

Calvin's Mystery of the Trinity

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The Eternal Being reveals Himself in His triune existence even more richly and vitally than in His attributes. It is in this holy trinity that each attribute of His Being comes into its own, so to speak, gets its fullest content, and takes on its profoundest meaning. It is only when we contemplate this trinity that we know who and what God is.¹

I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three: nor can I discern the three without being straitway carried back to the one.²

We do better to adore the mysteries of Deity than to investigate them.³

May the Lord grant that we study the heavenly mysteries of his wisdom, making true progress in religion to his glory and our upbuilding. [Calvin's introductory prayer for his Academy lectures]

INTRODUCTION

This study surveys John Calvin's view of the 'the sublime mystery' of (which is) the Trinity, the reasons for his views and their articulation, historical setting, and pastoral implications. We will concentrate on Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, complemented by his other writings (commentaries and sermons, etc.), and seek to isolate his particular concerns or contributions, theological methodology and pastoral praxis. Brief comments on contemporary Trinitarian theology conclude our investigation.

§1. JOHN CALVIN: LIFE AND MINISTRY

John Calvin (1509-64)—French reformer and theologian. Born at Noyon in Picardy (10 July 1509) to Gerard Cauvin (a notary public employed by the local bishop) and his wife Jeanne la France of Cambrai. The second of five sons, John initially studied for the priesthood (1523-27), but in 1528 commenced law studies in Orleans and Bourges. By 1533 he became convinced that he would be instrumental in the restoration of the Church to its primal purity, and came to prominence among the leaders of the Protestant movement in Paris.

After a short period of imprisonment and in danger of persecution he fled to Switzerland (in 1535), to devote his life to study. In March 1536 the first edition of the Latin *Christianae Religionis Institutio* was published. On a 'chance' visit to Geneva, Calvin heeded Farel's urgent appeals to forego his promising academic career and join the reformer in reorganizing the Swiss canton. His time as preacher and professor was short lived. Farel was expelled in 1538, and Calvin moved, at the invitation of Martin Bucer, to Strasbourg. There he met and married Idelette de Bure (died 1549): the widow of an Anabaptist converted to the Reformed position, she bore him one child, a son, who lived for only a few days.

Following a fruitful ministry in Strasbourg, he returned in 1541 to Geneva, and spent the next 14 years working to reform the immoral city as a theocratic commonwealth, conformed to God's will. Under his oversight, civil laws were revised, church government and discipline re-

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Baker: 1977), page 143. See also D Broughton Knox, 'The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of the Christian religion. Unless this doctrine is held firmly and truly, it is not possible to be a Christian' in *The Everlasting God* (Evangelical Press: 1982), page 49.

² Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Holy Baptism*, oration xl. 41 A SELECT LIBRARY OF THE NICENE AND POST-NICENE FATHERS, first series.

³ Melancthon, in the Introduction to the *Loci*, *Library of Christian Classics*, XIX, (SCM: 1953ff.), page 21.

introduced, liturgy revised, and a university founded. By 1555 he had become the leader of the community, offered shelter to English and Scottish Protestant refugees, and supported the French Protestants. Throughout this period, the bulk of his New Testament commentaries were published, together with writings on the reformation and predestination.

From 1555 until his death he dominated the community by his moral insight and wisdom, established an education system for young people, arranged for the care of the aged and poor, and continued the revision of the community's laws. Multitudes of refugees found Geneva a safe haven: students flocked to his academy lectures, to return home as missionaries to England, Scotland, and most European countries. He completed many Old Testament commentaries (on 23 books), preached frequently, offered wise counsel through many letters and personal contacts, and rewrote the *Institutes* (final French edition in 1560). Racked by constant pain from a stomach ulcer, haemorrhoids (also bouts of malaria and possibly rheumatism or sciatica), simple in life style (yet enjoying lawn bowls, darts, quoits and *la clef*, the Genevan 'jig', and good wine and food), the influential reformer died on 27 May 1564.

§2. CALVIN AND THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Calvin's *magnum opus*—and perhaps that of the Reformation itself—is the 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' (*Institutio Christianae Religionis*). This section provides a brief survey of the various editions of this work, and then covers some of the key factors contributing to the structure and development of the *Institutes*.

2:1 THE EDITIONS OF THE *INSTITUTES*

1536—printed in Basle, the pocket sized volume of 516 pages, in Latin. Of the six chapters, the first four covered the Law, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper): the order followed was that of Luther's Catechisms. This first section, functioning as a manual was coupled with the more polemic final two chapters, where Calvin dealt with false sacraments and Christian Liberty (especially to defend the French Church against the accusation of civil rebellion).

1539—another Latin edition, printed in Strasbourg. This expanded edition, now in seventeen chapters, and a theological formulation that governed all other editions, includes an extensive defence of the Trinity against Caroli (who had accused him of Arianism), and elaborates his disputes against the Anabaptists (especially on the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and the significance of infant baptism). With new chapters on the knowledge of God, and man, further chapters on repentance and the nature of justification by faith, providence and predestination, it concludes with a chapter on the christian life (issuing out of his pastoral experience and dependence on Bucer's thought and praxis).

1541—a French edition, published in Geneva. This edition is significant on two grounds, (i.) it was the first major theological work published in French (in fact, the first major work in modern French itself!), and (ii.) was popular, having been addressed to the common people of France. Its impact was immediate and extensive—it was the only book specifically cited in the Parliament of Paris Act of July 1, 1542, which decreed the suppression of heretical texts!

1543-45—new Latin editions, issued from Strasbourg, with a French edition in 1545 from Geneva, comprising twenty one chapters. These similar editions contained an expansion of the material on the Creed, with new items on angels, and ecclesiastical organisations.

1550-1557—three further Latin editions, four in French, each containing twenty one chapters, now including the innovation of subdivisions. The 1550 and 1551 editions saw the expansion of his treatment of the Scripture and its authority, a new section on the human conscience, and the French editions had further material on the resurrection of the body.

1559 (Latin)-1560 (French)—the thoroughly revised final edition, the '*Institutio Christianae Religionis*, now first arranged in four books, and distinguished by chapters, by the best method; and so greatly enlarged by new material that it can almost be regarded as a new work'. Before, the plan followed the outline of the Catechism, now it was shaped by the quadripartite Apostolic Creed (Book I—God, Book II—Jesus Christ, Book III—the Holy Spirit, and Book IV—the Church): before, providence and predestination were linked, now they were separated, with the latter being treated as a correlative of salvation: before, ecclesiastical authority was considered under the rubric of faith, now under the article of the Church: before, the Christian life as a conclusion to the work, now incorporated within the work of the Holy Spirit. Finally, two other features stand out, with the section on the resurrection placed in the article of the Spirit, and the critical issue of forgiveness deliberately linked with Christ and the Holy Spirit, to avoid either an implicit or explicit dependence on the Church (contra Roman Catholicism's instrumental/sacramental view of forgiveness).

2:2. FACTORS SHAPING THE STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE *INSTITUTES*

Obviously Calvin neither read nor wrote in isolation: there are a number of factors which shaped his theological thought and pastoral praxis, hence his writings. In common with the Reformers, he was steeped in the Scriptures, unparalleled in his grasp of the Old Testament, unmatched in his exegetical output.

Complementing his Biblical studies, Calvin was well versed in the writings of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine's dogmatics, John Chrysostom's 'unsurpassed exegetics', and Origen. Supplementing his Patristic studies—yet neither of them supplanting the Scriptures—was his appreciation and appropriation of the declarations of the Councils. In his writings we detect the faint echoes of John Dun Scotus, and the resonating chords of the Reformers. From Luther the catechetical form of theological work (although Calvin was never competent with German), from Melancthon Christology, the Law, love and liberty (but certainly not free-will and predestination!), from Zwingli, albeit more often to contradict, the necessity to expound the nature of the sacraments, and clarify the responsibilities of the citizenry: and from Martin Bucer (with their intimate association in Strasbourg) Calvin seems to have learned most (yet not as a clone or mimic). Further factors include his maturing experience of pastoral praxis in Strasbourg, his intense conviction to defend and declare the Church's faith, the desperate needs of Geneva, and his own personal experience of the grace of God in Christ.

Calvin's '*Institutes*', initially a simple manual had become the dogmatic obverse to his vast exegetical labours, yet remaining didactic, especially in its French editions. From its humble conception it had become one of the few books that have profoundly shaped the course of history.

§3. THE CONTEXT FOR CALVIN'S VIEW OF THE TRINITY

It is made a reproach to the framers of [Reformation creeds] that they simply stood in the paths of the earlier decision on the Trinity and the Person of Christ, and did not attempt a reconstruction of these doctrines In the first place, they required these doctrines as the foundation of their own evangelical faith . . . [then] accepted them from a clear perception that they were Scriptural and true . . . if they clung to these ecumenical doctrines of the Son and Spirit, it was because they . . . clearly perceived that the Scripture taught them.¹

3:1 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE REFORMATION

The Athanasian Creed (or *Quicumque Vult*: late fourth or fifth century?) states that 'the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.' This affirmation concerning the truth that

¹ James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (James Clarke & Co.: n.d.), page 283.

in the unity of God there is a trinity of persons, is known only by revelation, and issues in worship. Such an affirmation was not derived from the Church Fathers, but from the Scriptures as the written form of God's Word, and apostolic teaching. The Fathers sought to express in contemporary language and terms the revealed realities of the Christian faith, yet were hampered by the deficient categories, grammar and vocabulary of their language to adequately convey such truth.

While Jews bear witness to the revelation of the unity of God, the covenant LORD (in the *Shema*—Deut. 6:4ff.), the early Christians also confessed the Christ to be 'Lord and God'. They distinguished between the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also acknowledged the Spirit as God: they came to perceive that the God of the Old Testament and the Father of the New, together with the Son, are one and the same God. Coming to affirm the incarnation of God the Son as Jesus Christ, the early Church was soon forced to articulate its understanding of the Trinity. So, the formulation of the revelation concerning of the Trinity, as such, was dependent on the Church's views of the incarnation. Depending on whether Jesus is accepted as the incarnation of God the eternal Son, or simply a human being divinely equipped and energised for ministry (Adoptionism), or even the human form of a created or derived existence (Subordinationism, Arius), views of the Trinity were considered, rejected, or overhauled. Within all of the debates, derision and decisions—issuing in the Creeds of the Church—variant views of the incarnation compromised or contributed to a clear articulation of the Trinity. Along the broad spectrum, different groups stressed the unity of God (and thereby exclusive of any internal relations), while others the internal multiplicity of God (and the complexity of relations): the constant and twin dangers of unitarianism (also positions of Sabellius, the Subordinationists and all strict monotheists) and tritheism confronted the Church.

Athanasius rejected Arius' view that the Son was not of the same substance as the Father (Arius argued that the Son was created as Logos from the non-existent), but affirming that the Son was *homoousios* with the Father. His equivocal statement meant that the Church could articulate its belief in one God, yet with the Son having the same (not merely similar, or like) substance as the Father. In fact, he argued that only if Christ is truly God become man can and do humanity have any (ontological) contact with God. That is, within the full humanity of Christ, we have the incarnation of God the Son, who freely incorporates fallen humanity into the very communion of the Godhead.

Most of the discussion so far has concentrated on the Father and the Son, since up to this time the question of the Spirit had not been considered as critical, although various divergent views had been expressed. In the Eastern Church, the Cappodocians followed the insights of Athanasius, and defended the three full *hypostases* of the persons of the Godhead. This meant that they maintained the full *homoousios* of the Spirit, with that of the Father and Son. Yet the East did part company with the Western Church over the *filioque clause*, that is, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, *and the Son*, the Western Church's final formulation was expressed in Augustine's work, *De Trinitate*. He emphasizes the unity of essence and the trinity of persons, each of whom possesses the entire essence, and thus is identical with the other two persons. None of the persons may be considered in isolation from the others, since they relate by mutual dependence on the others, with interpenetration and indwelling. Like his forebears, Augustine had misgivings about the term for 'person', but felt obliged to use it rather than remain mute.

While the aim of this paper is to concentrate on the contribution of Calvin to our understanding of the Trinity, one further issue requires attention before we arrive at the Reformation period, and so, Calvin himself. It is 'the Latin heresy'.¹ By Calvin's time a subtle wedge had been driven between the ontological relations of the Trinity, especially between Christ and God the Father. On the one hand, the formal orthodox creeds were retained, but on the other hand, everyday thinking and daily life had compromised such formulations. The nexus or link between Christ and God was breached, and considered, to all intents and purposes, as an artificial, instrumental and external relation, rather than ontological, reflecting the

¹ See T F Torrance, 'The Deposit of Faith', in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1983, pages 1-28; 'Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy' *SJT*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1986, pages 289-309, and George Yule, 'Luther Attack on the Latin Heresy' in *Christ in our Place*, ed. by T Hart & D Thimell, (Paternoster Press: 1989), pages 224-252.

authentic internal relations of the Trinity. As a consequence, grace came to be seen as a commodity, albeit donated to man, often argued as contingent on the winsome merits of Christ and instrumentally dispensed to man via the Church's sacramental system. This meant that rather than God giving Himself to man, the divine gifts and giver were detached from each other, and God provided no self-expression through the Son and Spirit. And the disjunction between the giver and gifts resulted in another dichotomy, with the incarnation and atonement seen as separated, and so requiring the multiplicity of 'theories of the atonement' to provide some logical explanation for the—now divided—person and work of Christ.

Further, we have noted that Athanasius insisted that since the Son is self-existent as God, the incarnation is the ontological union of the Word/Son of God and man. This means that, for Athanasius, the thought (Logos) and action of God are one: the self-giving inner relations of God are expressed in the incarnation of the Son, who by the Spirit, employs parables and works to signify and reveal and realise the reconciliation promised by God, and the redemption and recapitulation of man to participate in the communion of God. But what Athanasius perceived as ontological, and inseparably linked, others had failed to discern, either in its initial form, or implications. For example, the converted Carthaginian lawyer, Tertullian, had earlier brought a Latin dialectic way of thinking to bear on this matter (he was, however, the first to introduce the term 'Trinity' into theology). In so doing, he had abstracted the 'knowledge (or truth) of God' from its concrete actualisation in Christ as incarnate Son, and taking this position to 'its logical conclusion', ended with the truth being (i.) detached from Christ, (ii.) composed of propositions perceived to be revelation by itself, and (iii.) a fixed or static set of doctrines as prescriptive or regulative beliefs (ie. 'we believe *that*' rather than believing *in* God).

Therefore the legacy which Calvin, and the other Reformers inherited, was a mixture of lipservice to orthodox creeds, and confused pastoral practice (and its theological justification): into such chaos they were called to defend and declare the truth of the one Trinitarian God, retrieve the initiative taken by Athanasius and Augustine, and express both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. While Luther maintained the formal credal articulations of the Trinity, and felt constrained to concentrate more on the great principle of 'justification by faith in Christ alone', Calvin may be regarded as the key Reformation figure to have recovered and rehabilitated the Church's understanding of the Trinity. But before we examine and evaluate his contribution, we will briefly mention some of his chief opponents and their views.

3:2 TRINITARIAN DISPUTE IN THE REFORMATION

Calvin's life and ministry, and particularly his views of the Trinity, and especially his defence in the Institutes, must be seen against the backdrop of three main protagonists—*Pierre Caroli*, *Michael Servetus* and *Valentinus Gentilis*. A brief sketch of their views and contacts with Calvin will provide us with a 'feel' for the setting in which he worked and wrote.

3:2:1 Pierre Caroli

Pierre Caroli, a brilliant but unstable Paris scholar, who vacillated between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (he simultaneously espoused prayers for the dead while denouncing the notion of purgatory!), challenged Calvin's Trinitarian orthodoxy in 1537. Caroli had become a pastor in Lausanne and on a visit of Calvin to the city had accused him (together with Farel and Viret) of heresy and supplanting the three Creeds (Apostolic, Nicean, and Athanasian) with a novel Genevan creed, the *Instruction in Faith*. While ready to subscribe belief in one God, Calvin was apprehensive of affirming the Athanasian creed—especially its concluding anathemas against heresies—since he was aware that Caroli might presume to accuse him and his friends of one or other of the condemned heresies. Such was the case, and at the Synod held in Lausanne on May 15, 1537, Calvin successfully (but intemperately) defended himself against the charge of Arianism. Caroli was deprived of his pastoral charge, and later in the same month was accused of gross immorality and forbidden to preach.

Two years later Caroli appeared in Strasbourg, again to accuse Calvin of anti-Trinitarian beliefs and anti-credal sentiments. It is reported that Calvin's unbridled temper flared—when provoked he reacted against Caroli like a 'wild beast'. In 1545 Calvin published a pamphlet against Caroli: perhaps the recurrent memory of his adversary's barbed accusations drove him to so emphatically protest his 'Trinitarian orthodoxy'.

Perhaps it also contributed to Calvin's determined—even obsessive—attitude towards Michael Servetus, and to a lesser extent, Valentinus Gentile.

3:2:2 Michael Servetus (1511-53)

Michael Servetus, physician and heretic, a native of Navarre, student (of mathematics, philosophy, theology and law) in Spanish university cities, travelled throughout Italy and Germany, and met Melancthon and Bucer. His Biblical studies evidently led him to repudiate or modify the doctrine of the Trinity, especially as he sought to convert both Jews and Moors. He rejected the notion of an eternal Son in his *De Trinitatis Erroribus Libri VII* (1531). This work disturbed his friends, so he fled to Paris, where he studied medicine, becoming the personal physician of the Archbishop of Vienne. Resuming his theological studies, he covertly corresponded at length with Calvin, who finally exposed his anti-Trinitarian views.

In 1553 his main work *Christianismi Restitutio* was anonymously published. He denied the Trinity and full divinity of Christ, whose humanity he regarded as a triplex compound, of (i.) the Word, which while not divine was the ideal reason for all created beings, (ii.) the soul and (iii.) the human body. His authorship was exposed, he was condemned by the Inquisition in Vienne, and while escaping *en route* to Italy via Geneva, was recognised, arrested, and denounced. Refusing to recant, he was burnt as a heretic (Calvin favoured a less barbarous method of execution) on October 27, 1553.

3:2:3 Valentinus Gentilis

Valentinus Gentilis, an Italian refugee who fled to Geneva, and in 1558 refused to subscribe to a confession of faith imposed on the Italian Church to reconcile divergent views of the Trinity and Christology. After being arrested, he appeared to retract his position, was then accused of blasphemy, and on further recanting (and thereby avoiding being beheaded), was required as an act of public penance to incinerate his own books. On fleeing from Geneva, he resumed his anti-Trinitarian stance in Lyons, was ejected from Poland, and crossed the authorities in Bern. Unlike their Genevan counterparts, they had no hesitation in executing him, by beheading, on September 10, 1566.

What Calvin encountered—and more than matched—in his opponents was their superficial appreciation and interpretation of the Scriptures, which exposed their fundamental framework as being that of Renaissance philosophy and humanistic ethics. We are now ready to turn to Calvin's exposition of God the Trinity.

§4. THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

Having considered the context in which Calvin wrote, we are now better prepared to come to his own contribution in the *Institutes*. For the Genevan reformer the treatment of the Trinity is deliberately placed within the Knowledge of God the Creator, after the chapter dealing with idolatry. The remainder of this section is a summary of the argument of the chapter on the Trinity—Book I: chapter xiii. Firstly the chapter is divided into its two main sections, the first of these a positive didactic and declarative statement of the orthodox view of the Trinity, the latter a polemic defence, refuting contemporary heretical views. Second, Calvin's paragraph by paragraph argument is summarised.

4:1. THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

- i. The Significance of the Persons [1-6]
- ii. The Deity of the Son [7-13]
- iii. The Deity of the Spirit [14-15]
- iv. The Trinity as Oneness and Threeness [16-20]

4:2. REFUTATION OF SOME RECENT HERESIES

- i. The necessity of faith [21]
- ii. Servetus' rejection of the Trinity [22] — his view of 'theogony', with the Son and Spirit indiscriminately mingled with created beings, with substantial deity in other created beings.
- iii. The full Godhead of the Son as with the Father, etc. [23-26]

- iv. Adversaries (esp. Valentinus Gentilis) improperly appeal to Irenaeus [27]
- v. Further appeal to Tertullian [28]
- vi. The unanimous affirmation by Church doctors to the orthodox view of Trinity [29]

BOOK I: CHAPTER XIII

IN SCRIPTURE, FROM THE CREATION ONWARD, WE ARE TAUGHT ONE ESSENCE OF GOD,
WHICH CONTAINS THREE PERSONS

(Terms used in the doctrine of the Trinity by the orthodox fathers, 1-6)

1. *God's nature is immeasurable and spiritual*: Scriptural teaching about God should be enough to banish both vulgar or populist delusions, and discredit pseudo-sophisticated subtleties of secularists. In emphasizing God's spiritual nature, the Scripture acknowledges God's accommodation of Himself to our 'slight intelligence': this is the correct reason for the so-called Scriptural anthropomorphisms.
2. *The three 'Persons' in God*: God Himself provides that which distinguishes Himself from idols, 'for he so proclaims himself the sole God as to offer himself to be contemplated clearly in three persons'. To avoid error we must reject false notions of 'persons' and depend on the Scripture's presentation, as in Hebrews 1:3ff. to affirm the one essence or *ousia* in God, yet also affirming three *hypostases* or subsistences, each distinct from the other.
3. *The expressions 'Trinity' and 'Person' aid the interpretation of Scripture and are therefore admissible*: these terms are rejected by some as being 'human' inventions, yet such argumentation does not shake our conviction in one God in three persons, each of which remains entirely God. Continued argumentation ends in the loss of truth and love. Countering the charge of employing 'foreign' terms to describe God, Calvin affirms that where 'novel' terms cloud rather than clarify the simplicity of God's Word, they are to be repudiated: on the other hand, where they do indeed clarify, they are to be retained as aids highlighting the truth.
4. *The Church has regarded expressions like 'Trinity', 'Person', etc. as necessary to unmask false teachers*: doctors of the early and present Church have felt compelled to employ such 'novel' terms to expose false accusers, who seek to disguise their errors in 'layers of verbiage'. For instance, the early fathers used the word *homoousias* to expose the sacrilegious Arius' duplicity, for while he confessed that Christ was God and the Son of God, he also affirmed that Christ was created and had a beginning, like other creatures. Again, Sabellius considered Father, Son and Spirit as mere names or attributes of God, without rank or distinction. Rejecting his position, the fathers asserted that a trinity of persons subsists in the one God.
5. *Limits and necessity of theological terms*: since these terms were not 'rashly invented', we ought not prematurely repudiate them. While we may be better off without them, our prime concern must be that all recognize and affirm that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, yet differentiated from each other by a 'peculiar quality'. Further, we ought heed the warning given by the fathers about the limitations of Greek and Latin terms, emulate their humility in the use of language, and be conscious of the accusations of heretics that we betray our own inconsistencies and deficiencies as we use such terms.
6. *The meaning of the most important conception*: we may assert that for us 'Person' means a 'subsistence' in God's essence: such subsistence is the act of being in relation to others, yet distinguished by a special quality. Again, when *God* is mentioned in a simple and indefinite manner, this use necessarily includes both the Son and the Spirit, as well as the Father. However, when the persons of the Trinity are compared with each other, their special qualities distinguish them from each other. Finally, Tertullian's definition that the divine economy or distribution has no compromising effect on the unity of essence is to be accepted.

(The eternal deity of the Son, 7-13)

7. *The deity of the Word*: the term 'Word' as employed in both the Testaments is no mere utterance, but is rather the 'everlasting Wisdom, residing in God, from which both all oracles

and all prophecies go forth'. After citing I Peter 1:10-11, cf II Peter 1:21; Heb. 1:2-3; Proverbs 8:2ff. and John 1:1-3, Calvin argues that 'unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself'.

8. *The eternity of the Word*: while some dare not 'openly deprive him of his divinity, [yet] secretly filch away his eternity', by stating that the Word began when God opened his mouth to create the universe. Rather, Calvin commenting on Genesis 1:3, John 17:5, and John 1:1-3, states that 'the Word, conceived beyond the beginning of time by God, has perpetually resided with him. By this, his eternity, his true essence, and his divinity are proved.'

9. *The deity of Christ in the Old Testament*: postponing the treatment of the person of the Mediator (until 'redemption' in Bk. II.xii-xvii), we are here concerned with the multiple testimony affirming Christ's deity (so in Psalm 45:6, 44:7Vg). Opinions by medieval Jewish commentators (possibly Rashi, Abraham Ibn Ezra and David Kimchi) are to be rejected, since they fail to consistently interpret their own Scriptures (notably Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) where the Christ is identified as the object of faith, as is God himself.

10. *The 'Angel of the Eternal God'*: these Jews also fail to perceive that Jehovah himself is frequently identified as an/the Angel (ie. in Judges 6; 7; 13). Servetus is cited (here for the first time in the *Institutes*) as impiously asserting that God never disclosed himself to Abraham and other patriarchs, and that they worshipped an angel in his place. However, in concert with the orthodox doctors, we interpret that chief angel to be God's Word, already fulfilling the office of Mediator. Citing Hosea 12 and Zechariah 2, Calvin concludes 'that he [Christ] is the same God who had always been worshiped among the Jews.'

11. *The divinity of Christ in the New Testament: witness of the apostles*: Paul (Rom. 9; 14; Ephesians 4:8) employs citations from the Psalms and Isaiah to show that Christ is the God who will never share his glory with another; John asserts that Isaiah saw the majestic God in the Temple, and that person was Christ (John 12; cf. Isaiah 6); and further references in Hebrews (to Psalms), and those cited by Paul and John confirm that Christ is no second 'god' but is rather the one true God, to whom worship is properly afforded.

12. *The divinity of Christ is demonstrated in his works*: Christ has been intimately participating in the governance of the world (with the Father, as in John 5:17), as well as having the power and authority to search the hearts and minds of men, and remit sins.

13. *The divinity of Christ is demonstrated by his miracles*: while it must be conceded that prophets and apostles worked miracles, and thereby distributed the divine donations in their ministry, Christ exhibited his own power. Further, genuine salvation, goodness and justice are of and from God himself—since Christ obviously had these, it must follow that he is God. Such good things are bestowed upon us as we invoke Christ that we seen in the Old Testament as the domain of God. We are instructed not only 'that by the Son's intercession do those things which the Heavenly Father bestows come to us but that by mutual participation in power the Son himself is the author of them. . . . There, indeed, does the pious mind perceive the very presence of God, and almost touches him, when it feels itself quickened, illumined, preserved, justified, and sanctified.'

(The eternal deity of the Spirit, 14-15)

14. *The divinity of the Spirit is demonstrated in his work*: a corresponding proof of the Spirit is sought in the same source. It affirms that the Spirit was active in 'tending that chaotic mass' (so Gen. 1:2) and adorning creation with its beauty and order: that the Spirit participated with God in the commissioning of the prophets; that our experience confirms the witness of Scripture to the Spirit's work as the giver of essence, life and movement to all created things, as the author of regeneration (by his own power) and future immortality, as the bestower of wisdom and speech, giver of justification, power, sanctification, truth, grace, and every good thing, and the one through whom we enter into the very communion of God. Therefore, the Spirit participates in the divine power, and 'resides hypostatically in God.'

15. *Express testimonies for the deity of the Spirit*: by reason of the indwelling of the Spirit we have become the designated and chosen temples of God: therefore, the Spirit is God (Calvin cites Augustine as arguing for the Spirit's divinity on the basis of I Cor. 3:16ff.; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16). Again, where the prophets speak of the Lord of Hosts, the New Testament declares that these words are the utterance of the Spirit: therefore the Spirit is God. Finally, to sin against the Spirit is to sin grievously, and such blasphemy will never be remitted.

(Distinction and unity of the three Persons, 16-20)

16. *Oneness*: the apostle Paul insists on *one* God, faith and baptism (Eph. 4:5), yet the name by which we are baptised is of the One God, but with equal clarity is expressed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). 'Hence it is quite clear that in God's essence reside three persons in whom one God is known.' Baptism therefore confirms the unity of God: with one faith we believe in the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Arians mistakenly deny (they 'prate most foolishly') the common essence of both the Father and the Son; Macedonians (with a 'like madness tormented' following Macedonius, a semi-Arian bishop of Constantinople, who rejected the deity of the Spirit) deny the full deity of the Spirit, supposing the 'Spirit' to merely be divine gifts.

17. *Threeness*: while the Scripture does indeed see a distinction of the Father from the Word, and the Word from the Spirit, we must be cautious and reverent in considering such distinctions. Gregory of Nazianzus is quoted with approval: 'I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three: nor can I discern the three without being straitway carried back to the one.' The words 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit' denote a real distinction, not a division. Calvin cites a number of passages from John's Gospel (1:3; 5:32; 8:16; 15:25; 17:5; 14:16) to confirm the Scripture's witness to the distinction of the Father and Son, and Son and Spirit.

18. *Difference of Father, Son and Spirit*: Calvin doubts the expediency of human comparisons or analogies to express these distinctions—at the best they are, as even the church fathers acknowledged, inadequate. Calvin refrains for two reasons, (i.) giving occasion to the malicious, and (ii.) deluding the ignorant. Those provided by the Scripture, however, are to be received. To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, as 'the fountain and wellspring of all things'; to the Son, wisdom, counsel and the orderly disposition of creation; to the Spirit is 'assigned the power and efficacy of that activity'. While there is no distinction of time, there is one of *order*: there is neither *before* or *after in* eternity, and the human mind, in contrast to the experience of faith, contemplates God first, then considers the wisdom as coming from God, and finally the 'power whereby he executes the decrees of his plan'. Calvin cites Romans 8 as further evidence for the dual procession of the Spirit, as the Spirit of the Father, and of the Son (following the Western form of the Nicene Creed).

19. *The relationship of Father, Son and Spirit*: 'in each hypostasis the whole divine nature is understood . . . [yet] to each belongs his own peculiar quality'. Calvin approves Augustine's view:

Christ with respect to himself is called God; with respect to the Father, Son. Again, the Father with respect to himself is called God; with respect to the Son, Father. In so far as he is called Father with respect to the Son, he is not the Son; in so far as he is called the Son with respect to the Father, he is not the Father; in so far as he is called both Father with respect to himself, and Son with respect to himself, he is the same God.

Augustine's position, which may be tabulated thus¹—

God (in Himself)
Father (in relation to the Son)

God (in Himself)
Son (in relation to the Father)

God (in Himself)
Holy Spirit (in relation to
Father and Son)

is developed expansively in his fifth book *On the Trinity*. Finally Calvin cautions, 'it is far safer to stop with that relation which Augustine sets forth than by too subtly penetrating into the sublime mystery to wander through many evanescent speculations.'

20. *The triune God*: 'when we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence, in which we comprehend three persons, or hypostases.' Hence, when the name 'God' is mentioned—without differentiation—all three persons are designated. Yet this same name also often applies particularly to the Father, as beginning and source, without any compromise to the full deity of the Son or Spirit. Further, the names 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit' all indicate a relationship among the persons. Hence, the whole essence of God is spiritual, comprehending Father, Son and Spirit.

(Refutation of anti-Trinitarian heresies, 21-29)

21. *The ground of all heresy: a warning to all*: Satan, as he has done in the past, continues to stir up 'ungodly spirits to harry orthodox teachers over this matter and today also is trying to kindle a new fire from the old embers.' That in question is the divine essence of the Son and the Spirit, and the distinction of persons. While Calvin's initial intention was *didactic* and *declarative* to the teachable, he must now turn to the *defence* of the truth. Such a great task calls for soberness, due to man's limited knowledge of God, and fidelity to the revealed word of God, not idle and inordinate curiosity.

22. *Servetus' contention against the Trinity*: to recite the catalogue of past errors and heresies would waste time and exhaust patience. Instead, our current task is to hold fast to what the Scripture has clearly disclosed—that is, the unity of essence and the distinction of persons. One contemporary erroneous view is that of Servetus, who evidently accused Trinitarians of being atheists. Calvin summed up Servetus' position as, (i.) the Trinity is 'tripartite when three persons are said to reside in his essence' (yet such a triad impugns God's unity), (ii.) 'Persons' are 'certain external ideas which do not truly subsist in God's essence, but represent God to us in one manifestation or another'. Servetus' 'theogony' (from $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ + $\gamma\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu\varsigma$ = 'God as parent': for Servetus there was no interval between the 'generation of the Son' and the human birth of Jesus Christ)² sees no distinction in God, at the beginning, since the Spirit and the Word were one and the same; but 'when Christ came forth as God from God, the Spirit proceeded from him as another God'. Further, God is in both the Son and Spirit, and, the Spirit 'being substantially in us and also in wood and stone, is a portion of God.' Hence, the Son and Spirit are indiscriminately mingled with all created things generally. Finally, 'the spirits of believers are coeternal and consubstantial with God, although he elsewhere assigns a substantial deity not only to the soul of man but to other created things.'

23. *The Son is God even as the Father*: further errors are now alluded to, with the views of Valentinus Gentile and others who at least avoid Servetus' impiety, and confessed the three persons, but then qualified this by arguing that the Father is truly and properly the sole God, the 'essentiator' (= essence giver), who infused his deity into the Son (it therefore being a

¹ Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin* (Baker: 1980), page 60.

² Battles, *op. cit.*, page 61.

derivative or abstracted from, God's own essence). This led to a distinction between the essence of God (ie. Father) on the one hand, and that of the Son and Spirit on the other. Calvin counters this by arguing that some differentiation in order is required for the Father to not be the Son. And without true essence, Christ's supposed deity is annihilated, and he is a God in name but not reality.

24. *The name 'God' in Scripture does not refer to the Father alone:* the opponents object that all unqualified references to God in the Scriptures must apply solely to the Father since 'unless the Father alone were truly God, he would be his own Father'. Calvin counters this absurdity with the fact that 'from the time that Christ was manifested in the flesh, he has been called the Son of God, not only in that he was the eternal Word begotten before all ages from the Father, but because he took upon himself the person and office of the mediator, that he might join us to God.' Further objections are answered by citations from Philippians 2:6-10 and John 4:23-24.

25. *The divine nature is common to all three Persons:* while others divide the divine essence between Father, Son and Spirit, we assert, with the Scripture, that God is one in essence. Their claim that we hold to a 'quaternity' (that is, of divine essence + three persons) is unfounded, since for us the unity lies in the essence, while Trinity in the persons. Taken to its logical conclusion, their position would be a Trinity comprised of 'the conjunction of the one God with two created things.'

26. *The subordination of the incarnate Word to the Father is no counterevidence:* our opponents cannot fathom why Christ, if properly God, should be called 'Son'. When Christ addressed God in John 17:3 as Son to Father, he was speaking as Mediator: this in no way compromised his own divinity, for it was included within the name 'God'. The highest rank afforded to the Father does not subordinate the Son to an secondary or inferior rank of deity beneath the Father's glory or essence: rather, 'because endowed with heavenly glory he gathers believers into participation in the Father. . . . Christ descended to us, to be us up to the Father, and at the same time to bear us up to himself, inasmuch as he is one with the Father.'

27. *Our adversaries falsely appeal to Irenaeus:* since Irenaeus asserted that the Father of Christ was the sole and eternal God of Israel, our opponents falsely presume that he rejected orthodoxy. Rather, he was combatting heretics who denied that the Old Testament God and the Father of Christ were one and the same. Our current dispute is with those who deny the same essential deity to Christ which they readily attribute to God the Father. Finally, there is overwhelming evidence in Irenaeus' work to prove that he acknowledged Christ as one and the same God as His Father.

28. *The appeal to Tertullian also is of no avail:* nor is Tertullian to be adopted as an advocate for our opponents. For Tertullian holds to the essential unity of the Godhead, but also allows within the divine dispensation or economy the distinction among the persons. And Tertullian's alleged subordination of the Son—'as second to the Father'—is not related to substance or essence, but economy.

29. *All acknowledged doctors of the church confirm the doctrine of the Trinity:* the claim by our opponents that Justin and Hilary support their cause is as baseless as their dependence on Irenaeus. Further, the alleged supportive citation from Ignatius is almost unanimously regarded as spurious. Augustine ('toward whom these rascals are most hostile') was conversant with the aforementioned fathers, approving their views: he also called the 'Father the beginning of all deity because he is from no one; and wisely considers that the name of God is especially ascribed to the Father because if the beginning comes not from him, the simple unity of God cannot be conceived.'

Calvin concludes that this completes his refutation of the 'chicaneries' by which Satan has endeavoured to pervert the truth of the doctrine. 'I trust that the whole sum of this doctrine has been faithfully explained, if my readers will impose a limit upon their curiosity, and not seek out for themselves more eagerly than is proper troublesome and perplexed disputations.'

§5. CALVIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO TRINITARIAN THOUGHT

The doctrine of God necessitates Trinity: 'The doctrine of the Trinity is not a special area of the Christian doctrine of God, but its overall epistemological framework and content. . . . It is concerned with participation in the Father by the Son in the Spirit.'¹

Calvin operated within the Western Church inheriting, as we have seen, the contributions of Augustine and Latin/Roman theology (with their stress on judicial-forensic soteriological theories) as compared with the Eastern (Cappodocians, and the retention of the communal/relational). Could he break free from the 'Latin heresy', meld the fragmented pieces of a consistent and authentic view of the Trinity together, and maintain such authenticity throughout his thought and praxis? If so, what would be the critical features of such a work, what implications could and/or would he draw from his understanding of the Trinity for the rest of his 'theology', and what elements identify Calvin's particular contribution to Trinitarian theology?

5:1. PARTICULAR TRINITARIAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Calvin's thought and expression is marked by simplicity, in his selection of relevant details, the structures within which they are considered, and the exposition of his reflections. The initial context for his treatment of the Trinity in the *Institutes* was following the discussion of Christ as the sole object of faith. But in the final, the 1559 edition, it was placed in the section dealing with the first Article of the Creed (the Creator): with faith treated later in Book III on the Spirit, the doctrine is here presented, without epistemological preparation. In so doing, he still acknowledged the critical place of Christology in his treatment, but indicated that the Trinity governs our whole understanding of God, and so creation, redemption and sanctification.

When we consider his actual treatment of the Trinity, we note his stress on the full essence of the persons, and the close/intimate connection of all outer actions with the inner essence of God as Father Son and Spirit. This means that the outer actions are not arbitrary, but reflect the actual internal relations of the Godhead.

We noted above that Calvin was accused of being Sabellian and Arianist in his views: his exposition counters such charges by affirming that the Christ is the eternal Yahweh: hence, whatever is said of the Father as God may (must) be said of the second Person. Therefore, he argues, Christ is not merely pre-existent but self-existent. And, the Trinity is self-existent, not merely one person being distinct from the others. Following his argument through, we find that the twin questions of subordinationism (that is, viewing and speaking—and so subjecting—of God in human terms and ideas) and modalism (which argues that certain actions must be alien to God in His fulness) are both dismissed. In his elimination of any remnants of subordinationism with his stress on the word *αυτοθεοτης* of the Son, Calvin at last expounds the full deity of Christ, to be affirmed within and by the Church. And Calvin is just as adamant about the full deity of the Spirit.

When we turn to the matter of terminology, especially as raised by his opponents, who claimed that the notion of 'trinity' was alien to the Scriptures, Calvin acknowledged that while the term 'trinity' may not be explicitly 'Biblical', the witness to its meaning and veracity may not be questioned. Two brief examples may be cited: (i.) historically the revelation which came in and through Christ (He consistently called God His Father, and the climactic event of Pentecost baptising the Church with the Spirit) identified for the Church the distinct persons of the Godhead, while affirming the concerted action of the Father, Son and Spirit; and (ii.) he notes that baptism is into the One Name (cf attributes which are essentially integral to all of God's 'modes') of God, yet this remains Christological (in the name of Jesus/Christ). And when others suggested that while the Scriptures failed to employ the word 'trinity', creation itself provided adequate expressions to indicate and clarify the 'trinity of God', Calvin rejected such notions of *vestigia trinitas* as unfounded.

¹ Dietrich Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology*, (SCM: 1986), page 144.

5:2. FURTHER IMPLICATIONS OF CALVIN'S THOUGHT

Assuming his view of the Trinity to be sound, simple and yet sublime, Calvin worked out the implications of his position. Following Athanasius, that only if Christ is God is there any ontological union of God and Man, Calvin went on to argue for the believer's union with Christ, and Christ's vicarious humanity.¹ That is, in the ontological union of God with man, in Christ there is full carnal, cognitive and spiritual union with man, yet as Son He shares the fullness of Godhead. Further, by coming to know Christ, the believer receives the benefits or blessing offered in and by Christ (thereby experiencing evangelical rather than legal repentance). Here Calvin has seen the inseparable union of the divine giver and gift, and stressed the self-giving and self-expression of God in Christ—he has countered the 'Latin heresy'. And while Calvin argued that such was confirmed by his own experience, he also argued that such notions were not mere subjectivism, for this was a necessary corollary of his high view of the objective God being united with man in Christ.

Further, since he saw the Trinity as governing all salvation in the life, death and resurrection of the incarnate and eternal Word Son, Calvin went on to discern the whole of the Christian's life as Trinitarian and incarnational. This is seen in his views on the sacraments, prayer, vocation, sanctification (the avoidance of idolatry and the mortification of the flesh), the ministry and mission of the Church, and the eschatology of hope for creation-at-large, with the promised new creation already present and realised in and by Christ. And what the Trinitarian God has already accomplished for creation in Christ is being applied by the Spirit, with the destination of all in the Elect One secured by the omnipotent holy grace of God, and to be reached by the people of God with Christ.

John Calvin set his treatment of the true God in the face of idolatry: he urged the Church to reject all idolatry and return to its former loyalty to not only orthodox credal statements, but to a full and rich experience of the Trinity in daily life. His prime concern, in concert with his fellow reformers, was not to venture beyond the testimony of the Scriptures, and the witness of the Spirit, who co-inheres the very being of God, and so is the one through whom God bears witness to Himself. Defending the truth of the Trinity against enemies of the truth, Calvin lay his stress on unity of essence, the distinction of the persons, and subordination without any further explanation. And in declaring the truth, he rehabilitated the life of the Church to a fully Trinitarian and incarnational participation in the very life of God through Christ. But would his understanding be appreciated and appropriated by the Church?

§6. CALVIN, CALVINISTS AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

6:1 THE TWIN DANGERS OF UNITARIANISM AND TRITHEISM

The Medieval Church faced the constant dangers of formal or functional unitarianism and tritheism. Calvin and his fellow reformers recovered the balanced and consistent view of the Trinity. But within a short time their followers had lapsed back into one or other extreme, or simply took for granted their view of the Trinity. In fact, to all intents and purposes, Trinitarian theology was eclipsed—again.²

6:2 THE ECLIPSE OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The views of Luther and Calvin were soon displaced by those who perpetuated the 'Latin heresy'. On the one hand the pietists and liberals continued the line of Renaissance thinking to its conclusion, in the morass of subjectivism (also confusing the human spirit with the Holy Spirit):

¹ Trevor Hart, 'Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as participation in Our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin' in *SJT*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1989, pages 67-84.

² See, for example, M Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (The Handsel Press: 1985), for a discussion of the doctrine of assurance, and the wider theological framework of 'covenant' see James B Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland' in *SJT*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1970.

on the other, a sterile scholasticism (with a displaced obsession with theological systems, almost believed to have quasi-hypostatic significance) gradually overtook and froze and fossilized much of the Reformed Churches into objectivism.

Against such extremes few clarion calls were heard. Among them may be named, in Scotland, for example, John McLeod Campbell, PT Forsyth and James Denney (but note that both Forsyth and Denney lacked a high view of the incarnation, and saw it simply as instrumental). All three stood for the objective revelation of God, the divine self-giving in Christ, the reconciliation and redemption accomplished and applied by the Trinity. In doing so, they rejected both the liberals' loss of the objective action of God in human history, as well as the evangelicals' cold orthodoxy, which had confused its formulations of the Gospel (also its soteriological obsession), often making the permanent and absolute message of the Church contingent on prevailing—but temporary and relativistic—philosophical systems.

When the evangelicals did speak out, they failed to gain much of a hearing. For example, in one of their most significant publishing ventures—entitled *The Fundamentals*—there is no treatment of the Trinity! But in 1917 the theologians' self-indulgence and complacency was shattered—a bomb exploded in their playground! Karl Barth gave notice that the agenda was to be changed, and the Trinity was again at the head of items for consideration.

6:3 THE RECOVERY OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY—KARL BARTH

The most extensive contemporary treatment of the Trinity is by Karl Barth (1886-1968), who affirmed the Trinity as the ground and governor of his theology. Over against Schleiermacher, for whom the Trinity was a mere appendix to his *The Christian Faith*, Barth saw the Trinity as providing the logic and dynamic of theology. Three points stand out in his *Dogmatics*: (i.) the Trinity is situated in the theological *prolegomena*, instead of its usual place in the doctrine of God; (ii.) it is considered from the standpoint of *revelation*, as God makes possible and actual his self-expression in Jesus Christ, as God the Lord in unity yet also as Father, Son and Spirit (with the Son being the Word and Image of the Father, and the Spirit being the One who discloses the Image and communicates the Word); and (iii.) the term 'person' is abandoned, since its meaning has suffered radically throughout the history of doctrine, as is 'modalism'. Barth appears to have taken up Calvin's use of the expression 'modes of being' within God.

Over against Barth, Emil Brunner (1889-1966) considered the Trinity to be a second-order doctrine, and rejected the Athanasian articulation of the Trinity. He argued that,

we must honestly admit that the doctrine of the Trinity did not form part of the early Christian—New Testament—message, nor has it been a central article of faith in the religious life of the Christian Church as a whole, at any period in its history. . . . The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity, established by the dogma of the ancient Church, is not a Biblical *kerygma*, therefore it is not the *kerygma* of the Church, but it is a theological doctrine which defends the central faith of the Bible and of the Church. Hence it does not belong to the sphere of the Church's message, but it belongs to the sphere of theology. . . . The idea of a "Triune God" does not form part of the witness and message of Primitive Christianity.¹

Since Barth and Brunner brought the truth of the Trinity back 'into the limelight', a number of major treatments have been offered the Church. For a survey of recent Trinitarian trends, we recommend the reader consult the illuminating article by John Thompson (himself a student of Barth, and fan of PT Forsyth!). In passing, we note that Process theology has little place for the Trinity, and Liberation, Black, Feminist, Death of God (that is, by the Cross, God died in/as Christ) theologies stray from, and target Calvin's view of the Trinity as irrelevant, outmoded, naive, or incomprehensible. Nevertheless, at the end of the twentieth century, the Church is being forced to reconsider this critical issue, and hopefully, return to a consistent understanding of the Trinity. Certainly such a return would necessitate a reformation of thought and praxis within the Church: such a reformation would receive the acclamation of the great Reformer—John Calvin.

¹ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God Dogmatics*: Vol. 1 (Westminster Press: 1950), pages 206-207, 217.

CONCLUSION

John Calvin's contribution to the Church's understanding of the Trinity was significant and salutary, and finally secured the 'orthodox' position within the life and ministry of the Church. Hearing and heeding the testimony of the Scriptures, guided by the confirmatory witness of the Church Fathers, Calvin retrieved the truth of the Trinity from heresy and re-established the Trinity as central to the Church's experience and exposition of the Gospel of the self-giving of God in Christ. While many—both before and since Calvin—have failed to acknowledge the triune God whom he worshipped and served, we are called with the Church to know the triune God, and in our knowing, offer our glad response to the Father, through (and with) the incarnate Son, by the Spirit.

Finally, just as Calvin was ready to invoke and approve the witness of others (especially Gregory's comment noted above), so we echo the words and sentiment of Jonathan Edwards, 'I would not be understood to pretend to give a full explication of the Trinity; for I think it still remains an incomprehensible mystery, the greatest and the most glorious of all mysteries.'¹

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¹ Miscellany 308 'Trinity': in *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from His Private Notebooks*, ed. H G Townsend (Greenwood Press: 1977), page 260.