

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD
Part III: The Ancient Church (The Holy Spirit)

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I. INTRODUCTION.

The discussion of the development of Theology Proper has essentially dealt with the pre-incarnate relationship of the Son to the Father (i.e., binarianism). This, of course, is the major emphasis of the scholars when discussing the topic of Trinitarianism in the Ancient Church. The purpose of this lesson is to deal with the development of Pneumatology within the context of the historical development of Trinitarianism. The clue to our parenthetical study is given by Cunningham (*Historical Theology*. I, 305): “There is nothing said in the original Nicene Creed about the Holy Ghost, except the simple mention of His name, because, up to that time, the Scripture doctrine concerning Him had not been made a matter of controversial discussion.”

II. THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.

A general summary of the understanding of the Apostolic Fathers, given their characteristic simplicity and naiveté, is provided by Sheldon: (*History of Christian Doctrine*. I, 89): “As practical Christianity, preceded the speculative, so naturally an acknowledgement of the Trinity of revelation preceded an acknowledgement of an essential Trinity, or the Trinity pertaining to the Godhead as such. The earliest references to the subject among Christian writers include little else than Scriptural phraseology, and speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as revealed and operative in the world.”

A. Clement of Rome (d. ca. 120)

Clement, in the letter to the Corinthians, speaks of the Spirit ten times, mostly in reference to the Spirit’s inspiration of the Old Testament. Only two references are helpful for our study: in chapter two, he speaks of the outpouring of the spirit (“an abundant outpouring of the spirit fell upon all”) and he uses the tri-part formula (“Have we not one God and one Christ and one Spirit of Grace who was poured upon us all?”). Dewar wrote (*The Holy Spirit and Modern Thought*, 85), “Taking this epistle as a whole, therefore, it may fairly be said that it does not add anything

to the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit, or reveal any further insight.”

N.B. II Clement, which is not to be confused in authorship with Clement’s letter to the Corinthians, has one reference to the Spirit (14:3). There the writer identifies Christ as the Holy Spirit (“the spirit is Christ”).

B. Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 112)

Apart from the trinitarian formula (it is noticeable that the order is Son, Father, and Spirit (*To the Magnesians*, 13.1), there is only one passage relative to the Holy Spirit (*To the Philadelphians*, 7): “For even though certain persons desired to deceive me after the flesh, yet the Spirit is not deceived, being from God; for it knoweth whence it cometh and where it goeth; and it searcheth out the hidden things. I cried out, when I was among you; I spake with a loud voice, with God’s own voice, Give ye heed to the bishop and the presbytery and deacons. Howbeit there were those who suspected me of saying this, because I knew beforehand of the division of certain persons. But He in whom I am bound is my witness that I learned it not from flesh of man; it was the preaching of the Spirit who spake on this wise; Do nothing without the bishop; keep your flesh as a temple of God; cherish union, shun divisions, be imitators of Jesus Christ, as He Himself also was of His Father.”

Thus, the Spirit is cast in the role of a personal revealer, one sent from God.

C. Hermas (d. ca. 130)

The *Shepherd of Hermas* abounds in allusions to the Spirit, but the writer has no consistent pneumatology.

1. He is beset by a confusion that is seen in second- and third-century writers; he fails to distinguish between the Son and the Spirit. In “Similitude”, 9.1 he stated “that the Spirit is the Son of God.” Similarly (“Similitude”, 5.6): “The Holy Pre-existent Spirit, Which created the whole creation, God made to dwell in flesh that He desired. This flesh, therefore, in which the Holy Spirit dwelt, was subject unto the Spirit, walking honourably in holiness and purity, without in any way defiling the Spirit. When then it had lived honourably in chastity, and had laboured with the Spirit, and had cooperated with it in everything, behaving itself boldly and bravely, He chose it as a partner with the Holy Spirit; for the career of this flesh pleased [the Lord], seeing that, as possessing the Holy Spirit, it was not defiled upon the earth. He therefore took the son as adviser and the glorious angels also, that this flesh too, having served the Spirit unblameably, might have some place of sojourn, and might not seem to have lost the reward for its service; for all flesh, which is found undefiled and unspotted, wherein the Holy Spirit dwelt, shall receive a reward. Now thou hast the interpretation of this parable also.”

2. Also, he confuses the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. He speaks on the one hand of the Holy Spirit, but reverses himself and speaks of its defilement (“Mandate”, 5:1-3): “ ‘Be thou longsuffering and understanding,’ he saith, ‘and thou shalt have the mastery over all evil deeds, and shalt work all righteousness. For if thou art long-suffering, the Holy Spirit that abideth in thee shall be pure, not being darkened by another evil spirit, but dwelling in a large room shall rejoice and be glad with the vessel in which he dwelleth, and shall serve God with much cheerfulness, having prosperity in himself. But if any angry temper approach, forthwith the Holy Spirit, being delicate, is straitened, not having [the] place clear, and seeketh to retire from the place; for he is being choked by the evil spirit, and has no room to minister unto the Lord, as he desireth, being polluted by angry temper.’ ”

N.B. In the remaining Apostolic Fathers little is relevant to our purpose as most speak of Him as the inspiration of the O.T. and state the baptismal formula (*Didaché*, 7.1). It may safely be said of the Fathers that:

1. The doctrine of the full deity and personality of the Holy Spirit is by no means universally grasped. So far as the personality of the Spirit is recognized, it is confused with that of the Logos (i.e., Christ).
2. There are no traces of the vital distinction between natural and supernatural operations of the Spirit.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE APOLOGISTS.

The Apologists did clearly advance the understanding of the Spirit, but still evidence some of the confusion manifest in the Fathers.

A. The Apologists of the Eastern Church

1. **Justin Martyr** calls the Holy Spirit the gift come down from heaven, which Christ imparted to believers after His glorification, and to the prophets before His incarnation. He wrote (*Address to the Greeks*, 23): “And if any one will attentively consider the gift that descends from God on the holy men—which gift the sacred prophets call the Holy Ghost—he shall find that this was announced under another name by Plato in the dialogue with Meno. For, fearing to name the gift of God “the Holy Ghost,” lest he should seem, by following the teaching of the prophets, to be an enemy to the Greeks, he acknowledges, indeed, that it comes down from God, yet does not think fit to name it the Holy Ghost, but virtue. For

as the sacred prophets says that one and the same spirit is divided into seven spirits, so he also, naming it one and the same virtue, says this is divided into four virtues; wishing by all means to avoid mention of the Holy Spirit, but clearly declaring in a kind of allegory what the prophets said of the Holy Spirit. For to this effect he spoke in the dialogue with Meno towards the close: 'From this reasoning, Meno, it appears that virtue comes to those to whom it does come by a divine destiny. But we shall know clearly about this, in what kind of way virtue comes to men, when, as a first step, we shall have set ourselves to investigate, as an independent inquiry, what virtue itself is.' You see how he calls only by the name of virtue, the gift that descends from above; and yet he counts it worthy of inquiry, whether it is right that this [gift] be called virtue or some other thing, fearing to name it openly the Holy Spirit, lest he should seem to be following the teaching of the prophets."

Having said this Martyr makes the following points:

- a) He distinguishes the Logos (i.e., The Word, Christ) from the Spirit, though he sometimes confounds them. He calls the Spirit the Logos of O.T. inspiration. (*First Apology*, 33): "And the angel of God who was sent to the same virgin at that time brought her good news, saying, 'Behold, thou shalt conceive of the Holy Ghost, and shalt bear a Son, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins,'—as they who have recorded all that concerns our Saviour Jesus Christ have taught, whom we believed, since by Isaiah also, whom we have now adduced, the Spirit of prophecy declared that He should be born as we intimated before. It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power."
- b) Also, he seems to place the Spirit below angels. He states (*First Apology*, 1:6): "Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him, and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught."

This view is confirmed in *Dialogue to Trypho* where he describes the Spirit as the Angel of God, a power which is sent to our aid from God. Neander wrote (*Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas*, I, 173), “Hence Justin might ascribe the third place in the triad to the Holy Spirit, although he places him at the head of angels.”

2. **Theophilus of Antioch**, the first Christian writer to speak of God as a Triad, at times separates the Spirit from the Logos. He wrote (*To Autolycus*, 2.15): “On the fourth day the luminaries were made; because God, who possesses foreknowledge, knew the follies of the vain philosophers, that they were going to say, that the things which grow on the earth are produced from the heavenly bodies, so as to exclude God. In order, therefore, that the truth might be obvious, the plants and seeds were produced prior to the heavenly bodies, for what is posterior cannot produce that which is prior. And these contain the pattern and type of a great mystery. For the sun is a type of God, and the moon of man. And as the sun far surpasses the moon in power and glory, so far does God surpass man. And as the sun remains ever full, never becoming less, so does God always abide perfect, being full of all power and understanding, and wisdom, and immortality, and all good. But the moon wanes monthly, and in a manner dies, being a type of man; then it is born again, and is crescent, for a pattern of the future resurrection. In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries are types of the Trinity, of God and His Word and His Wisdom.”

Theophilus however at other times identifies Christ and the Spirit as one (*To Autolycus*, 2.10): “And first they taught us with one consent that God made all things out of nothing; for nothing was coequal with God: but He being His own place, and wanting nothing, and existing before the ages, willed to make man by whom He might be known, for him, therefore, He prepared the world. For he that is created is also needy; but he that is uncreated stands in need of nothing. God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called “governing principle” [arch], because he rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and wisdom, and power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spake of the creation of the world and of all other things.”

3. **Athenagoras’ Plea for Christians** stressed the unity of the divine essence, yet admits to a division of persons in a certain order that includes subordinationism. He, like Martyr, refers to angels as objects of worship.
4. **Origen** affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is not a

creature, though the Spirit is said to have begun in eternity. The same error is evident with the Spirit as with the Son, subordinationism is evident. Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 131), “It is not altogether fair to conclude, as many have done, that Origen teaches a triad of disparate beings rather than a Trinity, but the strongly pluralistic strain in his Trinitarianism is its salient feature.”

B. The Apologists of the Western Church

1. **Tertullian** is looked upon as a pioneer in trinitarian theology. His views are most clearly evidenced in his writing against the unitarian Praxeas. He speaks of the Son and Spirit as being a part of the Godhead (*Against Praxeas*, 9 and 26). The Spirit is subordinated in rank to the Father through the Son. He employed such illustrations as the fountain, stream, and river or root, branch, and fruit to explain the triade of persons.
2. **Irenaeus**, like the Fathers, conceived of the Spirit as the inspiration of the O.T. Scriptures. He appears to be the first to grasp the full equality of the Spirit with the Son (“two hands of the Father”). He wrote (*Against Heresies*, 1.2.1), “Now man is a mixed organism of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God and molded by His hands; that is by the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom also He said ‘Let us make man.’ ” Elsewhere he wrote (*Against Heresies*, 4.34.1): “For God did not stand in need of these [i.e., the angels] in order to perform what He had determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him are always present the Word and the Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, through whom and in whom He made all things fully and of His own will, to whom also He speaks, saying: ‘Let us make man after our image and likeness.’ ”

Neander wrote (*Lectures*. I, 175): “He applied the theory of Subordination to the Holy Spirit: by such steps we attain to the Son through the Spirit, through the Son we ascend to the Father . . . He comprehends the whole doctrine of the Trinity in the words—The One God of whom are all things; the Son through whom all things; the Holy Spirit who reveals the dispensations of the Father and the Son among mankind as the Father wills.”

3. **Novatian**, the Presbyter has a doctrine of the Spirit that is insightful. He regards Him as the divine power which works in prophets, apostles, and the church, but makes no mention of His subsistence as a person. He wrote (*Trinity*, 29): “Next, well-ordered reason and the authority of our faith bid us (in the words and the writings of our Lord set down in orderly fashion) to believe, after these things, also in the Holy Spirit, who was in times past promised to the Church and duly bestowed at the appointed, favorable moment. (2) He was indeed promised by the prophet Joel but bestowed

through Christ. 'In the last days,' says the prophet, 'I will pour out from My spirit upon My servants and handmaids.' And the Lord said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' (3) Now the Lord sometimes calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete and at other times proclaims Him to be the Spirit of truth, He is not new in the Gospel, nor has He been given in a novel way. For it was He who in the prophets reproved the people and in the apostles gave an invitation to the Gentiles. Therefore, it is one and the same Spirit who is in the prophets and in the apostles. He was, however, in the former only for awhile; whereas He abides in the latter forever. In other words, He is in the prophets but not to remain always in them in the apostles, that He might abide in them forever. He has been apportioned to the former in moderation; to the latter, He has been wholly poured out, He was sparingly given to the one; upon the other, lavishly bestowed. He was not, however, manifested before the Lord's Resurrection but conferred by Christ's Resurrection. (7) In fact, Christ said: 'I will ask the Father, and He will give another Advocate that He may be with you forever, the Spirit of truth'; and 'When the Advocate has come whom I will send you from My Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from My Father', and 'If I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you'; and 'when the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you to all truth.' (8) Since the Lord was about to go to heaven, He had to give the Paraclete to His disciples, that He might not leave them as orphans, as it were, and abandon them without a defender or some sort of guardian. That would not have been proper at all. In Christ alone He dwells fully and entirely, not wanting in any measure or part; but in all His overflowing abundance dispensed and sent forth, so that other men might receive from Christ a first outpouring, as it were, of His graces. For the fountainhead of the entire Holy Spirit abides in Christ, that from Him might be drawn streams of grace and wondrous deeds because the Holy Spirit dwells affluently in Christ. Grounded in this Spirit, 'no one' ever 'says "Anathema" to Jesus', no one has denied that Christ is the Son of God, nor has rejected God the Creator; no one utters any words against the Scriptures: no one lays down alien and sac-religious ordinances; no one makes contradictory laws. (25) Whoever 'shall have blasphemed' against Him, 'does not have forgiveness, either in this world or in the world to come.' (26) It is He who in the apostles renders testimony to Christ, in the martyrs manifests the unwavering faith of religion, in virgins encloses the admirable continence of sealed chastity. In the rest of men, He keeps the laws of the Lord's teaching uncorrupted and untainted. He destroys heretics, corrects those in error, reproves unbelievers, reveals impostors, and also corrects the wicked. He keeps the Church uncorrupted and inviolate in the holiness of perpetual virginity and truth."

Subordinationism appears to be implied, although he does not deal with the distinction between the persons in the singular essence, nor did anyone

through the third century (NOTE, however, that Novatian has a rather full conception of the work of the Spirit.).

4. **Hippolytus of Rome**, who is to be closely identified with Irenaeus and Tertullian, affirmed plurality in the Godhead (*A Refutation of All Heresies*, 10.33): “Though alone, He was multiple, for He was not without His Word and His Wisdom, His Power and His Counsel”). No subordinationist strain is evident (i.e., one substance in multiple forms), but he speaks of the Son with little reference to the Spirit.

The point to make in the brief survey is that the confusion of the identity of the Spirit with the Son was resolved. He is seen as a separate Person with an increasingly defined ministry. On the question of substance, the East was heavily subordinationist, while the West in Tertullian and Hippolytus began to develop a full orthodox trinitarian faith.

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE THEOLOGIANS.

It was in the context of the Arian-Athanasian controversy that focus was placed upon the Holy Spirit and progress was made in understanding clearly the full implications of Trinitarianism.

A. Athanasius, Nicea, and the Macedonians.

1. **Athanasius and the Holy Spirit.** Athanasius’ major contribution in the Trinitarian debate focused upon the deity of Christ—the discussion regarding the Spirit was pushed into the background. Later, with the rise of the Macedonians, Athanasius developed his views affirming that the Spirit is of the same substance as the Father. Athanasius’ delineation of the full consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father and Son in a singular essence is stated in his famous four letters to Serapion, bishop of Thumir. He stated in his first letter to Bishop Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit (23): “But now, the one who is not sanctified nor has partaken [shared] of (the) sanctification, but is uncreated by the one who has sanctified all creatures, how could he be from all (things) or be from those who have partaken of him? ... But (the) creatures, as was said, are quickened through him. Now, he who will be a possessor [heir] of life but (is) a maker—cf. possessors and a quickener of (the) creatures, what affinity would he have with the originated (things), or how would he dwell with [a, how could he be of the same essence as] the creatures, which by him and through the Word become quickened? Neander (*Lectures*. I, 305) summarized his arguments as follows: “How can the Holy Spirit belong to the same class as the beings who are sanctified by him? The Holy Spirit is the source of true life; when he is imparted to us, we attain to communion with God. This would be impossible if the Holy Spirit were foreign to the divine

nature. If he were not divine but of a created nature, then something created would be admitted into the Trinity. Arianism could not be logically rejected if the Homoousion were not also ascribed to him.”

2. **The Council of Nicea (325 A.D.)** did not focus on the Spirit but solely upon the deity of Christ. Hence what the Nicene Creed says is merely an undefined postscript (“And we believe in the Holy Spirit”). The Spirit was tangential to the discussions.
3. **The Macedonians.** It was apparently taken for granted that if the personality and deity of the Son were confessed, that of the Spirit would be acknowledged also. Harnack is instructive when he wrote (*History of Dogma*. IV, 111-12): “The doctrine of Origen that the Holy Spirit is an individual hypostasis and that it is a created being included within the sphere of the Godhead itself, found only very partial acceptance for more than a century. And even in the cases in which, under the influence of the baptismal formula, reference was made to a Trinity in the Godhead—which came to be more and more the practice—the third Being was still left in the vague, and, as at an earlier period, we hear of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless the philosophical theologians became more and more convinced that it was necessary to assume the presence not merely of a three-fold economy in the Godhead, but of three divine beings or substances. In the first thirty years after the commencement of the Arian controversy, the Holy Spirit is scarcely ever mentioned, although the Lucianists and consequently Arius too regarded it as indeed a divine hypostasis, but at the same time as the most perfect creature, which the Father had created through the Son and which therefore was inferior to the Son also in nature, dignity, and position. In their Confessions they kept to the old simple tradition ‘and we believe in the Holy Spirit given to the believers for consolation, and sanctification, and perfection.’ They recognized three graduated hypostases in the Godhead. The fact that Athanasius did not in the first instance think of the Spirit at all, regarding which also nothing was fixed at Nicea, is simply a proof of his intense interest in his doctrine of the Son.”

After A.D. 350 a heated controversy over the Spirit emerged around the lead of one Macedonius, a semi-Arian bishop of Constantinople. At the Synod of Alexandria in A.D. 362. Athanasius saw to the first formal condemnation of the denial of the deity of the Spirit which was universalized at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (A.D. 381). The period prior to A.D. 381 was a period of confusion in the East over this issue as Homoiousians were becoming Homoousians. Gregory of Nazianzus noted (*Theological Oration*, 5.31): “Of the wise amongst us some consider the Holy Spirit to be an energy, others a creature, others God, while others again cannot make up their minds to adopt any definite view out of reverence for Scripture, as they put it, because it does not

make any very definite statement on the point. On this account they neither accord to Him divine adoration nor do they refuse it to Him, and thus take a middle road, but which is really a very bad path. Of those again who hold Him to be God, some keep this pious belief to themselves, while others state it openly. Others to a certain degree measure the Godhead since like us they accept the Trinity, but they put a great distance between the three by maintaining that the first is infinite in substance and power, the second in power, but not in substance, while the third is infinite in neither of these two respects.”

B. The Cappadocian and Constantinople.

The conclusion to the theological discussion relative to trinitarianism, particularly it has to do with Pneumatology, was brought about by the famous Cappadocians. Of them Harnack stated (*History of Dogma*. IV, 115), “They had apparently learned something from the letters of Athanasius Ad Serapion for they repeat his arguments and give them more formal development.”

1. **Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386)** is not to be identified with the Cappadocians, but he did provide several major treatises on the Spirit. Cyril had a fully developed, high view of the work of the distinct work of the Holy Spirit, but did not tangle with the difficulties of His nature and substance. He believed in His deity, but as a product of unknowing, unsearching faith. He stated (*Catechetical Lectures*, 16.24): “He heralded Christ in the Prophets; He wrought in the Apostles; and to this day He seals souls in Baptism. The Father gives to the Son, and the Son shares with the Holy Spirit. Not I but Jesus says: ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father’, and of the Holy Spirit He says: ‘When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will teach you all the truth,’ and what follows; ‘He will glorify me, because he will receive of what is mine and declare it to you.’ The Father, through the Son, with the Holy Spirit, bestows all gifts. The gifts of the Father are not different from the gifts of the Son or those of the Holy Spirit. For there is one Salvation, one Power, one Faith. There is one God, the Father; One Lord, His Only-begotten Son; One Holy Spirit, the Advocate. It is enough for us to know this much; inquire not curiously into His nature and substance. For if it had been written, we would have spoken about it; what is not written let us not essay. It is enough for salvation for us to know that there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. **Basil of Caesarea (d. 379)** advanced the Orthodox understanding of the trinity in the East by differentiating essence and persons. He wrote (*Epistle*, 236.6): “The distinction between ousia and upostasi” is the same as that between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man. Wherefore, in the case of the Godhead, we confess one essence or substance so as not to give a variant definition of

existence, but we confess a particular hypostasis, in order that our conception of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be without confusion and clear. If we have no distinct perception of the separate characteristics, namely, fatherhood, sonship, and sanctification, but form our conception of God from the general idea of existence, we cannot possibly give a sound account of our faith. We must, therefore, confess the faith by adding the particular to the common. The Godhead is common; the fatherhood particular. We must therefore combine the two and say, 'I believe in God the Father.' The like course must be pursued in the confession of the Son; we must combine the particular with the common and say 'I believe in God the Son,' so in the case of the Holy Ghost we must make our utterance conform to the appellation and say 'in God the Holy Ghost.' Hence it results that there is a satisfactory preservation of the unity by the confession of the one Godhead, while in the distinction of the individual properties regarded in each there is the confession of the peculiar properties of the Persons. On the other hand those who identify essence or substance and hypostasis are compelled to confess only three Persons, and, in their hesitation to speak of three hypostases, are convicted of failure to avoid the error of Sabellius."

Again he wrote (*On the Holy Spirit*, 45): "One, moreover, is the Holy Spirit, and we speak of Him singly, conjoined as He is to the one Father through the one Son, and through Himself completing the adorable and blessed Trinity. Of Him the intimate relationship to the Father and the Son is sufficiently declared by the fact of His not being ranked in the plurality of the creation, but being spoken of singly; for his is not one of many, but One. For as there is one Father and one Son, so is there one Holy Ghost. He is consequently as far removed from created Nature as reason requires the singular to be removed from compound and plural bodies; and He is in such wise united to the Father and to the Son as unit has affinity with unit."

This treatise of Basil's is considered a landmark for the defeat of Arian conceptions of the Holy Spirit.

- 3. Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389)** clearly affirms that the Spirit is God, that all the predicates of deity are to be attributed to Him (*Theological Oration*, 5.4): "If ever there was a time when the Father was not, then there was a time when the Son was not. If ever there was a time when the Son was not, then there was a time when the Spirit was not. If the One was from the beginning, then the Three were so too... what Godhead can there be if It is not perfect? And how can that be perfect which lacks something of perfection? And surely there is something lacking if it hath not the Holy, and how would it have this if it were without the Spirit? For either holiness is something different from Him, and if so let some one tell me what it is conceived to be; or if it is the same, how is it not from the

beginning, as if it were better for God to be at one time imperfect and apart from the Spirit? If He is not from the beginning, He is in the same rank with myself, even though a little before me; for we are both parted from Godhead by time. If He is in the same rank with myself, how can He make me God, or join me with Godhead?"

Again he clearly wrote (5.9): "What then, say they, is there lacking to the Spirit which prevents His being a Son, for if there were not something lacking He would be a Son? We assert that there is nothing lacking—for God has no deficiency. But the difference of manifestation, if I may so express myself, or rather of their mutual relations one to another, has caused the difference of their Names. For indeed it is not some deficiency in the Son which prevents His being Father (for Sonship is not a deficiency), and yet He is not Father. According to this line of argument there must be some deficiency in the Father, in respect of His not being Son. For the Father is not Son, and yet this is not due to either deficiency or subjection of Essence; but the very fact of being Unbegotten or Begotten, or Proceeding has given the name of Father to the First, of the Son the Second, and of the Third, Him of Whom we are speaking, of the Holy Ghost that the distinction of the Three Persons may be preserved in the one nature and dignity of the Godhead. For neither is the Son Father, for the Father is One, but He is what the Father is; nor is the Spirit Son because He is of God, for the Only-begotten is One, but He is what the Son is. The Three are One in Godhead, and the One Three in properties; so that neither is the Unity a Sabellian one."

4. **The Council of Constantinople (381)** was the climax in the church's discussion of trinitarianism. Kelly wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 263): "The climax of the developments we have been studying was the reaffirmation of the Nicene faith at the council of Constantinople in 381. At this the consubstantiality of the Spirit as well as of the Son was formally endorsed. The theology which prevailed, as exemplified by the great Cappadocians themselves and by teachers like Didymus the Blind (c. 398) and Evagrius Ponticus (399), may be fairly described as in substance that of Athanasius. It is true that their angle of approach was somewhat different from his. Emerging from the Homoiousian tradition, it was natural that they should make the three hypostases, rather than the one divine substance, their starting-point. Hence, while the formula which expresses their position is 'one ousia in three hypostaseis', their emphasis often seems to be on the latter term, connoting the separate subsistence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rather than on the former, which stood for the one invisible Godhead common to Them. Like Athanasius, however, they were champions of the homoousion both of the Son and (as we have just seen) of the Spirit."

The credal statement concerning the Spirit simply reads (Leith [ed], *The*

Creeds of the Churches, 33): “And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets; and in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead the life of the world to come. Amen.

N.B. As indicated previously, the penultimate statements of the Trinity in the West were made by Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine, both of whom heavily borrowed from the Cappadocians. One statement will sustain this point (Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 4.21): “But with respect to the sensible showing of the Holy Spirit, whether by the shape of a dove, or by fiery tongues, when the subjected and subservient creature by temporal motions and forms manifested His substance co-eternal with the Father and the Son, and alike with them unchangeable, while it was not united so as to be one person with Him, as the flesh was which the Word was made; I do not dare to say that nothing of the kind was done aforetime. But I would boldly say, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of one and the same substance, God the Creator, the Omnipotent Trinity, work indivisibly; but that this cannot be indivisibly manifested by the creature, which is far inferior, and least of all by the bodily creature: just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be named by our words, which certainly are bodily sounds, except in their own proper intervals of time, divided by a distinct separation, which intervals the proper syllables of each word occupy. Since in their proper substance wherein they are, the three are one, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the very same, by no temporal motion, above the whole creature, without any interval of time and place, and at once one and the same from eternity to eternity, as it were eternity itself, which is not without truth and charity. But, in my words, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separated, and cannot be named at once, and occupy their own proper places separately in visible letters. And as, when I name my memory, and intellect, and will, each name refers to each severally, but yet each is uttered by all three; for there is no one of these three names that is not uttered by both my memory and my intellect and my will together [by the soul as a whole]; so the Trinity together wrought both the voice of the Father, and the flesh of the Son, and the dove of the Holy Spirit, while each of these things is referred severally to each person. And by this similitude it is in some degree discernible, that the Trinity, which is inseparable in itself, is manifested separably by the appearance of the visible creature; and that the operation of the Trinity is also inseparable in each severally of those things which are said to pertain properly to the manifesting of either the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit.”

PARENTHESIS: The Holy Spirit and Procession. Since the church formulated its definite statement on the Spirit in the Godhead, one change, more accurately one addition, has been made at a provincial synod (Toledo, 589). The Western church, following the lead of Augustine added to the phrase in the Constantinopolitan Creed, “proceeds from the Father,” the phrase, “and the Son” (filioque = from the son). This was not acceptable in the East because, with its starting point in the trinitarian discussion at persons, it hinted in their minds at subordinationism (in the West the trinitarian starting point was a single “ousia”).

It was not until 867 that procession actually came to divide the church when Photius charged the West with introducing innovations into doctrine of the Trinity. He sustained his charge against the West by stating that it had falsified the most holy creed of Constantinople by adding the filioque clause (“worst of evils is the addition to the holy creed”). Harnack (*History of Dogma*. IV, 128) has agreed that such an insertion was an innovation.

N.B. Photius was patriarch of Constantinople. He was an adversary of Nicholas I, Pope of Rome, and as such sought to discredit him and his claims as the universal bishop of all the churches. Procession of the Spirit was a secondary issue in the on-going power struggle between Rome and Constantinople. It does provide a clue to the eventual East-West schism of the church in 1054.

V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to focus on the issue of the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian debate. The deity of the Holy Spirit was taken up because of its implications relative to the full deity of Christ. After the Council of Nicea (325) and with the rise of the Macedonians, Athanasius and the Cappadocians forged the full trinitarian statement that became the Creed of Constantinople (381). The only addition relative to the Spirit has been that of procession (stated at Toledo in 589 and controverted by Photius in 867) which was a major source of East-West tensions (and eventual schism). The development of the doctrine of the Spirit can be graphed as follows:

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE ANCIENT CHURCH

THE CHURCH FATHERS THE APOLOGISTS THE THEOLOGIANS

150

300

Confusion on His Person Confusion on His Person Clarification of

Confusion on His Work Clarification on His Work His Person

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD
Part IV: The Medieval and Reformation Church

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH.**
- III. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE REFORMATION CHURCH.**
 - A. In the Roman Catholic Church.
 - B. In the Protestant Tradition.
 - C. In the Non-Protestant Tradition.
- IV. CONCLUSION.**

I. INTRODUCTION.

Thus far in the study of Theology Proper, specifically Trinitarianism, our focus has been upon the Ancient Church. The fourth century (from Nicea to Constantinople, 325–381) was the period of the most fruitful discussion and formulation of the doctrine of God. What was stated by Athanasius was clarified by the Cappadocians in the East, which in turn formed the basis for Augustine’s domination in the West. The purpose of this lesson is to trace the discussion of the Trinity through the Medieval Period into the fringes of the Modern Era. In a very real sense Berkhof summarized this lesson plan when he wrote (*History of Christian Doctrine*, 94), “Later theology did not add materially to the doctrine of the Trinity.” In reality there is no advance, only retrogression.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH.

The Medieval Age (ca. 600–1500) presented no actual advancement in the Trinitarian debate, only repetition of established doctrine (i.e., Nicea as clarified by Constantinople is simply assumed).

A. In the Early Middle Ages (600–950 A.D.)

- 1. **John of Damascus (d. 754)**, generally considered the last of the Fathers in the Eastern Church and the systematizer of Eastern Theology, spoke to the issue of the Trinity, but brings forward nothing new. In his *The Orthodox Faith* he recognized a singularity of essence wherein exists a plurality of persons (“It is impossible to say that the three hypostases of the deity, although they are united to one another, are one hypostasis,” 233). Although he rejected Subordinationism, his great stress on the unity of the Son and Spirit in the Father has led to charges that he wavered between unitarianism and tritheism.

2. **Patriarch Photius** of the Eastern Church clashed in 867 with Nicholas I of Rome over the doctrine of Procession. Photius, using John of Damascus as a starting point, stressed that only the Father sends the Spirit, and that other view would denigrate the primacy of the Father. Nicholas argued that single procession de-evaluated the Son denying *homoousia*. Both were attempting to defend the faith and the issue went unresolved.
3. **John Scotus Erigena** (d. 877) declared that the terms Father and Son are mere names to which there is no corresponding objective distinction of essence in the Godhead, which veers into a Modalism.

B. In the Later Middle Ages (950–1400 A.D.)

The Later Middle Ages are demarcated in this writer's mind from the earlier period principally by the rise of Scholasticism and the intellectual life of the universities.

1. **Rocellinus (d. 1125)**, the founder of Medieval Nominalism, regarded the appellation of God, which is common to the three persons, as a mere name of species, and thus fell condemned at the Synod of Soissons (1093) for the charge of tritheism.
2. **Abelard (d. 1142)**, a disciple of Roscellinus, was not as radical as his teacher. His suspected error came from the fact that he identified the world-soul of the Platonic system with the Spirit. This appears to be a concession to his apologetic framework, because he affirmed the deity of the three persons. He held the doctrine of the Trinity to be a necessary idea of reason.

N.B. The difficulties of the Scholastics in stating the Trinity is ultimately the difficulty of Scholasticism, that is, they attempted to reduce spiritual truth to the pure, hot gold of rational simplicity. At times, rationalism judged the faith and determined its meaning.

3. **Anselm (d. 1109)**. His views represent a direct lineage from Augustine; indeed, some would argue, and perhaps rightly so, that he stated Augustine's position more cogently than did his mentor. He clearly opposed both Monarchianism and tritheism. To him the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds.

N.B. It is this writer's opinion that the best pre-reformation theologians on the Trinity to read are Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Anselm.

4. **Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274)**, the foremost teacher of the Dominican school and one of the greatest theologians of all time, built upon his mentor, Albertus Magnus, who suggested the means for arriving at truth (reason and faith). Aquinas moved into the realm of reason, things previously assigned to proof-by-faith though he never collapsed the two spheres believing that some Christian truths were not subject to rational verification (it must be understood that he worked to defend the faith from the Aristotelian approach of Islamic polemics by adopting an Aristotelian approach; he sought to use the adversary's weapon against them). He differed with Anselm, not in his concept of the Trinity, there he is quite orthodox, but in his insistence that God's existence can and must be proved by rational argument (Anselm held that proofs are unnecessary since God is self-evident). In fairness to Aquinas, he did not, however, dissolve special revelation into natural (upper story into the low). Colin Brown has written (*Christianity and Western Thought*, 123), "Thomas does not see philosophy as an alternative track to theology which enables him to prove rationally and intellectually items of faith which ordinary people have to accept simply by faith. Rather, it is a tool for clarifying issues."

N.B. Apart from heretical interpretations, which were readily confronted and rebutted, the conception of the Godhead remained unchallenged from A.D. 381.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE REFORMATION CHURCH.

The polarity of historic Catholicism into Protestant and Roman Catholic camps did not reflect radical divergence of opinion in all areas. Indeed, Reformation Protestants and Roman Catholics alike agreed on the doctrine of God and simply reaffirmed their convictions in a creedal fashion.

A. In the Roman Catholic Church.

1. **The Council of Trent (1545–63)**, a reaction to the growth of Protestant opinions, as well as a reforming council, spoke to the heated issues of that day (authority, justification, and the means of grace [sacraments]). The Tridentine Profession (1564), a creedal synopsis of the findings of Trent, in Article I states the dogmatic truth of Nicea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (A.D. 381). It reads:

"I. I, -----, with a firm faith believe and profess all and every one of the things contained in that creed which the holy Roman Church makes use of: 'I believe in one God, the

Father Almighty ...' ”

2. **The Decrees of Vatican I (1870)** do not speak to the issues of the Trinity simply because it was assumed by previous statement and it was not an issue that required clarification in that day (the issue in the nineteenth century was more fundamental—not trinitarianism, but authority and theism). Chapter I of the decrees of Vatican I reads:

“The holy Catholic Apostolic Roman church believes and confesses that there is one true and living God, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will, and in all perfection, who, as being one, sole, absolutely simple and immutable spiritual substance, is to be declared as really and essentially distinct from the world, of supreme beatitude in and from himself, and ineffably exalted above all things which exist, or are conceivable, except himself.

“This one only true God, of his own goodness and almighty power, not for the increase or acquirement of his own happiness, but to manifest his perfection by the blessings which he bestows on creatures, and with absolute freedom of counsel, created out of nothing, form the very first beginning of time, both the spiritual and the corporeal creature, to wit, the angelical and the mundane, and afterwards the human creature, as partaking, in a sense, of both, consisting of spirit and of body” (Harnack, *Creeeds of Christendom*. II, 239).

3. **The Decrees of Vatican II (1963–65)** are silent on the topic of the Trinity. The three persons of the divine, single Godhead are assumed. The Trinity was simply not the focus of the council.

N.B. The “de fide” statement of the church is simply: “In God there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Each of the three Persons possesses the one (numerical) Divine Essence” (Harnack, *Creeeds of Christendom*. II, 52).

B. In the Protestant Tradition.

The Reformers do not reflect a departure from the ancient creeds of the church, indeed, as noted previously, Trinitarianism was not an issue in the sixteenth century. Therefore, a few, brief notices to sustain trinitarian orthodoxy will be sufficient.

1. **Martin Luther (d. 1546)** accepted the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity because he felt that it was supported by the Scriptures. (“Scriptures thus

cleverly prove that there are three persons and one God. For I would believe neither the writings of Augustine nor the teachers of the church unless the New and Old Testaments would clearly show this doctrine of the Trinity" [*Works*, 39, 289]). The three-ness in one-ness to Luther is a stumbling block and must be appropriated by faith, he thinks the scholastics had erred by overstressing reason ("One should stick to the simple, clear, powerful words of Scripture" [*Works*, 37, 41]). He stated (*Works*, 10, 191), "If natural reason does not comprehend this, it is proper that faith alone should comprehend it; natural reason produces heresy and error but faith teaches and holds the truth for it sticks to the Scripture which does not lie or deceive." Althaus summarized Luther as follows (*The Theology of Martin Luther*, 200):

"Since Luther found that the Scripture bears witness to God's Trinity, he thought about it just as seriously as about the other basic Christian truths. Several of his series of theses and disputations deal with it; and he presented it in his sermons when the Christological texts used in the Christmas season, such as John 1 and Hebrews 1, demanded it. He was well aware of the medieval discussion of the doctrine. However, he rejects the "subtleties" of the scholastics who wanted to derive the Trinity from the nature of God and thus make it understandable to reason. He wishes to stick to and remain with the words of Scripture. In his interpretation of Scripture, he uses traditional concepts such as the eternal birth of the Son or that the works of God directed outside of himself are indivisible. Here, as elsewhere in the basic form of his doctrine of the Trinity, Luther follows the trail blazed by Augustine; for example, Luther says that the three persons cannot be theologically distinguished from each other by anything else than their respective relationships to one another as Father, Son, and Spirit."

The Lutheran standard, the *Augsburg Confession* (1530) reads:

"The churches, with common consent among us, do teach that the decree of the Nicene Synod concerning the unity of the divine essence and of the three persons is true, and without doubt to be believed: to wit, that there is one divine essence which is called and is God, eternal, without body, indivisible (without part), of infinite power, wisdom, goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and that yet there are three persons of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And they use the name of person in that signification in which the ecclesiastical writers (the fathers) have used it in this cause, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which properly subsists" (Harnack, *Creeds of*

Christendom. III, 7).

2. **John Calvin (d. 1564)**. Little needs to be said of Calvin's views on the Trinity, but the purpose in turning to him is found in his brevity and clarity of statement. Book I of the *Institutes*, chapter 13, is devoted to this issue. I simply quote Calvin (I, 13. 2):

“But there is another special mark by which he designates himself, for the purpose of giving a more intimate knowledge of his nature. While he proclaims his unity, he distinctly sets it before us as existing in three persons. These we must hold, unless the bare and empty name of Deity merely is a flutter in our brain without any genuine knowledge. Moreover, lest any one should dream of a three-fold God, or think that the simple essence is divided by the three Persons, we must here seek a brief and easy definition which may effectually guard us from error. But as some strongly inveigh against the term Person as being merely of human invention, let us first consider how far they have any ground for doing so ... When the Apostle calls the Son of God ‘the express image of his person’ (Heb. 1:3), he undoubtedly does assign to the Father some subsistence in which he differs from the Son. For to hold with some interpreters that the term is equivalent to essence (as if Christ represented the substance of the Father like the impression of a seal upon wax), were not only harsh but absurd. For the essence of God being simple and undivided, and contained in himself entire, in full perfection, without partition or diminution, it is improper, nay, ridiculous, to call it his express image (χαρακτηρ). But because the Father, though distinguished by his own peculiar properties, has expressed himself wholly in the Son, he is said with perfect reason to have rendered his person (*hypostasis*) manifest in him. And this aptly accords with what is immediately added—viz. that he is ‘the brightness of his glory.’ The fair inference from the Apostle’s words is, that there is a proper subsistence (*hypostasis*) of the Father which shines refulgent in the Son. From this, again, it is easy to infer that there is a subsistence (*hypostasis*) of the Son which distinguishes him from the Father. The same holds in the case of the Holy Spirit; for we will immediately prove both that he is God, and that he has a separate subsistence from the Father. This, moreover, is not a distinction of essence, which it were impious to multiply. If credit, then, is given to the Apostle’s testimony, it follows that there are three persons (*hypostases*) in God. The Latins having used the word Persona to express the same thing as the Greek *hypostasis*, it betrays excessive fastidiousness and even perverseness to quarrel with the term. The most literal translation would be subsistence. Many have used substance in the

same sense. Nor, indeed, was the use of the term Person confined to the Latin Church. For the Greek Church in like manner, perhaps for the purpose of testifying their consent, have taught that there are three *prosopa* (aspects) in God. All these, however, whether Greeks or Latins, though differing as to the word, are perfectly agreed in substance.”

This opinion is reflected throughout the entire Reformed Tradition and stated in the sixteenth century, *The Westminster Confession* (1647) states (II, 1.3):

“There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty ... In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”
(Harnack, *Creeeds of Christendom*. II, 606-08).

The *Shorter Catechism* of Westminster (1647) wonderfully reads:

“Question 4. What is God?

Answer - God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

“Question 5. Are there more Gods than one?

Answer - There is but one only, the living and true God.

“Question 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

Answer - There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory” (Harnack, *Creeeds of Christendom*. III, 676-77).

3. The Church of England stands within the same pale of Orthodoxy as seen in the *Thirty-Nine Articles (Article 1)*.

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost”
(Harnack, *Creeds of Christendom*. III, 487-88).

C. In the Non-Protestant Tradition.

This category may appear to be unintelligible so a word of explanation is in order. The Romanists and Protestants within the context of the Reformation subscribed to identical opinions on the Trinity; however, with the renewal of interests in the study of Scripture came some movements with heretical opinions on the Trinity due to the judgment of the Scriptures by finite reasoning. These emerged in the Reformation era but are not reflective of Romanist or Protestant theology at the point of Theology Proper.

1. The Socinians

- a) The origins of Socinianism, which in reality is a resurgence of the Monarchian heresies of the third century, are stated by McLachlan when he wrote (*Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England*, 605-606):

“Socinianism may be regarded as a blend of Italian rationalism with Polish Anabaptist tendencies. Its roots go down into the soil of Spain in the person of Michael Servetus, the author of the *Christianismi Restitutio*, a plan for a thorough reformation of Christianity by a return to the doctrine and teaching of the Christian religion in their original form. They also reached into Italy in the persons of those whom Calvin in scorn once called ‘the academic sceptics’.”

The movement came to flourish in Italy, parts of Eastern Europe, and particularly Poland where it sought political refuge. It broke forth as a schismatic movement from within the Reformed Church of Poland! The secular wing of the Renaissance, the Italian, was brought into Poland through the aristocracy.

- b) **The leaders of Socinianism**, other than Michael Servetus, were two: Laelius Socinus (1525–62), who appears to have been the

theological fountainhead of the movement, and his nephew, Faustus Socinus, who was its chief defender and promulgator (b. 1539). Socinian ideas rapidly spread to Holland; From Holland into England where it affected John Biddle, the Father of English Unitarianism. The tremendous impact of it is noted by McLachlan (*Socinianism*, 337):

“Considered thus, as a bearer of the liberal spirit of the Renaissance, Socinianism is of wider moment than just another form of Christian doctrine. It is part of the larger movement towards free inquiry, part of the break-away from medieval scholasticism in the direction of modern empiricism. To judge from the reactions against it on the orthodox side, the radical nature of the Socinian criticism was clearly recognized by many contemporaries, and its disintegrating influence upon old modes of Christian thought was more widely felt than has been generally admitted. The dominant form of antitrinitarianism in England in the seventeenth century, Socinianism was of greater importance than a mere doctrinal variant of Christianity. Like Arminianism, it reinforced, by attempting to carry out consistently to its conclusion, the great principle of the Reformation which affirmed the supremacy of private judgment. Like Arminianism, too, it was a liberating force, freeing men from the dominance of the prevalent Calvinistic theology. Owing much to humanism, perhaps more than any other religious movement in Europe, Socinianism was feared and hated by the orthodox as much for its rationalism and latitudinarianism as for its heterodox views of the Trinity and atonement. It helped to pave the way for the ‘Age of Reason’, when rationalism was no longer the monopoly of obscure dissenting writers and preachers and a group of latitudinarian divines.”

- c) The theology of Socinianism is most clearly evidence in the Racovian Catechism of 1574, a Polish Socinian Confession. The confession attests to one divine essence but then states that the one essence contains one person (33-34):

“Prove to me that in the one essence of God, there is but one Person?”

“This indeed may be seen from hence, that the essence of God is one, not in kind but in number. Wherefore it cannot,

in any way, contain a plurality of persons, since a person is nothing else than an individual intelligent essence. Wherever, then, there exist three numerical persons, there must necessarily, in like manner, be reckoned three individual essences; for in the same sense in which it is affirmed that there is one numerical essence, it must be held that there is also one numerical person.

“Who is this one divine Person?”

“The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“How do you prove this?”

“By most decisive testimonies of Scripture; thus Jesus says (John 17:3). ‘This is life eternal, that they might know THEE, (the Father) THE ONLY TRUE GOD.’ The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians (I Cor. 8:6), ‘To us there is but ONE GOD, THE FATHER, of whom all things:’—and again, in addressing the Ephesians (chap. 4:6), he said ‘There is—ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL: who is above all, and through all, and in you all.’

“How happens it, then, that Christians commonly maintain that, with the Father, the SON and the HOLY SPIRIT are persons in one and the same Deity?”

“In this they lamentably err—deducing their arguments from passages of Scripture ill understood.”

Calvin answers the anti-trinitarians, principally Servetus, mentor of Socinius, thusly (*Institutes*. I, 13.22):

“But as in our day have arisen certain frantic men, such as Servetus and others, who, by new devices, have thrown everything into confusion, it may be worthwhile briefly to discuss their fallacies ... The name of Trinity was so much disliked, nay, detested, by Servetus, that he charged all whom he called Trinitarians with being Atheists. I say nothing of the insulting terms in which he thought proper to make his charges. The sum of his speculations was, that a threefold Deity is introduced wherever three Persons are said to exist in his essence, and that this Triad was imaginary, inasmuch as it was inconsistent with the unity of God. At the same time, he would have it that the Persons

are certain external ideas which do not truly subsist in the Divine essence, but only figure God to us under this or that form: that at first, indeed, there was no distinction of God, because originally the Word was the same as the Spirit, but ever since Christ came forth God of God, another Spirit, also a God, had proceeded from him. But although he sometimes cloaks his absurdities in allegory, as when he says that the eternal Word of God was the Spirit of Christ with God, and the reflection of the idea, likewise that the Spirit was a shadow of Deity, he at last reduces the divinity of both to nothing; maintaining that, according to the mode of distribution, there is a part of God as well in the Son as in the Spirit, just as the same spirit substantially is a portion of God in us, and also in wood and stone. His absurd babbling concerning the person of the Mediator will be seen in its own place ... The monstrous fiction that a person is nothing else than a visible appearance of the glory of God, needs not a long refutation. For when John declares that before the world was created the Logos was God (John 1:1), he shows that he was something very different from an idea. But if even then, and from the remotest eternity, that Logos, who was God, was with the Father, and had his own distinct and peculiar glory with the Father (John 17:5), he certainly could not be an external or figurative splendour, but must necessarily have been a hypostasis which dwelt inherently in God himself. But although there is no mention made of the Spirit antecedent to the account of the creation, he is not there introduced as a shadow, but as the essential power of God, where Moses relates that the shapeless mass was upborne by him (Gen. 1:2). It is obvious that the eternal Spirit always existed in God, seeing he cherished and sustained the confused materials of heaven and earth before they possessed order or beauty. Assuredly he could not then be an image or representation of God, as Servetus dreams. But he is elsewhere forced to make a more open disclosure of his impiety when he says, that God by his eternal reason decreeing a Son to himself, in this way assumed a visible appearance. For if this be true, no other Divinity is left to Christ than is implied in his having been ordained a Son by God's eternal decree. Moreover, those phantoms which Servetus substitutes for the *hypostasis* he so transforms as to make new changes in God. But the most execrable heresy of all is his confounding both the Son and Spirit promiscuously with all the creatures. For he distinctly asserts, that there are parts

and partitions in the essence of God, and that every such portion is God. This he does especially when he says, that the spirits of the faithful are co-eternal and consubstantial with God, although he elsewhere assigns a substantial divinity, not only to the soul of man, but to all created things.

N.B. This type of Monarchianism is Sabellian or Modalistic.

2. **The Unitarians of England.** Socinian opinions were rapidly spread throughout Europe, particularly in Holland where they gained a hearing among the Remonstrant Party and in England. A Latin copy of the Racovian Catechism was presented to James I and publicly burned in 1614. McLachlan wrote (*Socinianism*, 163): “Before Biddle, Socinian opinions in England, though fairly extensive, were only thinly diffused. They existed rather as a latent element of thought silently circulated in books, rather than an open profession of worship. From 1640 on, however, contemporary references to Socinianism steadily increased in number.” Socinian ideas penetrated Oxford where John Biddle was studying toward a BA and MA at Magdalen College, 1634–41. There the canon of Christ Church complained that it crept in “endeavoring to infect and poison men’s faith.” Biddle argued “that Luther and Calvin deserve our gratitude for cleansing Christianity ‘from sundry Idolatrous Pollutions of the Romane Antichrist’, yet they did not go far enough: ‘the dregs (are) still left behind, I mean the Gross Opinion touching three persons in God.’”

Unitarianism flowered in England under the direction of Biddle and Joseph Priestly, the discoverer of oxygen (Servetus discovered the double circulation of blood). Because it stood outside the protection of the law, Socinian-Unitarians were unable to form any lasting organization or gather for worship. Not until 1813 (again in 1825 and 1844) were the religious and civil liberties enlarged to include all religious dissenters.

3. **The Deists of England.** The influence of Socinian views upon England became manifest in two distinct movements: English Unitarianism and English Deism. Not all Unitarians were deists, but all deists had a unitarian concept of God. A good survey of the progression of Unitarian views in history is given by John Orr (*English Deism*, 34):

“Some of the roots of deism go back into the series of bitter doctrinal controversies that raged in the early Christian church. The first and perhaps the greatest of these was the controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity. Trinitarianism, ably championed by Athanasius, won a difficult victory over creeds. But the defeated followers of Arius carried on the controversy in the protracted

disputes that arose over the person and nature, or natures, of Christ. Through the Middle Ages there was an occasional outbreaking of debate on these doctrines. But no widespread reviving of the old conflict came until the Reformation. Laelius and Faustus Socinus started the antitrinitarian movement known as **Socinianism** which spread widely and became especially strong in Poland. It resulted in seventeenth century England in a revival of the controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity. Many unitarians were not deists. But all deists had a unitarian conception of God and were sympathetic with the unitarians as against the trinitarians. Deism's spiritual ancestry leads back through Unitarianism to Socinianism and on back to Arianism."

N.B. The questioning of traditional religious views in the Reformation using the hermeneutic of reasonableness led to divergences that varied in extremes (mildly in Arminianism and Wesleyanism; radically in Socinianism, Unitarianism, and Deism). The radical usage of the "reasonableness hermeneutic" led to the rise of Religious Skepticism and the Enlightenment.

4. **The American Unitarians** emerged as the direct antecedent of English Unitarianism. Unitarianism began to take form as an embryonic movement in the mid-eighteenth century in New England and flowered at the turn of the nineteenth century in its major spokesman, William Ellery Channing (d. 1842), the famous pastor of Federal Street Church, Boston. In 1819 Channing delivered an ordination address for Jared Sparks in Baltimore, Maryland, that became the first printed definition of the movement. The sermon was entitled "Unitarian Christianity." Stating his objections with Orthodox Christianity, he began with the Trinity (*Works of William Ellery Channing*, 371):

"I. In the first place, we believe in the doctrine of God's UNITY, or that there is one God, and only one. To this truth we give infinite importance, and we feel ourselves bound to take heed lest any man spoil us of it by vain philosophy. The proposition that there is one God seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong. We conceive that these words could have conveyed no other meaning to the simple and uncultivated people who were set apart to be the depositaries of this great truth, and who were utterly incapable of understanding those hairbreadth distinctions between being and person which the sagacity of later ages has discovered. We find no intimation that this language was

to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God's unity was a quite different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings."

Then Channing lists three proofs for his position.

- a) "We object to the doctrine of the Trinity, that, whilst acknowledging in words, it subverts in effect the unity of God" (371). He wrote (371):

"We do, then, with all earnestness, though without reproaching our brethren, protest the irrational and unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. 'To us,' as to the Apostle and the primitive Christians, 'there is one God, even the Father.' With Jesus, we worship the Father, as the only living and true God. We are astonished that any man can read the New Testament and avoid the conviction that the Father alone is God. We hear our Saviour continually appropriating this character to the Father. We find the Father continually distinguished from Jesus by this title. 'God sent his Son.' 'God anointed Jesus.' Now, how singular and inexplicable is this phraseology, which fills the New Testament, if this title belongs equally to Jesus, and if a principal object of this book is to reveal him as God, as partaking equally with the Father in supreme divinity! We challenge our opponents to adduce one passage in the New Testament where the word God means three persons, where it is not limited to one person, and where, unless turned from its usual sense by the connection, it does not mean the Father."

- b) It is irrational to think that the Apostle could have held such an irrational doctrine and not be called upon to defend it (372).

"We are persuaded that, had three divine persons been announced by the first preachers of Christianity, all equal and all infinite, one of whom was the very Jesus who had lately died on the cross, this peculiarity of Christianity would have almost absorbed every other, and the great labor of the Apostles would have been to repel the continual assaults which it would have awakened."

- c) It divides and distracts loyalty in worship. "We also think that the doctrine of the Trinity injures devotion, not only by joining to the Father other objects of worship, but by taking from the Father the supreme affection which is his due" (373). Again, he wrote (373):

“We do believe that the worship of a bleeding, suffering God tends strongly to absorb the mind, and to draw it from other objects, just as the human tenderness of the Virgin Mary has given her so conspicuous a place in the devotions of the Church of Rome. We believe, too, that this worship, though attractive, is not most fitted to spiritualize the mind, that it awakens human transport rather than that deep veneration of the moral perfections of God which is the essence of piety.”

N.B. Unitarianism later developed a radical fringe that was deeply pantheistic, Transcendentalism, under such literary luminaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, and Henry David Thoreau. The single deity was seen as nature; the Creator/creature distinctive were lost. Transcendentalism has a modern counterpart in the New Age Movement.

IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the development of the doctrine of God through the Medieval and Reformation Churches. The Medieval period witnessed little development in trinitarianism apart from clarification within changing cultural-religious viewpoints (i.e., the attempts to rationalize the Trinity in the context of Scholasticism). The Reformation era saw Romanists and traditional Protestants affirm the Trinity. Within the context of the Reformation came a concerted attempt to subvert trinitarianism which became the basis for both Christian Rationalism and later Christian Liberalism. Socinianism emerged as an ideology spurred by Servetus which brought about the rise of English Unitarianism, Deism and American Unitarianism. While these four movements have vast differences, they share the same “Enlightenment Hermeneutic” with its disgust for trinitarianism.