

THE CHURCH AND THE TRINITY

By Dr. Geoffrey Dobbs

The following article is recommended to the close study of those Christians concerned about the failure of Church spokesmen to give an authoritative lead in demonstrating that the Doctrine of The Trinity is of the greatest importance to any consideration of the realities of politics and the principles governing human associations:

Every Trinity Sunday I make a point of going to church, usually a different one, in the hope of hearing a faithful and convincing exposition of the central doctrine of Christianity, and, hitherto, I have always been disappointed. Indeed, recently, I have not even heard that 'Confession of our Christian Faith, commonly called the Creed of Saint Athanasius' sung or said on the day dedicated to the Holy Trinity; and the last time I heard it (it was three years ago) it was 'explained away' in the sermon as an out-of-date formula, devised by the early Church to defend the unity of the Godhead (with no mention of the *diversity*) against certain heresies which are now only of historical interest.

Only of historical interest! No wonder the Church itself is deemed to be irrelevant to 'this modern age' if it cannot see the direct relevance of this unique, precise, lucid and immensely valuable exposition of the nature of God as revealed to us by His acts of the Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit, to our situation at the present time.

How could it be anything but relevant to the situation at any time? But at this time of all times, when, as in the early Christian centuries, all sorts of perversions of the Faith are rampant, and none more so than modern variations of the two particular heresies which the *Quicumque Vult* was especially designed to correct, how pitiful it is that the Church should be setting aside the lesson which it teaches, and blinding itself to the very dangers from which it was our shield and protection; and all this, in the name of keeping abreast with the times!

It is true enough that the Church must be prepared to change and adapt itself to new knowledge and new events and an ever-changing world situation if it is to survive; but survival implies life, and living adaptation implies continuity and growth, not the destructive gelatinisation of its essential character, which is what seems to be happening, in its attempt to merge with its environment. Are there no new insights to be had from this tremendous revelation, which is still relatively new if viewed in terms of human history?

To begin with, some of the ancient heresies seem scarcely to have changed at all during the intervening centuries; others have taken different forms, but their essential errors remain the same: either they divide the Unity, or they confound the Persons, of God.

Sabellianism, or modalism, which trivializes the three Persons into mere aspects or modes of manifestation of one Divine Person is very fashionable today. A sure sign of it is the selection of the most trivial meaning of the word *persona* to denote an actor's mask, thus retrogressing our faith's image of God to that of a Monarchical Jehovah, merely play-acting with his people by appearing to them in different guises. The practical significance of such a belief as it works out in human affairs is catastrophic.

As for Arianism, which 'divided the substance' of God by placing the Son and the Spirit at a lower level of Godhead than the Father, there are all sorts of it current today among the speculations of the theologians, who will, no doubt, find little difficulty in pointing out the differences. But these are all matters of detail of minor importance. The destructive essence of the heresy is that it makes Jesus something less than God Himself, whether he is a sort of Junior God, an angel, or merely a very special sort of human being with a special sort of relationship with God, or even a rather remarkable Jewish rabbi. Whatever it may be, it entirely changes our idea of the love of our Creator, which required Him to give Himself for our salvation. If the ultimate reality of love is that it requires the sacrifice of someone else, then the Universe is quite a different place, and the belief in this is quite a different religion from Christianity, and ought not to masquerade under the same title.

In the same way, if we are Modalists, or Monarchists or Unitarians of one sort or another, who deny the reality of the Persons of the Trinity, then we exclude all those properties which belong to diversity from our idea of the Godhead, including those of mutualism in love, of association and of diversification, which is of the essence of creation. We have set limits upon God, and reverted to an earlier, childish conception of Him as the autocratic Monarch and Dictator of the Universe, whose love is the apotheosis of self-love, even though it may be extended to His creatures, which can be no more than extensions of His homogeneous Self.

Among other forms of ancient heresies which are in tremendous vogue today are innumerable sorts of Gnosticism, combining elements of Christianity with the what is believed to be the secret wisdom and illumination of the East, as

purveyed by a variety of 'gurus'. Salvation is through man's own 'wisdom' and by the practice of certain 'techniques', but the whole multifarious movement also tends towards the merging of all religions into one World Religion incorporating 'the truths' from all the others, which, however, may be retained as different 'ways' to the truth through Christ, Mahomet, Moses, Marx, Buddha etc. In passing, it may be noted that this tendency, which is destructive of all religions, but most of all of Christianity, runs very conveniently parallel with the obvious drive towards World political domination.

The other formidable heresy of the ancient world, Manichaeism, with its belief in an eternal dualism of conflict between God and Satan as the ultimate reality, survived for at least twelve centuries and kept bursting up again and again, even within mediaeval Christendom. Now it towers over more than half the world and permeates the other half, including the Churches, in a form which, because of its superficial differences, seems to deceive the learned and to be obvious only to those with a simple grasp of essentials. But because Marxism-Leninism, with its materialism and atheism, rejects both God and Satan, it is not thought of as a religious heresy, and its fundamental identity with Manichaean dualism is seldom pointed out. Yet its philosophy of dialectical materialism is now imposing its policy of continuous conflict and confrontation upon the whole world. As Lenin said: "Development is the 'struggle' of opposites" and "dialectics is the study of the contradiction *within the very essence of things*".

It is beyond my understanding how it can be that the Church, after maintaining, century after century, its dynamic equilibrium in the glorious revelation of the Triune nature of God against the battering of these heresies, should now to so large an extent be abandoning its hold upon its own faith and policy, and is now so often to be seen, publicly and increasingly following an infidel World into the related errors of Monopoly (or Totalitarianism) and Dualism in the form of dialectical confrontation, instead of leading the World out of them. Instead of stressing and expounding in the clearest terms the tremendous constructive and healing significance of the Athanasian Creed for a World torn with conflict for monopolistic power, the Churches, especially the Anglican and the Nonconformists, have almost abandoned it, in practice, if not in precept, for the heresies it was designed to correct.

If indeed Lenin was right, then the creative power of the universe is not love, but conflict, and the ultimate reality is divided against itself, whether we think of it as a personal God or an impersonal, and misinterpreted, Darwinian 'struggle for existence'. At this point I am not even arguing that Lenin was not right, but

only that, for anyone who believes that he was, the Christian religion is a load of fantasy, quite out of touch with reality, and the whole of it, and not merely the Athanasian Creed, ought to be abandoned, as most people have already abandoned it for lack of any clear statement of what it amounts to. At present the Anglican trumpet is making such a confusion of dissonant, contradictory, and pitifully uncertain squawks that the natural reaction of many is to walk quietly away from it in search of some crowd of people who really seem to know what tune they are playing.

There are still a very large number of people who were born and brought up as Anglicans (or at least, 'C. of E.') and who still feel a sort of loyalty to it as they do to their family, their old school or their country (right or wrong) but can no longer feel any enthusiasm or want to take any real part in something that looks so very like a rather feeble and servile imitation of the secular political world, with a positively eager plasticity to current fashion and mass prejudice. Considering that most of us are already bored to tears (when not driven to the verge of vomiting) by the dreary nastiness of the secular world, as presented to us continually by the media, it is really quite unreasonable to expect us to show more than a lukewarm interest in a Church which tries so desperately to adapt itself to every prevailing 'trend', and to reconstruct the fundamentals of its theology to fit every 'situation' which may be brought about by the vicious use of centralised financial or political power.

Of course, I know very well that there are many parish churches of which this is quite untrue; but it is true of the 'image' presented by the Anglican Church as a whole, now that it has adopted the main prejudices which are associated with modern dialectical 'democracy' with its implicit belief in verbal confrontation followed by the numbering of opinions. There is now scarcely a single fundamental element in the Christian Faith which is not being subjected to the dialectic process of public questioning and confusion from *within*, and not only from without the Church: the Fatherhood of the Father, the Sonship of the Son, the occurrence of the Resurrection, the reality of the Trinity, the virginity of the Virgin, the existence of Hell and of the Devil; indeed, even the existence of any reality corresponding to the meaning traditionally given to the word 'God' is challenged, not only by the declared enemies of Christianity, but by eminent theologians within the churches. In a world in which the word 'discrimination' has been politically inverted into a hate-word, there is no difficulty in confusing this sort of destructive dialectics with genuine, constructive discussion.

As a result, the churches, and especially the Anglican Communion, appear to be committing suicide. No doubt the rapid and flexible production of 'situation theologies' to suit the requirements of the manufacturers of 'world situations' and the manipulators of public opinions is very 'exciting' for the production team, as well as conducive to employment in the logging, pulping, ink-making, printing and publishing trades and the broadcasting media, but for the consumer the product is of negative value (like so many other products which the producers thrust upon us for their own purposes these days). If he swallows it, his own Christian faith (if any) is poisoned and weakened, sometimes fatally, while he is offered nothing to replace it in any way comparable in its precision, satisfaction and effectiveness.

There appears to be a general tendency for people to project their own errors upon others, and it is especially those whose religion has gelatinized into a vague, mystical, inter-personal emotion of 'concern' between the units of the human herd, and who shy away from anything so definite as 'doctrine' or 'dogma' as from a thorn-bush, who may be heard declaring that the Athanasian Creed is too 'mystical', obscure and incomprehensible to have any meaning in this day and age. The reverse appears to me to be true. Of course all language about God is metaphor, and we can think about Him only by analogies with our limited human experience; which is why, no doubt, our Lord taught us by parables from everyday life. But even the Creed itself tells us that there are not three incomprehensible, but one incomprehensible, that is, God; yet it is the doctrine of the Trinity which is commonly supposed to be especially 'incomprehensible'; and it is this, of all things, which is nowadays so commonplace, so familiarly built into our thinking, that it is taken for granted.

Consider how we think about our Universe of space, time and matter: all these three are trinities of one 'substance' or 'nature' but of three wholly distinct 'personas' or 'characters'. Space has its three dimensions; time its past, present and future, though it is significant that in Marxist thought the present is virtually abolished and time reduced to a duality — an everlasting struggle between the old and the new, the dying past and the developing future. Matter, again, has its three phases, solid, liquid, gas; all quite different, yet all of the same substance. A tripod is the 'first' thing, which will stand, since it requires a minimum of three equal forces to establish a stable equilibrium. There may, in fact, be more than three forces in equilibrium, but these can always be resolved into three, and not less than three. There is no stability in a monopod or a bipod.

When we come to human affairs, here again we find stability in tri-unity. The family, the basis of society, is triune, of father, mother and child or children. Under the prolonged influence of Christianity, Britain, the U.S.A., and the nations of the Commonwealth as well as many others which have imitated them, developed a triune constitution; in Britain of Crown, Lords and Commons; in the U.S.A. and her many imitators, President, Senate and House of Representatives. In World affairs, the balance of power between at least three major blocks is essential to the maintenance of peace, and what we most fear is a breakdown of this balance so that we are confronted with a duality of opposing World Powers, or an overwhelming preponderance of one Power.

Whenever and wherever a trinity breaks down or becomes unbalanced, monopoly or dualistic conflict takes its place with disastrous results, and monopoly itself always creates internal conflict among those struggling to reach the apex of power, which conflict is frequently directed outwards into aggressive warfare. The dualistic religion of Marxism is by now by far the most aggressive power in the world, psychologically, terroristically and militarily. It aims at total domination with no toleration of rival or counterbalancing powers, and even in its milder forms as seen in British socialist politics, it exhibits an arrogant impatience with the slight hindrance which the much enfeebled revisionist Chamber of the Lords and the vestiges of political power left to the Crown are still capable of giving to the will of the elected dictatorship of the Commons. The world is now torn with inter-socialist wars and terrorisms and hostilities, now that the fascist reaction has been reduced by conquest to a very minor element. Since the defeat of America, not so much in the jungles of Vietnam as on the campuses of the U.S.A., the sole organised resistance to the world dominance of totalitarian collectivism is that which survives in Southern Africa, which, no doubt, explains why about one-two-hundredth part of the world population is almost universally denounced as an intolerable menace to the rest of the world.

In personal affairs, the abandonment of a Trinitarian concept is resulting in the breakdown of family life, as indicated, for instance, by the current misnomer 'one-parent family', referring not to a family which has lost one of its parents but to a duality of mother and child which never was a family, or to a family broken in two halves by divorce. The idea, also, that a child in a woman's womb is merely a part of her body over which she has totalitarian powers of monopoly, including life and death, is essentially anti-Trinitarian.

There are, of course, fashionable ways of evading careful consideration of these facts, of pretending they are not facts by denouncing them as some sort of

'numerism' or superstition about the magic properties of the number three; or some sort of illogical deduction of the nature of God from some chance occurrences of trinities in the Universe. But that is not the way it happened. The nature of the Holy and Ultimate Trinity was first revealed to men by the acts of God recorded in the New Testament. It was only after this revelation that the Trinitarian structure of the Universe gradually became apparent, opening the door to the immense power liberated by the growth of modern science, as well as to the concept of a balance of powers in human affairs.

The simpler trinities of the physical and temporal world are now so built in to our consciousness as to be taken for granted, but as we lose our hold of faith and imagination upon the reality of the Ultimate Trinity our moral and spiritual powers are becoming detached from our mental and physical ones as our world lurches back into conflict between monopolies of grossly magnified power.

It is pitiful that the modern Christian should so often flinch away in such namby-pamby fashion from the firm realism of the *Quicunque Vult* in its assertion that to think correctly about the Ultimate Reality is essential to salvation. Are there no such hard consequences attendant upon the lesser trinities — say, for instance, that of water? May one 'confound the phases' of water without penalty by diving head first into a frozen pool? And what of the man or woman whose sense of time confuses past, present and future, or whose spatial sense cannot distinguish between right and left, up and down? Or what, again, of 'dividing the substance' as might some inhabitant of the tropics, crash-landed among arctic or alpine snows, who obstinately refuses to believe that this white stuff is that same water which he needs to live? Could we even exist if we carried such confusions regularly into practice; for it is clear that it is the outcome in practice of thinking which carries the consequences of both life and death? There is no salvation in mere knowledge, but life has to be accepted and not rejected.

It seems that, while these everyday trinities are accepted as realities, the Ultimate Trinity is becoming increasingly unreal to many Christians — a matter of theological speculation and opinion, a vague idea unrelated to everyday life and mainly of academic interest. In science, in business, in the practical affairs of life we do not operate on such vague ideas without disaster; and indeed we see the consequences of such abandonment of reality in family life, and in social, political and economic affairs generally; and in the Church the same rot is far gone. It is impossible to progress, to go anywhere except down into the mud or to do anything constructive when immersed in a quagmire. We are the rich

inheritors of the revelation of the Triune Nature of God which, far from entitling us to rest smugly upon it as if we were the possessors of all truth, is, and was surely intended to be, a firm basis on which to carry out the first duty of man - to grow in love and understanding of his Creator. But how can we do this if we abandon this firm basis of our faith and wallow in a mire of contemporary 'feelings' and 'opinions'? Is it not a first essential, especially for those who want to advance and progress in the Christian faith, to return to the firm path they have left, and to look again at the great Confession of the *Quicumque Vult* in a fresh and practical way?

The Athanasian Creed

WHOSOEVER WILL BE SAVED,

before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith.
Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled,
without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this:

That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity,
neither confounding the Persons,
nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father,
another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.
But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the
Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.
Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.
The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible,
and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.
The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal.
As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated,
but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty,
and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three
Almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God,
and the Holy Ghost is God.
And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord,
and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge
every Person by himself to be both God and Lord,
So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say,
There be three Gods, or three Lords.
The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.
The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son,
neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons;
one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other;
none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons
are co-eternal together and co-equal.

So that in all things, as is aforesaid,
the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
He therefore that will be saved is must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also
believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess,
that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;
God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds;
and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world;
Perfect God and perfect Man,
of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the
Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man,
yet he is not two, but one Christ;

One, not by conversion of the Godhead
into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God;
One altogether; not by confusion of Substance,
but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul
and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ;
Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell,
rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father,
God Almighty, from whence he will come
to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies
and shall give account for their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life
everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully,
he cannot be saved.