

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 1

## THE DOCTRINE OF GOD (The Being of God)

These are some of the lecture notes and lectures for the Systematic Theology 1 class, which are here in shortened version. The first few lectures are merely condensing the opening chapters in Berkhof's Systematic Theology. The rest of the lecture notes/lectures consist of expanding on salient points, and on research. It is hoped that the material will be of benefit to the reader. All the passages from the Scriptures, unless otherwise intimated, are from the King James Version.

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### Introduction

Theology is a science of God and the Universe, and as W.G.T. Shedd states, "*The material therefore which it includes is vaster than any other subject.*" It most certainly is. Whilst then theology is the science of God it cannot in the broader sense be considered in isolation from the universe and mankind, and this demonstrates how extensive and comprehensive this subject is. There are those who define theology as *the science of religion*. This is vague to say the least, all because it fails to take account of who or what is the principal object of the investigation, and because of this the etymology of religion must be considered. To some it means reverence and worship; others view it as being bound to God; and a third group understand it as the creature's obligation and duty to God. Augustine defines theology as, "*...the rational discussion respecting the deity.*" City of God 8:1. Turretin defines the object of any science to be "*....that which is principally treated and to which all the conclusions refer.*" (1.5.1) From this he concludes and affirms that the object of theology is God and divine things, and that the nature and attributes of God are regarded as primary matter, and man's relation and duty to Him as secondary.

There is a chasm between knowing God in part and not knowing Him at all. Calvin says "*Wherever this living faith exists, it must have the hope of eternal life as its inseparable companion, or rather must of itself beget and manifest it; where it is wanting, however clearly and elegantly we may discourse of faith, it is certain we have it not.*" Book 3:2: 42. Indeed Calvin implies that the believer's knowledge concerning some of the qualities of God are more certain than he does concerning any of the properties of matter, and that religious cognition is closer to absolute truth than sensuous cognition is. Hales supports this position. He makes this distinction: "*.....a certainty of speculation, and a certainty of experience; a certainty grounded in the intellectual agency, and another grounded in the feelings. Of the latter kind is the certainty of faith; and with reference to this kind of certainty, theology is superior to the other sciences.*" Neander 4:427. Finally, Shedd says "*But while the deity is in one sense the most mysterious of all objects of knowledge, in another sense He is the most*

*luminous. No idea so impresses universal man as the idea of God. Neither space nor time, neither matter nor mind, neither life nor death, not sun, moon or stars, so influence the immediate consciousness of man in every clime, and in all generations, as does that presence that in Wordsworth's phrase "is not to be put by." This idea of ideas overhangs human existence like the firmament, and though clouds and darkness obscure it in many zones, while in others it is crystalline and clear, all human beings must live beneath it and cannot possibly get from under its all-embracing arch."* Dogmatics Theology Part 1 p 75.

## **THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

Theology is defined then as, *the science of God and divine things*. However, the Greeks had a broader view of it and hence applied it to theories of theogamy (the doctrine on the genealogy of pagan deities) and cosmogony (the doctrine of the origin of the universe). Aristotle used it in a general sense as equivalent to all metaphysics. He divided theoretical philosophy into physical, mathematical and theological. The early Christian Fathers used it in a restricted sense of the doctrine of Christ. In our day it is used to describe the entire science of God's nature, being, works, and attributes. In dealing with this subject it will be divided into two categories- the natural and the revealed.

Natural theology is insufficient to produce a saving belief in God, it does leave him without an excuse that there is a Supreme Being. It is however important to be aware of the distinction between 'the Supreme Being of theology, and the Supreme Being of philosophy.' There are many references in the Scriptures to the importance of natural theology: Psalm 19: 1-7, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple:* and Acts 14:15, *Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:* and Romans 1: 19 - 20, *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:* and finally Romans 2: 14, *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.*

All theology is based on the presupposition that God exists, however diverse theologians might be on many other issues regarding God. In Christian theology the Supreme Being is assumed as being self-existent, the originator of all things, and that he is a Personal Being who is both immanent and separate from his works. It is

important to mention this because Pantheism, which we will eventually come to, rejects that God has a personal being separate from creation.

There are many who deny the existence of a Supreme Being despite all the proofs that abound around them. Professor Flint divided theoretical atheism into (1) dogmatic atheism which repudiates the very idea of a Higher Being; (2) sceptical atheism which doubts the ability of the human mind to comprehend the existence of a Higher Being, which is just a form of agnosticism; and (3) critical atheism, which denies proofs for the existence of God. The latter is similar to dogmatic atheism and may only differ in allowing at least for the examination of proofs which are rejected.

It is argued that all heathens have religious ideas because these ideas are innate. Others argue that it is the capacity to arrive at religious ideas that is innate, and from that it follows that man has the capacity to receive revealed theology which he is able to apprehend. The passages of Scripture which have already been quoted assert that nature reveals the existence of a Higher Being, and therefore man is capable of deriving some knowledge of that Higher Being from nature.

The first truth of theology - which has already been stated - is the existence of God, and following on from that presupposition is how man learns about His existence. To Dr Charles Hodge the knowledge of it is innate. To him any truth is intuitive which is perceived by the mind. But Robert L. Dabney rejects this and says that, .....*an intuitive truth is one seen true without any premise*. According to his reasoning, an intuitive truth is not innate, but that the power of receiving it is innate.

Theologians and Christian philosophers in attempting to explain belief in God common to all men as a rational process, have argued from the *a priori* (reasoning from cause to effect) and *a posteriori* (reasoning from the effect to the cause). First, let us look briefly at Emmanuel Kant. He argued that because something now exists something must have existed from eternity. This of course is recognized as the starting point of all reasoners. If nothing existed from eternity nothing could exist, for substance cannot rise out of *nihil* into *esse*, therefore there had to be a first Cause. Dr Clarke argued that there had been from eternity some immutable and independent Being, because an eternal succession of dependent beings without an independent first cause is impossible. As this Being is independent eternally, he must be self-existent, that is necessarily existing, and the cause of his existence is eternally within himself.

So then following on from these arguments, how can it be proved that this uncaused Being created the Universe. That the Universe exists cannot be denied, but if it existed from eternity it is self-existent, and this leads to Pantheism - that the Universe is God; and on to the theory of an infinite independent series of finite organisms. Kant refuted the proposition that nothing can exist without a cause out of itself - it cannot be absolute. If this were so then a cause must be assigned to the first Cause. But a cause is not a nonentity - it is real. A cause must have power because there must be something in its nature to produce effects. The Universe is an effect - it is not self-existent and eternal, and everything that enters into its composition is dependent and mutable. Its existence must depend on an extramundane First Cause. Let us at this juncture examine the five arguments for the existence of a Supreme Being who

brought the Universe into existence. These arguments are to be found on pages 26 and 27 in Berkhof's Systematic Theology.

**The Ontological Argument:** This argument is ascribed to Anselm of Canterbury the famous author of *Cur Deus Homo*, which we will be examining when dealing with the subject of the atonement. His argument is, that to have the idea of a perfect Being, that Being must exist, and that which exists in reality is greater than that which exists in the mind. In this argument perfection is assumed as belonging to that which exists. The problem is that the idea can be complete, but its object might not exist, and therefore one cannot prove the existence of the object from the idea however complete the latter may be. Indeed, the question beckons to be asked, Is there a link between abstract thought and real existence?

Descartes' position, that *I am because I think*, regarded this as an 'ultimate fact of consciousness which cannot be doubted.' This was his corner-stone of the ontological evidence of the existence of God. His view, that for a finite to have this idea of the infinite, such an idea could not have originated with the finite, nor could it have come from what surrounds us. He agreed that we can have many ideas to which there are no answering existence, but such ideas he regarded as just voluntary creations of the mind, but the idea of God is necessary - we cannot help having it. In what sense is Anselm's argument different from Descartes? To the former the existence of God is inferred from the idea, whilst the latter maintains that in the idea actual existence is included. Kant rejected this argument as being incapable of proving the existence of a higher Being.

**The Cosmological Argument:** This argument is founded on the principle of a sufficient cause. We have already examined cause and effect and will avoid covering the same ground. This argument however states that the world must have had a cause outside of itself, and that the cause must have been sufficient to account for its existence. It is erroneous to say that God requires a cause, for that brings God down to the level of the finite. For this reason some theologians prefer to speak of God as the Uncaused because in referring to Him as the First Cause the danger is there to argue that this leads to endless cycles.

**The Teleological Argument:** There is a syllogistic form to this argument - a design supposes a designer. Indeed everywhere in the world there are clear evidences of design. How can design be defined? It can range from, 'to form an idea,' to 'a representation of a thing by an outline.' In this argument however, design means the selection of an end to be attained; the choice of means for its attainment; and the application of the means to achieve the end in view. In viewing the Universe or the world, it is self-evident that intelligence, wisdom, and power, all imply a Cause, for it is obvious that the intelligence is not in the thing designed, but in the designer. The world is full of evidence of prevision. However, there are objections raised to this argument. It is opposed by those who do not allow for any distinction between physical and mental causes and who maintain that the one can be resolved into either of the others. Those who regard the Universe as being derived from the Infinite Being are also opposed to it, because they argue that to this Being no intelligence can be predicated. But the argument from design does prove that the One who brought the

Universe into being is intelligent because it is interspersed throughout the Universe, and furthermore it proves that its Cause was adequate to produce such an effect.

**The Moral Argument:** This argument, along with other things, deals with the constitution of human nature whereby there is a sense of right and wrong, and this perception is immediate. The conscience has an authority from which the person cannot extricate himself for it both commands and forbids. Its peace is sublime (in the experience of those who trust the Lord) but a troubled conscience inflicts incalculable pain. From this it follows that the moral judgments of man imply a standard he is obliged to comply with, and that authority is not derived from man but from another source. This argument received a positive response from men like Kant and Sir William Hamilton who admitted that human nature compels them to believe that a moral Ruler exists, and that He is a person.

**The Historical or Ethnological Argument:** Since the sense of the divine is universal it is argued that man was made to be a worshipper - that it belongs to his nature. If therefore the nature of man leads him to worship, this is regarded as the proof that there is a Supreme Being who constituted man to be His worshipper. It is however pointed out that this is less prominent in the civilized world, and if it is universal, civilization should not be able to impair this awareness. It does not follow from the argument that because it is less prominent in the civilized world, that this renders the Ethnological Argument worthless. Whilst the practice of religion might be less in the civilized world, which in itself is doubtful, that does not prove that man is not constituted to be a worshipper.

Are these arguments of any worth? Robert L Reymond regarded them as of no value and disagrees with theologians such as Francis Turretin (Institutes of Elenctic Theology), Charles Hodge (Systematic Theology), D. L. Dabney, (Lectures in Systematic Theology) and L Berkhof (Systematic Theology) for their inclusion. He says *.....I do not commend these arguments as I have stated in my Justification of Knowledge, because they are fundamentally unsound, and because Christians should neither use unsound arguments nor urge unbelievers to place their confidence in them.* (A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith). He seems to miss the mark - the aim surely is to leave man without excuse (Ps 19: 1-3). Some Reformed divines dismiss these arguments as worthless, whilst others see in them something of worth. To dismiss them as worthless seems to be reckless.

Can the existence of God be proved by rational argumentation to the point that all doubts are precluded? Belief in God by rational argumentation as being the One who created the Universe does not provide in itself any information about the moral attributes of God, and hence such a belief can never bring a sinner to repentance and saving faith. It must not be overlooked that nowhere in the Scriptures does God prove His existence. This is borne out by the opening words of Genesis: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* But man is inexcusable. Believing in God to the eternal salvation of the soul is not through rational argumentation, but by God revealing Himself through His Word and Spirit, and the effectual application of it to the soul. All those who come trusting God *....must believe that he is, and that he is*

*the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him. (Heb 11:6)*

## **THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD**

It is abundantly clear from the teaching of the Scriptures that God can be known. In Exodus 6:3 God addressed Moses saying, *And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them;* and in Psalm 76:1, *In Judah is God known;* and in Isaiah 11: 9 the prophet predicts,.....*for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea:* and Paul in Romans 1: 21 referring to the heathen, attributed the knowledge of God to them, but they did not want to retain it, *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened:* and finally John 17:3, *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* Van Til was of the view that divine self-revelation can produce in men a true knowledge of God although this knowledge can only be but analogical to that of God's knowledge of Himself, and .....*at no point identical with the content of the divine mind.* The Scholastics distinguished between knowing God in His essence, which is impossible, and knowing about His nature, which appears to be by unaided reason, which the Reformers rejected. God's essence will forever remain incomprehensible. It can be occasionally heard among believers, and it is obviously intended to convey some aspect of humility, of which one cannot help being sceptical, that 'we know nothing.' This is an unscriptural statement, because if we know nothing we are in total darkness, and making a profession of faith that we are Christ's, is a contradiction. One cannot have saving faith without knowledge, because faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. What precisely is the very minimum amount of knowledge necessary to be saved is not easily stated, but there must be sufficient knowledge for the person to know that he is guilty and sinful, and that Christ is the Saviour of sinners.

The knowledge that is conveyed by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures is such that the person knows God acts, although he does not know how He acts, or the relation it bears to other things. He knows that God loves, is merciful and that He hates sin. Therefore the nature of this knowledge, with its limitations, nevertheless conforms to what its object really is – and believes that God is infinitely wise, powerful, just, good, loving, and merciful, and to Him the sinner can be reconciled and enjoy fellowship in time and in eternity.

David Hume, the philosopher, denied that it was possible to know God. Hume was a sceptic, and it is said that if the word agnostic had been coined in his day then it would have applied to him. His Treatise of Human Nature contains the substance of all his philosophy. Sir William Hamilton's works consist of his analysis of consciousness and his treatment of external perception in psychology, his philosophy of the unconditioned in metaphysics, and his analytic of logical forms in pure logic. He argued that the infinite can only be conceived as a negation of the thinkable. It is true to say that heaven is more intelligible to the finite mind if perceived of negatively - the absence of all that causes sorrow, temptations, death, than to attempt to

understand it positively.

How does the mind proceed to know God? It has already been referred to briefly that it is easier to understand God by way of negation, and that is how the older divines viewed it; but they also spoke of the way of eminence and causality. Not only then are limitations denied Him, but to Him also is ascribed every excellence and is acknowledged as the First Cause. All the attributes of human nature can be ascribed to Him free from any limitation whatsoever. Paul in addressing the Athenians made a tacit reference to this point: Acts 17: 29 *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.* Anthropomorphism is a word that has sometimes been used in a bad sense, and hence misleading, but in its biblical context it demonstrates what Paul was alluding to. Jacobi says, *We confess, therefore, to an anthropomorphism inseparable from the conviction that man bears the image of God; and maintain that besides this anthropomorphism, which has always been called Theism, is nothing but atheism and fetichism.*

Even in false religions the object worshipped is assumed to possess attributes like the worshipper. But the philosophers affirm that it is not the thing themselves we perceive but only certain ideas and images, and this denies any possible knowledge of the thing itself. This denies that any true knowledge of God is possible, that it is only the person's own idea of what God is. But Scripture declares God to be what we ascribe to Him, that is the attributes of human nature are in Him in an infinite degree. We are persons, so is God three Persons in unity; we have a moral nature, albeit polluted on account of the Fall, and so has God a moral nature of infinite perfection. God has revealed Himself in His Son. What Christ did on earth was the Father's will, His words were the words of God, His work the works of God and all the love He revealed, His tenderness and forgiveness and holiness and longsuffering were all manifestations of God the Father - *He that has seen me has seen my Father also.*

God's Revelation to man is twofold - General and Special. The former has to a great extent been referred to already, and it suffices at this juncture to remark that it is general in that it is natural, for its mode of communication is by nature. Special Revelation is supernatural, whether direct, as was often the case in the Old Testament, or by angels or men; and in the new Testament, it is by the Son: *God who at sundry times and in divers manner spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.* Hebrews 1: 1 - 3. His General Revelation extends to all mankind, but His Special Revelation is for all those chosen by Himself to eternal life.

Thomas Aquinas did not see any conflict between the truths of natural or general, and those of special or supernatural, and if a conflict is present, he said, blame must be apportioned to the philosophy. But the Reformers aimed at a synthesis of both, because that it was through 'the entrance of sin into the world that the handwriting of God in nature is obscured.' Besides this, man became polluted and totally incapable

of reading aright what was written by God in the work of creation. His Special Revelation encapsulates the former.

Man could never aspire to a true knowledge of God if left to all the evidences around him in creation and providence. Despite all the evidences around him of the Creator being wise and powerful, yet he is left in the dark about His moral attributes such as His holiness, justice, righteousness, love and mercy. He has to turn to the Scriptures for that knowledge, and whilst nothing more can be known about God in this life, but what He reveals of Himself in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is required to convince the sinner of his sinnership, and that salvation is through believing in Christ, and that it is in and through Christ God reveals Himself to man. Therefore true knowledge of God is unattainable by rational argumentation. If man is to have a true knowledge of Him, God must come to man. Abraham was in total ignorance of God - it was God who came to him and made himself known. By the grace of God he repents and believes in the Lord Jesus, and only then is he able to behold the wonders of the work of creation in the universe as the handiwork of God. He will study the Scriptures and discover more about God and increase in knowledge of Him. But the acquisition of more knowledge is not for knowledge's sake. It provides him with a deeper understanding, and leads to loftier views of God, to greater fellowship and to his sanctification.

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## **THE RELATION OF THE BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD**

### **The Being of God**

Some theologians assert that the essential being of God is unexplained and defies definition, whilst others say that by attempting to define God is only an attempt to analyse 'the idea of God as it lies in our mind, or that we can state the class of being to which He belongs, and the attributes by which He is distinguished from all other beings.' The Westminster Shorter Catechism definition of God is, *God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his being, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.* He is distinguished from all other spirits by His eternity, unchangeableness and perfection. The holy angels are sinless and perfect in that sense, but it is not something that is essential to their nature, it is that which God was pleased to grant, and also sustain, otherwise all the angels would have sinned. Perfection however is essential to the nature of God just the same as are the other attributes.

Being, is that which has substantive existence and is opposed to a mere force. God as a Being has personality. According to the Scriptures personal attributes are attributed to Him such as wisdom, justice, love, power and holiness. The essence of God is in the name Jehovah - I am that I am, declaring unequivocally his absolute independence. The words of Christ to the woman of Samaria, *God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth* ( John 4: 24) - speak of His essence. He is distinct from the universe. There are of course views opposed to this, such as those who claim that the world is to God what the human body is to the human being, because they view Him as a composite Being. The Materialists deny all that is spiritual and insist that the material alone is real. To the Idealist, all objective existence is denied, and only the subjective is real. The Pantheists view the world as the existence of God, and that He has no existence apart from it – but God is both immanent and transcendent

### **Divine Attributes**

The divine perfections are called attributes, without which the nature of the Divine Being would be impossible. In referring to the relation of the attributes to the essence of God great care must be exercised and this cannot be overemphasized, that we do not represent God as a Being who is composite - that is composed of different elements. But care must also be exercised to avoid confusing the attributes in order to avoid the former. It is a balance that in some ways is delicately poised. The Realists of the Middle Ages, viewed God as a composite Being consisting of different elements. The Nominalists failed to distinguish between the attributes and regarded them as different names meaning the same thing. These were extreme views, but it is a fact that the Reformed Theologians tended more to the latter than the former. To them, 'the unity and simplicity of the divine essence precludes not only the physical composition of constituent elements, or of matter and form, or of subject and accidents; but also metaphysical distinctions as of act and power, essence and existence, nature and personality.'

The attributes of God are understood as different modes in which He reveals Himself to His creatures. Some would regard the attributes as additional to His Being, but the

attributes are God Himself. Whilst then they operate as a whole, each is distinct from the other. Hence the essence of God must not be conceived of as existing by itself apart from the attributes. A quote by Leibnitz is apposite at this point: *The perfections of God are those of our own souls, but He possesses them without limit. He is an ocean of which we have only received but a few drops. There is in us something of power, something of knowledge, something of goodness; but these attributes are in entirety in Him.*

As already stated above, the divine attributes are modes either of the relation or of the operation of the divine essence. The essence must not be conceived of as existing by itself and prior to the attributes. Shedd says, *God is not in essence and attributes, but in attributes.* (Dogmatic Theology) And Turretin speaks more or less in a similar vein, *God's attributes cannot differ really from the essence or between themselves as one thing differs from another thing.* (Turretin 3. 5, 7)

### **Classification of the Divine Attribute**

The object in view under this heading is that of order, and subsequent to that, clearness. It is acknowledged that there is not one method which has been given precedence over the rest. It is therefore more beneficial to give a brief summary of some. First, that it is to be done by way of causation - that He is the first cause and therefore every virtue that is acknowledged is the effects produced by Him. Second, that it is by way of negation - denying to Him the imperfections and limitations that belong to man. Third, that it is by way of eminence in elevating all His perfections without limit which belong to Him as the Infinite Being. Classification is now narrowed down to the negative and the positive. To the former we associate simplicity, infinity, eternity and immutability; and to the latter, power, knowledge, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. These two classes are normally designated absolute and relative. By the former is to be understood those attributes which belong exclusively to Him, and not to any other being. The latter implies those that are related to an object. These attributes are also referred to as incommunicable and communicable. He does not communicate infinity and eternity to any, but He does communicate knowledge, love, power, goodness and wisdom. It is not different modes of classification that are expressed by them, but, 'different modes of designating the same classification.'

Divine attributes can be also put into two classes, namely, passive and active in relation to the essence. The essence as passively related to itself is self-existence and simplicity; but as passively related to duration, is eternal. Self-existence, simplicity, eternity, immensity and unity are not to be taken as active operations of the divine essence but inactive relationships of it. 'They are modes of existing but not of energizing.' What is meant by the latter? 'Essence when viewed as in action belongs to such attributes as omnipotence for it is energizing, or omniscience as cognizing, or the adopting of means to a particular end as wisdom, or goodness as kindness.' If therefore divine attributes are modes of the relation or operation of the divine essence, is the person to be taken as the mode of existence of the essence? *The internal operation of the essence describes a trinitarian person.* What is meant by this statement by Shedd is that when the essence energizes *ad intra* the operation is

generation or spiration, and the essence is energizing as the Father or the Son, but

when *ad extra*, the operation is omnipotence, or omniscience or benevolence, and so a Trinitarian Person is a mode of the essence.

There are those who group several attributes together under a general term, such as wisdom and omniscience under the head of **understanding**, because they are viewed as cognitive attributes involving perception only. Goodness and mercy fall under the head of **will** for they are voluntary attributes in the sense that their exercise is sovereign and optional. Whilst it is correct to say that there are places in the Scriptures when all the attributes are brought together under one heading such as Psalm 19 : 1, *The heavens declare the glory of God.....* there are many other areas of Scripture where this does not apply, and where a particular attribute, or more than the one attribute, is meant as in Romans 6: 4, .....*Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.....* Therefore it is preferable to consider the attributes separately rather than grouping a few together under one head.

Besides the above methods, there is a principle of classification which is based on the constitution of human nature. From this it follows that the attributes of God can be placed under three heads, the first of these pertaining to His essence, the second to the intellect and the third to the will.

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## THE SCRIPTURES

The first chapter of the Confession of Faith is to be read thoroughly in dealing with this subject. In the opening lecture consideration was given to various philosophies and views about the existence of a Supreme Being. It will not be necessary in considering the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of faith to venture near such subjects but to embark on our consideration of the Scriptures as God's Special Revelation to mankind.

For a time His communications were by theophanies, dreams, voices, visions, the Urim and the Thummim, and by prophetic inspiration. It is obvious from the tenor of the conversation between Abraham and one of the three men who came to him before the destruction of the cities of the plain, that the one who spoke with him was none other than the Lord. The same applies to the one who wrestled with Jacob who appeared like an ordinary human being, but was in fact the Lord - the Angel of the Covenant. There are many instances of revelations of this nature in the Old Testament. The heretics have compared them to the words of Romans 8: 3, regarding God sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and assert that He did not assume a true human nature, but was simply a likeness to sinful flesh similar to that in the theophanies. But likeness in that passage in Romans is to be attached to the word sin, and not to flesh - He took upon Him bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

While dreams, voices and visions often conveyed personal revelations, there were the many occasions when the revelations were for the people rather than the individual. The Urim and the Thummim was something in the High Priests breastplate which gave an oracular response. When other channels of communication failed, this was resorted to. A classic example, and a very tragic one, is recorded in 1 Samuel 28:6, *And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams nor by Urim nor by prophets.* In his desperation he then resorted to a witch. All the revelations given by the Lord through the various channels mentioned are all recorded for us in the Scriptures, but the most extensive and informative in the Old Testament, came through prophesy. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament bear all the marks of historical records that are authentic.

### Section 2

God is not only the object of knowledge, but is also the personal and active agent who operates on the human mind. Without this it would not be possible to have any knowledge of Him. To perceive the truth intuitively is because the person is illumined, otherwise he would remain in ignorance. Scripture makes this abundantly clear in passages such as; Job 32:8, *But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the almighty giveth them understanding:* and, John 1: 4, 9: *In him was life and the life was the light of men.. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* The true knowledge that man has of God is not self derived. Therefore it follows that it is not possible for the human intellect to be infallible, unless supernatural power preserves it from error. Man is a fallen creature and even when enlightened he still *sees through a glass darkly.* Whilst natural revelation leaves fallen man without excuse, it cannot however tell him anything about mercy.

### **Special Revelation**

Although some of the inspired writers were given revelations direct from God, nevertheless inspiration and revelation are two separate matters. The Scriptures contain many truths and facts that result from observation and reflections and not from a special personal revelation given to the writer. There are many examples one could refer to, but the following will suffice. The journey of the children of Israel is to a great extent a record of eyewitnesses. The history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the books of Samuel, Chronicles and Kings is an account drawn from contemporary sources, and from geographical and chronological material, but it is preserved from error. There are the inspired writers who also received special revelations which they have recorded in their inspired writings, such as Daniel, Ezekiel and John. But there were other inspired writers who did not receive any special revelation. The opening words of the Gospel according to Luke is an example: *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.*

### **The Nature of Inspiration.**

What is the essential difference between inspiration and revelation? The former is more in 'the nature of superintendence' (Shedd), whilst the latter is of the nature of instruction and information. The words of the serpent to Eve were a falsehood – they were not inspired, but they are part of God's inspired word. Whilst the words were falsehood, they are recorded with infallible accuracy, and that applies to lies and false accusations and every evil word recorded in the Scriptures – they are all recorded with infallible accuracy. It is said of the early Church Fathers that they had loose views of inspiration. This, Augustine could not be accused of. In his *Harmony of the Gospels*, he says, .....*whatever he wished us to read concerning his works and deeds, he ordered to be written down as if with his own hand.*

### **Authenticity of the Scriptures**

It is a fact that any written composition is authentic if it is the product of the person to whom it is attributed. The Scriptures' authenticity establishes the fact of credibility. External proofs of their authenticity consists of the testimony of contemporaneous writers, and corroborating history from independent and reliable sources. Christ acknowledged the authenticity of the Old Testament because he frequently quoted from it: Mark 14: 49, *I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.* – Luke 24: 44, *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me.* – John 5: 39, *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* – Acts 1: 16, *Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.* – 2 Timothy 3: 16, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* It is also the

same canon adhered to by both Jews and Christians.

There are also the internal evidences. It is preposterous to deny inspiration, as if men from different ages, backgrounds, some greatly gifted others less gifted, some educated and others with very little education, could possibly have written over a period of approximately fifteen hundred years and never contradicted each other, and produce one complete unit. This could not have been possible without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which makes the Scriptures different from any other book in the world. Then there is the excellency of doctrine. God is presented as sovereign without beginning and end, perfect in His being and attributes, just and holy, kind and merciful, and nowhere is anything said by any of the writers that diminishes or contradicts in the least such excellency. This is just one example which demonstrates the perfection of this written revelation. However it is by faith alone that the Scriptures can be embraced as indeed God's written revelation. *Faith is an act of the understanding and will, a synthesis and carries the whole man with it.* This is what Shedd said in opposition to mere scientific **assent** which is an act of the understanding only and but part of man.

There are those who depreciate the written words of the Bible and affirm that the written words are not themselves the actual word of God, and that Word is to be distinguished from the word of the Bible. Professor Piper was of this view. He claimed that the Bible contains the truth of God, and that Jesus told the Jews that they were mistaken in identifying the Bible as the Word of God. But this is totally erroneous. Christ did the very opposite – He honoured them by quoting frequently from the Scriptures. Piper would not accept that God speaks to us through the written word, but that God's word is the message that comes to us through the Scriptures. Brunner had a similar view. To him the words of the Bible are not in themselves the word of God but,.....*a framework or sign by means of which the Word of God is conveyed to the hearer.* Our Faith 1936 p10. Karl Barth refused to identify the Bible as the word of God: *If God has not been ashamed to speak through the Scriptures with its fallible human words, with its historical and scientific blunders, its theological contradictions, with the uncertainty of its transmission and above all with its Jewish character, but rather accepted it in all its fallibility to make it serve Him, we ought not to be ashamed of it when with all its fallibility it wants anew to be to us a witness: it would be self-will and disobedience to wish to seek in the Bible for an infallible element.* Kirchliche Dogmatik 1 Translated by Cornelius van Till, The New Modernism 1946 p286. His position is somewhat similar in some ways to those of Piper and Brunner. He was not denying that the Scriptures are the word of God, although he is denying infallibility to the written word. To him it was the word of God only when God spoke to the person and the person responded to it. In other words the word was only inspired when it became so to the individual.

### **The Canonicity of Scripture**

In brief, canonicity means the right of any writing to its place among inspired writings. Canonicity as can be appreciated is closely connected to authenticity. If a book is proved to be the genuine product of a prophet, evangelist, or apostle, its canonicity is established. Of course there is also the need to establish authorship. This requires the testimony of competent witnesses and especially of those who lived

nearest to the time of the alleged authorship. In the Scriptures we have the complete canon.

But what is the origin of the word canon? It is a general ecclesiastical designation which originated in times prior to the Council of Nicaea, from the canon or roll which recorded the names of all the clergy of a certain church. When the word is applied to Scripture it means a measuring rod, and the reason being that figuratively it was applied to what was artistic, scientific or ethical as a guide or a model. At a later stage the word was applied to orthodox Christian doctrine as opposed to heresy. Since AD 300, the plural form has been applied to ecclesiastical regulations. The test of canonicity of a particular writing depended on how it was received by the church. As far as can be ascertained, the earliest use on record of this word is in the fifty-ninth canon of the Council of Laodicea, AD 363, *No psalms of private authorship can be read in the churches, nor uncanonical books, but only the canonical books of the Old and New Testament.* The canonicity of the New Testament books was not settled by the authority of the primitive church, but by its testimony. It is not therefore the authority of the early Christians that is the crucial matter, but their testimony. We have the teaching of the Holy Spirit regarding the credibility of the Scriptures, but not in regard to its canonicity. God has left this to men to judge. He does not inform anyone as to the authorship of Joshua and Chronicles, because that would have been a revelation. Dorner, in his *Christian Doctrine* says, *It gives us no divine certainty as to the manner and method in which certain writings have arisen in history.*

We have men such as Justin Martyr who speaks of the “memoirs” of Christ as the work of the Evangelists. Irenaeus (202AD) cites passages from all four canonical gospels, and Tertullian does the same. These men lived relatively close to the time of the apostles. The Vaticanus and the Sinaitic manuscripts belong to the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (325/50 AD). The former contains all the gospels and the epistles except Philemon, Titus, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, Hebrew and Revelation. The latter contains all the books of the New Testament. It was the custom and usage of the Church and not conciliar action that led to the New Testament canon. The first conciliar action regarding the canon was by the Council of Laodicea in 363 AD.

### **Apocrypha.**

This word means anything hidden. These books are uninspired and have no place in the Canon of Scripture. They are namely, Tobit, Wisdom, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two books of the Maccabees, and the History of Susannah which is a prefix to the Book of Daniel. They were never recognized by the Jews as forming any part of the canon of Scripture. Jesus never quoted from any of them. These books however were adopted by the Roman Catholics by an article of the Council of Trent and became part of their canon of Scripture.

All canonical books are Divinely inspired. It must not be overlooked that the inspiration was not in any way mechanical like a boss dictating to a secretary the very wording and the style of the letter. This would have led to a uniformity of style. When therefore the inspired writers are referred to as penmen, such a comment ought to be qualified, lest a careless hearer or reader concludes that mechanical inspiration is meant. They were not penmen in the sense corresponding to the analogy given. Their

instrumentality went much further than recording facts. Their inspiration was organic. This took cognizance of their intellectual ability, their gifts, and things characteristic to their style of writing, none of which was suspended though inspired by the Holy Spirit. This accounts for the diversity of style throughout the Scriptures, and even the manner in which the information was conveyed. For example, Luke who obviously was the author of Acts, speaks of a crippled person's ankle bones. No one would be so precise in identifying the specific area of his problem but a physician. Moses on the other hand writes like a historian and that is what one would expect of him. When the four accounts by the Evangelists of the Gospel of Christ are compared, we find that their narrative of the same subject differs. Only Luke records the conversion of the malefactor, but he omits in other narratives what one or more of the Evangelists records. When therefore the four accounts are brought together the picture is complete. This demonstrates the amount of liberty they were given in selecting material, whilst at the same time the Holy Spirit was active in all that they selected, and how it was written.

The authority of the Scriptures does not rest on the testimony of the Church, but directly on God. The Roman Catholic church puts the authority of the church before the Scriptures. In putting the authority of the church above the Word they claim that it is the Church's prerogative to add to the revelation as it deems necessary and thereby they make the Scriptures a product of the Spirit through the Church. But this order is wrong and unscriptural - instead the Church is the product of the Spirit through the Word. Throughout the Scriptures there are evidences of the Supernatural, of intelligence, unity and design. The uniqueness of their inspiration lies in the fact that there are sixty six books and forty authors. Some of these writers were separated by many centuries, to a great extent they wrote at intervals, yet there are no errors, no contradictions. The perfection of its inward system is unique.

The Scriptures are the complete rule of faith and practice. Their teaching is sufficient to lead to God, to meet our needs, to encourage, comfort and instruct. In them is a perfect system of doctrine. The revelation is complete. The Scriptures then are the Word of God, they do not contain the truth - they are in their entirety the truth. To say, as some have carelessly done, that the Scriptures contain the truth is wrong for by implication they contain also what might not be the truth. Traditions, however commendable some of them might be, must never take the place of God's Word. However, although the Word is a complete revelation, it is not sufficient by itself to awaken a sinner and bring him to repentance and faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit is needed to apply the word with irresistible power whereby the sinner is made willing to forsake sin and embrace Jesus Christ. Of course there is a difference between the spiritual illumination which the Holy Spirit gives to man, and inspiration.

Whilst they are the complete rule of faith, and that no duty religious or otherwise contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures is binding upon the individual, they do not specify matters in detail, but lay down a general principle. The Scriptures are perspicuous so that all that is necessary for man to learn regarding guidance, and practical Christianity, is there for him to grasp. By that is not meant that all Scriptures are equally clear to the understanding, or that they are all of equal value in terms of edification, encouragement and comfort. A believer will undoubtedly spend more

time studying the Book of Psalms, Isaiah, the Gospels and the Epistles than looking at genealogies, and lists of names and areas where there are mysteries which are difficult to elucidate, such as the imagery in certain parts of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation, and also many unfulfilled prophecy. The reason being that where the soul is fed the believer will repeatedly resort to such pastures. However, that does not mean that all the Scriptures are not treasured by Him. We are to search the Scriptures even those areas where there are difficulties, for the Lord gave them to us as our rule of faith and conduct.

It must be emphasized that only the original writings were inspired. Hence the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek are the absolute rule and are to be appealed to in all controversies. That some translations are superior to others is not in doubt. The original text has been passed down through the centuries in absolute purity. If God had not preserved it, what would have been the purpose of providing the Scriptures as man's rule of faith and practice in every generation, if indeed all the manuscripts had been allowed to become so corrupt that they would bear little or no resemblance to the original given by the Holy Spirit?

Other translations of note are the Septuagint, normally identified as LXX, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament, and was translated in Egypt in 285 BC; the Syriac of AD 100; the Vulgate of AD 385 and the Coptic of the fifth century.

### **Interpretation**

The infallible rule for interpreting the Scriptures will always be the Scriptures. They are a complete revelation in themselves, and can shed light on every passage of Scripture. The Holy Spirit who is the author of the Scriptures, is the adequate expounder of them. What the Roman Catholic Church does is tantamount to ascribing infallibility to men in placing the authority of the Church above the Word, and take upon themselves to be the sole rule for their interpretation. Reformers rejected that any body of men, however qualified, are authorized to interpret Scripture and apply this in a way that is always binding on fellow-believers. Creeds and Confessions are only binding on those who voluntarily profess them, and in matter are only binding in so far as they faithfully teach what the Scriptures proclaim.

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## THE ATTRIBUTES

### Incommunicable Attributes

In the opening lecture on the Existence of God, a number of references were made to the Absolute. It is important before dealing with the attributes to draw attention to the distinction that ought to be maintained between the absolute of philosophy and the absolute of theology. It has to be stated that the absolute of philosophy in most cases has no identification with the Absolute of Christian theology. The reason being that the former have a conception of the absolute that is alien to the God of the Scriptures. There are many instances which one could identify, but it suffices in demonstrating this problem by referring to Spinoza who identified the absolute with the world, so that to him all things are just transient modes. Others considered the absolute as the *...unity of thought and being as the totality of all things, which includes relations, and in which all the discords of the present are resolved in perfect unity*. This reveals how contrary to the God of Scripture such conceptions are, and hence the distinction between the Absolute of Christian theology, and that of philosophy.

In dealing with the Incommunicable Attributes which belong to God only because there is nothing resembling them in man, one could argue that in distinguishing infinity from eternity is nothing short of a tautological exercise. The same argument could be put forward regarding immensity and the communicable attribute of omnipresence. It would be wrong to deny that in a number of ways they seem to overlap, however, there are differences. Incommunicable attributes belong solely to the Being of God and are not communicated to His creatures. The intransitive attributes are those which do not go forth and operate outside of the divine essence but remain internal, such as, immensity, eternity, simplicity and self-existence. But the transitive attributes issue forth and produce effects such as, omnipotence. These attributes distinguish God from the rest of creation. The Incommunicable Attributes come under seven headings, namely: Self Existence, Immutability, Infinity, Absolute Perfection, Eternity, Immensity and the Unity of God.

### Self Existence

In the first lecture there were occasions when God was referred to as his own cause or the uncaused. Just as we have seen how the term Absolute as used by the philosophers, differed from the Christian usage of it, so the same applied to their usage of the first cause which was derived from *causa sui*, which strictly speaking means that God is His own cause. This is incorrect, for God is uncaused and no finite mind is capable of venturing beyond that point. In theology the finer points are of fundamental importance. Being uncaused implies that He exists by necessity of His own Being. He is therefore the only independent Being in existence and everything else is dependent upon him. This independence Christ touched on in John 5: 26, *For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave he to the Son to have life in himself*; Isaiah 40: 18, *To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?* Romans 11: 33-36, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of God and who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.* Revelation 4: 11, *Thou art*

*worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

### **The Immutability of God**

In the Shorter Catechism's definition of God, unchangeableness is ascribed to His being, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. He is indeed unchangeable in His essence, attributes purposes and consciousness. Immutability results from His eternity, as omnipresence does from immensity – Psalm 33:11, Isaiah 46:10, Hebrews 6: 17 and James 1: 17. It also characterizes the divine consciousness because nothing new can be added to it. Infinite knowledge is also a fixed quantity. The act of creation *ex nihilo* made no change to Him. It did not affect His own eternal essence, will and power to create - they were the same from eternity. When it is said in Scripture that God repented, Gen 6:6, and Jonah 3: 10, it just means that there was no change in His attributes and character, but only in His manner in treating men. When evil men repent and obey, instead of the wrath of God abiding upon them they experience His blessing, when on the other hand righteous men turn to wickedness they experience the wrath of God upon them. Charnock says, *When the devils now fallen stood as glorious angels they were the objects of God's love necessarily; when they fell, they were the objects of God's hatred because impure. The same reason which made him love them while they were pure made him hate them when they were criminal.*

He remains the same in His perfections, purposes and promises. He is not subject to increase in power, glory, wisdom, knowledge or holiness. There can be no improvement and no diminution - He remains eternally the same. This is borne out by the following passages: Psalm 102:26-27, *They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: all of them shall wax old as a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.* Hebrews 1: 10-12, *And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they shall all wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

It is therefore foolish on the part of those who say that the work of creation, the incarnation, God's anger being turned away, and the hiding and revealing of His face, all imply change. The work of creation and the Incarnation did not affect any change in the Being of God - He remained the same after that work had been accomplished, as He was before it from eternity. He just brought into reality that which had been in His mind from eternity. The same applies to the incarnation. Although the second person of the Trinity assumed human nature, He continued to be the God He was from eternity, although He became what He never was before – 'God and man in two distinct natures and the one person forever.'

But what about His anger? When mercy is shown does it not imply a change on the part of God towards that former offender? As shown above, it does not. God's anger shall never cease towards sin, because God and sin can never be reconciled, so that when a sinner repents, God shows mercy because His justice has already been fully satisfied by the perfect obedience, sufferings and death of Christ the sin bearer, on

behalf of sinners. God will always be merciful towards the penitent. It however is clearly revealed in Scriptures that God does hide His face, and on other occasions His face shines upon His people. It is doubtful if there is any believer who has not experienced this for himself/herself. This does not imply a change in God. The cloudiest of days cannot stop the sun shining - it shines perpetually irrespective of weather conditions, but the clouds do prevent it shining upon the earth and therefore lack of sunshine cannot be blamed on the sun. In a similar manner the hiding of God's face does not imply a change - the change is in man's behaviour which causes the dark clouds and the hiding of God's face which will shine again when he repents and fellowship is restored. The Church complained about the hiding of His face all because of her waywardness: Psalm 80: 17 - 19, *Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O Lord of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.* It has to be made clear that to many immutability and immobility are synonymous which is not true. Though God is immutable He is also *actus purus*.

Pelagians and Arminians attribute change to the knowledge of God because they say that His decrees are dependent on man's action; and the Pantheists view God as undergoing a developing process. Such views are contrary to the nature of God and the teaching of Scripture.

### **The Infinity of God**

Infinity is a general term which applies to the divine essence denoting also a characteristic belonging to all the attributes of God. It is the perfection whereby the Divine Being is free from limitations, and this applies to all His attributes. He is not limited by space, time or the universe. It is relatively easy to perceive of this attribute in a quantitative sense as if the infinity of God can be in some way identifiable with the universe and space. That He bears a relation to all that He has brought into being is true, but it is not to be used in any way as if it could quantify His infinity which is, and will forever, remain beyond finite comprehension. It has no frontiers.

### **His Absolute Perfection**

This is another example of how closely some of these attributes are to one another in their nature. The Absolute Perfection of God is the Infinity of the Divine Being considered in itself. Theologians are careful to make a distinction between the quantitative and the qualitative in their understanding of it - here the latter applies. Whether therefore holiness, wisdom, justice or truth are referred to they are all to be understood as infinite, in terms of their being free qualitatively from all limitations and defects.

### **Eternity**

The eternity of God is His essence related to His duration - a duration which has no beginning, no succession and no end. Eternity, though immeasurable, is frequently referred to in the Scriptures as that which goes on through the ages: Ps 90: 1,2, *Lord thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations, Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from*

*everlasting to everlasting, thou art God; Ps 102: 12, But thou, O Lord, shalt endure forever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.* The Schoolmen stated that God by reason of His eternity has a simultaneous possession of His total duration. All divine knowledge is immediately before Him, and there are no succeeding parts. Jonathan Edwards says: *The eternity of God's existence is nothing but his immediate, perfect and invariable possession of the whole of his unlimited life together and at once. It is equally improper to talk of months and years of divine existence and mile squares of deity.* Although there is a succession of things as they exist, there is no succession in God in regard to His knowledge. Man knows a succession successively, but to Him all things are known instantaneously and simultaneously. It is difficult for the finite mind to have any other perception of eternity other than a duration. We are accustomed to beginnings and endings and hence are very prone to view eternity as more or less a modification of that position. Eternity however is free from limitations and is not in any way governed by time. God is the eternal I AM. Berkhof provides a helpful definition of His Eternity:.....*that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all successive moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.* (Systematic Theology p60).

### **Immensity**

Immensity is the divine essence unrelated to space: *But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded.* 1Kings 8:27; also *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.* Jeremiah 23: 24. The essence of God is spiritual and therefore there can be no extension of substance, and by virtue of it is omnipresent. It is said that the latter has respect to the whole universe of created beings, but immensity to what is beyond. But surely what applies to immensity by definition, must equally apply to omnipresence. Some divines in referring to immensity speak of it as 'beyond the universe' by that they do not mean that there were spaces beyond the universe but that the universe cannot contain Him.

How can we possibly differentiate between immensity and omnipresence? The former is explained as that which 'transcends all spatial limitations,' yet He is present everywhere at the same moment in all His Being; and whilst there is not the least part of the universe where He is not, He is not at any time present in a greater sense in one place more than another. Is heaven not spoken of in the Scriptures as His dwelling place? It is indeed but that does not make His presence there any different from any other spot in so far as His Being is concerned. The difference between heaven and the rest of the universe is that He reveals His glory there in a special manner, and He shall reveal Himself in His glory in Christ forever and ever.

Wherein is the distinction then between immensity and omnipresence? By His immensity He transcends all space, whereas omnipresence denotes that He fills all space so that He is everywhere in His being. With regards to the latter, He is not bound by it. Omnipresence will be dealt with under communicable attributes, but this needs to be said in the passing that since Omnipresence implies immanence, seeing He fills space, it can be quickly seized on by Pantheists that His transcendence over all things is being denied and therefore He can have no separate existence from the

universe. The other extreme view is that of the Deists who seized on to His transcendence at the expense of His immanence. They see God as impotent to intervene in the universe He has brought into being. If God were literally contained in the universe the universe would be more immense than He. Anselm said, *Nothing contains you but you contain all.*

**The Unity of God.**

This attribute implies that there is but One Divine Being, and that is the unequivocal teaching of the Scriptures: 1 Cor 8:6, *But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we in him: and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.* Deut 6: 4, *Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.* This speaks of the *unitas simplicitatis* whereby God is set apart from all other beings. The *unitas simplicitatis* deals with the qualitative aspect of the unity. God is not composite and is thus free from division into parts. Those not familiar with the Reformed position see the Trinity as the divine essence shared between the three Persons, whereas the opposite is true, and were it not, neither could there be God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, yet the three Persons are one God.

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## COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

The Communicable Attributes of God will be considered under the following headings: (a) The Intellectual Attributes, (b) The Moral Attributes (c) The Attributes of Sovereignty.

### The Intellectual Attributes

The intellectual attributes of God are His Knowledge, Wisdom and Veracity.

**Knowledge:** Regarding the knowledge of God it can be said from the outset that He knows Himself. This is something that cannot be said of any human being, that he knows himself. Man knows very little about himself. He can spend a lifetime in this world and as long as he remains unregenerate he will never discover his sinfulness. It is only as a believer, through the Word and Spirit, along with the trials of this life, that he is capable of making fresh discoveries about himself. But God is in stark contrast with His creature, and knows Himself in the depth of His Being. His knowledge is not acquired like that of His creatures, for He knows immediately all that can be known.

With regards to the creation of the Universe, this was in the mind of God from eternity and the reality of the Universe in time corresponds perfectly with that. He knows all things at once in their totality, nature, function and the end result. What is known to Him now is what He knew from eternity. Nothing can be added to His knowledge. There is however a distinction drawn between His necessary and His free knowledge. The former is called so because it does not arise from an action of the will and covers what has already been said about knowing Himself. Some call it simple intelligence because it is an act of the Divine intelligence.

The free knowledge is that which comprehends all things past present and future. It is a concurrent act of the will that determines this knowledge. He knows the hidden essence of everything, the motives which prompt actions and the genuineness or otherwise of any action. It is not possible to conceal anything from His knowledge: *O Lord thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off* Psalm 139: 1-2. Strictly speaking God does not search out anything for that would imply ignorance until a matter has investigated, and a conclusion arrived at - all things are exposed and exhaustively known to Him. There are many passages that refer to His omniscience besides the one which has been quoted, such as John 21: 17, *He saith unto him the third time, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter being grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee...* and Psalm 37:18, *The Lord knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be forever.*

The free actions of man and God's foreordination of them is something that is beyond human comprehension and remains inexplicable. The great difficulty is in grasping how God can foreordain action which is freely originated by man. To get round the problem some have claimed that God has no knowledge of such action.

Whilst it seems impossible to understand this mystery, what is absolutely certain is that it is not possible for anything to take place outside of the eternal decrees, and hence He in His sovereignty has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and that includes man's free actions. Another point that has to be mentioned in the passing and that is that some regard man's will as acting in an arbitrary manner. Is this possible? Dr Orr says, *For freedom after all is not arbitrariness. There is in all rational action a why for acting - a reason which decides action. The truly free man is not the uncertain, incalculable man, but the man who is reliable. In short freedom has its laws - spiritual laws - and the omniscient Mind knows what these are. But an element of mystery it must be acknowledged still remains.*

**Wisdom** Knowledge and wisdom are very closely related. God's wisdom can be viewed as His intelligence in the selection of proper ends, otherwise how could appropriate means to realize a particular end be possible. He chooses the means which shall achieve the end whereby He is glorified. The work of creation abounds with evidences of the wisdom of God.

It would be wrong to restrict the wisdom of God to the work of creation. The whole of history abounds with evidences of His wisdom. It is particularly clear in the work of redemption to all who have been enlightened. God told Adam that the day he would sin he would surely die, and all his posterity. How could the God who does not change, who honours His word, who hates sin and can never be reconciled to it ever be able to rescue man without doing violation to His moral attributes? It is when these matters, and a lot more, are considered that we realize the uniqueness of His wisdom, and this is summed up for us by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3: 16, *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.* God manifest in the flesh is among other things a revelation of the wisdom of God whereby it was possible to save man, and for the moral attributes of God to be in perfect harmony with no violation to any of them. This wisdom however was viewed by the ignorant as foolishness which Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 1: 21 - 24, *Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* This is of course a subject that will be dealt with in depth when the doctrine of the Person and work of Christ are dealt with.

The wisdom of God is also seen in Providence and especially in the experiences of His people as individuals, and that of the Church collectively. He is able to work all things to their good, even the malice of Satan and all his efforts to hinder and if he could, destroy the work of the Lord. It also applies to all their trials, the nature of which one could easily conclude was inimical to their spiritual well being. Despite all that He guides all things so that in the end they are to the spiritual advantage of

His people, the prosperity of His kingdom, and the glory of His name. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* Romans 11: 33.

**Veracity.** God is perfectly reliable. The most honest of men is not perfectly reliable simply because he is an imperfect creature, but also in view of a position he takes on certain issues that may change with the passage of time, and may have to modify his previous position, or even abandon it, and be seen as being contradictory. We have an example of this in the Epistles to the Corinthians. Paul had to make a material change to his plan, which was not initially explained, and so they accused him of not being reliable, that his yea was not yea nor his nay nay. All because of developments within the church at Corinth the change to his plan was necessary.

The Veracity of God is inextricably joined to His omniscience and faithfulness and therefore is at all times, and in every event and situation reliable. The Scriptures frequently refer to the faithfulness and the truthfulness of God, and this especially in relation to His Covenant and promises. This is a ground of encouragement and comfort to all who trust Him, that however much the dispensations of His providence may appear at times to believers to contradict His promises, they can depend on His faithfulness and truth: and when such providences run their course, the outcome will be in harmony with the promises. The promise God gave to Paul concerning all who were on board with him on the ship, appeared for a time to be contradicted by His providence. The cargo had to be thrown overboard to give buoyancy in the storm, the ship had to grounded and broken up by the waves which all appeared contrary to the promise, that all would be saved, but that is precisely how they were all finally saved. Those who could not swim were saved by the timber that had broken away from the hull. When they were all safe on the beach the promise was ultimately fulfilled.

‘God is truth, in a comprehensive sense because it applies to all that He is; and in an ethical sense because what He says is reliable. He is also referred to as logically reliable because all things are to Him as they are.’

### **The Moral Attributes**

The Moral Attributes come under three heading, Goodness, Holiness and Righteousness. Under Goodness we have love, grace, mercy, and longsuffering.

**Goodness** Before the goodness of God to others is considered, it must first be understood as His essential goodness. Goodness is the divine essence energizing benevolence towards the creature. Being good in Himself He is holy, but as showing goodness to others He is kind. *No earthly father can love his children with the benevolence equal to that which God feels towards his created offspring.* (Shedd). When we ascribe goodness to a person it is based on our knowledge of that person and especially our knowledge of their kindly deeds which is the fruit of common grace, or the goodness that is associated with saving grace. But whether it be the fruit of common grace or saving grace, it is not something that belongs to the essence of a fallen nature, for guilt is contracted in the womb, and as Christ said, .....*Why callest*

*thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God* .....Matthew 19:17. So then whatever goodness is in man it is acquired. But supposing God had decreed not to reveal His goodness He would still be essentially good. In the metaphysical sense He is absolute perfection. His goodness extends to all His rational creatures: Ps 145: 7, 9, *They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.* It is also extended to all His irrational creatures: Matthew 6: 26, *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather unto barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* From this final sentence it is implied that whilst the goodness of God extends to all His creatures, yet He deals with those who love Him in a special way: Ps 84: 11, *For the Lord is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.* Rom 8: 28, *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* The goodness of God extends to the brutes and they receive it according to their capacity as brutes, but man receives the goodness of God to him both mentally and physically.

The chief objections to the doctrine of divine goodness are: (a) the permission of sin; (b) the existence of suffering; and (c) the slow progress of redemption. Whilst the permissive decree allowed sin into the experience of the human race, that did not make God its author. Whilst the origin of sin remains a mystery, the evil of sin springs from our fallen nature and therefore we are wholly responsible for it. But what is overlooked is that the common grace of God has mitigated the consequences of being sinful by nature and practice, for if God had dealt with fallen man according to his deserts the whole of mankind would have been cut off. Whilst then the goodness of the deity is infinite, the exercise of His goodness is limited, but still beyond computation. The reprobates will continue to enjoy the goodness of God whilst they are this side of eternity.

**Love** The love of God is defined by Berkhof as, *that perfection of God by which He is eternally moved to self-communication.* (Systematic Theology p71). One questions the adequacy of this definition.

The Schoolmen, and not a few of the philosophical theologians, denied that there were any feelings in God, otherwise that it would imply passivity or susceptibility of impression from without. Bruch says, *We must exclude passivity from the idea of love, as it exists in God.* As far as he was concerned, for God to be dependent on rational beings because he experienced complacency in them would be totally inconsistent with His nature. However, the facts of Scripture remain to be explained. God is revealed as the God of love - the moving cause of salvation is the love of God. There has to be a distinction drawn between philosophical speculation and the testimony of Scripture. It is also sufficiently clear from the Scriptures that people are objects of His love, and therefore they are the objects of complacency and delight. It is therefore inconceivable to think of the God of Scripture void of love. Hodge says, *We must believe that God is love in the sense in which that word comes home to every human heart.* If this is not accepted then it must be concluded that the words of Exodus 34:6 are just empty words or wholly unintelligible to us: *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful*

*and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth.* The apostle John sets God's love before believers as the example to follow in their relation to each other 1 John 4: 10 - 11: *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us we ought also to love one another.* The word love as it is ascribed to God throughout Scripture allows for no other interpretation than that love in him in all that is essential to its nature, is what it is in us albeit very imperfectly.

**Grace** The grace of God has a number of connotations in the Scriptures, but generally speaking it can be regarded as His favour, and in bestowing it upon His creatures it is undeserved favour. The Hebrew word for grace is *chen*, and it is not restricted to God's dealings with men, but extended to humans in dealing with one another. In Genesis 39: 4, it is said, *And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.* There is a similar situation in Ruth 2:2, *And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, let me now go to the field and glean the ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace.....* Regarding humans in their dealings with each other, the gracious outcome may have been deserved, but from God to man it is invariably undeserved. So then His grace is to be viewed as the source of all blessings bestowed on those who put their trust in him: Titus 2: 11, *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. - But after the kindness and love of God our saviour toward man appeared, not by righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost: which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* The grace of God provided a way of salvation, and by that same grace the purchased redemption is applied. At a later stage common and saving grace will be examined.

**Mercy** The two Hebrew words for the **mercy** of God are *Chesed* and *racham*. In our English version the latter is translated *the tender mercies of God*, but in the New Testament there is but the one word, *eleos*. Mercy cannot be deserved because if it could it would cease to be mercy. This is very clearly brought out in Lamentation 3: 22, 23, *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness:* Ps 57:10, *For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds:* and Psalm 136 where each of the twenty six verses ends with, *for his mercy endureth forever.* In showing mercy to a sinner, and pardoning sin all His moral attributes are in perfect harmony. God takes delight in mercy. Mercy however is sovereign in its exercise: Romans 9: *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.* In dealing with this attribute one is faced with some of the difficulties identified by some in defining the love of God. If we conclude that the misery of the creature is the cause of mercy being shown, then it logically follows that all His sinful creatures are miserable including the fallen angels and Satan, and therefore you expect mercy to be shown to them all. But God did not elect the whole of mankind and fallen angels to eternal life, and that also applies to showing mercy - the sovereignty of His mercy must not be overlooked.

**Longsuffering** The longsuffering of God implies that the sinner continues in sin, and

even those who have been justified can behave in a manner that justifies His displeasure being shown, otherwise longsuffering would be irrelevant. It has to be borne in mind that it brings other attributes into consideration, such as the continued goodness of God, the repeated warnings, the presuming upon His patience by the people, and the deferring of His judgment. There are many passages of Scripture where His longsuffering is clearly demonstrated. Every believer knows too well how prone he/she is of taking for granted, at least at times, the goodness of God, and thus presuming upon His patience- Romans 2: 4, *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* and 2 Peter 3:15, *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.....* It is also tacitly referred to in Psalm 130: 3, *If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand?*

**Holy** This word is from the Hebrew root, *qad*, to separate, and is applied primarily to God. The Greek words, *hagiazō* and *hagios*, convey a similar meaning. The nature of holiness in its original sense implies that God is distinct from all His creatures – it is the perfect rectitude of the will. The divine will is in absolute harmony with the divine nature. The Lord is said to be holy, Exodus 15: 11; Ps 89: 35; and Is 6: 3; Rev 4:8,15. His word is said to be holy Rom 1:2; His promise is holy Ps 105:42; His Sabbath is holy Ex 20:8, Is 58:13; His people are holy Is 62:12; His residence is holy Is 57:12. But the problem with defining holiness as a setting apart, is that it applies also to all the other attributes - indeed there is not one moral attribute which fails to set God apart from all His creatures. Sometimes holiness is regarded as the celestial and supreme perfection. But are not all the moral attributes co-equal and none is above another? However, there is this difference between holiness and the rest of the attributes, that it can be applicable to all that is predicated of God, as the following passages reveal: Exodus 15:11, *Who is like unto thee O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders:* 1 Samuel 2:2, *There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God:* Isaiah 6: 6, *And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.* Hosea 11:9, *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.* Holiness has also been described as *absolute unapproachableness - awful majesty*, and on the creatures part, *absolute self-abasement*. This most certainly is borne out by the Zeraphims in the account by Isaiah quoted above. They were awestruck and demonstrated self-abasement though they were holy beings. How much more should this be the experience of sinners saved by grace, and yet how seldom is their insight of inward corruption corresponding to that of Paul's, Romans 7: 24, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death.*

Holiness in God cannot be defined like it is in man or angels as conformity to a moral law, because a moral law supposes a Supreme Being whose love and service are obligatory on inferiors. *The only rule for the divine will is divine reason as it prescribes everything that is befitting an infinite being to do.* (Shedd). He is not under law nor above law but is law, for He is righteous by nature and by necessity. The moral law is the clearest expression of divine holiness. He delights in purity, Ps 11:7;

loves righteousness, Ps 35:5, 37:28, 99:4. He abhors evil, Jer 44:4, Heb 1:13. Holiness can also be considered as the quality in God whereby He is right in Himself and in all His actions. This is implied in the Hebrew *saddiq* which means straight, and the Greek *dikaios* which means right, that is right in the absolute sense.

Returning to the Hebrew root from which holiness comes, that of separation, there is His separation not just from all His creatures, but also from all evil, which points to His majestic purity and moral excellence. He demands purity of life in His moral creatures, 1Peter 1: 16, ....*be ye holy for I am holy.*

Holiness and justice are also close, and this is borne out in many passages, but the following will suffice; Ex 20:5; Deut 32: 4; and Rom 2:6-10. Rectoral justice is His rectitude as a Ruler over good and evil whereby He dispenses rewards and penalties. Renumerative justice is the distribution of rewards to men and angels: Ps 58:11; Matt 25:21; Heb 11:26. It is the expression of divine love just as retributive justice is of His wrath towards evil. The reward is of course in consequence of the divine promise.

When His people are rewarded for their struggles with sin, the world, flesh and the devil, whilst it is they who struggle, yet the ability to struggle and overcome is by the grace of God so that there is no human merit in it. Justice demands that sin must be punished, but not necessarily in the person of the offender, because it can also be punished vicariously, but not in both.’ If this is done in the latter then a full measure and degree is announced by the law.’ This subject will be focused on when the doctrine of the atonement is dealt with.

**Righteousness** The righteousness of God appears to overlap somewhat with His holiness. The objection is raised that among men righteousness can only be understood as conformity to law, and therefore how is it possible to address God’s righteousness when He is not subject to any law? It is true that He is not subject to a law that is outside of Himself, but there is a law within the nature of God which is absolute. In view of this a distinction has to be drawn between the absolute and the relative justice of God, the former is, .....*that rectitude of the Divine nature, in virtue of which God is infinitely righteous in Himself, while the latter is that perfection of God by which He maintains Himself over against every violation of His holiness, and shows in every respect that He is the Holy One.* ( L Berkhof Systematic Theology p74/75).

Both holiness and justice are thus very closely related to righteousness. In the Hebrew and Greek words, the idea of conforming to a standard is conveyed. God is the Moral Ruler in the universe. He has instituted a moral government in the world and provided a just law. Rewards and punishments can be carried out directly or indirectly by Him. We have a classic example of the latter in Romans 13: 1 -4, *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then be afraid of the power? do that*

*which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God*

*to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on him that doeth evil.* There are other passages in which the reward is emphasised: Psalm 58: 11, .....*Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.* Heb 11: 26, *Esteeming the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.* The rewards spring from the Covenant relation between Him and His people. He is the One who enables them to be obedient.

### **Attributes of Sovereignty**

His sovereignty extends to all things - the sparrow does not fall to the ground without His authority, and the hairs of the head are all numbered. Under this heading the two subjects to be considered are **Will** and **Power**.

**Will:** The sovereign will of God is represented in Scripture as the final cause for all things - indeed all things are derived from it. Ps 135: 6, *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth, in the seas and all deep places.* Daniel 4: 35, *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

In dealing with the will of God, care has to be exercised because there are occasions when it denotes the whole moral nature, on other occasions the faculty of self-determination, but also the rule of life for man. However its more common usage is that of the faculty of self-determination. A distinction is made between His decreetive and His preceptive will. By this is not meant two wills but rather two modes of it. The former covers everything that comes to pass both good and evil, whereas the latter is man's rule of conduct. The former is always accomplished, but the latter is often disregarded in this world.

The other point that deserves consideration is that of freedom of His will. In the exercises of His will does He act necessarily or freely? God is the object of the former. He necessarily wills Himself and all His personal distinctions in the Godhead, and acts according to the laws of His Being. On the other hand, God's creatures are the objects of His free will. However His freedom must not be perceived to be nothing else but pure indifference - it is instead rational self-determination.

The decreetive will as already said covers everything that He has foreordained. Does this imply that God is responsible for the entrance of sin into the world? To this question the Arminians respond by saying that He permitted it, and that this was dependent on His foreknowledge of it. Reformers are careful not to handle this subject in such a way that it would make God the author of sin, although they do accept that the decreetive will includes sinful deeds of man. They readily admit that it is far from easy to get round this difficulty and are thus careful to stress that whilst God wills to permit sin, that He does not will to effectuate it, as He does that which is morally good.

**Power** The Sovereignty of God is that whereby he executes His will. According to

Hodge and Shedd absolute power is the divine efficiency as exercised without the intervention of second causes, while ordinate power is the efficiency of God as exercised by the ordered operation of second causes. Charnock, regards absolute power as that whereby God is able to do what He will not do but is possible to Him; but ordinate power is that which He decreed to do - this is one and the same power. It must be said that even His absolute power is not divorced from His perfections

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## THE TRINITY

This is an extremely difficult doctrine to understand and enlarge on. The conflicts surrounding this doctrine were focused on the need to maintain on the one hand monotheism, but in doing so there was the denial of the personal distinction within the Godhead: and on the other hand in acknowledging the trinity of persons there was failure in making them coequal in substance, power and glory. The consequence of this was the failure to handle correctly the essential deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Let us at this point consider a little some of these difficulties. Going back to the early church Fathers, we have Origen maintaining the position that the Son was subordinate to the Father, and that the Holy Spirit was subordinate to the Son. This was not a view left in isolation but sadly was seen as an impetus to the Arian denial of the Son's and Spirit's deity. They represented the Son as the first creation of God - a doctrine currently held by the Jehovah's Witnesses. To preserve the unity of God the other two Persons were made to differ in rank, thus discarding their consubstantiality. Whilst the Arians had what could be described as a vague idea of a Trinity, the Monarchians viewed the three Persons as just a number of modes in which God revealed Himself. They were divided into two groups, namely, Modalistic and Dynamic. Unlike Dynamic Monarchianism the Modalists maintained the true divinity of Christ, whilst the former regarded Jesus as a man, and the Holy Spirit an influence.

It was as late as the fourth century before there was an attempt to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity. This was done at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD. They declared the Son to be coessential with the Father. It took fifty six years later for the deity of the Holy Spirit to be dealt with at the Council of Constantinople in 381AD - this attempt was not sufficiently adequate. There was official agreement that the Son is generated by the Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and Son. It was the work done by Augustine that removed the elements of subordination, and was a more complete statement. Although John of Damascus provided a full statement, Augustine's was superior.

During the Post- Reformation period the doctrine of subordination was revived, and the reason was to maintain the unity of God. The Arminians regarded the Father as having pre-eminence over the Son and the Holy Spirit. Swedenborg claimed that the eternal God/man became flesh in the Son and operated through the Holy Spirit. Schleirmacher's view that the Trinity was just three aspects of God was not much different from Monarchianism's number of modes.

### **God as Trinity in Unity**

God is Tri-Personal and this is essential to His Being. The following reveals Shedd's thinking on the Trinity. He bases his argument on 'the general self-consciousness of the Triune God as distinguished from the particular individual self-consciousness of each one of the Persons of the Godhead. For in self-consciousness the subject must know itself as an object, and also perceive that it does. This is possible in God

because of His trinal existence. God could not be self-contemplating, self-cognitive and self-communicating if He were not trinal in His constitution.'(Dogmatic Theol

pp393)

There is an infinite fulness of Divine life in God - Eph 3:19, *And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.* This fulness is also attributed to Christ - *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.* The Greek word for fulness is *pleroma* and is applied to the grace and truth manifested in Christ John 1: 16; to all His virtues and excellencies Eph 4: 13; the conversion and restoration of Israel Rom 11: 12; and the end of an appointed period. Returning then to the *pleroma* in relation to the Being of God, Chrysostom said of it *The fulness of God is that excellence of which God Himself is full.* It is indeed the plenitude of the Divine perfection, and this is the sense in which it dwells in Christ. 'But if it is taken as the genitive of the object it means the plenitude that flows from Him.' In dealing with *pleroma* within the context of the Trinity the former has to be our understanding of it.

How clearly is the doctrine of the Trinity taught in the Old Testament? It is not stated unequivocally in a single verse as we have it in Matthew 28: 19. Some have appealed to *Elohim* being plural as implying this doctrine. The clearest passage in the Old Testament on this doctrine is surely Genesis 1:26, *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.....* Although this verse does not furnish us with any specification, at least a plurality of Persons is identified, and also personal distinctions. There is also in Genesis 11: 7 a similar emphasis on plurality of persons and of personal distinctions: *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language.....* Combining these verses with the many references throughout the Old Testament to the Oneness of God, a Trinity in Unity is the logical conclusion. Besides these passages, there are numerous references to the Spirit, and to the prophecies about the Messiah, which combined point to more than one Person in the Godhead. It will be profitable to search out other passages than those referred to here.

In the New Testament this doctrine is more specific. In some passages only the Son is referred to: Mark 1:11 - in Matt 11: 25,26, Christ acknowledges God as His Father, and again in Jo 11:41. In Lu 3:22, the Holy Ghost and the Son are referred to and in Matt 28:17 the three Persons are named. These are only a few examples of the many passages in the New Testament on which the doctrine of a Tri-personal Godhead can be based. Therefore in the Divine Being there is one indivisible essence *ousia essentia*. God is therefore One in His constitutional nature.

There are individual subsistences. With the Greek writers we associate the term *hupostasis*; the Latin writers used *persona*; and the Schoolmen coined *subsistentia*; but they all had one thing in common - namely, distinctions. It is relatively easy to observe distinctions among humans, but in referring to distinctions within the Godhead care must be exercised. It is personal self-distinction within the Divine essence, and not a different essence that constitutes each Person. To Calvin, person meant subsistence, and what distinguished them were incommunicable properties. (Inst 1,13:6) The whole of the divine essence belongs to each Person - it is not the

whole divided into three parts.

The uniqueness of the divine nature is that unlike humans it can subsist wholly in more

than one person. The unity of the essence in person is regarded as a numerical unity. It does not exist apart from the three Persons of the Godhead. In regards to personal subsistence, ontologically the Father is first, the Son second and the Holy Spirit third, because the Father is unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and Son eternally. 'Generation and procession which take place within the Divine Being may suggest some form of subordination, but there is absolutely no subordination in the possession of the whole of the divine essence by each Person.'

Calvin, to whom we referred earlier, regarded incommunicable properties as those which distinguished the Persons. These incommunicable properties belong to the *opera ad intra* - the personal operations which belong to each of the Persons. To the Father belongs *generation*; to the Son *filiation*; and to the Holy Spirit *procession*. This equally applies in the *opera ad extra* - the specific nature of the outward work of each Person. To the Father creation is ascribed, but also to a great extent in representing the Trinity, the designing of the work of redemption, the election of the Son as Redeemer and the election of sinners; to the Son redemption; and to the Holy Spirit, regeneration, effectual calling and sanctification. This order is also referred to as the Economic Trinity.

It is not uncommon to find Father applied to the Triune God as the originator of all things; Eph 3:15, Heb 12: 9, James 1:17. He is also called Father in His theocratic relation to Israel, Deut 32: 6, Is 64: 8, Mal 1:6. In the New Testament He is Father in an ethical sense to all His children, Rom 8:16, 1 John 3:1. It is also referred to as the relationship of the first Person to the second Person; John 1: 14, 18; John 8: 54, and John 14: 12 - 13.

The Son will be dealt with in detail when the doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ is considered. However it is appropriate at this juncture to make a few comments. Christ existed before He was born, - He came down from heaven John 3: 13, John 16: 28. But what about the eternal generation of the Son? Was it necessary or dependent on a free act of God's will. Some, and among them Origen, regarded it as an act dependent on the will of God. This position was dangerously flawed because it robbed the Son of His deity. The generation of the Son must be understood as an act of the Father's necessary will, for otherwise it would have been impossible for Him to share the Father's eternity if His generation had not been necessary. The problem we are faced with here is when we refer to an act it implies a point at which it took effect, but in this matter that must not be how it is understood. We are dealing with a matter that was timeless. What was eternally generated? Was it His essence? How could it be when He is of the same essence as the Father? The logical outcome to that line of reasoning would be that the Father's essence was also generated, which is an impossibility. It was the personal subsistence of the Son that was generated. But that is not without its problem, because following on from that the question arises, did the Father first generate a second person and then communicated to Him the divine

essence? If this were so then His generation would not have been from the divine essence. Berkhof is very succinct in his statement on this point: *It is that eternal and*

*necessary act of the first person in the Trinity, whereby He, within the divine Being, is the ground of a second personal subsistence like His own, and puts this second person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation or change.* (Systematic Theology p 97). This still remains a great mystery to finite minds.

The peculiar property of the third Person is expressed by the title Spirit. The essence of the Father and the Son belongs to Him also. As a Person, He is always designated as the Spirit of the Father and Son, and acts for and reveals both the Father and the Son.



