Part I

Introduction

1 Developments of the doctrine of the Trinity

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"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:18–19, NRSV). So is Jesus reported to have said to his eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee. While biblical scholars dispute whether these words are Jesus' *ipsissima verba* or a baptismal formula of the early church retroactively placed on Jesus' lips, the verse is an incontrovertible indication that faith in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whose name (note the singular "name" and not "names") baptism is administered, is already present in the New Testament itself.[1] It has been correctly pointed out that the Christian faith in the Trinity should not be understood to be based exclusively on explicitly triadic formulae such as the above-cited verse, 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Peter 1:2, and so on. Rather, the trinitarian data of the New Testament include all the exceedingly numerous texts that speak of the relationship between Jesus and the Father, between Jesus and the Spirit, between the Father and the Spirit, and among the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit.[2] Indeed, the literary structure itself of most New Testament books is arguably trinitarian.[3] In addition, the reality of the Trinity is present not only in certain New Testament formulations but also in the events of Jesus' life and ministry, in particular his conception, baptism, transfiguration, and death and resurrection, and at the Pentecost. Finally, it can reasonably be claimed that there are already intimations or adumbrations of the Trinity in the Old Testament such as the many names used for God (e.g., Wisdom, Word, Spirit), the "angel of Yahweh" figure, and some theophanies (e.g., the three men in Gen 18:1–2 or the threefold Sanctus of Isaiah's vision in Isa 6:3).

While all these observations are correct, it does not mean that a full-fledged *doctrine* of the Trinity is already developed in the New Testament. As the various chapters of this book show, the road that leads from the New Testament embryonic affirmations on the Trinity to

contemporary trinitarian theologies is a long, meandering, and tortuous one, at times disappearing and reappearing in the thicket of Christian doctrines. Despite the organic metaphors occasionally deployed for it that conjure a steady and accumulative growth (e.g., the acorn growing into an oak tree), doctrinal development has never been a linear evolution progressing from better to best. Rather, the history of Christian doctrines often exhibits a recurrent pattern of growth, decline, eclipse, retrieval, and possibly growth again, to which a variety of factors, including political pressure, have contributed. The intent of this introductory chapter is not to recount all and sundry developments in trinitarian theology but to outline some of the key forces and agencies that have provided the impetus for and shaped the developments of trinitarian theology, not all the stages of which constitute progress and advancement.

FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

The first and perhaps the most fundamental of these forces and agencies is the very dynamics of faith itself. Though not rational, faith is a reasonable act and as such contains within itself an irresistible drive to understand itself, by determining precisely *what* it is to be believed, understanding its *meaning*, judging the grounds for its *truth*, and evaluating its moral *value* and *practical implications*. With regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, the early Christians face the task of reconciling in a conceptually coherent way their (Jewish) belief in the one God (monotheism) and their experience and consequent affirmation of the Father's, Jesus', and the Spirit's divine status and their distinct personal actions on their lives. To put it schematically, they believe that there is only one God (Deut 6:4), yet they experience – differently and distinctly – that the Father is God, that Jesus the Son is God, and that the Spirit is God. The effort to reconcile unity and plurality in God is not a matter of solving a mathematical conundrum or a metaphysical puzzle of how one is three and three is one. Rather, early Christians are compelled to account for the three distinct ways in which the one God is experienced as present and active in their lives and in the history of salvation – that God, who is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, creates, saves, and sanctifies humans, not simply as three different and successive ways or roles in which God acts toward them but as three truly different personal "entities." These three "entities" however do not constitute three Gods but one God.

At the heart of this theological account is not a metaphysical speculation about the structure of the cosmos or the nature of the divine in the tradition of Greek philosophy but an attempt at holding together, for pastoral and spiritual purposes, two apparently contradictory *experiences*, namely, that God is one *and* that God is plural, insofar as the one God is perceived as acting in distinct modes as Father, Son, and Spirit. This is done primarily in narrative style, by telling the story of God's involvement with humanity and in the world as distinct agents. The word "person" is not yet used to designate these actors, even though they act with unmistakably personal characteristics such as understanding, freedom, and love. Rather, terms that are already familiar in the Old Testament discourse about God, such as "Father," "Son," "Word," "Wisdom," and "Spirit," are pressed into service to refer to these divine agents, not so much in their eternal mutual relationships (what theologians call the "immanent," "transcendental" Trinity) but in their relationships to and activities on behalf of humans (the "economic" Trinity). Later, a more technical terminology and conceptual apparatus will be adopted from Greek and Latin languages and philosophies to distinguish these three personal agents (*who* they are) from their nature (*what* they are) and from each other (their reciprocal *relations*). These terms and philosophies are not however used to discover new ideas about God but to express faithfully and accurately what experience has already taught Christians about *what* and *who* God is.

HERESIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

In carrying out this task of "faith seeking understanding" – to use a definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* by the eleventh-century theologian Anselm of Canterbury – it is inevitable that errors are committed, one-sided affirmations made, and inadequate perspectives adopted. To understand these errors it is helpful to remember that the theologians who are condemned as heresiarchs did not intentionally set out to innovate, itching for novelty and originality. Rather they were seriously concerned with the question of salvation and were engaged in the pastoral task of expressing the truths of faith in ways that would make sense to their contemporaries.[4] In so doing however they emphasized only one aspect rather maintaining the whole of the Christian faith. Faced with two apparently contradictory statements, they did not have a capacious enough analogical imagination to hold both of them in a creative and intellectually unresolvable tension of "both-and" but

opted for the seductive clarity of "either-or," affirming one alternative and denying the other.

With regard to the Trinity, there are, theoretically speaking, two possibilities: either to affirm unity and deny plurality in God, and vice versa. All trinitarian heresies are but variations on these two "choices" (that is what the Greek *hairesis* means). *Tritheism*, which privileges God's plurality, while common among "pagans," was not a live option for early Christians, who adhered strictly to Jewish monotheism, even though it remains a constant danger in popular imagination, especially when the term "person" is used to refer to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Because of the heavily psychological connotation of the word "person" in contemporary usage, it is a natural temptation to imagine that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit constitute three distinct consciousnesses, three centers of activity, three concrete beings. That is why theologians as different as Augustine, Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner were reluctant to use the term "person" and coined other phrases such as *Seinsweise* (modes of being: Barth) or distinct *Subsistenzweise* (manners of subsisting: Rahner) to refer to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The alternative option, that of privileging God's unity, known as *monarchianism*, arises in connection with the issue of the identity of Jesus. Confessing the Son as divine is seen by some as jeopardizing the godhead of the one God who is the Father. It takes two main forms. The first, attributed to Theodotus, Artemon, and Paul of Samosata, is called *dynamic monarchianism* or *adoptionism*, and according to this Jesus is a human being whom God adopts as his son at his incarnation or baptism. The second, attributed to Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius, is called *modalism*; according to this the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three "ways" or "modes" or "faces" in which the one God acts in history but there is no real distinction among them. Another version of modalism is *patripassianism*, which holds that Jesus is God the Father who is incarnated and suffers as the Son.

The most (in)famous proponent of the oneness of God to the detriment of the divinity of the Son is the fourth-century Alexandrian presbyter Arius, according to whom the Son, being created, is inferior to the Father. For him God is an absolutely immaterial substance who cannot generate any son from his substance but only creates another being through an act of the will. The Son, though created, is however a perfect creature and is therefore superior to all other creatures. In fact, like Plato's demiurge, he is an intermediate being between the absolute, inaccessible, and unknowable one God and the material world.

Arius' trinitarian theology, later given an extreme form by Aetius and his disciple Eunomius and called *anomoean* (dissimilar), asserts a total dissimilarity between the Son and the Father.

Arianism is fiercely opposed by Athanasius of Alexandria and condemned by the Council of Nicaea (325), whose teaching affirms that the nature/substance/essence of the Son is the same as or identical to (*homoousios*) that of the Father and that therefore he is fully divine and equal to the Father. There is also the mediating position between Arius and Nicaea, espoused by Basil of Ancyra and several bishops friendly to the imperial court, which says that the Son is neither dissimilar nor identical in nature to the Father but only similar (*homoiousios*) to him.

However one judges these different trinitarian theologies, it is undeniable that heresies – in the early church and at any other stage of history – have played an important function in the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. At the very least they compel the church to clarify its beliefs, provide them with scriptural warrants, elaborate arguments in their defense, show their connections with other doctrines, display their import for Christian living, and express them in a language appropriate for its contemporaries. These tasks lead us to the next factor in the development of the trinitarian doctrine.

CRITICAL DIALOGUE WITH CONTEMPORARY CULTURES

In expounding the church's beliefs to their contemporaries, theologians necessarily enter into dialogue with the cultural resources of their times. These conversation partners normally include philosophy, but not exclusively; other disciplines have been brought into conversation with theology such as literature, psychology, sociology, religious studies, and the so-called hard sciences (e.g., biology, astrophysics, and medicine), especially today. This dialogue is known by various names such as "indigenization," "contextualization," "localization," or "inculturation." It is important to note that the gospel is not a divine message devoid of cultures, to be implanted in its pristine purity in other cultures. In fact, it is already laden with cultural elements (e.g., Jewish and Greek), so that the encounter between the gospel and other cultures is more properly viewed as an *intercultural* process. Furthermore, this intercultural encounter is not simply as a one-direction movement, from the gospel to cultures, as if the gospel only enriches other cultures and itself remains unaffected by them. On the contrary, both the gospel and the cultures enrich, complement, and even correct each other in the process.

In trinitarian theology, the first intercultural encounter is between the Christian faith and Greek and Latin languages and philosophy. Started already in the New Testament, it culminates at the Council of Nicaea, when the council decides to adopt the term *homoousios* to explain the divinity of Jesus, even though it is not a biblical term and has been used by Sabellius in a modalist sense. At other times, the church adopts a common term but modifies its meaning. For example, whereas *ousia* (being) and *hypostasis* (substance) are strictly speaking synonyms and are still used in this way by Nicaea, in the writings of the Cappadocians, that is, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, they are assigned totally different connotations, with *ousia* taken to mean what is common and abstract (Aristotle's "first substance"), and *hypostasis* what is proper and concrete (Aristotle's "second substance"). Eventually, the formula "*mia ousia* [one substance] *treis hypostaseis* [three persons]" is applied to the Trinity.[5] Another term, *prosopon*, literally meaning a face, mask, or role, is used (more frequently in Gregory of Nyssa) as equivalent to *hypostasis* but without any modalist undertone. In the East, the word *trias* is first used by Theophilus of Antioch. In the West, the third-century African theologian Tertullian coins the word *trinitas* and uses *substantia* and *persona* as equivalents of *ousia* and *prosopon* (or *hypostasis*) respectively.

Furthermore, trinitarian theology was developed not only with linguistic borrowings but also by adopting certain currents of philosophy. Early Apologists such as Justin and Theophilus of Antioch make use of Stoicism and Platonism, the latter as mediated by Philo, to explain how the Son as Word (*logos*) exists eternally with the Father as his "immanent Word" (*logos endiathetos*) and acts in time through creation and revelation as his "expressed Word" (*logos prophorikos*). Later, neo-Platonism, with its founder Plotinus, exerts a great influence on early Greek trinitarian theology, for instance, that of Origen and the Cappadocians.[6]

The use of philosophy to express the Christian understanding of the Trinity is not of course limited to the patristic era but continues throughout the subsequent history of Christianity. Thomas Aquinas makes use of Aristotle, and since the nineteenth century Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Ernst Bloch, and Whitehead, just to mention a few, cast their long shadows over contemporary trinitarian theologies. Furthermore, as Christianity expands beyond its own Western habitat, it enters into dialogue with other cultures and religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religions to enrich its trinitarian theologies.

Such use of linguistic conventions, philosophy, and religious thought to elaborate a theology of the Trinity has never been a wholesale,

slavish adoption but is a critical and creative adaptation and transformation. Early theologians never simply transpose the trinitarian faith into the philosophical categories available in their days. In this intercultural encounter there has not been a Hellenization of Christianity, as Adolf Harnack charges. Rather the reverse is true, that is, there has been a Christianization of Greek thought. We have already mentioned the attribution of specifically Christian meanings to *ousia* and *hypostasis*. There is also a momentous transformation of the Greek understanding of "person" by the Cappadocians, especially Gregory of Nazianzus, who take "relation" not as a mere "accident" (that is, one of Aristotle's existing-in-a-substance categories) but as a self-subsisting and person-defining characteristic. (As Thomas later says, person is "subsisting relation.")

Neo-Platonism is modified by Athanasius, who rejects its notion of "unoriginate" as an essential attribute of God. Rather, for him, "unoriginate" is a personal and proper attribute of the Father alone, so that the Son, though originated (that is, begotten of the Father), is no less divine than the Father, and the Spirit, though "proceeding" from the Father through the Son (the West later added "*and* the Son"), is no less divine. Paradoxically, by using the non-biblical, Greek-sounding *homoousios* to affirm the Son's divinity, Nicaea rejects Arius' Hellenization-gone-too-far, in which the neo-Platonist concept of God is taken as the norm to judge the Christian understanding of who the Father of Jesus is.

COUNCIL, CREED, WORSHIP

The mention of Nicaea brings us to another agency in the formation of the trinitarian doctrine. Nicaea and the subsequent councils demonstrate that theology, or better still theologizing or doing theology, is not a private enterprise where originality and novelty are the prized hallmarks of scholarship. Rather it is a communal, or, more precisely, ecclesial activity carried out in, with, for, and on behalf of the church, in faithfulness to God's self-revelation. It is an activity in which the corporate *sensus fidei* (the sense or instinct faith of the whole church) and the regulative teaching ministry of the bishops and councils play an indispensable role.

With regard to the Trinity, the divinity of the Son is affirmed by Nicaea (325) and that of the Holy Spirit by Constantinople (381). These teachings are set forth in "symbols" or creeds, later known as the Nicene creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (the latter being a revised version of the symbol of Epiphanius of Salamis) respectively.

Subsequent councils in the West, local and general, adopt the practice of professing their faith in the Trinity by issuing creeds of their own, often incorporating the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, with the important addition "and the Son" (*filioque*) to the procession of the Spirit from the Father (e.g., the Eleventh Council of Toledo in 675, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, and the Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence-Rome in 1438–45).

These later Western creeds (including the so-called Athanasian creed *Quicumque vult*) tend to use a more technical language and function mainly as summary statements of the trinitarian faith. However, the early creeds or symbols of faith, especially the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed and the so-called Apostles' creed, are used primarily in the context of worship, especially in the administration of baptism (where the form of a triple question-and-answer is used) and the celebration of the Eucharist (where it is sung on solemn occasions). Throughout history, the creed, whether recited in worship or used for didactic purposes, serves as the Christian community's profession of faith in and doxology of the Trinity and as the *regula fidei* (rule or canon of faith), ways of demarcating orthodoxy over against heresy and of distinguishing the Christian faith from other religious traditions.

In addition to being the proper context for the creeds, worship serves two other functions, namely faith-embodying and faith-generating. On the one hand, what the church believes, it celebrates, and vice versa: the church's beliefs regulate and shape its celebrations. Hence by observing what and how the church worships one can know what the church believes. The Latin phrase for this function is *lex credendi, lex orandi* (the law of belief [determines] the law of prayer). On the other hand, the liturgy also generates belief. At times, worship anticipates explicit formulations of belief; at others, it preserves beliefs that might have been forgotten or obscured. Hence, the liturgy is a source of faith, and the Latin phrase for this function is *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer [determines] the law of belief). With regard to the Trinity, the feast of the Trinity was established in 1334 in the West to celebrate this central mystery of the Christian faith. It can also be argued that even if there has been a forgetfulness of the economic Trinity in theology, the memory of what God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have done in the history of salvation is always kept alive in the consciousness of the church thanks to worship and prayer.

The development of the doctrine of the Trinity, as even a cursory perusal of the following pages will make clear, is a complex and tortuous

history. At times, especially to the theologically uninformed, the acrimonious quarrels and bitter church divisions that lead to exile (several times, as with Athanasius), excommunication (as with Arius and other heretics), and even burning at the stake (as in the case of Michael Servetus) seem to hinge on a different alphabet (as between *homousios* and *homoiousios*), a mathematical conundrum, or a petty struggle for power between rival sees and theological schools (e.g., Antioch vs. Alexandria) rather than on a matter of life and death. While power struggles, ecclesiastical and civil, were admittedly not absent, the parties involved in the trinitarian debates did believe that at stake was indeed something belonging to the *status confessionis* and not a matter of indifference (*adiaphora*), a metaphysical issue, or a mere question of semantics. Indeed, Athanasius and the Cappadocians were convinced that the denial of the divinity of Jesus and later, of the Holy Spirit, would jeopardize the very salvation of humanity. If Jesus is not divine, how could he have saved us, they argue, and if the Holy Spirit is not divine, how can he sanctify or divinize us? What is at stake then is nothing short of the very survival of the Christian faith.

This means that the Trinity lies at the heart and center of Christian life. This does not however mean that the doctrine of the Trinity has always been at the apex or the pivot of Christian theology. While the Trinity has always been at the center of the church's public prayer and worship, which is rendered to the Father in the Son and by the power of the Spirit – though not always in popular devotions – it has not always occupied a place of honor, at least in Western theology. Schleiermacher dedicates only a few pages to the Trinity at the end of his magnum opus *Der christliche Glaube* (*The Christian Faith*). In neo-scholastic manuals of Roman Catholic theology, God is treated in two separate treatises: *De Deo Uno* ("On the One God") and *De Deo Trino* ("On the Trine God"), with scarcely any connections between them. It took a Barth and a Rahner to make the Trinity not only the central doctrine of the Christian faith but also the structural principle of Christian theology.

The task of rediscovering the Trinity for faith, worship, and life is a constant challenge and need. It is an essential part of the *cogitatio fidei*, of thinking in faith about faith, to understand more deeply what God has revealed about Godself, to correct errors about God (and modernity and postmodernity are not devoid of them!), to retrieve what the Christian tradition has taught, to dialogue with contemporary cultures and religions, in communion with the Body of Christ. It is to contribute to this ongoing task that this *Companion* was conceived and realized.