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WHO IS GOD?

Apparently most people who attend church services today have never heard a sermon expounding the doctrine of the Blessed, Holy, and Undivided Trinity—the transcendent, living God, Yahweh-Elohim, worshiped by Christians through the centuries. Further, they have had either little or no instruction in the importance, or the actual content, of this doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. In fact, many seem to think that the Holy Trinity is a mathematical problem belonging to the realm “above” and therefore has little or no practical importance.

GOD OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

From the perspective of orthodox Christianity, the hearing of no sermon could *perhaps* be said to be good, in the sense that the doctrine of the Blessed, Holy, and Undivided Trinity is so basic to all hymnody, prayer, and preaching that a sermon on the Trinity is not necessary. It is assumed the Trinity is proclaimed implicitly and explicitly in all that is said and sung. We can imagine that this situation could exist in a church which has a learned and godly pastor and keeps close to Protestant ortho-

doxy, or a parish which uses an ancient or classic liturgy—for example, the essentially patristic Greek liturgy of St. Chrysostom or the English liturgy of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1662). A study of these written forms of worship shows that structurally they relate the church to the Holy and Transcendent Father, through the Incarnate Son and in/by the Holy Spirit in worship and for salvation. Of course, the presence of carefully expressed Trinitarianism in a liturgy does not automatically guarantee living faith in the Blessed, Holy, and Undivided Trinity in the hearts of those who use the liturgy. What it does, however, is to ensure always the possibility of the church being genuinely orthodox in mind and heart.

On the other hand, where there is no formal, orthodox liturgy, the absence of teaching on the living God as a Unity in Trinity and a Trinity in Unity could *perhaps* be said to be bad, in the sense that the absence of the doctrine means exactly what it appears to mean. The pastor and congregation seem to get on quite well without any regular, explicit reference in song or sermon to the Blessed, Holy, and Undivided Trinity. While they obviously believe in one, personal God, they do not appear to believe in, or to place any obvious importance upon, the eternal Trinity of Persons, the Holy Triad. Possibly they believe in one personal God, who has three names (“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” or “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier”), with whom all are encouraged to have a “personal relationship.” Or possibly they believe that the Father is God and that Jesus Christ is also God (in some lesser way), but the Spirit is simply and only God active in the world in an invisible way.

In fact, what seems to be widely held in the West in both conservative and liberal Christianity concerning the “Godness of God” is that God as God, or God in his Godhead, is unreachable, unknowable, and beyond all appropriate description. God is Mystery. Therefore, to speak to, or describe, such a God we must use the best names, images, phrases, and metaphors available to us. If we are conservative, we take our forms of address and description from Scripture and holy tradition—the experience of yesterday; and, if we are liberal, we take them from contemporary human experience and such experience of the past as resonates with our present needs. In the former case, we find it

natural to speak of God as “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” as well as of “the Lord” and “the King”; in the latter case, we see it as a duty—in being politically correct—to speak of God[*dess*] as “Father-Mother,” “Friend,” and “Parent,” as well as “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.”

If we take a look back over what Western thought has intended by the word “God” (which is normally masculine in grammatical gender in Western European languages), we find that the prominent meaning is that of monotheism—there is one and one only true and living God, Creator of the universe. However, there have been other meanings, some of which are becoming prominent today. Various Europeans have been intellectually committed, for example, to pantheism (the world is God and God is the world), panentheism (the world is contained within God), and deism (God is wholly beyond the world and takes no interest in it). Further, for those (the majority) who do not feel the need for, or are incapable of arriving at, any intellectual clarity, and who do not follow Christian orthodoxy, the word “God” has stood for “something” or “someone,” which/who is supernatural and invisible, and which/who is known through feelings, in religious experience or by intuition. This undeveloped sense, conviction, or idea of God is probably nearer to pantheism today than to classical monotheism.

Further, when it is said today from many parts of the major Christian denominations that God is Mystery and unknowable and that we are to choose the most appropriate names and images from our experience by which to speak of “him/her,” it is not to be assumed that we are into monotheism—let alone Trinitarian monotheism! More likely we are into panentheism or pantheism.

The late C.S. Lewis’ *Miracles* devotes chapter 11 to pantheism as popular religion. “So far from being the final religious refinement,” he wrote, “Pantheism is in fact the permanent natural bent of the human mind; the permanent, ordinary level below which man sometimes sinks, under the influence of priestcraft and superstition, but above which his own unaided efforts can never raise him for very long.”¹ Lewis also wrote:

We who defend Christianity find ourselves constantly opposed not by the irreligion of our hearers but by their

real religion. Speak about beauty, truth and goodness, or about a God who is simply the indwelling principles of these three, speak about a great spiritual force pervading all things, a common mind of which we are all parts, a pool of generalized spirituality to which we can all flow, and you will command friendly interest. But the temperature drops as soon as you mention a God who has purposes and performs particular actions, who does one thing and not another, a concrete, choosing, commanding, prohibiting God with a determinate character. People become embarrassed or angry.²

Not a few committed Christians who are self-consciously Trinitarian have experienced what Lewis describes, even in supposedly "orthodox" congregations and denominations.

A century or so before Lewis began to write his books, a Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited and studied American society. Then he wrote what has become a famous book, *Democracy in America*. It is still much read in America—especially in college courses. One of the chapters concerns religion in a democracy, and it is of importance to us because of the ties which de Tocqueville saw between the grand experiment of democracy in the new world and the seductive power of pantheism within the American nation.

In his brief chapter 7, "What Causes Democratic Nations to Incline toward Pantheism," de Tocqueville comments on the increase of pantheism in Europe—within philosophy in Germany and within literature in France. Then, with America in mind he wrote:

When the conditions of society are becoming more equal and each individual man becomes more like all the rest, more weak and insignificant, a habit grows up of ceasing to notice the citizens and considering only the people, of overlooking individuals to think only of their kind. At such times the human mind seeks to embrace a multitude of different objects at once, and it constantly strives to connect a variety of consequences with a single cause. The idea of unity so possesses man and is sought by him so generally that if he thinks he has found it, he readily yields himself to repose in that belief. Not content with

the discovery that there is nothing in the world but a creation and a Creator, he is still embarrassed by this primary division of things and seeks to expand and simplify his conception by including God and the universe in one great whole.³

When people were seen as belonging to tribes and families and when their personhood was defined in relation to others, they were not seen atomistically and not regarded as "individuals." Rather, they were seen as persons in relations as part of a grand ordered universe. But democracy ultimately rests upon seeing human beings not in tribes and families but as "individuals"—and this creates the problem for the human mind. So de Tocqueville continues:

If there is a philosophical system which teaches that all things material and immaterial, visible and invisible, which the world contains are to be considered only as the several parts of an immense Being, who alone remains eternal amidst the continual change and ceaseless transformation of all that constitutes him, we may readily infer that such a system, although it destroy the individuality of man, or rather because it destroys that individuality, will have secret charms for men living in democracies. All their habits of thought prepare them to conceive it and predispose them to adopt it. It naturally attracts and fixes their imagination; it fosters the pride while it soothes the indolence of their minds.

Among the different systems by whose aid philosophy endeavors to explain the universe, I believe pantheism to be one of those most fitted to seduce the human mind in democratic times. Against it all who abide in their attachment to the true greatness of man should combine and struggle.⁴

Since the publication of this book, others have observed that the tendency of the American soul, raised in the excessive culture of individual rights, is toward pantheism. A recent study of rock music, *The Triumph of Vulgaritas*⁵ by Robert Pattison, traces this music to nineteenth-century British pantheism. The beat in

the music is the heartbeat of mother earth!

The insights of Lewis and de Tocqueville raise the possibility that the external rite (i.e., the words, symbolism, music, dramatic action, and ceremonial of the worship service) can be objectively orthodox (in terms of holy tradition), while the mind-set of some, if not all, participants can be pantheistic. Further, it is also entirely possible that even where there is a vocal commitment to the inerrancy, inspiration, and authority of Holy Scripture, pantheism and natural religion can be present in hearts and attitudes. This is because in this case the attitude to the Bible can be at the level of commitment to an ideology rather than as an expression of living, personal faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Blessed, Holy, and Undivided Trinity.

Perhaps it is appropriate to add that pantheism or panentheism is the belief we would expect and indeed find in modern people, who feel the need to believe in “God” and who live in a culture where the general belief in development, progress, and evolution is taken for granted. Here God is the *Zeitgeist* or the animating Spirit or the Mind or the Life-Force of the evolving culture and universe. In this kind of general environment it is possible to speak quite sincerely in the manner of a trinitarian theist and really be a pantheist.

This can best be illustrated by referring to the presence today of “Modalism,” which is an ancient but ever-present heresy. What Modalism teaches is very simple. It asserts that there is one and only one God; at different times in human history God is known in different ways and by different names. His chief names for Christians have been “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The use of these prominent names does not mean he is truly a Trinity; it means only that he is like a triangle with three “sides”—sometimes God is fatherly, sometimes he is universal Spirit, and sometimes he is best looked for in Jesus. Where Modalism is accompanied by an emphasis on the majesty and transcendence of God then it is really a form of Unitarianism. But where it is held in the context of experiencing the nearness, availability, and immanence of God, it is often nothing more than a form of pantheism—pantheism using Christian vocabulary. I fear that the union of modalism and pantheism is more common in North American religion than most of us would care to admit.

UNDER ATTACK

So we see that the received doctrine of the Holy Trinity, passed down in ecumenical creeds and local confessions of faith, is under silent attack from within. It is being eroded by the inbred and incipient pantheism within the individualized soul of Western man, particularly in North America. Further, the teaching that God is Three in One is under attack from without. It is being set aside or revised by feminist theologians (who, in terms of their sex, are both female and male).

Feminist theologians are supported by people within the leadership of denominations as well as in seminaries and colleges—people who often have not thought through what they are being asked to believe. This attack upon “the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” is a crucial part of the larger attempt to dismantle the received linguistic structure of Christianity. Of the latter, Robert W. Jenson has offered this intriguing observation.

One may fear that the current crisis, where it is in progress, is equaled in the previous history of the Faith only by the gnostic crisis of the second and third centuries, and by the crisis of vulgar Enlightenment at the hinge of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If one historical event could fully repeat another, one might even say that the “inclusivist” crisis is a simultaneous rerun of the two, joined into one by recapitulation also of the causal relation between them.⁶

Further, this current crisis generates great energy. This is because those who wage the war for the new ways are able not only to appeal to the mind and ethos of modern culture for support, but are also able to use in battle weapons forged in earlier times both by orthodox and liberal theologians.

What is the nature of the attack upon the linguistic structure of classic, dynamic, biblical, orthodox trinitarian theism? As far as I can see, the strategy involves creating an ethos and mind-set in which new ways of describing and addressing God are deemed both appropriate and necessary. This is achieved through a combination of the following: (1) by making use of

what is known as apophatic theology; (2) by emphasizing the importance of modern secular and religious experience for the knowledge and naming of God; (3) by the use of "metaphorical" theology; (4) by accepting feminist teaching on the wickedness of patriarchy, androcentricism, and sexism; (5) by following the more extreme form of the historical-critical method in the reading and interpretation of the Christian Bible; and (6) by adopting a concept of God from the insights and principles of process theology and/or panentheism.

Underlying all these is the deliberate confusion of sexuality with gender. That is, the word *gender* is used where *sexuality* is required. For example, "The church is to be free of racial and *gender* [i.e., sexual] bias." In the study of a language we refer to the gender of nouns and pronouns. Grammatical gender has nothing whatsoever in principle to do with sexuality, which is the reality of being physically a male or a female. Yet, by constantly speaking of gender instead of sexuality, feminist theologians give the impression that sexuality in human beings is only as important as gender in grammar. The French say "La table" (feminine gender) because that is how they have always spoken. Yet the gender could have been masculine or neuter and then they would now say "Le table"; but they don't because the gender for unknown reasons is female.

We now turn to the sixfold strategy of the feminist theologians:

(1) *Apophatic theology*. There is a long tradition both within certain forms of Platonic philosophy and in Greek Orthodox theology of assuming and claiming that God as God, or God in his essential deity, is unknowable, inexpressible, incomprehensible, and ineffable. In Orthodoxy this apophaticism consists in negating that which God is not—for example, he is not any part of the visible or invisible created order, not goodness, love, and wisdom, and not even being itself. "He has made darkness his abode" (Ps. 18:11). Yet this negative way is balanced by the positive way. The claim of cataphatic theology (which always accompanies apophatic theology) is that God has revealed himself definitively in Jesus Christ. This self-revealing God is the God to whom the believer says "Thou." Thus God in his ineffa-

ble essence is beyond all knowledge—he is supra-essential and supra-celestial. However, God in his energies is knowable for he actually unveils himself and reveals himself. He tells us his name(s). Examples of the apophatic and cataphatic style abound in the Divine Liturgy of St. Chrysostom and that of St. Basil.

Feminist theology makes much of the apophatic dimension and divorces it from the cataphatic. So God is said to be Mystery, which we are to name. That is, if God is beyond knowledge and description, and if this God who is Mystery has not given any definitive self-revelation, then human beings are left to search for God and to name, to address, and to describe God according to their own lights and experiences. Thus God has had and will have many names. Feminists name God out of their own feminine experience.

(2) *Religious experience*. Ever since the Enlightenment and the influential writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher at the beginning of the nineteenth century, theologians in the liberal tradition have seen the raw material of theology as the religious experience of Jews and Christians. Thus they have used the Bible not as an account of divine revelation to be received by the church as authoritative, but as a collection of accounts of a variety of religious experiences to be received critically by the church for reflection and guidance. Then to this recorded experience of Jews and Christians theologians have added the further experience of the church through space and time, including their own space and time.

Feminists now also insist that the general and religious experience of women as women must be taken fully into account within the "raw material" upon which the theologian reflects. This major dimension (involving the experience of half of "humankind") has been absent from theological reflection until the present, they say, and therefore the theology of the past cannot be wholly trusted for it has been biased in favor of men.

(3) *Metaphorical theology*. If ultimate Mystery (that is God or God[dess]) has not revealed his/her true name and nature, then human beings will do (and have done) their best or their worst to describe and address God[dess] from within their specific experi-

ence of the divine and from within their own cultural horizons. As there can be no literal descriptions of the ineffable God[dess], all forms of address must be either in simile (e.g., "God is like a mother hen") or metaphor (e.g., God is a "Rock," "Father/ Mother," and "Divine Friend,"). And these similes and metaphors (sometimes called "models") will change from place to place, culture to culture, and time to time. Those used by the Israelites, Jews, and early Christians belong to their own context and times and do not necessarily have any value or worth for today.

Feminists call for the development of metaphors and models for deity which reflect the experience of God[dess] by women. These will include, but will not necessarily be only, feminine images such as "Mother." Such expressions as "Great Lover" and "God of many names" will also have a place, as also will "Life-creating Wisdom" and "Name Unnamed."

(4) *Feminist ideology.* Here the key words and concepts are "patriarchalism," "androcentricism," and "sexism." It is assumed that the culture and society presumed in both the Old and New Testaments as well as throughout European Christian history expressed in greater or lesser degree these evils. Men were in charge and everything existed primarily for the good of men. So it is not surprising, say feminists, that in Scripture, as well as in synagogue and church, God was always "He" and conceived via male images such as Lord, King, and Master. And the Trinity was "the Father, the Son, and the Spirit." Thus androcentric religion has buttressed male domination (and vice versa) since, in the oft-quoted words of Mary Daly, "If God is male then the male is God."

Living now in times of liberation, the church has a solemn duty to elevate the status of women, claim feminists, and as a sign of this duty to begin to name and address God with non-masculine or feminine metaphors. Obviously many metaphors and models can be used and God as a Trinity (if God[dess] is experienced in the world as Threefold) could be "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier," or "God, Christ, Spirit" or "Mother, Lover, and Friend," or any other set of three names.

(5) *Historical-critical method.* It is obvious that to use the Scriptures as they do, the feminist theologians have drunk deeply of

the modern historical-critical method in its more agnostic forms. That is, they treat the books of the Bible as ordinary, ancient, religious books and seek to explain them in terms of the times and contexts and concerns in which they were originally written. In this explanation they do not allow for any unique or even special "inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit." They treat the Scriptures as unique simply because they are the first in line, belonging to the foundational period of Christianity, not because they are authoritative in any stronger sense.

(6) *Pantheism/panentheism.* Because they reject classical, trinitarian theism with all its supposed masculine features, because they wish to emphasize the immanence rather than the transcendence of God, and because they desire to name God[dess] in feminine ways, feminist theologians find themselves by design or default embracing views of God which link God's being intimately with the cosmos. Many have been influenced by process theology and speak of the world as "God's body." They claim that while God is not strictly identical with the world, the world is nevertheless within God. Some feminists, however, do claim to experience God in a threefold way and so from within their panentheism there is still talk of God as some kind of Trinity (as there is also in non-feminist panentheism, particularly in the philosophy of Hegel and those who follow him). However, the purpose of this Trinity is usually stated as being that of providing a model of community for humanity—a model which does not foster patriarchalism!

STUDYING THE BIBLE

In response to this feminist campaign and teaching, which has deeply influenced Western Christianity in both its conservative and liberal expressions, there are two basic ways of doing a study of the biblical teaching on the Trinity. One is to ignore the underlying pantheism, the linguistic crisis, and the feminist attack and allow the Bible to speak for itself on its own terms, believing that the Holy Spirit will convince people of the truth of the biblical doctrine, if the evidence is fairly stated. Such a work would conceivably look like Lockyer's *All the Divine Names and*

*Titles in the Bible: A Unique Classification of All Scripture Designations of the Three Persons of the Trinity.*⁸

The other is to set forth the biblical evidence for belief in the Holy Trinity and, in doing this, face some of the challenges and questions raised not only by the latest feminist theology but also by pantheism and liberal theology. Some of the writers in the symposium *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* have attempted to do this in short essays.⁹

What I shall attempt to do in this book fits somewhere between these two approaches, but is certainly more of the latter than the former. We are all affected by the call to become "politically correct" in our use of language; thus, in some way or another, we all face this modern, feminist challenge when we think theologically or address God in prayer. Regrettably, in my opinion, modern translations of the Bible (e.g., the NRSVB, NEB, and NJB) have moved toward the general use of inclusive language, and the tendency in biblical translation and in the editing of Christian books for publication seems to be toward the way of accommodation with politically correct language.

Since this is primarily an exercise in biblical doctrine (i.e., what is specifically assumed and taught by the writers of the sacred books of the Bible), it is necessary for me briefly to state how I view the canon of Scripture. The New Testament is an *authoritative collection of inspired, authoritative books*. The author (and editor where there was one) of each book was/were inspired by the Holy Spirit in what he/they wrote so that the content of what is written reflects the will of God, the Father. So each book is *authoritative*, pointing to Christ, the Lord. However, the early Christian church during the first four centuries decided which books were actually to be within the canon or collection called the New Testament. Now certainly the pastors of the church in the first four centuries were led by the Holy Spirit in this process of sifting and choosing which books to include, but we must allow that the church (through pastors and synods) was actually an authority (under Jesus Christ the Lord by the Holy Spirit) in the creation of the canon of the New and in the accepting of the canon of the Old Testaments.

And if we allow that the early church was an *authority* under Jesus Christ in terms of the creation of the canon, then it is

reasonable to grant that the doctrinal understanding of the same church in terms of such great themes as the identity of God the Father, of Jesus Christ his Son, and the Holy Spirit ought to be received by us with the utmost respect. In other words, along with the New Testament we received from the same church and at the same time as the agreed canon of the New Testament a creed, or rather, two creeds. First, the Creed of the Council of Nicea (325) and then, secondly, the longer Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed approved by the Council of Constantinople (381) with their teaching on the Persons and the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The latter creed is normally called "the Nicene Creed" today (and we shall have more to say about it in the next chapter).

Over the centuries Christian teachers have held that they are to hear and read the Bible with minds which have accepted and appropriated this authoritative statement of the identity of the Persons and work of the Holy Trinity. In fact, once the church had clarified and put into careful statement the central themes of the sacred Scriptures, then the Bible was read from this particular point of view within worship. Thus, the very teaching which the Bible had yielded (and continued to yield) to patient and prayerful study, then became the doctrinal basis upon which the church actually read the Scriptures in its Liturgy and Daily Offices over the centuries.

Thus it seems that all a Christian is doing when he writes a book on the biblical basis for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is looking in Scripture for that which as an orthodox Christian he already believes. Actually it is probably true to say that in his own study and experience he is doing personally and quickly what the church did corporately in the first four centuries. Of course, he knows what the church decided and that is his faith. So he is looking at the Scriptures while facing the challenges raised and the questions asked in his own time (e.g., through the use of the historical-critical method and by the critical estimate of the Bible in feminist theology). He studies to see whether in the light of such criticisms the Scriptures still yield to the prayerful student the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And because of the experience of the church in twenty centuries, he will be very surprised not to be encountered by the Holy Trinity.

THE HOLY TRINITY AND BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Since we are considering the testimony of the Scriptures, perhaps the best way to introduce the "biblical" doctrine of the Holy Trinity is to consider briefly the implications of what is said of the Scriptures by the Scriptures in terms of their relation to God.

It is well known that Jesus himself, as well as his apostles and disciples, believed that the authors of the books of what we now call the Old Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, declared that "the Lord God of Israel" is the God who "spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Luke 1:68, 70). The Apostle Peter insisted that "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, explained that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Further, in several places, Paul speaks of the Old Testament as a whole and in terms of being like a thinking, rational, omniscient subject and person: thus the Jewish Bible is "God's oracles [utterances]," in and from which God is heard to speak (Rom. 3:2; 9:17; 10:11).

When asked, "What is the primary message spoken by the divine oracles?" the answer of Jesus and his apostles was "the Messiah." On the road to Emmaus, the resurrected Jesus spoke of his own suffering and crucifixion to the two disciples. "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then, "beginning with Moses [i.e., the Five Books of Moses] and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

Peter told the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia the following:

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they

inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The prophets not only spoke the word of the Lord to their contemporaries but they also spoke of the future Messiah, even though they did not understand all of the word they proclaimed.

As we reflect upon what the writers of the New Testament have to say about the inspiration of the Old Testament, we get an insight into the way in which Yahweh-Elohim, the Lord God of Israel, related to and acted toward his covenant people. Obviously Moses and the later prophets are prophets of Yahweh-Elohim, the God of Abraham, Moses, and David. At the same time they are inspired, even indwelt, by the Spirit of the Lord God (also "the Spirit of Christ"), who actually speaks God's words through them; further as they speak and write they point to Jesus, the suffering and glorified Messiah, who is in himself as a Person the Word of God, and who as such speaks God's words. Thus we see (even if "in a mirror dimly," 1 Cor. 13:12) the Three, whom the resurrected Lord Jesus named "the Father . . . the Son, and . . . the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19), revealed in the origin, content, and purpose of the Holy Scriptures.

Our task in the rest of this book is to look for both the "raw material" and the implicit and explicit statements of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the Bible. This work will cause us not only to look at the Bible itself, but also at what various writers have said about the doctrinal themes and contents of the Bible.

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2

GOD IN RELATION TO US

In this chapter we shall first examine briefly three simple yet profound descriptions of God—a task which will introduce us to the biblical vision of the Holy Trinity and prepare us for the biblical study in chapters 4 to 11. Then, so that we shall not be reading and studying the Bible in a vacuum, we shall turn to examine the origins of the ecclesial doctrine/dogma of the Holy Trinity as this was developed in the early and medieval church and recorded later in the confessions of faith of the Protestant churches of the Reformation. To know the ecclesial dogma will help us both to appreciate the biblical vision of the Holy Trinity and the concept of the development of doctrine.

The three simple yet profound statements concerning God all appear in the Johannine writings of the New Testament and, upon examination, yield a lively conception of God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

GOD IS SPIRIT

John, the evangelist, reports that in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well Jesus said, "God is Spirit" (John 4:24). Too often this has been taken out of context and made to