup>25</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.6.

<sup>26</sup>*Inst.* 1.13.19-20; *OC*, VII.323f.; XI.560.

<sup>27</sup>Refer to *The Trinitarian Faith*, 130-132, 310-312, 320-321.

<sup>28</sup>*Inst.* 1.13.17-18. The language Calvin uses to say that the divine Persons are "other" than one another reflects that of Gregory Nazianzen in his first *Epistle to Cledonius*, *Ep.* 101.

<sup>29</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.4.

<sup>30</sup>Augustine, *In Ps.* 68.5; Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 39.11; cf. also Gregory Nyssen, *Ex comm. not.*, ed. Jaeger, vol. 3.1, 19-25; *De Spir. St.* 3.1, 13-15.

<sup>31</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.19.

<sup>32</sup>Gregory/Basil, *Ep.* 38.4,7; Basil, *Con. Eun.* 1.25; 2.12; 3.1; *De Spir. Sanct.* 13, 45-46, 58-59; *Hom.* 24.4; *Con. Sab.* 4; Gregory Nyssen, *Con. Eun.* 1.36,42; *Adv. Maced.* 12-13; *Non tres dei*, 3.1. See further *The Trinitarian Faith*, 236-238, 317-319.

<sup>33</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 1.38; 2.38; 29.3,15,19; 30.19-20; 31.8-14; 32.30,33; 34.8,10; 40.41-43; 42.15-17.

<sup>34</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 6.22; 25.17; 29.2-3; 30.20; 31.9-11, 14,16; 34.8-9,13; 38.8; 39.10-11; 40.41-43; 42.16; 45.4.

<sup>35</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.41,43; 43.30; cf. 29.15. See again *The Trinitarian Faith*, 318.

<sup>36</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 21.13 and 34; 31.14; 34.8; 40.41; 42.15.

<sup>37</sup>Athanasius, *In illud omnia*, 6.

<sup>38</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.9-11, 17-19; 34.13; 39.11; 40.1,45; 42.16, etc.

<sup>39</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.23-24, 28. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31,14.

<sup>40</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.19, 25; *OC*, VII.322-24; XI.561.

<sup>41</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 2.38; 29.2f; 31.13-14; 39.12; 40.41; 41.9; 42.15-16. Cf. also the last few lines of Gregory's poem 10, *Peri Aretes*, Athens edit., vol. 61, 146.

<sup>42</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.14; cf. also 25.16; 26.19.

<sup>43</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.20-25; *OC*, VII.580.

<sup>44</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.26.

<sup>45</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.28; refer also to 1.13.6, and to Tertullian, *Adv. Praxeam*, 2.9 cited by Calvin here.

<sup>46</sup>Gregory Nazianzen pointed out that in the New Testament the order in which Father, Son, and Spirit are mentioned varies, which evidently indicates that the order does not detract from the full equality of three divine Persons, *Or.* 36.15.

<sup>47</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.26; *Comm. on Jn.* 14.28; Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus*, MPG 75.144-145, 177-178, 180; *In Jn.* 6.38-39, 10.29-30, 14.28; Hilary, *De Trin.* 9.51,54-55; *De syn.* 64; Didymus, *De Trin.* 1.16,18,26-28; *De Spir.St.* 36; and see Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 30.7-14.

<sup>48</sup>See, for example, Athanasius, *Con. Ar.* 3.1-3, 4.1-3; *Ad Ser.* 1.27; 2.3,5; 3.1.

<sup>49</sup>Hilary, *De Trin.* 3.1, 2-4; 4.10; 9.69.

<sup>50</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 18.42; 22.4; *Ep.* 101.6.

<sup>51</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 20.7-11; 23.8; 29.2; 31.6-9,14; 35.1-4; 40.41; 42.15-16.

<sup>52</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.16; see also 31.14; and cf. 25.16; 26.19; 42.15-17.

<sup>53</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 29.2; 40.41; cf. 2.36.

<sup>54</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.8-10; 39.11-12. Thus also Cyril of Alexandria, *Thes.*, MPG, 75.575-617; and *In Jn.* 73.209-210, 604-605; 74.213-214, 333-335, 417, 448-449, 710-711; *Con. Nest.* 4.1-3, MPG, 76.168-189; *De ador.* MPG, 68.148, etc.

<sup>55</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 18.42; 22.4; *Ep.* 101.

<sup>56</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.7, with reference to Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.41.

<sup>57</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.2, 17; *OC*, VII.313f, 321-322.

<sup>58</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.18, 20.

<sup>59</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.19. This is the Athanasian argument put forward in the *Ad Serapionem*, 1.25-127; 3.1; 4.3-4.

<sup>60</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.20; also 1.13.24.

<sup>61</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.2, 19-20, 29.

<sup>62</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.19.

<sup>63</sup>Cyprian, *De unitate ecclesiae*, 3, 5-6. See Calvin, *Inst.* 4.2.6, 6.17, etc.

<sup>64</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.2: *quorum quisque in solidum sit Deus*; 1.13.23: *restat ut tota et in solidum Patris et Filii sit communis*.

<sup>65</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 6.22.

<sup>66</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 24.4; 28.5,9,17; 30.17. Gregory's arguments are set out in contrast to the stark negativity of Eunomius.

<sup>67</sup>Calvin, *Inst.* 1.2.2; 1.3.1; 1.10.2; 1.5.1, 9; 1.13.1, 21; 3.2.6; *OC.* I.491; II.34-35; V.33; XI.561-562; *Comm. on Acts*, 6.14; *Comm. on Romans*, 1.19; *Comm. on Hebrews*, 1.3, etc.

<sup>68</sup>Basil, *Ep.* 234.1-3, 235.2-3; *Con. Eun.* 1.14,23; 2.32; *De obs. se 7*, Athens edit., 36. For Basil himself this distinction did not have the importance that was later given to it. Thus he could say in the same Epistle: "We confess that we know what is knowable of God, and yet what we know reaches beyond our comprehension." *Ep.* 235.2. However, its use by Maximus (together with the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius), by John of Damascus and Gregory Palamas had the effect of introducing into Byzantine theology a damaging dualism of an Augustinian kind.

<sup>69</sup>John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 1.4.

<sup>70</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 38.7, repeated in 45.3. In this admittedly obscure passage Gregory refers to the Name of *God Who Always Is* which he gave to himself when speaking to Moses on the Mount, and to the dim and slight conceptions we may form of God's eternal and limitless Being, *ouk ek ton kat'auton, all'ek ton peri auton*. However, the contrast between *kat'auton* and *peri auton* came to be widely used in formalising a distinction between the divine energies and the divine Being.

<sup>71</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.32.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. the critical reaction of Didymus, *De Spir. St.* 23-25, 60-61; *De Trin.* 2.6.7, who could speak of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as the presence of God *secundum substantiam*, and not merely *secundum operationem*.

<sup>73</sup>This is the Athanasian concept of *enousios energeia* and *enousios logos*; see *The Trinitarian Faith*, 72-74, 131, 246, 311, 336.

<sup>74</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, *Ep.* 58; *Or.* 43.68.

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