Nice and Hot Disputes

The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century

PHILIP DIXON

'Its straightforward aim is to demonstrate and rectify the fact that "neglect of seventeenth-century England is a serious lacuna in contemporary studies of trinitarian doctrine" . . . admirably clear and thoughtful.'

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For my parents

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O Blessed glorious Trinity,
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Which, as wise serpents, diversly
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Give mee a such selfe different instinct
Of these let all mee elemented bee,
Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three.

('The Litanie', John Donne)

Preface

This book arose out of three related questions. The first was one that had puzzled me for several years: Given that in standard Christian nomenclature God is spoken of as 'three persons', when was God first referred to as *a* person? This quickly led me to a second question: Granted the standard narrative of 'recovery' of the doctrine of the Trinity for Western theology and practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when and why was the doctrine of the Trinity 'lost'? The initial question led me to the Socinians on the Continent and John Biddle in England, who were insistent that God was one person not three. My interest in the second question deepened. The fact that Socinianism loomed large, at least in popular fear, in seventeenth-century England, and that Biddle's confession that 'God is the name of a Person' was made in 1644, confirmed an intuition I had that the Stuart Age contained important clues about the marginalization of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here, however, the plot noticeably thinned rather than thickened. For all their rejoicing over the 'recovery' of the doctrine of the Trinity in recent decades, it is difficult to find any twentieth- or twenty-first-century theologian who pays more than the scantiest attention to English theology about the doctrine during the seventeenth century. The period is almost always leapt over in silence.[1] The theological controversies surrounding the

[1] The 'take off' point and the 'landing stage' may be different but the vast majority clear the seventeenth century without comment. Catherine LaCugna, in her acclaimed *God for Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), leaps from Gregory Palamas to the twentieth century; Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Cassell, 1985), leaps from Aquinas to the twentieth century; R. S. Franks, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1953) makes

Trinity in the 1690s have received some attention from historians but very little from theologians.[2] This leap, in the words of William Babcock, 'leaves blank the very interval that we must need to have filled in if we are to gain some understanding of where and how this shift of sensibilities took place, the interval between the trinitarian theology of the medieval scholastics and the trinitarian theology of Schleiermacher and those who came after him.'[3] And so the third question formed itself. What had gone on in those controversies that would be of interest to the theologian? This book hopes to fill in the blank and, by its account of the way in which the Trinity was displaced, to provide another brick in the wall of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity.

At the outset I freely admit that I write as a theologian and not a historian. The works of Redwood, Champion, Clark and others have given me very useful and informative insights. They have examined the impact and implications of the crises surrounding the doctrine at this time for English society and Church. Some historians have sought to show this period as a stage on the journey to the Enlightenment, or religious freedom, or the development of the category of 'religion' itself. These agendas are fine but they are not mine. I wished to examine the disputes over the Trinity from the perspective of theology: what insights do the disputes have to teach us about the doctrine itself?

All viewpoints are rooted in a particular place and I have tried to be as aware as possible of the limits that my own places on me, but I must confess that I write as a Catholic theologian who is convinced that, in the words of article 234 of *The Catechism of the*

passing reference to the controversies of the 1690s. Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), treats the seventeenth century so briefly that his comments are of little use. Older syntheses such as John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England* (3 vols.; London: Strahan, 1870), provide summaries of the positions of many of the protagonists of the trinitarian controversies of the seventeenth century, in as much as these are part of an item labelled 'religious thought'.

[2] Historical works include, J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688–1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986); Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). A noticeable exception to the rule among theologians is William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996) who correctly identifies the importance of the seventeenth century in the loss of the trinitarian doctrine of God.

[3] William S. Babcock, 'A Changing of the Christian God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century', *Interpretation* 45 (1991), pp. 133–56 (135).

Catholic Church, 'the mystery of the most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life'. Older accounts of the period and disputes covered by this book have often been written by Unitarian historians who understandably have been keen to show the rationality, bravery and goodness of those who challenged talk of God as three persons. This book is not a partisan rejoinder to those works, many of which are commendable for the depth and breadth of scholarship displayed, but it is rooted in the conviction that the 'loss' of the Trinity is a cause of sorrow not joy. Karl Rahner's observation that many Catholics are monotheists who would not notice if the doctrine of the Trinity were dropped is probably overstated, but there is still a considerable way to go if the mystery of the Trinity is really to be 'the central mystery of Christian faith and life'. This book is certainly not intended primarily as a work of apologetics, but if it contributes in some way to the 'recovery' of the Trinity that will be welcome.

Throughout the writing of this book I have become increasingly aware of other issues and controversies swirling around. There are big questions concerning language, exegesis, soteriology and ecclesiology, to name a few that I have alluded to in passing. I am also aware that there is a Continental dimension to this story that but partially appears in these pages. Several books could be written on that. I have focused on England because it was regarded both at home and abroad as somewhere of a forcing house for anti-trinitarian sentiments and arguments. If at the end of this book the reader emerges with a clearer understanding of the process whereby the doctrine of the Trinity was 'lost' I shall be content. If the reader is inspired to go back to some of the seventeenth-century authors themselves, so much the better.

The writing of a book puts one in debt to so many people. The seeds of my own fascination with the Trinity were sown by Eric Wastell and were nourished more formally by Owen Cummings. Some of my original questions were inspired by Brian Davies, and my quest for answers took me to Cambridge. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Nicholas Lash, whose delight in the Trinity confirmed my own. During my research I received great assistance and encouragement from Douglas Hedley, Richard Rex, Hueston Finlay, Eamon Duffy, Richard Luckett and many others who asked pertinent questions or provided nuggets of information. The staff in the Rare Book Room

in the University Library at Cambridge and their counterparts in the Duke Humphrey at the Bodleian, Oxford could not have been more helpful.

Friends helped me to keep a perspective on my research and provided much appreciated love and support. Among them I must thank Hugh and Madeleine McManus, David and Liz Robertson, John and Anne Burns, Dorian Llywelyn, Thomas Fink, Tom O'Connor, Bill Boxall, Ambrose Walsh and many others. Paul McManus' enthusiasm for the good things of life prevented me from becoming too obsessed with work, and I owe much to David James for his gentle encouragement in this as so much else. This book is dedicated to my parents as a small token of gratitude for all they have given me.

Introduction

Something happened to the doctrine of the Trinity in the seventeenth century: it ceased being a mystery of faith and became a problem in theology. This book examines how and why that transformation took place. The sixteenth century had not seen any great blossoming of trinitarian theology: the polemics of the Reformation debate precluded that, but the trinitarian consensus in doctrine and imagination were still overwhelmingly intact. Calvin burnt Servetus for his anti-trinitarian views at Geneva and was applauded by Catholics throughout Europe for doing so. Henry VIII founded Trinity College, Cambridge, his Catholic daughter, Mary, Trinity College, Oxford, and his Protestant daughter, Elizabeth, Trinity College, Dublin. Elizabeth reacted with horrified disbelief that 'monsters' who denied the Trinity could exist in her kingdom. John Donne preached sermons replete with trinitarian reference and none of his contemporaries objected to or questioned the audacious trinitarian imagery of his poetry. For Donne, it was 'the foundation, the summe, it is the Christian Religion, to believe aright of the Trinity'.[1] He was not afraid to develop the political implications of this belief, in his preaching 'the Trinitarian God was a model for the pluralist state'.[2] Others, too, were not afraid to use their imagination in

[1] Evelyn Simpson and George Potter, eds., *The Sermons of John Donne* (10 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), VI, p. 139. Donne's poetry is examined in Chapter 7.

[2] David Nichols, 'Divine Analogy: The Theological Politics of John Donne', *Political Studies* 32 (1984), pp. 570–80 (580).

regard to the Trinity.[3] But by the 1720s, the most trenchant defender of the Trinity, Daniel Waterland, warned that the imagination had no place to play in understanding the doctrine. His own impeccably orthodox writings are dull and stilted. In the intervening years assaults upon the doctrine of the Trinity had clearly taken their toll. This book examines how the Trinity became marginalized from Christian life, practice and thought, and why that change took place.

To most people in the seventeenth century it would have seemed impossible, and also undesirable, to separate faith and theology from political and social concerns. The fabric of life was shot through with references to religion and belief at every point. The assaults and defences of the Trinity were not games played in ivory towers but matters of life and, in one case, death. Most of the combatants were not politically naïve and were well aware of the wider ramifications that their denial or defence of the doctrine could have for Church and state, but they simply will not fall out into two neat camps labelled 'radical' and 'reactionary' or whatever. Anyone who would like to find a straightforward corollary between religious and political radicalism or reaction will be disappointed. While not neglecting the political and social implications of the positions adopted, this book focuses on the *theology* expressed in the conflicts. Those engaged in them, whatever other agenda they may have possessed, were doing so primarily because of the *theological* implications of denying or asserting the Trinity.

The best histories let the dead speak for themselves, so I have tried to let the defenders and detractors of the doctrine of the Trinity express their arguments and concerns in their own words. Their wit, exasperation, sarcasm, confusion, ridicule, patience, fear and much more is effectively conveyed in the language and rhetoric they employed to advance their case. The denunciation of the Trinity as a 'tripartite idol', the brash accusations of 'heresy and nonsense', and the subtleties involved in talking about 'three subsistences' still eloquently convey the positions adopted. On occasions we are reminded quite forcefully that faith and theology

[3] See Dennis R. Klinck, '"*Vestigia Trinitatis*" in Man and his Works in the English Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981), pp. 13–27. Klinck shows how Donne's contemporaries shared the same 'applied trinitarianism'. They saw the Trinity reflected in humanity, philosophy and even physiology.

can be expressed in a way that is far from genteel, 'nice' and unchallenging.

The period of the investigation covers roughly the 'Stuart Age', in itself one of the most controverted periods of history. Some of the key figures of that epoch have generated hundreds of volumes of research and assessment in their own right, and there are hundreds of contemporary seventeenth-century contributions to the debates over the doctrine of the Trinity. Another study could have centred itself on the exegetical problems raised by the disputants or the soteriological understandings they manifested. While not neglecting those concerns, this book focuses on the word 'person' and its usage as a way of organizing and gaining insight into the material available. 'Person' is one of the key words in trinitarian discourse, yet its meaning, suitability and usage are not agreed upon either during this earlier period nor in our own time. Tertullian could have had little idea of the troublesome legacy he was bequeathing to the Church when he first introduced *persona* into Christian theology. A number of twentieth-century theologians have questioned the usefulness of the word and the advisedness of retaining it. Some, such as Barth and Rahner, have seen the word 'person' as inherently problematic and best avoided, or at least to be very carefully qualified. Others, such as Moltmann and Boff, have argued that the modern idea of 'person' enhances rather than diminishes our understanding of the doctrine. In the seventeenth century, 'person' became a highly contested concept in regard to the Trinity. Many, if not all, of the disputes surrounding the interpretation and acceptability of the doctrine revolved around the word and its usage. Part of the problem lay in the changing understanding of the nature and function of language; to oversimplify greatly, analogy and metaphor were at a discount while univocal usage was increasingly privileged. Part lay in the development of new understandings of what 'person' meant; Hobbes and especially Locke challenged the contemporary hegemony in this area. Part lay in the theological presuppositions revealed in the writings of the doctrine's defenders and critics; there is no agreement even among the former as to the exact content the term was meant to bear when used of the Father, Son and Spirit.

My opening chapter gives an impressionistic account of the displacement that the doctrine of the Trinity was suffering during

this period in piety, catechesis and popular celebration. The next chapter situates the origin of many future disputes in the context of the Civil War and its aftermath. During this period John Biddle, the 'Father of the English Unitarians', made his confession that God was *a* person, and it is from this period that we witness the growth of anxiety about Socinianism, a radical Continental heresy popularly synonymous with anti-trinitarianism. Chapter 3 displays and evaluates the speculations of Thomas Hobbes in regard to the Trinity, and their contemporary impact. Chapter 4 is the heart of the book, and presents a survey and analysis of the controversies of the 1690s, which prove a watershed in the history of the proclamation and reception of the doctrine in England and further afield. Chapter 5 develops this investigation and assesses the contribution of John Locke, dragged into these controversies by the Bishop of Worcester, to the disintegration of the trinitarian consensus. Chapter 6 plots the legacy of the controversies of the 1690s for the early eighteenth century and beyond. The book ends with a brief conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

Bones to Philosophy, but Milke to Faith

The people of the seventeenth century were obsessed with God and his dealings with men. Questions concerning Church order, doctrine and the limits of religious toleration were not the concern of clerics alone but the entire nation. Certain flashpoints could start a civil war, or secure the deposition of a king, or ignite bitter feuds among those who called themselves Christians. Towards the end of the century, disputes over the origins, truth and meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity threatened to tear apart the Church by law established, and the reaction of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities at various times is a clear indication that the popular impact of the disputes was of no negligible concern. To some contemporaries it seemed as if the heated debates over the divinity of Christ in fourth-century Alexandria had suddenly arrived in late seventeenth-century England. The truth was a little more complicated, as the hegemony of trinitarian belief had been on the wane for some time. Most of the material for the succeeding chapters has been garnered from works of apologetic and polemical theology, but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that there were no indications that the doctrine of the Trinity was in trouble in other areas as well. Only an overly restricted notion of theology would limit this investigation to the purely formal material found in the controversial books and pamphlets. To gain a fuller insight into the fate of the doctrine of the Trinity during the seventeenth century we must take account of what might be labelled 'popular religion': How did the population at large appropriate the doctrine of the Trinity, if they did at all? How was devotion to the Trinity expressed? How were the

persons of the Trinity perceived? How was the doctrine taught, thought and celebrated? What impact did the controversies have at grassroots? Answers to such questions are not readily obtained, and it would be difficult enough to respond to these questions on behalf of our own society. The passage of time has obscured matters still further, but by examining a wide variety of material we may obtain some impression of the broader picture vis-à-vis the doctrine of the Trinity. Through examination of catechisms, prayer books, hymnaries, art and iconoclasm, poetry, diaries and proposed revisions to the Liturgy of the established Church, we can savour some of the flavour of seventeenth-century piety in regard to the Trinity. Although this chapter makes no excuses for being impressionistic and tentative I believe it is a useful introduction to investigate the marginalization of the doctrine that took place early modern England.[1]

The Practice of Pietie

Can we know how people prayed then, what words they used, what sentiments they echoed? The sheer volume of printed prayer books is daunting and seems to preclude any generalization, but a partial solution to this difficulty may come by examining the most popular works of the period. We may assume that these 'best-sellers' were most influential in forming popular private piety, and the task is made easier by a survey undertaken by C. John Sommerville. He isolates, by printing and reprinting, the most popular works of the day and then proceeds to analyse these works paragraph by paragraph to assess the concerns of popular piety at the time.[2]

The Reformation did not mark anything like a complete rupture with the spiritual heritage of the past. Augustine's *Confessions*,

[1] Among the studies of popular religion should be noted Barry Reay, *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), and Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin, 1971), as well as studies devoted to particular periods, e.g. the Civil War.

[2] C. John Sommerville, *Popular Religion in Restoration England* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1977), see pp. 9–19. Sommerville makes some reference to the period before the Restoration. I have augmented this with Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (5 vols.; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961–75), and H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1603–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

à Kempis' *Imitation* and works by St Bernard remained highly popular. Suitably sanitized versions of the exercises of Ignatius Loyola and the meditations of Francis de Sales were provided for Protestant readers. Other works by Andrewes, Taylor, Baxter and Baker were widely read.[3] The trinitarian overtones of these works are clear: according to Sommerville 'these devotional manuals or guides to spirituality, however much they differ in the methods they inculcate or in their theological emphases, all express a robust conviction of the reality of God, of the finality of Christ's revelation of his love, of the interior transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit'.[4]

Of particular note from the earlier part of our period is the work of the Puritan Lewes Bayly (d. 1631), Bishop of Bangor. *The Practice of Pietie* was one of the most reprinted works of spirituality · John Bunyan for one admitted it as a great influence on his life. Arguing that there can be no true piety without knowledge of God, Bayly spends nearly sixty of his opening pages exploring the doctrine of the Trinity. His exposition examines the three persons and the nature of their unity. Bayly informs his readers that in the Divine Essence 'the divers manner of being therein are called Persons', and that

> a Person is a distinct substance of the Godhead. There are three Divine Persons the *Father*, the *Sonne* and the *Holy Ghost*. These three *Persons* are not the severall *substances*, but three distinct *subsistences*; or three *divers* manner of being of *one* and the *same substance*, and *Divine Essence*. So that a *Person* in the *Godhead*, is an individuall *understanding* and incommunicable *Subsistence*, living of it selfe, and not sustained by *another*.

This plurality in the Godhead is neither *accidental* (something extraneous or variable), nor *essential* (there is only one essence), but *personal*, and the persons are to be regarded as *alius* and *alius* not *aliud* and *aliud*. These three persons are distinguished in three ways: by name, by order and by action. Bayly then proceeds to give what is in effect a summary grammar of the Trinity.[5]

The divine persons may be distinguished by name. The first

[3] See Davies, II, pp. 81-2, and 69f.

[4] Davies, II, p. 78.

[5] Lewes Bayly, *The Practice of Pietie* (London: 1631), pp. 5, 6.

person is named 'Father', firstly in respect to his natural Son, and secondly in reference to the elect adopted by grace. The second person is named 'Son' because of his eternal begetting from the Father. The third person is named 'Holy Spirit' because he is 'spired' from the Father and the Son and makes holy the elect of God. Thus in a few words Bayly links very effectively the immanent Trinity (God as God exists in his self) and the economic Trinity (God as God appears in the economy of salvation). The doctrine of the Trinity is not conceived as some arcane piece of information about the immanent life of God, but rather is an exposition of that life as experienced by the Christian. The internal relations of the persons make an impact on the lives of believers. The Father is father of the elect who makes his children by adoption through the sanctificatory power of the Holy Spirit. The believer does not put his or her trust in some undifferentiated God, but is caught up into the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[6]

The divine persons may also be distinguished by order. The Father is the first person, having neither his being nor his beginning from any. The Son is the second, being the only begotten of the Father. In respect of his essence he is of himself but in respect of his person he is begotten by an eternal and incomprehensible generation. The Holy Ghost, the third person, proceeds from both and receives the whole divine essence by spiration. In respect of these distinctions the Father is logically before the Son whom he begets, and both are before the Spirit whom they spire. But Bayly insists that this priority of order does not imply that one person is superior or another inferior. Order is not at the expense of the coequality of the persons; they are equal in every essential respect.[7]

Finally, the divine persons may be distinguished by their internal actions. Their external actions *ad extra*, although attributed to one person, nevertheless are actions 'after a sort' common to them all. However, the *internal* actions – begetting, being begotten, proceeding – are peculiar to each person. These are 'incommunicable Actions; and doe make, not an *essential*, *accidental*, or *rationall*, but a *real* distinction betwixt the three *Persons*'. The

[6] See Bayly, pp. 7–8.
[7] See Bayly, pp. 7, 8–12.

Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. The divine essence is common to all three, therefore there is a Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Bayly concluded by reminding his readers that the Trinity is a mystery to be adored and worshipped rather than 'curiously searched by reason'.[8]

This elaborate trinitarian grammar, it should be stressed, was the beginning of one of the best-selling prayer books of the age. Why was this long preamble included? Towards the conclusion of his exposition of trinitarian doctrine Bayly gives his reasons for insisting that the doctrine must be known. Firstly, it helps us discern the true God from false gods; we need to know that we are addressing ourselves to God and not to some phantom. Secondly, the knowledge of the Trinity we gain from contemplation of our salvation inspires us to greater awe and love. Thirdly, having some knowledge of the mystery will stir us up to imitate the divine Spirit who sanctifies us. Finally, this knowledge will ensure that we have the right conceptions of God and not gross, blasphemous imaginations such as those who 'conceive God to be like an old Man sitting in a chare: and the blessed Trinity to be like that tripartite Idoll, which the papists have painted in their Church-windowes'. In sum, a proper understanding of the Trinity removes idolatry, focuses prayer and encourages true devotion and knowledge.[9]

The prayers provided by Bayly are very long-winded by our standards. However, they constantly address the Trinity by name and have a definite trinitarian dynamic. Bayly does not exhibit the timidity of later divines in talking about and to the Trinity, and he is not afraid of using some vivid metaphors to bring this dynamic out. For instance, the warming effect of the wine at Holy Communion can be seen as a warming of the soul by Christ, and a reminder that we have been given the Holy Spirit to drink (a reference to 1 Cor. 12:13). This Holy Spirit is what makes us one with Christ.[10]

Though the majority of earlier works share the same flavour, none of the 'best-sellers' after the Restoration were as studiously trinitarian in their outlook. Richard Allestree (1619–1681), Regius Professor of History at Oxford from 1663 to 1679, reminded his

[8] Bayly, p. 17; see pp. 15–19.
[9] Bayly, p. 52; see pp. 50–52.
[10] See Bayly, p. 604.

readers that acknowledgement of the true God was a duty imposed by faith. This God was Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. The persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are revealed in Holy Scripture and to be accepted as true.[11]

Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667), Anglican Bishop of Down and Connor and a celebrated devotional writer, preceded his collection of prayers with a discussion of Christian 'Credenda', including the fact that

> God being one in nature, is also three in person; expressed in the Scripture by the names of 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'. The first person is known to us by the name of 'The Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. The second person is called 'The Son, and the Word of the Father'. The third is 'The Spirit and Promise of the Father'. And these are three and one after a secret manner, which we must believe, but cannot understand.

Given this Credenda it is not surprising to find that one of the first acts in the 'agenda' of prayer is that 'when you first go off from your bed, solemnly and devoutly bow your head, and worship the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost'.[12]

Thomas Ken (1637–1711), Bishop of Bath and Wells, later deposed for his refusal to accept William of Orange as King in place of James II, produced a prayer book for children, which provides prayers to the Holy Child, and also one for the help of the Holy Spirit in reading the Scriptures correctly. The High Churchman, John Cosin (1594–1672), who became Bishop of Durham at the Restoration, published a prayer book with an amended form of the monastic offices of Terce, Sext and None. It was fitting to pray three times during the day, he argued, 'in reverence of the BLESSED TRINITIE'.[13]

While it would be wrong to suggest too great a shift in the substance of devotional material, it is notable that the best-sellers of the period after the Glorious Revolution in 1688 are not so 'spiritual' in tone. One of the leading books of the day was more

[11] Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (London: 1659), see pp. 4–6.

[12] Jeremy Taylor, *The Golden Grove*, in *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor* (15 vols.; London: Moyes, 1828), XV, pp. 12, 33.

[13] Thomas Ken, *A Manual of Prayers for Use of the Scholars of Winchester College* (London: 1675), see p. 11. John Cosin, *A Collection of Private Devotions* (London: 1655), p. 5.

concerned to indulge in anti-Roman polemic and present an apologia for the Church of England, rather than provide a trinitarian exposé of prayer.[14] Perhaps a further straw in the wind was the popularity enjoyed by the books of the Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn (1644–1718). Penn had fallen foul of the authorities for his alleged anti-trinitarian sentiments. This general shift is reflected in Sommerville's synthesis. He notes an increase in stress on the anger of God after the Restoration and a down-playing of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Sommerville also claims that some of the best-sellers show a distinct confusion about the persons of the Godhead. The emphasis on the Father, which some have detected in the piety of the Protestant reform, is clearly in evidence, while 'the Holy Spirit was not a subject of interest in its own right, and what little mysticism the literature expressed was not associated with the person of the Spirit'. The memory of the fervent pneumatology of some of the Civil War sects may well have contributed to this distancing from the Spirit and, in a country that was still very sensitive about the legacy of the Interregnum, anything that smacked of such manifestations of 'enthusiasm' was highly suspect.[15]

The Christian's ABC

The next chapters will concentrate on disputes and controversies between those with some theological sophistication. While the works generated were of considerable influence, they were obviously not read by the bulk of the population. Nevertheless, throughout the period the communication of basic instruction in the Christian faith was a constant concern, and we need to examine how the doctrine of the Trinity was presented in popular teaching.

Here we face similar problems to those we encountered in investigating devotional works: the amount of written catechetical material is vast. But again we are fortunate in having a reliable guide. In his magisterial work, *The Christian's ABC*, Ian Green

[14] William Stanley, *The Faith of a Church of England Man*, 2nd edn (London: 1675).

[15] Sommerville, p. 80; see pp. 76–8, 86. Sommerville tabulates the results of his research in an Appendix. The most popular of all subjects dealt with in the material is 'The person of God' (81). Unfortunately there is no way of telling from the title of this category, nor from the text, what exactly Sommerville means by such a phrase.

freely admits that the material of oral instruction is now unreconstructable, but argues that the literature is an indicator of the tone of catechesis at the period. His book contains an exhaustive list of printed catechetical material. He himself investigates a limited number of best-sellers. What follows is an investigation of some of those that reached the 'top twenty'. Once again a general pattern emerges, which conforms to that which we have already detected: as time progresses, the presentation of the Trinity becomes less vivid and more defensive, and the Trinitarian imagination contracts.[16]

William Perkins' *Foundation*, published first in 1595, was one of the most popular works in the first half of the seventeenth century. Perkins (1558–1602), Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and a leading Puritan divine, was concerned to make his readers 'doers' rather than just 'hearers' of the Word, and his exposition of the Creed was geared to that end. He taught that 'There is one God, creator and governor of all things, distinguished into the Father, the Sonne, and the holy Ghost', and claimed that this is the plain teaching of Scripture. We conceive God, says Perkins, 'not by framing any image of him in my minde, (as ignorant folkes doe, that think him to be an olde man sitting in heaven) but I conceive him by his properties and his workes'. God is distinguished 'into the Father which begetteth the Sonne, into the Sonne who is begotten of the Father, into the holy Ghost who proceedeth from the Father and the Sonne'. The rejection of pictorial images of God is a theme that we will examine shortly, for the moment it is important to note that Perkins set the tone for further catechetical projects by insisting that the Trinity are differentiated by 'properties and workes'.[17]

This differentiation was echoed in other popular catechetical works. Richard Bernard stated that God 'is but one substance, yet distinguished into three, the Father, Sonne, and holy Ghost, which distinction is in person, propertie, and manner of working'. S. Egerton, writer of the best-seller during the period 1610–1630,

[16] Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See his 'Introduction' for the significance of catechisms for Protestantism in general, and for an outline of his methodology and means of analysing material.

[17] William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion: Gathered into Six Principles* (London: 1595), p. 3, B3.

was keen to emphasize the continuing work of the Trinity: Christ sanctified our nature in his person and continues to sanctify us daily by the Spirit. Baptism is given in the name of the Trinity because it is through this sacrament that we come to share communion with the three persons in one God. Another author illustrates his teaching by highlighting the trinitarian dynamic of prayer: the Holy Spirit moves, the Son mediates, and the Father hears.[18] From the same period another catechism similarly illustrated the works of the three persons from Scripture and from Christian experience, but included a caution against the deficiencies of worldly analogies. The whole matter was 'very mysticall, and therefore hath bred many heresies in some'. Most authors, when appealing to scriptural warrants, appealed to the Johannine Comma (1 Jn 5:7), a text whose authenticity was to be fiercely disputed in later years.[19]

The most popular catechism of the entire first half of the seventeenth century, John Ball's *Short Treatise*, again emphasized the importance of properties and works in discussing the Trinity. It is the property of the Father to be of himself and beget the Son, it is the property of the Son to be begotten, and of the Holy Spirit to proceed from both. Their works are those of decree, creation and providence. Ball is keen that his readers understand how the word 'person' is used of the Trinity:

> A person generally taken, is one intire substance, not common to many, endued with life and understanding, will and power. A person in the God head is the God head restrayned, or distinguished by his personall propertie . . . The whole divine nature being indivisible . . . is common to all three persons Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost . . . therefore whatsoever doth absolutely agree to the divine nature, or is spoken of the divine nature by relation to the creatures, that doth agree likewise to every person in Trinitie . . . Every person in Trinity is equall in glory, and eternitie . . . and there is a most neare communion and union between them, by which each one is in the rest, and

[18] Richard Bernard, *A Double Catechism* (Cambridge: 1607), p. 14. S. Egerton, *A Briefe Method of Catechizing* (London: 1615), see pp. 7–8, 15. This latter work was originally published in 1594. George Browne, *An Introduction to Pietie and Humanitie* (London: 1613), see p. 11.

[19] John Mayer, *The English Catechisme Explained*, 3rd edn (London: 1623), p. 25.

> with the rest . . . and every one doth possesse, love, and glorifie each other . . . working the same things.[20]

During the Civil War a different tone can be detected creeping into catechesis. A more defensive note is found in the catechism of the royalist divine, Henry Hammond (1605–1660). Written in 1646, Hammond makes a plea for non-scriptural items in the Liturgy, such as the *Te Deum*, because they praise the Trinity. The *Gloria Patri* likewise should be retained. Hammond warns against the Arian form of the doxology, which gives glory *to* the Father, *by* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit. He deplored the setting aside of creeds as some of his Parliamentarian opponents were advocating as a recipe for 'turning God and Christ, and all the Articles of the Creed out of men's brains'.[21]

This defensive tone can be detected in two popular catechisms that appeared after the Restoration in 1673. Their exposition of the doctrine was also much drier and less imaginative. Richard Sherlock defended the doctrine against objections, while Edward Boughen thought it necessary to defend the origin and use of the Creeds. A year latter, another catechism argued that the Trinity could indeed be found in the Scriptures, but the only text advanced in favour of the claim was the Johannine Comma. The format found in the catechism of John Wallis (1616–1703), the champion of orthodoxy in the 1690s, could not but have contributed to this aridity. In this work questions are put that require a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The teaching on the Trinity is reduced to answering in the affirmative that there are three persons, and that each is God.[22]

The rising tide of unease with the doctrine of the Trinity is reflected in a catechism of 1690. Thomas Jekyll acknowledged doubts about the authorship of both Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds, but argued that even if they are not the actual compositions of their titular authors, nevertheless they are gleaned from

[20] John Ball, *A Short Treatise Contayning All the Principall Grounds of Christian Religion* (London: 1633), p. 50.

[21] Henry Hammond, *A Practical Catechisme* (London: 1646), p. 27; see pp. 25, 26.

[22] Richard Sherlock, *The Principles of Holy Christian Religion* (London: 1673), see pp. 27f. Edward Boughen, *A Short Exposition of the Catechism* (London: 1673). John Worthington, *A Form of Sound Words* (London: 1674), see p. 2. John Wallis, *A Briefe and Easie Explanation of the Shorter Catechism*, 9th edn (Dublin: 1683).

their writings. It can be proved from Scripture that each of the three persons are ascribed attributes that belong to God alone and are therefore divine. Reason is brought into play to counter the argument that the doctrine destroys the natural notion of the unity of God. For earlier authors the Trinity was a mystery beyond reason, to be adored by faith and experienced in Christian life, for Jekyll the Trinity rests on arguments revolving around notions of the divine being. The tract is orthodox in terminology, but trinitarian sentiment is missing and the prayers appended to the book have little trinitarian rhythm or content.[23]

By the turn of the century the legacy of the controversies of the previous decade are clearly evident. Peter Newcome concedes that atheism is a bare possibility, but argues that even if that were true it would still be beneficial to believe. Newcome stresses the unity of God. The persons within the Godhead are distinguished by properties and operations. The properties are cashed out negatively: the Father is the Father not the Son. The mystery is incomprehensible but credible because of the witness of revelation. Reflecting the disputes of the decade, Newcome insisted that the persons are not mere names or forms, a person is a 'singular, subsistent Intellectual Being', not an accident, quality, energy or operation of God. But for all its carefully chosen language, Newcome's catechism does little to develop a lively sense of the importance of the trinity in the life of the believer.[24]

These were the standard best-selling catechisms of Church of England divines. In the next chapter we will examine the anti-trinitarian Racovian Catechism and the two catechisms of John Biddle. They undoubtedly had an influence on certain thinkers, as we shall find them referred to at various times, but their popular impact was slight. One of the most popular English Catholic catechisms, published in 1637, devoted a significant number of pages to discussion of the Trinity. Thomas White, a friend of Thomas Hobbes, claimed that what in others is a 'thing' is a 'person' in man. A person is initially defined as a 'rationall or intelligent thing', but this is quickly amended as 'person' and 'thing' are not interchangeable. Even things can be both one and three, and the

[23] Thomas Jekyll, *A Brief and Plain Exposition of the Church Catechism* (London: 1690), see pp. 13, 14. For the prayers see pp. 75–7. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned.

[24] Peter Newcome, *A Catechetical Course of Sermons for the Whole Year* (2 vols.; London: 1700), I, p. 303; see pp. 68, 97–8.

very lame illustration of a three-cornered table is provided as an example. White substantially revised his catechism for its second edition in 1659. Originally the discussion of 'person' took place in the context of the hypostatic union, and a discussion of the Trinity followed. By 1659 White discussed the concept of 'person' first in the context of trinitarian doctrine and then proceeded to the hypostatic union. This may well be an indication of a growing awareness that 'person' was becoming a problematic term in the context of the Trinity by this time.[25]

The Hymnes and Songs of the Church

For much of our period parts of Morning and Evening Prayer and Communion Service may have been sung or chanted, but outside this 'ordinary' the only fare was metrical psalmody. The collections of metrical psalms often included versions of the *Te Deum* and the *Quicunque Vult* (the Athanasian Creed, so-called from its opening words).

Before the Restoration, non-scriptural hymns were regarded by most with suspicion as being 'relics of Popery'. However, the origins of English hymnology are to be found in the early seventeenth century.[26] It was during this period that the first hymn book appeared for Church of England congregations. George Wither's *The Hymnes and Songs of the Church* was quite an ambitious endeavour. The hymns and songs were composed by Wither while Orlando Gibbons provided the tunes, but the project was doomed from the start. Wither had fallen foul of the Stationers' Company, who sought to maintain their monopoly on the printed word and, despite repeated attempts to break out of their imposed straitjacket, Wither was unable to popularize his work.[27]

The book included a metrical version of the Athanasian Creed:

[25] Thomas White, *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine* (Paris: 1659), p. 77; see pp. 76–9. A facsimile of the edition of 1637 is available in D. M. Rogers, ed., *English Recusant Literature 1558–1640*, vol. 358 (Ilkley: Scholar Press, 1977).

[26] See J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Watson aims to provide 'a study not a survey' of hymnology from the seventeenth century to the present day.

[27] George Wither, *The Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (London: 1623). An account of the dispute, which saw the Stationers enter into an unholy alliance with the Puritans can be found in Watson, p. 57.

Those that will saved be must hold,
The true catholicke faith,
And keepe it wholly, if they would
Escape eternall death.

Which Faith a Trinity adores
In One; and One in Three:
So, as the Substance being one,
Distinct the Persons be.

One Person of the Father is,
Another of the Sonne;
Another of the Holy Ghost,
And yet their Godhead one:
Alike in glory; and in their
Eternity as much: God
For, as the Father, both the Sonne,
And Holy-Ghost is such.

Verses 3 and 4 proceeded to outline that these three persons are uncreated, infinite, eternal and yet one. Verse 5 expounds the proper predication of the terms 'God' and 'Lord':

The Father likewise God and Lord;
And God and Lord the Sonne;
And God and Lord the Holy-Ghost,
Yet God and Lord but One.
For though each Person by himselfe,
We God and Lord confesse:
Yet Christian Faith forbids that we
Three Gods or Lords professe.

The subsequent verses hymn the Begetting of the Son, the Procession of the Spirit, the coeternality and equality of the three persons, the Incarnation and Redemption, and conclude with the hope of the Second Coming.[28]

Wither also provided hymns for seasons and feasts, including a translation of the *Veni Creator* which invokes and addresses the

[28] Wither, 'Song 43'.

Holy Spirit. 'Song 59' was intended for Trinity Sunday and the hymn stressed the limitations of reason in the face of the mystery:

> Those, oh, thrice holy Three in one,
> Who seeke thy Nature to explaine,
> By rules to humane reason knowne,
> Shall finde their labour all in vaine;
> And in a shell they may intend,
> The sea as well to comprehend.
>
> Faith's objects true, and surer bee,
> Than those that reasons eyes doe see.

The importance of analogy is recognized by Wither, and he draws upon the traditional metaphor and imagery that as we shall see was to be so disparaged by Aderne in his directions for preachers:

> Yet, as by looking on the Sunne,
> (Though to his substance we are blinde)
> And by the course we see him runne,
> Some Notions we of him may finde:
> So, what thy Brightnesse doth conceale,
> Thy word, and workes in part reveale.

As the motion, light and heat of the sun, are distinct and yet there is only one sun, so likewise with the Trinity there is distinction and unity:

> Most glorious Essence, we confesse
> In Thee (whom by faith we view)
> Three Persons, neither more nor lesse,
> Whose workings them distinctly shew:
> And sure we are, those persons Three
> Make but one God, and thou art He.

Having established the distinction in the Trinity, Wither outlines their perichoretic or interpenetrative unity when acting *ad extra*:

> Yet, though this Motion, Light, and Heate,
> Distinctly by themselves we take;

Each in the other hath his seat,
And but one Sunne we see they make:
For, whatso'ere the One will doe,
He workes it with the other two.

So in the Godhead there is knit
A wondrous threefold True-love-knot,
And perfect Union fastens it,
Though flesh and bloud perceive it not;
And what each Person doth alone,
By all the Trinitie is done.

Their Worke they joyntly doe pursue,
Though they their Offices divide;
And each one by himselfe hath due
His proper Attributes beside:

Each person is eternal and infinite in unity:

And neither Person aught doth misse,
That of the Godheads essence is.

This trinitarian devotion surfaces in other hymns, for example the hymn for All Saints looks forward to the end of time when the saints will be gathered into the company of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[29]

Whatever the merits of Wither's writings as poetry, as hymns they are quite valiant attempts to render the complexities of the doctrine of the Trinity into a popular genre. His verse never achieves the depth of feeling or flourishes of rhetoric that we will find in Donne, but it does reveal a faith that was thoroughly trinitarian in flavour. Wither was obviously 'at home' with the doctrine of the Trinity much as Donne was, and in a way in which the majority of later divines were not.

Once again, in hymnology we find further evidence that the emptying of the devotional and emotional appeal of the doctrine

[29] Wither later expanded his work into three volumes; the introduction to this *Halleluiah* states that the work is in three parts to mirror the Trinity. For details of this later work, which was published in 1641, see Watson, p. 64.

was accelerated after the Restoration. Hymn books from this period are not replete with hymns to the Trinity. William Barton's *Four Centuries of Select Hymns* published after the Restoration contains some trinitarian doxologies:

> To God the Father and the Son,
> and Holy Ghost therefore
> Eternal honour let be done,
> henceforth for evermore.[30]

And also contains a poor verse on the Johannine comma:

> Three witnesses there are above,
> and all these three are one:
> The Father, Son, and sacred dove,
> One deity alone.
> The living Father sent the Son,
> Who by the Father lives:
> And unto them that ask of him
> the Holy Ghost he gives.[31]

But Barton simply lacks the spark of trinitarian feeling found in Wither.

John Mason's *Spiritual Songs* from the last decade of the seventeenth century similarly contains a variety of trinitarian doxologies:

> Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;
> The Father sent his Son;
> The Son sends forth the Holy Ghost,
> For Mens salvation.[32]

[30] William Barton, *Four Centuries of Select Hymns* (London: 1668), 'Hymn XLIX' in the second century. It should be pointed out that the 'centuries' are groups of one hundred hymns.

[31] Barton, century I, 'Hymn XC'.

[32] [John Mason], *Spiritual Songs* (London: 1696), p. 7. Mason's songs are thoroughly scriptural. To modern minds not so steeped in the Old Testament the results can be unintentionally hilarious, as in the hymn (still sung in a truncated form today) 'How shall I sing that majesty', which contains these memorable lines: 'Thy Bright Back-parts, O God of Grace, / I humbly here adore'. The book of Exodus was obviously more to the forefront of the seventeenth-century mind than our own!

But the spark is missing here as well. The hymn to the Holy Ghost does not really address the third divine person, and in general the hymns are empty of references to the Trinity and devoid of trinitarian dynamic. In the hothouse atmosphere of the 1690s this was hardly surprising.

Batter my Heart

This general trend towards an emptying of the affective imagination in regard to the Trinity is also reflected in the poetry of the Stuart Age. Ben Jonson in 'The Sinner's Sacrifice' addressed himself to the Holy Trinity tenderly while upholding the central aspects of trinitarian teaching:

> O holy, blessed, glorious Trinity
> of persons, still one God, in unity
> The faithful man's believed mystery,
> Help, help to lift
>
> Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, you three
> All coeternal in your majesty,
> Distinct in persons, yet in Unity
> One God to see.

The poem's last verse is a very skilful weaving of theology and triple triadic structure. The persons are named by their attributed works in the creation: 'maker', 'saviour' and 'sanctifier'. The present experience of the believer in the trinitarian dynamic is then outlined as the persons are requested to 'hear', 'mediate' and 'sweeten'. Finally, Johnson inverts the order of the Trinity to celebrate the trinitarian gifts to humanity: 'grace', 'love' and 'cherishing':

> My maker, saviour, and my sanctifier,
> To hear, to mediate, sweeten my desire,
> With grace, with love, with cherishing entire,
> O then how blessed.[33]

[33] Ben Johnson, *The Complete Poems* (ed. G. Parfitt; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

George Herbert (1593–1633), one of the first Anglican poet-divines, wrote of the Trinity several times. He tended to stress the incomprehensibility of the Trinity, but in a way that is an invitation to worship rather than a defence. In a poem entitled 'Ungratefulness' he writes,

> Thou hast but two rare Cabinets full to treasure,
> The Trinity, and the Incarnation:
> Thou hast unlock'd them both,
> And made them jewels to betroth
> The work of thy creation
> Unto thyself in everlasting pleasure
>
> The statelier Cabinet is the Trinity
> Whose sparkling light access denies:
> Therefore thou dost not show
> This fully to us, till death blow
> The dust into our eyes:
> For by that powder thou wilt make us see.[34]

Again, like Jonson, Herbert does not simply state the bare bones of the doctrine, but holds out the vision of perichoretic life as the Christian goal.

But clothing the 'bare bones' of doctrine is achieved pre-eminently in the works of John Donne (1572–1631), Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, London. If ever there were a poet of the Trinity, it is he. Donne's reverence, love and imaginative feel for the doctrine in his preaching was noted in the Introduction. This flair is given full expression in his poetry.[35]

'The Litanie', which dates from the first decade of the seventeenth century, is based on the traditional Litany of Saints. As a litany it opens with invocations to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person is addressed with a petition for mercy and help. In the fourth stanza Donne addresses the triune God:

> O Blessed glorious Trinity,
> Bones to Philosophy, but milke to faith,

[34] *The Works of George Herbert* (2 vols.; London: Bell, 1859).
[35] John Donne, *Complete English Poems* (ed. C. A. Patrides, London: Dent, 1994).

> Which, as wise serpents, diversly
> Most slipperinesse, yet most entanglings hath,
> As you distinguish'd undistinct
> By power, love, knowledge bee,
> Give mee a such selfe different instinct
> Of these let all mee elemented bee,
> Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbred three.

The result is audacious: orthodox doctrine and startling imagery are woven together in masterly fashion. The perichoresis of the three divine persons is captured by the imagery of entangled serpents, and the two words 'distinguish'd undistinct' suggest almost effortlessly what oceans of ink were to be unable to communicate. The relative attributes of power, love and knowledge point to this 'distinguished undistinction'. The stanza ends with the plea that the author be caught up into the life of what Donne refers to, in a startling paradox, as the 'unnumbred three'. The verse is a vivid testimony to the way in which doctrinal formulae, 'the bones to philosophy', can successfully couple with the devotional imagination, 'the milke to faith'. In some ways the whole history of the progress of the doctrine of the Trinity during the seventeenth century is from Donne, who gives both 'bones' and 'milke' to the valley of the dry bones found in the defences of Waterland that we will examine in Chapter 6.

The same imagination shines in the *Holy Sonnets*. In 'Sonnet XIV' Donne exclaims, 'Batter my heart, three person'd God' and the entire sonnet is a prayer to be ravished by the perichoretic deity. The same desire for communion with the three persons is found in 'Sonnet XVI', where Donne speaks of 'his joynture in the knottie Trinitie'. The adjective captures wonderfully both the difficulty of the doctrine but also the inseparability of the three divine persons, and by extension those who are caught up into their love.

The years after the Civil War have simply nothing to compare in trinitarian imagination. There has been much dispute about the doctrinal tenor of the works of Milton. I will investigate Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* in Chapter 4. In his book *Milton and the English Revolution*, Christopher Hill comments sagaciously that attempts to render Milton orthodox tell us more about the anxieties of their proponents than Milton.[36] Unfortunately his

[36] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), see p. 1.

comment turns out to be a Parthian shot. Hill's own designs in claiming Milton as 'a radical heretic' are clearly visible, and while it is true that Milton advocated 'a more perfect reformation', the extent and scope of such a reformation in regard to trinitarian doctrine is not at all clear. It is difficult to decide the nature and extent of Milton's alleged heresy in regard to the Trinity, and Hill's attempt to read *Paradise Lost* and the *Doctrina* as symbiotic partners is heavily contested. While the latter document seems to have a distinct subordinationist tone, *Paradise Lost* has to be judged on its own merits.[37]

The obvious has to be stated at the outset: *Paradise Lost* is not a doctrinal treatise. As poetry it must not be judged by alien categories. That there are three persons in the narrative is clear, though the Holy Spirit is hardly treated. What is at stake in the debate is the relationship between them. At certain points Milton can sound thoroughly orthodox: the Son is 'only begotten', the 'radiant image' of God's glory moreover 'in him all his Father shone substantially express'd', he is both 'God and man'. Other points sound a more discordant note: 'Thee next they sang of all Creation first / Begotten Son, Divine Similitude'.[38]

Whatever the true nature of Milton's belief about the Trinity, it should be noted that even those who would defend Milton from the charge of heresy see the trinitarianism of *Paradise Lost* as distinctly subordinationist. Milton, in common with many of those I shall investigate in the following chapters, took Christian doctrine to be clearest and purest near its source, and, again in common with many others, saw a disastrous sea change occurring in Christianity around the time of the Council of Nicea. Milton perceived the teaching of the ante-Nicene Fathers to be the true teaching of Christ and his Apostles. The understanding of that teaching, which again it must be stressed was not strictly speaking Arian, lent the subordinationist tone found in his writing.[39]

[37] See C.A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), and W. B. Hunter, ed., *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971).

[38] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 1989), book III, lines 80, 63, 137, 315, 384–5.

[39] See Patrides for the claim that Milton took up the revived subordinationist conceptualizations of the Cambridge Platonists (p. 16). Hunter's articles in *Bright Essence* reject the charge of Arianism levelled against Milton by showing that the Son is generated from the substance of the Father and not, as Arius would have it, 'out of nothing'.

The same forces that we have found present in other areas of popular expression seem to be at work in poetry too: a distancing from the doctrine, a dumbing down of the imagination, a loss of trinitarian dynamic. While I must stress that my study of popular religion is tentative and impressionistic, it does seem that during the seventeenth century a decisive alienation from the doctrine is occurring. This alienation is reflected in the imagination. As the doctrine of the Trinity is eviscerated of its popular appeal, the bones are left to knaw on but the milk has dried up.

Three Faces in a Knot

Given the alleged obliteration of images from English churches during the sixteenth century, it may seem somewhat futile to look for iconography of the Trinity. However the 'stripping of the altars' was not as total as is sometimes implied — the iconoclasts of the Civil War certainly had a busy time removing the relics of Popery. Their accounts imply that most, though by no means all, of the images still left in the churches before the 1640s were found in stained glass. Are there any clues to be found about popular devotion to the persons of the Trinity?[40]

When Paul Best inveighs against 'the triple headed Cerberus' of the Trinity in the 1640s it is tempting to dismiss this as a piece of florid polemic. But when we find the sober Lewes Bayly warning his readers not to conceive the Trinity as 'a tripartite idoll' we need to think again. Best's complaint has more substance than would initially appear. Prior to the Reformation the most popular method of depicting the triune God was the so-called 'Italian Trinity'. In this image the Father, often wearing a triple tiara, holds in his hands the crucified Christ, over whose head hovers the Spirit in the form of a dove. This image was widely used. Sometimes the three divine persons were even depicted in the form of three human persons: three men equal in stature,

[40] Two useful accounts of the iconoclasm of the seventeenth century are given in Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), and John Phillips, *The Reformation of Images* (London: University of California Press, 1973). Aston's book refers to a 'restoration' of images in the seventeenth century, presumably under Laud, but unfortunately does not deal with this.

visage and action. The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge has a well-preserved alabaster depicting the Trinity in this way. Devices and symbols, such as triangles and interlinked circles, were frequently used to express devotion to the Trinity.[41]

If pictorial representation of the Trinity was common, objections to such portrayal had a venerable history. Wycliffe had singled out images of the Trinity for attack: 'laymen depict the Trinity unfaithfully, as if God the Father was an aged *paterfamilias*, having God the Son crucified on his knees and God the Holy Spirit descending on both as a dove'. The Lollards were particularly concerned about images of the Trinity and inveighed against them in their *Twelve Conclusions*. This opposition to images of the Trinity grew during the Reformation period. Cranmer opposed such representations, and concern was voiced about such images throughout the reign of Elizabeth I.[42]

It must be stressed that concern about images of the Trinity was more than a rejection of images *per se*. It was not the peculiar preserve of puritans or militant Protestants. On the Continent, the Bishop of Meaux had selectively pruned images from his cathedral, being especially concerned to remove any connected with the Trinity.[43] Jeremy Taylor was particularly vexed by such depictions. In his *Dissuasive from Popery* he reproved 'the custom of the church of Rome, in picturing God the Father, and the most holy and undivided Trinity'. Taylor was acutely aware that such representations were hostages to fortune: 'it ministers infinite scandal to all sober-minded men, and gives the new arians, in Polonia, and anti-trinitarians, great and ridiculous entertainment, exposing that sacred mystery to derision and scandalous contempt'. Taylor would not countenance symbolic representation either. He reprobates Papists who, in Mass books and glass, 'picture the holy Trinity with three noses, and four eyes, and three faces in a knot, to the great dishonour of God'. Taylor argued that the Holy Trinity never appeared in any form, therefore it could not be depicted visually. As all representation of the essence of God is excluded, the Trinity cannot be

[41] See Heather Child and Dorothy Coles, *Christian Symbols* (London: Bell, 1971) for an account of symbolism in regard to the Trinity, pp. 43–51. Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, is noteworthy for its trinitarian devices, including the delightful 'Rabbit Window'.

[42] Aston, p. 156; see pp. 131, 335, 432.

[43] See Aston, p. 53.

pictured, and no symbol can be found for that which has no form.[44]

During the 1630s the ascendancy of the Laudian party led to a limited revival of images in the Church of England. The extent and content of this revival is still unclear, and we lack evidence about the subjects portrayed. Some stained glass was commissioned for sure, and the statue of the Virgin above the portico of the University Church in Oxford, which contributed to Laud's conviction and execution, shows that glass was not the only medium employed. John Cosin, in the vanguard of the restoration of images, apparently had the font at Durham Cathedral decorated with a dove to represent the Holy Spirit. Cosin was accused of re-importing the Italian Trinity, and one of the canons of the cathedral delivered a jeremiad against the bishop in which he was denounced for wearing a cope embroidered with an image of the Trinity.[45]

Whatever the extent of this revival of imagery, the reaction was ferocious. In a climate that was hysterically and pathologically anti-Catholic such innovations could not be tolerated. There were iconoclastic riots in 1640 and 1641, and in 1642 the Long Parliament decreed that 'all crucifixes, scandalous pictures of any one or more persons of the Trinity, and all images of the Virgin Mary, shall be taken away and abolished'.[46]

One of the most zealous of the iconoclasts was William Dowsing. His 'Journal', recording his forays into the churches of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, makes interesting and sad reading. Countless windows were smashed and images removed. Dowsing listed his destruction with delight. Among those destroyed at Little St Mary's, Cambridge, was a 'picture' of God the Father sitting in a chair, possibly an 'Italian Trinity'. Pictures in Trinity College

[44] Taylor, *Works*, X, pp. 175–6, 177; XI, p. 169. At this latter point can also be found a specific censure of the Italian Trinity.

[45] See Phillips, pp. 152, 177. For the canonical diatribe, see Peter Smart, *The Vanitie and Downe-fall of Superstitious Popish Ceremonies* (Edinburgh: 1628). Smart's account is still bitingly funny, as when he inveighs against the music at the Communion Service as a 'hydeous noise' which renders 'the greatest part of the service [. . .] no better understood than if it were in Hebrew or Irish'! (p. 24).

[46] Davies, II, p. 343. An eyewitness account, giving a vivid and graphic description of the desecration practised, can be found in Bruno Ryves, *Angliae ruina* ([n.p.]: 1647). His account can lapse into bathos as when he records the destruction of the organ at Westminster Abbey: 'they brake down the Organs, and pawned the Pipes at severall Ale-houses for pots of Ale' (p. 236).

and the Round Church suffered the same fate. At Teversham there was a picture with four suns, three contained the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the fourth the three persons in one God. This too was destroyed. In another church Dowsing spared an image of the devil as such images were not included within the parliamentary decree![47]

It is difficult to conclude with certainty what impact these images, and their subsequent destruction, had upon their beholders. It must also be emphasized that iconoclasm and anti-trinitarianism are in no ways coterminous. Such images were reviled by Best, an opponent of the Trinity, but also decried by Bayly and Taylor, staunch trinitarian believers. For a culture that was becoming symbolically densensitized such imagery may have been a hindrance rather than a help to understanding. The iconoclasm is clearly consistent with the general trend towards a suppression of the imagination in religion in general. However, in a society that was still largely illiterate, the destruction of such aids to devotion possibly removed what little handle the ordinary believer could get on the doctrine.

The Matter and Stile of Sermons

The vast majority of churchgoers would have heard at least one sermon on a Sunday. Most of these discourses perished as soon as they were preached, and it is thus very difficult to gain a clear picture of the standard fare on offer in most parish churches. The celebrated and influential preachers had their sermons copied and published, but these are hardly a representative proportion of the whole. The nature of ordinary preaching and its references to the divine persons is almost a closed book, but some hints are to be found.

There is general agreement that both the style and the content of preaching changed quite drastically during our period. The opening years of the Stuart Age saw the flourishing of the so-called 'metaphysical preachers'. Men such as Donne, Andrewes and Jeremy Taylor were praised for their learning, wit and rhetoric. Their sermons are replete with quotations, imagery and

[47] *The Cambridge Journal of William Dowsing 1643* (transcribed by A. C. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), pp. 7, 12.

allusions drawn largely from the Scriptures but also from the Fathers and Classical authors. They wished to move their hearers to action and did so by linking doctrine and practice in a seamless whole. They appealed to the imagination, used allegory, and played fairly freely with their text. The Restoration divines were very different. Charles II, having grown used to the briefer expositions of Continental preachers, prized and praised brevity and simplicity of style. The Court preachers quickly caught on. The concerns of the Restoration period also affected preaching. Anything that smacked of fervour or 'enthusiasm' was automatically suspect — that sort of thing had led to the Civil War. Coolness and rationality were valued. The Scriptures were cited less frequently, and the Fathers down-played. Preaching became less urgent and more urbane. Preachers bothered themselves with moralism not with mystery, and natural explanation was preferred to supernatural. The 'plain speech' of the Royal Society affected the preachers of high society. Preaching was valued if it was rational, peaceable and useful. There was little time for speculation or celebration of mystery. Preaching towards the end of the seventeenth century became, in the waspish comment of one recent commentator on the sermons of Tillotson, the expounding of 'Christian discipleship without the taking up of a cross'. Such a climate was not conducive to any imaginative restatement of the doctrine of the Trinity.[48]

A preachers' guide published in 1671 shows the direction of the tide quite clearly. Preaching has fallen into contempt, the author argued, precisely because preachers dealt too much with obscure points of doctrine and not enough with everyday concerns. In a sermon there should be no 'obscure passages, or nice speculations', and the preacher must resist the urge to become 'a Mystery-man'. Reason is the tool to confirm faith, not 'Enthusiasm or bare tradition, both of them bad Nurses'. The emptying of the imagination is categorically enjoined in a passage that deals with trinitarian metaphors:

> nor should you study to prove the Trinity in Unity (as some have attempted) by the comparison of three folds in the same

[48] Davies, H: *From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox* (1975), p. 184. This paragraph relies heavily on Davies.

> cloath, or by the three faculties or powers in the soul, which are all one in essence, or by the similitude betwixt him and the substance, light and heat of the Sun. The truth of such articles is not to be made evident from comparisons, which prove nothing, but from Scripture so interpreted by most ancient Councils and Fathers.[49]

That at least two of the censured metaphors are found in the writing of the Fathers does not seem to have struck the author. Given such direction it is not surprising that the sermons of the 1690s are much less vivid and convincing than those of Donne, whose sermons, while hardly 'unreasonable', are testimony to his conviction that the Trinity was a mystery 'not to be chewed by reason, but to be swallowed by faith'.[50]

A final clue to the content of sermons, at least after the Restoration, is offered by the diarist John Evelyn. His first record of preaching against Socinianism dates from 1659, the next is an account of a sermon preached on Trinity Sunday in 1679. In the 1680s references are made more frequently and become a flood in the 1690s as the Socinians 'began exceedingly to broch their heresy more than ever in England'. Evelyn's accounts are of sermons preached *against* the errors of the Socinians and Arians. The doctrine was expounded in defensive terms: it was a mystery; it required faith not reason; it was the teaching of the primitive Church. Evelyn gives no account of any sermon that attempted to integrate the doctrine into the affective life of piety, or demonstrate its practical use. The most imaginative response we find is in an entry for July 1691 recording the creation of a new parish church. The presiding bishop told the congregation that the new church,

> was to be dedicated to the Holy Trinity, in honour of the 3 undivided Persons in the Deity, & to mind their duty, in giving equal worship to both the Father, Son, & Holy Ghost, & steadfastly to cleave & assert, the Godhead of them all, according to the faith of the Church in all ages, & now especially,

[49] John Arderne, *Directions Concerning the Matter and Stile of Sermons* (ed. John MacKay; Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), pp. 3, 4, 6, 25–6.

[50] Quoted in David Nichols, 'The Political Theology of John Donne', *Theological Studies* 49 (1988), pp. 45–66, (57).

that Arianisme, Socinianisme, & Atheisme, began to spread amongst us.[51]

The Rhythm of the Liturgy

Theological reflection that neglects the study of Liturgy runs the risk of serious distortion. Investigation of the actual practice of public worship helps the historical theologian in his task. Indeed, 'the study of the aspiration and adoration of entire Christian communities and communions is a profound clue to the interpretation of religious life at any period . . . it is as important as the consideration of the ideas of individual theologians'. It might even be said that 'the true history of the Church is . . . the history of its worship'.[52]

During the Stuart Age the Book of Common Prayer was under attack on two fronts. Before the Civil War it was seen by many as too 'Papist', a perception that culminated in its proscription on 3 January 1645. This ban was circumvented by numerous stratagems, and its Liturgy was freely available throughout the Commonwealth period.[53] The very minor revisions of 1662 and 1689, and the more profound aborted reforms proposed at the outset of the Restoration, sprung from concern with the 'Papist' nature of the prayer book.

The more interesting and less predictable attack was that mounted in the early eighteenth century by the maverick scholar William Whiston and the leading theologian Samuel Clarke, who were much more concerned to 'correct' the doctrinal errors of the prayer book.[54] (I will investigate the theological writings of both in

[51] *The Diary of John Evelyn* (ed. E. S. De Beer; London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 19 May 1695, 19 July 1691; see the entries for 13 February 1659, 15 June 1679, 2 July 1699, 26 May 1700.

[52] Davies, III: *From Watts and Wesley to Maurice* (1961), pp. 6–7. See footnote 9 for the claim of Roger Lloyd about the 'true history of the Church', which Davies endorses.

[53] That this was the case is ably demonstrated by Morrill and Spurr; see, for instance, Spurr's first chapter dealing with the Interregnum.

[54] The depth of the BCP's trinitarianism can be seen in the following brief outline. The practice of repeating the traditional doxology 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost' at the end of each psalm is a clear example of the Prayer Book's trinitarianism. As it stood, the form of the doxology rendered each person equal praise and honour. The Litany, which was to be recited every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, invoked the three divine persons individually and collectively. It stated categorically that there were

Chapter 6.) Their proposed reforms and adapted Liturgy reflected their subordinationist theologies. Whiston's eccentric nature was amply displayed in his liturgical provisions, which he later recalled had been the immediate occasion of the first of several entanglements with the Bishop of Ely, unhappy with his omission of three of the four opening petitions of the Litany and the complete abandonment of the Athanasian Creed.[55]

Disturbed by the coequality implied by the form of the doxology used at the end of the metrical psalms, he proposed a revision:

> To God the Father, through the Son,
> And in the Holy Ghost,
> Be Glory now, and ever paid,
> By us, and all his Host.[56]

Great poetry it is not, but it neatly illustrates the purely economic Trinity advocated by one who saw himself as a 'Primitive Christian'. His revised Liturgy expunged the Athanasian Creed altogether, deleted the Preface for Trinity Sunday, and altered the words of baptism and other ordinances to reflect the subordinationist tendencies of his thought. Whiston was no mere rationalist paring down the liturgical formulae: amongst other proposals he advocated a return to the first Prayer Book of Edward the VI,

'three Persons and one God'. The Apostles' Creed was read every morning and evening, and the Nicene Creed recited during the celebration of the Holy Communion. The Athanasian Creed was to be recited on thirteen set days — an instruction deeply resented and disobeyed in certain circles. The Preface for Trinity Sunday was emphatic:

> Who art one God, one Lord: not one only Person, but three Persons in one Substance. For that which we believe of the glory of the Father, the same we believe of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, without any difference or inequality.

The blessing given at the conclusion of the Communion was explicitly trinitarian, as were the formulae for baptism, the giving of the ring in marriage, and absolution at the Visitation of the Sick. The laying on of hands at diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ordination was given 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'. At this conferral of orders the *Veni Creator* sequence, an explicit invocation of the Spirit, was sung. As well as this explicit trinitarian language the Liturgy possessed a trinitarian ethos. The feasts of Christmas, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday were celebrated, providing ample opportunity for reflection upon the Incarnation, the Spirit, and the mystery of the Trinity. The ordinary Sundays of the year were counted as 'Sundays after Trinity'.

[55] William Whiston, *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd*, (4 vols.; London: 1711), I, see pp. xci, lxxv.

[56] Whiston, I, p. cxxix.

and the use of oil in baptism. In Liturgy, as in writing, he was concerned only with the reconstruction of what he took to be 'Primitive Christianity'. Several of Whiston's suggestions cropped up again and again in proposed revisions of the prayer book during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[57]

The proposed revision of Samuel Clarke was more rationalist in tone: the Liturgy needed reform to make it acceptable to right-thinking men. His copy of the 1662 prayer book, preserved in the British Museum, has all its trinitarian formulae struck through. Clarke did not publish his proposed revision but circulated it privately. Prayer is directed to the Father alone. The Athanasian and Nicene Creeds are omitted, and the Apostles' Creed amended with a comma to read 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty'. The doxology is changed to 'Glory be to God by Jesus Christ through the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost'. The Preface of Trinity Sunday is deleted, and all trinitarian formulae amended in a subordinationist direction.[58] Although the proposals of Whiston and Clarke had little direct influence upon the Liturgy of the Church of England, the latter's proposals were to be influential in the development of non-trinitarian liturgies outside the established Church.[59]

We have found clear evidence then that the seventeenth century marked something of a watershed in popular appreciation and appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In the following chapters we shall examine some of the causes for this decline in trinitarian imagination, and investigate some of the arguments and disputes that eroded the trinitarian hegemony of doctrine.

[57] For Whiston's Liturgy and some interesting comparisons, see W. Jardine Grisbrooke, *Anglican Liturgies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: SPCK, 1958).

[58] See R. C. D. Jasper, *Prayer Book Revision in England 1800–1900* (London: SPCK, 1954), pp. 2–3. Against this background Waterland's spirited defence of the Athanasian Creed is more understandable. The very modest revisions of the Prayer Book in 1689 had reduced the number of times it was to be recited during the year from thirteen to five. There had been some discussion of its removal altogether in an attempt to conciliate the nonconformists but the proposal was defeated. Well into the nineteenth century the suitability of this creed for public worship was still a bone of contention.

[59] See A. Elliott Peaston, *The Prayer Book Reform Movement in the XVIIIth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1940).

CHAPTER TWO

The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme

The chaos, confusion and torment generated by the English Civil War is well captured in the lapidary title of Christopher Hill's book, *The World Turned Upside Down*. Hill and others have skilfully presented us with the turmoil that engulfed much of the British Isles during 'the English Revolution'. The crucial importance of religion in the conflict has been recognized increasingly in recent years, leading John Morrill to insist that this period sees not the first modern revolution but the last war of religion. Anarchy, confusion and disorder reigned in Church and state, and religious disputes were the most powerful motor behind the civil conflict. The English Reformation had never produced the ultra-radical eruptions that occurred in Münster and elsewhere on the Continent, but the English Revolution was to eclipse them. Civil chaos provided a catalyst for the advancement of various 'deviant' doctrines, opinions and practices in religion. Dogma, moral teaching and the interpretation of Scripture were examined, questioned and rejected as never before. The breakdown of any effective censorship meant that heterodox views could be canvassed almost with impunity, and tracts and invectives poured from the unregulated presses in abundance.[1]

[1] Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Temple Smith, 1972). A very useful bibliography for Civil War material can be found in Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed* (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 353–6. John Morrill emphasizes the importance of religion in his essays, many of which are collected in *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London: Longman, 1993). The impact of the conflict upon, and development of, religious genres is traced in Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640–1660* (London: Yale University Press, 1994).

There had been some chinks in the trinitarian consensus in the previous centuries. The Lollards were unhappy with popular depictions of the doctrine in iconography. A priest called Assheton had been corrected by Archbishop Cranmer for his alleged unorthodoxy in regard to the Trinity. Bartholomew Legate, a preacher among the Seekers, and Edward Wightman, the last person to be burnt for heresy in England, had both been executed in 1612 for their anti-trinitarian views among other things. But these were isolated incidents and, in the case of poor Wightman at least, more the product of feeble-mindeness than the result of any systematic denial of the doctrine. The 1640s were different. It was in this turbulent decade that the seeds of future trinitarian conflicts were sown. Some links, such as the republication of John Biddle's works in the early 1690s, are obvious. Others are not quite so blatant but provide clear evidence that the controversies of the 1690s were the re-emergence of a theme that had been heard unmistakably fifty years before. The issues found in the disputes of the later decade — the interpretation of Scripture, the limits of reason, the role of tradition, the implications of toleration, the intelligibility of doctrinal language — can all be found in the 1640s and 1650s. One of the aims of this book is to correct the neglect of antecedents that nearly all who have sought to examine the controversies of the 1690s have been guilty of. Although I do not agree with their theological conclusions, the sharper historical insight exhibited by unitarian apologists such MacLachlan, and Wallace before him, must be given proper acknowledgement. To root the conflicts of the 1690s in the period surrounding the Civil War is not to commit the fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* found in some historical theology, but simply to insist that the topography of these later controversies surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity is already abundantly clear during this earlier period and in particular that the word 'person' occupies the central place in the dispute.[2]

[2] H. John MacLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951). The 'Introduction' in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *From Persecution to Toleration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 5, especially, is not guilty of such neglect and Grell is very perceptive when he notes that anti-trinitarianism in England was born at this time. Robert Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography* (3 vols.; London, 1850).

Libertinisme and Fearful Anarchy

In 1646, as the conflict in the country was entering a new and decisive phase, a splenetic diatribe against religious error appeared under the delightfully rabid title of *Gangraena*. Its author was Thomas Edwards (1599–1647) who had been an uncompromising Puritan from his early youth and had fallen foul of Archbishop Laud at the outset of his clerical career. He was renowned for his violent temper and speech as his vituperative and satirical *Gangraena* clearly shows. As a convinced Presbyterian, Edwards believed in the continued maintenance of an established and inclusivist Church, and his fury was partly directed at the Independents, who favoured congregational Church government unconnected to the state. But Edwards' main target was the extremist sects flourishing freely in the anarchy of civil war, and *Gangraena* vented his spleen on the strange doctrines, unorthodox teachings and bizarre practices of his contemporaries. He despised the lay leaders of the sects, lamenting the 'swarms . . . of all sorts of illiterate mechanick Preachers, yea of women and Boy Preachers'. He despaired of the situation, 'for we instead of a reformation, are grown from one extreme to another, fallen from Scylla to Charybdis, from Popish innovations, superstitions, and prelaticall Tyrrany, to damnable heresies, horrid blasphemies, Libertinisme and fearful anarchy'. Parliament had recently issued directions for the destruction of any religious images remaining in churches, and Edwards warmly applauded the iconoclasm, but he feared that the sects presented a greater danger and reminded its members that 'you have broken down images of the Trinity . . . we have those who overthrow the Doctrine of the Trinity'. *Gangraena* was a clarion call to action.[3]

Edwards provides a catalogue of errors preached in the previous four years, especially in London, that he himself had heard or had on good account. Some are relatively trivial, such as the preacher who exhorted men to receive the Lord's Supper with their hats on. Some strike the modern reader as ludicrously funny, such as the jeremiad delivered against the eating of black puddings based on Old Testament proscriptions connected with the consuming of blood. But others were far more

[3] Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* (London: 1646), 'The Epistle Dedicatory', not paginated.

serious and far reaching, among them four errors touching on the Trinity:

> 8. That right reason is the rule of Faith, and that we are to believe the Scriptures, and the Doctrine of the Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection, so far as we see them agreeable to reason, and no further.
> 24. That in the unity of the God-head there is not a trinity of Persons, but the Doctrine of the Trinity, believed and professed in the Church of God, is a Popish tradition and a doctrine of Rome.
> 25. There are not three distinct persons in the Divine essence, but only three offices; the Father, Son, and holy Ghost are not three persons, but offices.
> 26. That there is but one Person in the Divine nature.[4]

What is most remarkable about this list is that it provides a concise catalogue of nearly every major component in the disputes surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity for the next 90 years. Conflict over the role and scope of reason, the desire for a fuller and more perfect Reformation and the total rejection of anything that smacks of tradition, the neo-Sabellian interpretation placed on the doctrine by Hobbes and others, the unitarian mono-personal deity, are all major themes that will occur again and again in our narrative. The seeds of the later disputes were clearly being sown in the 1640s. The doctrine of the Trinity was becoming a contested matter: by 1644, for instance, the Baptists in Bristol openly debated whether or not God was one person.[5]

Edwards was rueful about the very future of Christianity given that 'within these last four years in England there have been blasphemies uttered of the Scriptures, the Trinity, each person of the Trinity, both of Father, Son, and holy Ghost'. Turning his fire once more on his Independent quarry, he concluded with a plea to Parliament to reject their request for toleration, which he feared would simply open the floodgates of error. (The same argument

[4] Edwards, pp. 19, 21. The numbers before each reflect their order in the text.

[5] See Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 190.

was to be used by Anglican opponents of religious toleration after the Restoration.)[6]

The errors reported by Edwards were allocated to various sects in Ephraim Pagitt's *Heresiography*. Pagitt (1575–1647), a skilled linguist at Christ Church, Oxford, who at one stage had translated the Book of Common Prayer into Greek, had been a strong royalist at the start of the Civil War but had come to see Presbyterianism as the only antidote to the rise of the Independents. He lamented that no sooner had the Roman yoke been thrown off at the Reformation than 'Behold suddenly a numerous company of other hereticks stole in upon us like locusts'. Like Edwards he was appalled by the lay leadership of the sects and inveighed against the fact that 'shoo-makers, coblers, button-makers preach'.[7] The religious disunity now manifest caused Samuel Rutherford, who had come south as a Scottish member of the Westminster Assembly, to lament that 'not onely every City, but every family almost hath a new Religion'.[8] John Taylor expressed his contempt of the 'swarme of sectaries' and their 'mechanick preachers' in satirical vein:

> These kind of vermin swarm like Caterpillars
> And hold Conventicles in Barns and Sellars,
> Some preach (or prate) in woods, in fields, in stables,
> In hollow trees, in tubs, on tops of tables,
> To the expense of many a tallow Taper,
> They tosse holy Scripture into Vapor.[9]

Pagitt accused four groups of holding heretical views of the Trinity: the Anabaptists who believe that 'Christ is not true God, but onely endued with more gifts that other men'; the Familialists (*sic*) who claim that 'it is ridiculous to say God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost; as though by saying these words they should affirme to be three Gods'; the Socinians who deny that Christ is

[6] Edwards, p. 37.

[7] E. Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 2nd edn (London: 1645), 'The Preface'. *Heresiography* is a companion volume to *Christianography*, which catalogued those Churches that did not share the errors of Rome.

[8] Samuel Rutherford, *A Sermon Preached before the Right Honourable House of Lords* (London: 1645), p. 6.

[9] John Taylor, *A Swarme of Sectaries* ([n.p.]: 1641), p. 7.

truly God and hold that the Trinity is repugnant to the Scriptures; and the Antitrinitarians or new Arians who 'deny the Trinity of Persons' and refuse to accept that Christ or the Spirit are of the essence of God. Pagitt was indignant with his fellow Protestants because even 'the Papists worship God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; whereas some of these sectaries blaspheme the holy Trinity'. Citing the executions of Bartholomew Legate and Edward Wightman in 1612 for their alleged anti-trinitarianism, Pagitt urged the magistrates to use similar measures to destroy the sects and their preachers.[10]

Anti-trinitarian teaching and anti-trinitarian groups are thus clearly present in the England of the 1640s. But from where did such sentiments originate, who were the propagators of such views, and why were such opinions being advanced? During this period anti-trinitarian ideas seem to flow from two sources, often intermingled but distinguishable. The first was the spread of Socinian ideas from the Continent. The second was a home-grown product born out of the marriage of biblicism and nascent rationalism. It is to the first of these sources that we now turn.

Italian Atheism

Throughout the seventeenth century 'Socinian' was a stock part of the abusive rhetoric of much religious debate. It functioned much as the word 'red' in 1950s America or 'fascist' in our own society. It was used emotively rather than descriptively, and accusations of 'Socinianism' have to be treated with great caution. Having said that, by 1640 Socinian thought and teaching was definitely permeating certain sections of English society.

The Socinians proper derived their name from the eponymous Faustus Socinus, a free-thinking humanist born in Siena in 1539. Faustus had been introduced to radical thought by his uncle Laelius. Both Socinii exemplified the spirit of Renaissance humanism and individualism of northern Italy, hence its characterization as 'Italian Atheism' by Francis Cheynell, one of its bitterest opponents.[11] Finding himself under threat because of his

[10] Pagitt, pp. 12, 86, 125, 154; see p. 123.
[11] Francis Cheynell, *The Man of Honour Described* (London: 1645), p. 26.

radical views in his native province, Faustus Socinus settled first in Basel and then, again out of concerns for personal safety, made his way to Poland, which at this time was far from being the ultra-Catholic country it later became. The liberal regime of its ruler, Sigismund II, provided a refuge for many 'dissident' believers, much as Holland was to become a few years later. In Rakow Socinus founded a college, which developed and disseminated his controversial teaching.

The Socinians refused to accept any authority other than that of Scripture, and they insisted that disputes about the meaning of Scripture were to be settled by reason alone. Their combination of these two convictions has led to them being characterized as 'evangelical rationalists', and led them to reject original sin, depict the sacrifice of Christ as purely exemplary and not propitiatory, and insist over a century before Kant that all beliefs had to be morally cashable. Above all they were renowned and vilified for their anti-trinitarianism, and indeed 'Socinian' was used as a synonym for unitarian during much of the seventeenth century.[12]

In 1605 the college at Racow had produced a catechism in Polish, known ever after as 'the Racovian Catechism' which aimed to be a compendium of Socinian teaching. Amongst other things it taught that Christ was not divine, that the Holy Spirit was not a person, and that God was *one* person not three. The catechism was soon translated into Latin, and in 1609 it arrived in England complete with a dedication to James I, whom the Socinians mistakenly believed to be a model of religious toleration. James was appalled and the book was burnt by the hangman.[13]

The Racovian Catechism divided knowledge of God into two types: truths that were considered essential to salvation and those that were merely conducive to it. The unipersonality of the deity was deemed to fall into the latter category; it is conducive but not essential to salvation to believe that God is one person. The catechism argued that God can only be one person in this vein: the essence of God is one, by definition there cannot be two or more gods; a 'person' is an individual intelligent essence; therefore the

[12] For a brief introduction to Socinus and Socinianism, see Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London: Longman, 1984), pp. 230-6. A much fuller account of the history of Socinianism can be found in Wilbur.

[13] *Catechesis ecclesiarum quae in regno Poloniae* (Racoviae: 1609), hereinafter referred to as the 'Racovian Catechism'.

individual intelligent essence, which we call 'God', must be one person and only one person. Those who affirm three persons in the Godhead do so because they misunderstand the Scriptures. Texts cited in favour of the doctrine of the Trinity are rejected by the catechism as inadequate. According to the catechism the word 'God' is used in two ways in the Bible: one for the Almighty God, and the other for those who are invested with his power and act in his name. Ignorance or confusion about this usage, along with other unscriptural influences have produced the erroneous doctrine of the Trinity. Although those who believe in a trinity of persons can still be saved, to believe that God is one person is more *conducive* to salvation; trinitarian belief is dangerous for several reasons: it overthrows God's unity; it obscures God's glory; it subverts the way of faith by not allowing to the Son and the Spirit their secondary operation in the role of salvation; and finally, it is one of the main stumbling blocks for the conversion of the heathen, who think that Christians believe in three Gods. The Socinian grammar of divinity holds that the 'person' of God is the Father. Christ is a human person, albeit one who has been elevated by the divine power of God to be a mediator between God and humanity, and the Holy Spirit is not a person but a personification of God's actions.[14]

It is important to grasp what is going on here. Socinianism is best seen as an exegetical position, and the Racovian Catechism was arguing that trinitarian language was unreasonable, but also that it was unscriptural. Socinian roots in Renaissance humanism led them, along with much early Protestantism, to be impatient of what they saw as scholastic niceties and thus to reject reflections that were at pains to examine how the word 'person' functioned in its trinitarian context. Whereas in much scholastic discussion of the Trinity, and indeed in Augustine, 'person' had been used as a formal term to enable Godtalk to continue, the Socinians took it as a material description. The change in perspective was fatal for the doctrine of the Trinity. If God was one then he was one individual person. For them the doctrine of three persons in one God was tantamount to asserting that there were three individuals

[14] Racovian Catechism, p. 32; see pp. 41, 42. The catechism dismisses the possibility of more than one person in the Godhead: 'Hoc sane vel hinc patere potest, quod essentia Dei sit una numero. Qua propter plures numero personae in ea esse nullo pacto possunt, cum persona nihil aliud sit, nisi essentia individua intelligens.'

in the Godhead and hence three individual gods. The words of the doctrine were not to be found in the Bible, and in the aftermath of the Reformation it made perfect sense to the Socinians to see the doctrine of the Trinity as yet another manifestation of the anti-Christian designs of the Roman Church, and to hail Socinus as 'the Reformer of the Reformers'.[15]

A Mystery of Iniquity, Three Headed Cerberus

Given the inauspicious welcome meted out to the Racovian Catechism, it should not be surprising that the historically verifiable course of Socinian thought in early Stuart England is hazy. The catechism and other Socinian literature could hardly expect wide or overt dissemination, but by the 1640s views very similar to those contained in the catechism were being canvassed and, equally importantly, denounced. Accusations of Socinianism had been flung in the previous decade against Chillingworth by the Jesuit controversialist Edward Knott. Chillingworth (1602–1644) had been an early ally of Laud but, troubled by doubts about his personal salvation, became a convert to Catholicism in 1630. His experience in the seminary in Douai drove him back to the Church of England within the year. In 1636 Knott cited Chillingworth's views on the role of reason in the interpretation of Scripture as evidence of his Socinian tendencies. Although Knott was very keen to press home the claim that Socinianism was the logical progression of Protestantism, a move that was to become a standard part of Catholic polemic, the tract itself is short of concrete evidence and slurs Chilingworth by inference and innuendo. Chillingworth's classic rejoinder, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation*, enshrining the principal of free inquiry, was a denial of Knott's charge and concerned to test the extent and limits of reason and Church authority rather than trinitarian doctrine.[16]

[15] MacLachlan's book has a verse in the page facing the Preface that captures this sentiment well,

> *Tota ruet Babylon; destruxit tecta Lutherus,*
> *Calvinus muros, sed fundamenta Socinus.*

[16] Matthew Wilson (pseud. for Edward Knott) in *A Direction to be Observed by N.N.* ([n.p.]: 1636).

Anti-trinitarian apologists such as Wallace have often wanted to claim Lord Falkland as the first Socinian in England, but caution needs to be exercised, as these partisan studies are explicitly driven by the desire to establish the pedigree of unitarian theology. It is quite probable that in places like Great Tew, Falkland's seat, there was access to both written and verbal accounts of Socinian doctrine, and the Grand Tour undertaken by the sons of the English nobility may have put some of them in touch with radical theological movements on the Continent. Many Socinians had settled in Holland after being driven into exile from Poland, and while MacLachlan vastly overstates his case by claiming that Holland was 'the bridgehead for the Socinian invasion of England', there was undoubtedly a steady trickle of Socinian books and ideas over the channel. It is also clear that certain Polish Socinians visited England on several occasions, and some sent their sons for education there. Of course this does not provide conclusive evidence that those they visited were Socinian sympathizers, nor, by the same token, that those who owned Socinian books agreed with their content. Opponents of Socinian thought were also becoming well aware that radical questioning was underway in certain quarters by the 1640s. In the opening year of the decade, Convocation had passed 17 canons aimed at cauterizing movements and tendencies deemed to be heretical and subversive. The fourth canon explicitly repudiated Socinianism, and while the canons themselves had no impact, as they were deemed *ultra vires* by Parliament, they are a clear indication of the alarm felt by the ecclesiastical establishment. The popular appeal of Socinianism proper was slight but, whatever its numerical strength, Socinianism was to become a constant concern to authorities in Church and state.[17]

Anti-trinitarian views were not confined to the clergy. One of *Gangraena*'s targets, was Paul Best, a friend of John Milton. After studying at Cambridge, Best had travelled extensively in Poland and Transylvania. There he had imbibed Socinian views and

[17] Robert Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography* (3 vols.; London: E.T. Whitfield, 1850). Another nineteenth-century unitarian author is less ideologically driven in tracing the rise of unitarian thought in England; Gaston Bonet-Maury, *Early Sources of English Unitarian History* (tr. E. P. Hall; London: British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1884). Bonet-Maury argues that the 'foreigners' churches' were the main ports of entry of unitarian ideas into England where, he believes, they found very fertile soil.

become a devotee of unitarian theology. According to Edwards, Best had described the Trinity as 'a mystery of iniquity, three headed cerberus [. . .] a tradition of Rome'. Best's *Mysteries Discovered*, written during his imprisonment for blasphemy, certainly justified Edwards' concern. The critique of trinitarianism expressed, the interpretation of John 1:3 as referring to the new creation, and the denial of the personality of the Holy Spirit, indicate more than passing acquaintance with the writings of Socinus and his followers. Best elaborated his creed:

> I believe the Father to be God himself . . . and the Son is our Messiah . . . whom God made Lord and Christ . . . And the holy spirit is the very power of God . . . or the Father God essentially, the Sonne vicentially, the holy spirit potentially . . . but for the Son to be coequall to the Father, or the holy spirit a distinct coequall person I cannot finde . . . And that of three coequall persons to be but a Chappell of Rome.[18]

Best construed trinitarian language as unscriptural: talk of three persons must mean three individuals and hence three gods. Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity stands in the way of the conversion of infidels because they see it plainly to be a doctrine that asserts three gods. Offering an account of the corruption of Scripture contained in it, Best outlines its genesis and introduction by the 'semi-pagan Christians of the third century in the Western Church'. Best is well acquainted with the standard orthodox replies that attempt to justify talk of three persons but dismisses them:

> As for that which is commonly answered that God is not divided but distinguished into three equall persons, [it] is as much as if they had not a reall, but only a relative and rational being or existence, as if essence and existence differed in God, or in anything whose kind consists in one individual: for hypostatical union or communion of properties, they are but reall contradictions, and the frog like croaking of the Dragon, the beast and false prophet.[19]

[18] Edwards, p. 38. Paul Best, *Mysteries Discovered* ([n.p.]: 1647), pp. 4–5.
[19] Best, pp. 11, 14.

Best rested his case by appealing to Scripture and Scripture alone as the right rule of faith: 'let us labour to reconcile Scripture by Scripture, and by no means admit of an absurd sense'. He thought it clear that one God must have one essence, one existence and *hence* be one person; to speak of three persons would be to introduce three existents sharing the same essence. And this cannot be true, argued Best, because in God existence and essence are one. Best is not an original thinker but he exhibits definite traits amongst certain religious radicals: the insistence upon scriptural language, the impatience of analogical and formal linguistic usage, biblical literalism, and of course anti-Roman polemic.[20]

A more nuanced example of the widespread disintegration of theological sensibility in regard to the Trinity is provided by John Fry. In 1647 Fry (1609–1657), a member of Parliament, had heard of a minister, possibly John Biddle, in prison on charges of anti-trinitarianism. Fry's interest placed him under suspicion of unorthodoxy, and he himself was accused of denying the divinity of Christ. Fry's pamphlet in defence, *The Accuser Sham'd*, reveals the growing unease surrounding the use of the word 'person' in regard to the Trinity. Fry declared himself

> altogether dis-satisfied with those expressions of three distinct persons, or Subsistences in the Godhead . . . Truly I do not believe Jesus Christ to be God, after the manner which some hold him forth, for according to my understanding of their words and expressions, they hold forth three Gods, and I would fain know how it can be demonstrated, that there can be three distinct persons, or subsistences in one entire being.[21]

Fry's comments are all the more interesting as he claims to be orthodox: 'I do and ever did, since I knew anything of Divinity, really believe, That the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and that these three are equally God . . . and yet there are not three Gods but one God'. It was the implications of the language of 'person' that disturbed Fry. He exhibited a 'common sense' conception of person thinking it properly used only of man. Fry feared that using it of God could not but lead to

[20] Best, p. 9; and see p. 8.
[21] John Fry, *The Accuser Shamd* (London: 1648), p. 15.

tritheism. His understanding and argument are worth quoting at length:

> I shall briefly speak to that gross and carnal Opinion of three distinct Persons, or Subsistences in the God head, and conclude. Persons or Subsistences, are Substances, or Accidents, as for the word Person, I do not understand that it can properly be attributed but to man; it is out of doubt with me, that if you ask the most part of men what they mean by a Person, they will either tell you 'tis a man or else they are not able to give you any answer at all: & the word Accident, I suppose none will attribute that to God; for according to my poor skill, that word imports no more but the figure or colour, &c. of a thing, and certainly no man ever saw the likeness of God, as the Scriptures abundantly testifie; and therefore neither of the words, Person or Subsistences, can hold forth such a meaning as Accidents in God.
>
> Athanasius in his Creed saith, There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; others say, That there are three distinct Subsistences in God: Well, these three persons or Subsistences, cannot be Accidents, neither do I think the meaning is of any: Then certainly they must be Substances; if so, they must be created or uncreated, limited or unlimited, then the person of the Father is a Creature, the person of the Son a Creature, and the person of the Holy Ghost a Creature, which I think none will affirm; if they are not created or limited, then they must be uncreated and unlimited, for I know no medium between created and uncreated, limited and unlimited: If they are uncreated and unlimited, then there are three uncreated and unlimited Substances, and so consequently three Gods. For my part, I finde no footing for such expressions in Scripture; and I think them fit onely to keep ignorant people in carnal and gross thoughts of God, and therefore I do explode them out of my Creed.[22]

It is important to understand the difference between Best and Fry if we are to grasp the complexities of the process surrounding the demise of trinitarian thought and imagination. Best was

[22] Fry, pp. 21, 22–3.

opposed to the very doctrine of the Trinity, Fry was not. Fry's problems are more linguistic and conceptual than credal. He states clearly that he accepts what has been handed on to him about the Godhead of Father, Son and Spirit. It is the language used to expound this belief that troubles him, especially the word 'person' which he felt was misleading, unscriptural and dangerously close to tritheism. We are also witnessing once again an impatience with the scholastic jargon and the deadening of analogical imagination. Parliament itself grew impatient with Fry, and although no action seems to have been taken against him directly, his pamphlet and a subsequent anti-clerical work were both ordered to be burnt.

The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme

A key figure in the religious controversies was Francis Cheynell (1608–1665), an avowed and belligerent Presbyterian, who had been a divine at the Westminster Assembly. On the capture of Chichester by Parliament in 1644 he had successfully secured the retention of Chillingworth, by now in chronic bad health, at the town and spared him the journey to London. This action was to provide little relief as Cheynell took advantage of his charge to torment him about his theological views. At Chillingworth's funeral Cheynell flung *The Religion of Protestants* into the grave and denounced its author as both a crypto-Papist and Socinian sympathizer.[23] In 1647 Cheynell was one of those charged by Parliament with the reforming of Oxford University and undertook this commission with a fervour and tenacity that earned him the hatred of many. This was only increased by his subsequent interposition as President of St John's College.

In 1649 Cheynell published *The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme*. In it he charted the genesis of Socinian thought in Italy and Poland, its waxing strength in England, and the dangers it posed to true religion. His book was intended as a call to arms against this new, insidious menace. Despite his undoubted fanaticism, Cheynell was no lonely crazed maverick obsessed with gremlins of his own imagining, for the threat of Socinianism was also by now very real in many English minds, and the existence of

[23] See Francis Cheynell, *Chillingworth novissima* (London: 1644), for these charges and a defence of his conduct at the funeral.

large amounts of Socinian and anti-Socinian literature from this time is eloquent testimony that Cheynell and others were not tilting at windmills.[24]

Cheynell's intemperate zeal is clear in his book, and throughout the heat of the moment can still be felt in the force of the polemic. He saw the root of the Socinian creed as an illegitimate extension of reason; some of the scholars at Oxford had lost their faith by their 'vaine curiosity' and were 'mad with reason'. At the outset of his investigations into the university he had quickly found evidence of Socinian sympathy.[25] 'The Epistle Dedicatory' of Cheynell's book recounted the seizure of a manuscript belonging to John Webberley at Lincoln College during a visitation in 1648. Webberley was one of several in the university suspected of reading and disseminating Socinian literature. The manuscript turned out to be the translation of a Socinian book, which Webberly claimed was solely for his own use. However, it contained an 'Epistle Dedicatory', and Cheynell wryly commented that 'I never heard of any man yet who wrote an Epistle to himself'.

Sharing a common contemporary perception, Cheynell believed that a battle was taking place for the soul of Protestantism itself. In many ways his book reflects the 'conservatism' of the Parliamentary cause, and the popular abhorrence of 'innovation' in religion. Cheynell was convinced that Laud, the recently executed Archbishop of Canterbury, had connived at the growth of Socinianism by asserting that 'reason by her own lights can discover how firmly the Principles of Religion are true'. Cheynell feared that Laud had been playing a double game, for 'Arminianism is a fair step to Socinianisme', a suspicion shared by other opponents of Arminian teaching.[26] And if it was clear to men such as Cheynell that the High Church ritual and religion of Laud was not pure Protestantism, it was even more clear to them that neither was that of the Socinians who had the temerity to claim that *they* were the true heirs of Luther and Calvin. Cheynell was well

[24] Fr[ancis] Cheynell, *The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme* (London: 1643). See MacLachlan, *Socinianism*, chapter VIII, for the widespread distribution of Socinian literature, esp. pp. 124–7. The *DNB* labels Cheynell a 'fanatic'.

[25] Cheynell, *The Rise*, p. 24.

[26] Cheynell, *The Rise*, pp. 40, 35. For a modern examination of these suspicions, see Carl O. Bangs 'Arminius and Socinianism', in Lech Szczucki, ed., *Socinianism* (Warsaw: PWN, 1983).

aware that Socinus 'pretended . . . to be Reformer of the Reformers, nay of the Reformation itself'. These pretences simply strengthened his conviction that the 'Devill hath done more mischiefe in the Church by counterfeit Protestants . . . than by professed Papists'. The Socinians, he warned, denied the resurrection of the dead, original sin, and baptismal regeneration; 'they advance the power of nature and destroy the power of grace'. Above all else he highlighted their opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, and denounced them as latter-day Noetians for maintaining 'that there was but one person in the Godhead'.[27]

God Is the Name of a Person

It is not clear if Edwards had John Biddle, 'the Father of the English Unitarians', in his sights when he had denounced those who asserted that God is *one* person, but Biddle seems to have been the first to utter such sentiments in English. He is also the most systematic English anti-trinitarian writer during this early period, and his influence was the most far reaching. Although his works were not great in volume, his influence proved considerable. They were reprinted in the early 1690s, and John Locke, amongst others, was obviously acquainted with them.

Born at Wooton-under-Edge in 1615, after attending the local grammar school in Gloucester, Biddle proceeded to Magdalen Hall, Oxford, from where he graduated in 1638 and returned to take up a place at his old school. Some years later, on 2 May 1644, he was brought before the Royalist magistrates of the city on account of his heretical views. This resulted in the first of many periods of incarceration, at the hands of both Crown and Republic. A contemporary story tells of the young Thomas Firmin, who was to be highly instrumental in the propagation of anti-trinitarian literature in the closing decade of the century, interceding for Biddle with Cromwell during the Protectorate. Cromwell is supposed to have dismissed Firmin as a 'curl-pate boy'. The story is almost certainly apocryphal but it seems as if Firmin was instrumental in securing a pension of £100 for Biddle during his exile to the Scilly Isles. Biddle eventually died in prison in London

[27] Cheynell, *The Rise*, pp. 19, 7, 25, 5.

in 1662. He was not alone in causing concern to the authorities in Gloucester. In the same year John Knowles (*fl.* 1646–1668) had to answer charges regarding his alleged denial of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. [28]

Biddle's published writings, most of which were condemned and burnt, were expansions of his personal confession of faith before the Magistrates on 2 May 1644:

> 1. I believe there is but one Infinite and Almighty Essence, called God.
> 2. I believe, that as there is but one Infinite and Almighty Essence, so there is but one Person in the Essence.
> 3. I believe that our Saviour Jesus Christ is truly God, by being truly, really, and properly united to the only Person of the Infinite and Almighty Essence.[29]

In a work denying the deity of the Holy Spirit, Biddle expounded his understanding of 'person' and how he believed it was properly to be used of God. He dismissed those who argued that the Holy Spirit is distinguishable from 'God' if we speak 'personally' but not if we speak 'essentially'. Such a distinction he derided as unscriptural, and argued that it could not be conceived except by entertaining the notion of two separate things in one's mind:

> If the person be distinct from the Essence of God, then it must needs be something; since nothing hath no accident and therefore neither can it happen to it to be distinguished. If something, then either some finite or infinite thing: if finite, then, then there will be something finite in God, and consequently, since by the concession of the adversaries every thing in God is God himself, God will be finite; which the adversaries themselves will likewise confess to be absurd. If infinite, then there will be two infinities in God, to wit, the Person and essence of God, and consequently two Gods; which is more absurd than the former. Thirdly, to talk of God taken impersonally, is ridiculous, not onely because there is no example thereof in

[28] See the *Old DNB* and *New DNB* articles on Firmin, and Knowles.
[29] Quoted in MacLachlan, *Socinianism*, p.170.

> Scripture, but because God is the name of a *Person, and signifieth him that hath sublime domination or power: and when it is put for the most high God, it denoteth him who with Soveraign and absolute authority ruleth over all; but none but a person can rule over others, all actions being proper to persons: wherefore to take God otherwise than personally, is to take him otherwise than he is, and indeed to mistake him.
>
> * By Person, I understand, as Philosophers do, suppositum intelligens, that is an intellectual substance compleat, and not a mood or subsistence; which are fantastical and senseless terms, brought in to cozen the simple.[30]

This statement needs careful examination. In it Biddle reduces language to material description alone, there is no place for words to function as *formal* concepts to aid reflection or clarification. What is conceived as separable in the mind must be a materially separate thing. To use the word 'person' is to speak of an absolute, separate and independent existent. There appears to be little appreciation or acceptance that the language of 'person' could be used analogically, for Biddle sees no important difference in the way in which 'person' is used of God and how it is used of men or angels. This is well in line with a growing privileging of the univocal in language in general and Biddle's rather peculiar scriptural literalism in particular: Biddle's literal reading of the Scriptures led him to conclude *inter alia* that God had emotions, had limited knowledge of future events, and even possessed a body of sorts. (This last claim seems very peculiar to modern ears but was not exceptional in the seventeenth century. Stephen Nye, a leading player in the controversies of the 1690s, recalled late in life how he had argued two of Biddle's disciples out of their crude anthropomorphic understanding of God. Hobbes too insisted that God had some sort of body.)[31] And again, like Best and others, he saw himself as completing the process begun at the Reformation:

[30] John Biddle, *XII Arguments Drawn out of the Scripture* in *The Apostolical and True Opinion Concerning the Holy Trinity* (London: 1653).

[31] Stephen Nye, *The Explication of the Articles of the Divine Unity, the Trinity, and Incarnation* (London: 1715), see pp. 181f. Firmin and Hedworth – the two disciples in question – were apparently concerned that a belief in the universality of God's presence would render him present in the 'privy' and other insalubrious places!

> For though Luther and Calvin deserve much praise for the pains they took in cleansing our Religion from sundry idolatrous Pollutions of the Romane Anti-Christ, yet are the dregs still left behinde, I mean the Crass Opinion touching three Persons in God. Which error not Onely made way for those Pollutions, but lying at the bottome corrupteth almost the whole Religion.[32]

Biddle was at pains to highlight the dangers of Trinitarian doctrine in an exposition that bears more than a superficial resemblance to the dangers catalogued in the Racovian Catechism. First, the doctrine 'introduceth three Gods, and so subverteth the unity of God'. Secondly, 'it hindereth us from praying according to the prescript of the Gospel, because we are directed to pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit'. Thirdly, the 'Tenet of three Persons in God prohibiteth us to love and honour him as we ought. For the highest love and honour is due to him who is the most high God. But such love and honour can be exhibited to no more than one Person.' Fourthly, 'this assertion of three persons in God, thwarteth the common notion that all men have of God. For our very understanding suggesteth to us, that God is the same with the first cause of all things, onely being of himself, and all others from him.' Fifthly, 'this error is the main stumbling block that the ancient people of God, the Jewes, for entering into the Church of Christ' (this latest objection reflected the debate about the readmission of Jews to England taking place in the 1650s). Finally, the country had entered into a solemn league and covenant for the Lord, and the Lord's honour would be best served by recognizing that he is only one.[33]

Biddle then proceeded to outline his Christology. Christ is a human person; he does not have a divine nature. He is 'God' in the sense that he is united to the Almighty God. Biddle, unlike the Socinians proper, did not deny that the Holy Spirit was a person. However, the Holy Spirit was an 'Angellical person', the 'principal Minister', and not a divine person in any way. Biddle maintained a

[32] John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity, According to the Scripture* (London: 1648), 'Preface'; see pp. 2–3.

[33] Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 'The Preface'.

trinity of persons he simply denied that there was a trinity of divine persons.[34]

Imprisonment only strengthened Biddle's resolve to propagate what he saw as the true biblical faith. It also gave him opportunity for writing and translating. He produced two catechisms, one for adults and one for children. These used only scriptural language in expression. In the former he explicitly rejected what he labelled any 'mystical' interpretation of Scripture, by which he meant any other than a literal sense. Such mystical interpretation led only to error and Popery. The language used in exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity was dismissed as 'a baffle on the simplicity of Scripture'. Sounding rather like a present day Jehovah's Witness, he pointed out that nowhere in the Scriptures can phrases such as 'subsisting in three persons' be found.[35]

Biddle's repeated critique of the orthodox position on the Trinity had three main strands. First, he rejected it as unscriptural. In several treatises he challenged his opponents to find in Scripture the technical trinitarian language they used. Secondly, somewhat in common with the Socinians, he believed that disputes about the meaning of the Scriptures were to be resolved by the use of reason alone. There was to be no appeal to the Fathers or to tradition in interpreting texts as these could only play into the hands of Papists. Finally, while the doctrine of the Trinity uses the word 'person' to generate a real but not absolute distinction. Biddle will not permit such usage: 'persons' are concrete things not formal concepts, and the assertion that God is three persons is tantamount to asserting that there are three absolutely separate gods, much as Peter, James and John are three separate human beings.

The Divine Triunity

Such a frontal attack on the prevailing doctrinal orthodoxy was obviously going to draw considerable flak. One of Biddle's first critics was Nicholas Estwick who in his *PNEUMATOLOGIA or a Treatise of the Holy Ghost* disputed Biddle's arguments against the deity of the Holy Spirit. Estwick presented eight syllogisms

[34] See Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, pp. 27, 50, 44.
[35] John Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism* (London: 1654), 'Preface'.

designed to show that the Holy Ghost is God. He conceded that there were scriptural texts that distinguished the Holy Spirit from God, but he denied Biddle's conclusion that the Spirit was therefore not God. Estwick realized that part of the problem lay in the shifting referents of the word 'God', and he made an attempt to sort out its grammar. He chided Biddle because 'There is a fallacious homonymie of the word [*God*] [*sic*] which hee make's frequent use of to abuse his Reader'. He went on to note that the word 'God' can function essentially when the attributes of God are described or when a work *ad extra* is noted, but it can also be used properly of any of the three persons of the Trinity. Estwick concluded that there is a proper and legitimate distinction to be drawn in speaking of God essentially and personally: 'There is a reall distinction, and there is a distinction in regard of our rational conception. The former is denied and the later is asserted touching the nature of God.' The divine nature only actually exists as it subsists in the three persons although we are able to form a conception of the divine nature in our minds, as it were apart from the three persons.

> Essence denote's an absolute substance, but a Person is referred to another; that is communicable, this is incommunicable . . . the person beget's, is begotten, and proceed's, but the divine Essence neither beget's, nor is begotten, nor doth it proceed; one Person is not predicated of another, the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father — but the divine Essence is predicated of every Person.[36]

Estwick's remarks presume an understanding of language that is not simply materially descriptive, unlike Biddle who conceives language as a univocal tool.

The growing concern about heterodox opinions motivated the authorities at the University of Oxford to ask their newly imposed Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Francis Cheynell, for a refutation of Socinianism and a defence of orthodox doctrine. This request echoed one from Parliament for a refutation of Socinianism in general and John Fry in particular. *The Divine Triunity of the*

[36] Nicholas Estwick, *ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ or a Treatise of the Holy Ghost* (London: 1648), pp. 35, 36, 39.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, published in 1650, was the response. A remark in the 'Epistle Dedicatory', stating that 'since the beginning of the year 1645 there have been many blasphemous books to the great dishonour of the blessed Trinity printed in England', provides further evidence that the events of the 1640s seemed to contemporaries a major catalyst in the development and advance of radical critiques of trinitarian doctrine. The book is so unlike Cheynell's previous works – scholarly, fair, balanced, clear, well written, and so lacking in splenetic polemic — that I suspect it may well be the work of an academic 'ghost writer' at the university. What is also notable is that, unlike many other books emanating from the orthodox camp during this period, there are chapters dealing with the soteriological and practical dynamics of trinitarian belief.[37]

The book repays close examination. Its opening two chapters defend the use of philosophy in divinity thus aiming to legitimize the use of one of the major tools that will be used in later chapters to explicate the doctrine of the Trinity. Philosophy alone is insufficient, for the Trinity can only be known by revelation, but the third and fourth chapters insist that it can help in establishing how we should think and talk about the Mystery. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the key issue of what it might mean to say that the persons of the Trinity can be distinguished but not divided, and are united but not confounded.

Chapter 6 examines the grammar of 'person' in general and grammatical rules governing the trinitarian use of the word in particular. For the most part it is concerned with the relationship between the concepts of 'person' and 'nature'. At the outset Cheynell insists that the word 'person' is *not* applied in the same way to God, angels and men. Some initial points are then made about persons in the Trinity: the divine persons are more than mere relative properties as some would claim, they are three subsistences in the Godhead; each person is a 'peculiar manner of subsisting superadded to the Divine nature, [it] doth make a true distinction between the Father and the other two Subsistences, but it make no Composition at all'. This remark must not be misconstrued, this superaddition is a formal not a substantial claim: it is not the case that first we have the divine nature and then the

[37] Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (London: 1650).

differentiation of the persons is added to it. When we speak of each divine person we are speaking at least of the substance, essence and nature of God.[38]

The Boethian delineation of person as 'an individual substance of rational nature' was then expanded by Cheynell to yield a new definition: 'a person is an undivided substance, an understanding substance, a complete, incommunicable, independent substance, which doth not depend on anything else by way of inhaesion, adhaesion, union, or any other way, for its sustenation'. Personal properties belong in some way to the person concerned but these properties are not to be abstracted from the divine nature, to do so would be to destroy the divine simplicity. The word 'God' can be predicated of all three persons. We must be cautious: 'when we describe the divine nature, we should not abstract it from the three Persons; and when we describe a Divine Person we should not abstract him from the Divine nature'.[39]

Some very important ground rules are being established here: while we can of course direct our attention to the divine nature or a particular divine person, we should not speak in such a way as to give the impression that the divine persons and the divine nature are separable in reality. Much depends on the particular focus of our investigation. According to Cheynell, we speak of *relative* perfection when we focus on the *three* who are one because it is the relative properties that are important in such discourse, hence we speak, for example, of the perfect begetting of the Son; whereas when we focus on the *one* who is three we speak of *absolute* perfection, so we can say that the Godhead itself is not begotten. He was confident that many of the puzzles posed by those who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity would fall away if we are clear about the grammar used when speaking of the persons and of the Godhead.[40] To make matters clearer, and because there is no parallel in nature for the type of language we are using, Cheynell urged that we always speak of a *divine person* rather than simply of a *person*, and claimed that 'A Divine Person is a spiritual and Infinite Subsistent, related indeed to those other uncreated Persons, which subsist in the divine nature with, but distinguished from those

[38] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 70; see p. 63.
[39] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, pp. 72, 80.
[40] See Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 86.

coessential persons by its peculiar manner of subsistence, order of subsisting, singular relation and incommunicable property'.[41]

Granted then that we sometimes speak in terms of the persons and sometimes in terms of divine nature, how can we distinguish the persons and the nature in a way that is both adequate and accurate? Cheynell saw this as the most difficult question in the whole of Divinity, and indeed the way in which this distinction is made and understood separates orthodoxy from the opposing errors of tritheism and Sabellianism. Our first clue comes from the fact that we can speak of the Father and the Son as being in 'relative and friendly opposition': the Father is not the Son but nevertheless related to the Son by virtue of being Father. The second important clue we have is that, while the divine essence is predicated of each and every person, the persons cannot be predicated of each other: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, but the Father is not the Son nor the Holy Spirit, and the Son is not the Spirit. The relations that hold between the persons are peculiar to them and not common to the divine essence, so in speaking of 'begetting' we are speaking of an internal relation peculiar to the divine person of the 'Father' not of the divine essence of 'God'. In other words it is the Father who begets, not the divine nature. Likewise it is the Father who begets, not the Son or Spirit. This should not be taken as implying a material distinction between the persons on the one hand and the divine nature on the other. We must not think of God as being in any way compounded of nature and subsistence.[42]

Cheynell now feels that he is in a position to answer the Socinian 'grand objection', which construes in this way: every person is a substance, if there are three persons subsisting then there are three divine substances, and therefore the Godhead is either a compound of subsistence and nature, or there are three gods. Cheynell answers that indeed every divine person is a substance but they are the *same* divine substance. By their peculiar relations the persons are distinguished but this implies no compound in the Godhead because a compound demands a material distinction between nature and person that is simply not there in God. According to Junius, an earlier theologian in the Protestant reform

[41] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 96.
[42] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 102; see pp. 100–2.

whom Cheynell cites with approbation, the divine persons can be present to the mind in three ways: as *essential*, as *personal* and as *relative*. Thus, for instance, the second person could be considered as 'First Cause', as Jesus Christ, as the 'begotten one'.[43]

There are important differences between created and uncreated persons. Created persons are of a finite and dependent nature; uncreated persons are infinite and independent. Created persons are compounded with nature; uncreated persons have an indivisible nature. Created persons have a nature that is numerically differentiable; uncreated persons share the same, singular nature. Created persons have different understandings, wills and powers; uncreated persons have the same understanding, will and power. Created persons occupy different places and are limitedly present; uncreated persons are omnipresent. Created persons have different accidents; uncreated persons have no accidents. Created persons differ in temporal location, uncreated persons are coeternal. Thus when using the word 'person' of men and God we must be aware of salient differences in the way in which the word is used. To sum up: created persons differ because of natural properties; uncreated persons share the same nature and differ solely in personal properties.[44]

Having now dealt with the distinction to be observed between 'divine nature' and 'divine person', the seventh chapter of Cheynell's book deals with the distinction between the divine persons. The Trinity was revealed in Christ and transmitted to us through the Word of God: 'If any man in Athanasius his time asked how many persons subsist in the Godhead they were wont to send him to the Jordan. "Go say they to Jordan and there you may hear and see the blessed Trinity."' The persons of the Trinity can be distinguished in several ways. The inward actions proper to them, such as begetting and being begotten, differentiate them. (These actions do not imply a change in God, as the Socinians argue, because they are eternal not temporal; the Father unchangeably begets and the Son is eternally begotten.) The persons are distinguished by their order – the Father is the source and origin of the Son and both of the Holy Spirit although this order should not be taken in any sense that would imply the Father's

[43] See Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, pp. 138–40.
[44] See Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, pp. 144f.

superiority. They are distinguished by their personal properties; for instance, the Father alone is the first principle of subsistence in the Godhead. All the distinctions Cheynell draws are formal and real, but while they are not purely notional they do not imply a material distinction in God. If the three were materially distinct then there would be three gods, if they were only notionally distinct there would be one God under three different aspects.[45]

The exposition up to this point is concerned with the grammar of trinitarian belief, but Cheynell was equally well aware of the soteriological dimension of the doctrine and the practical significance of the mystery of the Trinity, for the life of faith is expounded in chapters 8 and 9. These chapters are a lucid and compelling account of the role that the Trinity plays in the life of a believer. A man may 'savingly believe in Christ' and worship the true God only if he accepts this doctrine as the true Christian one. That God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the proper object of faith is clearly shown in the Scriptures and thus the Father, Son and Spirit are also the proper object of worship. We worship all three as God but not as some deity 'out there', Cheynell's practical pneumatology highlights how the lives of the believer and the Trinity intermingle through the Spirit. It is the Spirit who is at work in the proper interpretation of the Scriptures. It is the Spirit too who is at work in believers and brings them to explicit belief in the Trinity. It is the Spirit who helps us to love the Father and the Son. The world was created by the Trinity and we are elected to salvation, our re-creation, by the Trinity. All the soteriological actions that take place in a believer's life are the work of the Trinity. Amongst these the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are pre-eminent.[46]

The book's final chapter was a call to action steeped in Cheynell's Calvinism. The first conclusion of natural theology, that there is a God, is not enough to make one a Christian. The first principle of Christianity is that this God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We only have access to the Father through the Son and Holy Spirit. Socinians and the like who do not accept this basic faith must be rejected and excluded from the Church. If we do not adore God as Father, Son and Spirit then to all practical

[45] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 185, and see pp. 185–90, 195, 227, 236, 273, 248.
[46] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 250, and see pp. 270f., 323, 315f., 396.

intents we are atheists worshipping a false god. The civil magistrates must use their powers to help stamp out such error.[47]

The Divine Triunity is a remarkable book. It is balanced, clear and still very readable. It draws its strength from the scholastic tradition but, in contrast to many other scholastic works of the period, its presentation is lively and compelling. The author is alive to the subtleties and nuances of language. Above all what comes across is the author's realization that talk about the Trinity has to be underpinned by a suitable grammar. Cheynell is acutely aware of how the nuts and bolts of trinitarian language interact and modify each other. The book is a compendium of scholastic thought in Protestant refraction. In an age that often tried to draw a trichotomy between Scripture, reason and tradition, *The Divine Triunity* made a bold attempt to synthesize all three. But it is for its attention to the soteriological dimensions of the mystery that Cheynell's book deserves to be remembered. It marks, I believe, one of the last real attempts to deal with the Trinity as a practical matter. Many later orthodox apologetics lack the soteriological vitality of Cheynell's exposition and his deep appreciation of the Holy Spirit. The suspicion of 'enthusiasm' that became endemic in English life after the Restoration was to prove the death knell for pneumatology, and with it any real sense of the importance of the Trinity for the life of the believer.[48]

The Metropolitical Seat of Socinianism

Despite legal measures such as the 'Draconic Ordinance' of 1648, which sought to extirpate the problem by proscribing strict punishments for those expressing critical views of the doctrine, concern about anti-trinitarian heresy continued to grow throughout the years of the Protectorate and Commonwealth. Other books appeared to refute the writings of Biddle and the Socinians. In 1655 John Owen, the imposed Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and Vice-Chancellor of the university, at the request of the Council of State, published his *Vindicae Evangelicae*. The main objects of

[47] Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, see pp. 420, 424.

[48] See R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (London: Collins, 1987) for a classic account of this phenomenon.

his attention are the writings of Biddle, as requested by his commissioners, but the work also tackles the Racovian Catechism and shows a deep knowledge of Socinian writers. In his 'Dedication' Owen noted with shame that Biddle's book has attracted such attention on the Continent that it is assumed that 'Heresy hath fixed its metropolitical seat here in England'. Owen felt the force of charges that we should feel uneasy with the use of extra-scriptural language as a means of talking about the Trinity. He saw that the writings of the Schoolmen could be part of the problem, fired as they are by 'boldness, Atheistical curiousity, wretched inquiries, and babling'. They have departed from the simplicity of Scripture in their illegitimate quest for understanding and have possibly contributed to the heresies that are now rearing their heads. Owen even admitted that there is a basic plausibility in the Socinian argument, given that words such as 'Trinity', 'Person', 'Essence' are not found in the Scriptures. Owen's arguments are largely drawn from Scripture and much of the book is devoted to dry exegesis and refutation. However, he allowed the legitimacy of using non-scriptural language to explicate the meaning of Scripture, and also argued for the value of tradition, not as an ancilliary authority to be sure but as context for the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. In the words of Carl Trueman, Owen's latest biographer, 'the Creeds act as heuristic devices which facilitate the unlocking of Scripture's teaching'. The *Vindicae* like Cheynell's *Divine Triunity,* is driven by soteriological concerns first and discusses the ontology of the Trinity in that light. Two years later Owen developed his thoughts in a more mystical direction when he published *Of communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*[49]

In the same year as the *Vindicae,* Estwick published his second attack on Biddle. In *Mr. Biddle's Confession of Faith, Touching the Holy Trinity* Biddle was described as 'a Ringleader of the Samosatenian and Macedonian Hereticks'. Estwick endorsed Owen's perception of the sordid reputation England now enjoyed on the Continent

[49] John Owen, *Vindicae evangelicae* (Oxford: 1656), 'The Dedication', 'To the Reader', pp. 46, 60; see p. 18. Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), p. 30. Trueman's book is admirable in rescuing Owen from his obscurity and misrepresentation, and also shows how the whole of Owen's theology is thoroughly trinitarian. However, I still feel compelled to agree with the *Old DNB* that 'his style is somewhat tortuous and his method unduly discursive, so that his works are often tedious reading'.

for heresy and unorthodoxy. Estwick's methodology is the same tedious point-by-point reply that he had adopted in *PNEUMATOLOGIA*; however, he acknowledges his debt to Cheynell and wisely directs his reader to *The Divine Triunity*. Much of his reflection is indebted to this work and is simply an echoing of Cheynell.

Estwick outlines the notion of 'person' at work in his reply during his opening remarks. A person is 'an individual subsistence in an intellectual nature' and is used here as a 'restrained theological notion'. This qualified definition is then illustrated by way of contrast. A person has understanding, twenty men are persons while twenty sheep are not. A person is individual, twenty men are not one person. A person is incommunicable, thus the divine nature although singular is not a divine person as it is communicated to Father, Son and Spirit. Divine persons are not distinguished in essence, and the divine persons are not really separable from the divine nature. We must take care in talking not to give the impression that the divine persons can be materially distinguished, although the divine persons are real and not merely a fiction of reason. We know the Trinity solely by revelation; reasoning from effects alone would be insufficient, as we could not decide if they are the work of a God who is one person or three. Biddle is wrong to argue that three divine persons are three gods because three human persons are three separate individuals. He makes this mistake because he does not take into account the difference between divine nature and human nature. Although God is singular this singularity is essential not personal; the essence is affirmed of all three persons, but personhood cannot be affirmed of the essence itself, and thus it is incorrect to speak of God as one person.[50]

Estwick then dealt with Biddle's arguments about the dangers of trinitarian belief (see above, p. 52). To say that God is three persons does not subvert the unity of God. We can pray to all three members of the Trinity singularly, but even when addressing one in particular the other two are implicitly involved. Echoing the teaching of Aquinas, among others, Estwick argues that the 'Our Father' is addressed to all three persons. It is the trinitarians who worship the true God revealed in the Scriptures as three

[50] Nicholas Estwick, *Mr. Biddle's Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity* (London: 1656), 'The Dedication', p. 9; see pp. 10, 11, 12.

persons, and the Socinians who have constructed an idol. And while God is indeed the first cause, this description is proper to the Trinity integrally and does not belong to one person alone. The Trinity may well be a stumbling block for Jews but, rather than jettisoning what God has revealed, they must be brought to believe in the God who has been shown as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[51]

Throughout the following pages Estwick illustrates the grammar of 'person' used in the context of the Holy Trinity. 'The plurality of Divine persons introduceth not plurality of Gods, for all three have one and the same individual, infinite Essence, though they have not after the same manner'. The Trinity is a relationship of *alius-alius* not *aliud-aliud*, someone to someone as it were rather than something to something. The general rule is that personal properties are proper to a person, whereas essential attributes are common to all three. A 'Person is that Quod est, as the thing that is, and the Nature is that Quo est, whereby it is such a being'.

Biddle's errors, according to Estwick, stem from two main sources. First, he has exalted reason far above its actual capacities; in doing so he has brought down the Scriptures to the level of reason rather than letting the Scriptures raise and enlighten reason: 'most of their arguments against the Trinity, are built upon this false principle, that we are after the same manner to judge hereof, of God's infinite being, as of a finite Creature'. Secondly, Biddle constantly uses semantic tricks to score his points and refuses to pay sufficient attention to the context in which the word 'God' is being used in a sentence. The same sleight of tongue whereby he argues that if the Father is God then the Son cannot be one can also generate the argument that if James is a man then Peter cannot be. Estwick sees Biddle's refusal to accept the distinction between speaking of God *personally* and *essentially* as merely capricious.[52]

Concern about heterodox teaching in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity was not confined to the well educated and theologically literate. Nicholas Chewney's polemic, *A'IPΕΣΙΑΡΧΑΙ or A Cage*

[51] Estwick, *Mr. Biddle's Confession of Faith*, see pp. 21, 41, 44. Cf. Biddle's arguments against the Trinity, p. 19.

[52] Estwick, *Mr. Biddle's Confession of Faith*, pp. 90, 187, 402; see pp. 120, 81.

of Unclean Birds was aimed at the popular end of the market, and while the book was short on argument it was rich in amusing invective. Chewney provides some 'Cautionary Tales' for heretics, conjuring up a parade of those who have denied the Trinity and consequently came to a bad end. One was strangled by a relation, another castrated, one threw himself into a well, and many have been struck by incurable diseases. The book warned against the abuse of reason and concluded with a plea that only those practiced in the art of divinity should delve into the depths of faith.[53]

The roots of subsequent trinitarian controversies then can clearly be found during the turmoil of the English Civil War. The emergence of books concerned with 'the Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme', coupled with manifest contemporary fears of this and similar errors, propels one to the conclusion that the 1640s marked a watershed in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity as we find for the first time in England incontrovertible evidence of systematic attacks upon the doctrine. The social upheaval of the war produced an environment in which previously unutterable (and possibly unthinkable) thoughts flourished. The *de facto* collapse of censorship meant that 'deviant' views could be canvassed as never before. The Racovian Catechism, for instance, was reprinted in London in 1652. The catalogue of errors provided by Edwards is remarkable in that it outlines the kernel of nearly every future heterodox position vis-à-vis the Trinity for the next hundred years. The link between the turbulent period of the Civil War and Commonwealth and later controversies about the Trinity was apparent to some contemporaries too. Humphrey Prideaux for one had no doubt that the problems of the 1690s had their roots in the sectaries of the 1640s.[54] It is important to stress that the roots of the trinitarian disputes of the last decade of the seventeenth century pre-date the Restoration and scientific revolution, and are *theological* in origin.[55]

We can also now observe the beginning of a significant shift in the focus and understanding of the nature of language. There is a move away from the imaginative and the analogical towards the univocal. Contemporary evidence for this shift is shown in part by

[53] Nicholas Chewney, *A'IPEΣIAPXAI or a Cage of Unclean Birds* (London: 1656).

[54] Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture* (London: 1697).

[55] See Grell's 'Introduction' for confirmation of this claim. For the effects of the breakdown in censorship, see Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age* (London: Longmans, 1980), pp. 207f.

a growing impatience with the technical language of scholastic philosophy in certain quarters. Whatever its shortcomings, such scholastic language did enable the construction of an understanding beyond the purely material, and one of the reasons for the reappropriation of scholasticism by Continental Protestantism was its usefulness in combating the radical reformers.[56] The emergence of an attitude to language that privileged the univocal was bound to preclude the exercise of imagination needed to engage fruitfully with the doctrine of the Trinity. This 'flattening' of language was to increase as the century progressed and was to have dire consequences for the doctrine of the Trinity.[57]

Finally, the word 'person' clearly played a crucial role in these early disputes, which already centre around the way in which it is to be used in talk about God. None of the early opponents of the doctrine of the Trinity denied that God was personal, but they rejected as absurd and dangerous the claim that God is three persons. To men such as Best and Biddle the claim was blatant tritheism, to a man such as Fry it was simply baffling. Upholders of the doctrine refuted the charge of tritheism and sought to demonstrate how the word 'person' was to be properly used and understood when speaking of the Trinity. They tried to show the similarities and differences implicit in speaking of divine persons and human persons. They strove to show how the divine persons could be differentiated by relation, action and origin, without being divided materially and were thus defending the accepted grammar of trinitarian orthodoxy. But the fact remained that seeds of anti-trinitarian thought had been sown and were to sprout in abundance during the subsequent decades.

[56] I am indebted to Dr Richard Rex for this point.

[57] This drive to univocity has been charted in Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), see especially the first two chapters. Funkenstein describes the process as one of 'de-metaphorisation' and 'de-symbolisation'.

CHAPTER THREE

A Strange Wheemise Concerning the Blessed Trinity

The legacy of the Civil War was to be the dominant component of the political and religious agenda for the rest of the seventeenth century. Such a violent 'experiment' branded the thinking and formed the fears of the generation who took part in it. The subsequent quest for stability was paramount but not easily fulfilled; there were simply too many conflicting views about the causes of the war and its lasting legacy. As people tried to understand the personal trauma they had undergone, their questioning extended beyond themselves to the body politic: What had happened to cause such a sickness?

In our own day we ponder the extent to which machines can think and how far we ourselves could be described as thinking machines, and the language of computing is often used to describe the human mind. In the seventeenth century the machine metaphor was employed to shed light on the human body. One thinker however was concerned to see how far the body politic could be likened to a machine. How did its component parts interact? How was it to be kept together? And if religion had proved such a destructive force, what was its proper function? The materialism and determinism that characterized his answers meant that Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was to be execrated by his contemporaries, even if he shaped the form of their replies far more than they realized. And the influence of theology on Hobbes and of Hobbes on theology is now being recognized, not simply for his time but for our own. We ought not neglect the writings of the 'Beast of Malmesbury' about the doctrine of the Trinity.[1]

[1] Brief introductions to Hobbes and his thought include Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford:

I will begin by examining the highly disputed question of Hobbes' own belief or lack thereof, and then proceed to investigate his understanding of theology and its place in his writings in general and then his reflections about the doctrine of the Trinity in particular. After studying the exchanges provoked by this I will conclude with an analysis and evaluation of Hobbes' speculations about the doctrine of the Trinity.

That he Was a Christian 'tis Clear

What was 'clear' to John Aubrey has remained obscure ever since. Arguments about the true nature of Hobbes' beliefs have continued unabated from his day, and even now there is no consensus about their sincerity, origin or proper interpretation. Some have concluded that Hobbes' writings represent a subtle and subversive atheism, others have argued that Hobbes is simply an eccentric believer. The dispute about Hobbes' religious convictions is quite fascinating, but the survey and analysis that both primary and secondary literature deserve are well beyond the scope of this chapter. I can only outline briefly the evidence that leads me to support those who depict Hobbes as an eccentric believer.[2]

Oxford University Press, 1989) and A. P. Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Macmillan, 1997). Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), provides an exhaustive bibliography of Hobbesiana. Skinner is keen to 're-connect' Hobbes, who has too often been portrayed as the Melchizedek of philosophy: 'a lonely eminence, a thinker "without ancestry or posterity"' (p. 7). Hobbes' legacy for theology is sketched in Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes* (pp. 22–3), but would repay further investigation. For Hobbes' own works I have adopted two methods of reference: the majority of English works cited and all Latin works are to be found in the editions of Sir William Molesworth, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes* (11 vols.; London: 1839–45), and *Thomas Hobbes . . . opera philosophica quae Latina scripsit omnia* (5 vols.; London: 1839–45), referred to respectively as *E.W.* and *L.W.* in the text. Because the English version of *Leviathan* is so readily available in many different editions, the references to this work are edition neutral and made by chapters and, where applicable, marginalia. A useful chronology of Hobbes' writings can be found in A. G. N. Flew, 'Hobbes', in D. J. O'Connor, ed., *A Critical History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 153–69. It is not hard to imagine that Hobbes' own experience of the English Civil War would have had a similar effect upon him as the Thirty Years War had on Descartes and Leibniz; cf. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), esp. chapters 2 and 3.

[2] S. I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) situates Hobbes in a broader historical context and contains an appendix which provides a chronological catalogue of seventeenth-century anti-Hobbesian literature. In the last thirty

The sheer volume of his writings concerned with theological matters, and his deep knowledge of Scriptures, Church history, and Anglican credal and liturgical formulae manifest Hobbes' abiding interest in religion. The focus of Hobbes' interest is undeniably the political and social effect of religion, but his writings often touch on issues that have little direct bearing upon the sociology of religion. As one of his more sympathetic commentators has argued, 'The secularist interpretation would have more force if Hobbes never said anything constructive about religious issues . . . but just the opposite is true'.[3] His idiosyncratic exposition of religious issues laid Hobbes open to the accusation of heresy, still a serious charge in the seventeenth century, and he had little doubt about the incendiary desires of some of the bishops in his regard.[4] If Hobbes were a complete unbeliever his readiness to publish what he must have known to be unacceptable opinions needs to be explained. There is simply an economy in reading Hobbes in a way that accepts that he meant what he said. This is not to deny the subtleties and deliberate ambiguities of the text, which must be taken into account. But to see Hobbes as presenting a deliberate yet occult destruction of the Christian religion, as Leo Strauss has argued, pushes one to the bounds of credibility. Are we really to take over half the *Leviathan*, for instance, as an elaborate, sophisticated yarn? One commentator has gone as far as dismissing such attempts as 'esoteric' because in his view they rely on too fantastic a reading. And I think there is a great deal of truth in Christopher Hill's jesting comment that

years there has been a reappraisal of Hobbes' religious beliefs. According to Peter Geach 'the obstacles to a proper understanding of Hobbes' religious position mainly consist in calumny and ignorance': Peter Geach, 'The Religion of Thomas Hobbes', *Religious Studies* 17 (1981), pp. 549–58 (549). Geach concludes that Hobbes was a Socinian. The boldest attempt to extract Hobbes from the atheists' pantheon is A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), which provides a brief synopsis of the state of play between 'religious' and 'secular' interpretations (pp. 13–15). Martinich reads Hobbes as a well-intentioned, if somewhat eccentric, apologist for the Christian faith, and cautions against uncritical acceptance of the judgements of Hobbes' contemporaries. For the uses of the word 'atheist' at this time, see pp. 19f.

[3] Martinich, *The Two Gods*, p. 203.

[4] Hobbes believed that Bishop Bramhall of Derry would have happily lit the pyre under him: 'But mark his Lordship's Scholastic charity in these last words of this period: *such bold presumption requireth another manner of confutation.* This bishop, and others of his opinion, had been in their element, if they had been bishops in Queen Mary's time.' *E.W.*, IV, p. 317.

Hobbes' views were so heretical that he makes an unlikely atheist.[5]

Many of the arguments for Hobbes' unbelief have rested from the very first on the assumption that materialism must imply atheism. While certain forms of materialism are atheistic, it does not follow that all materialism is so, and too many commentators have simply assumed the connection. Hobbes was a materialist; the Hobbesian Universe admits of no non-material reality. Given this, his repeated affirmations of God's corporeality are surely intended to assert that God *is* real. If God were not corporeal then he would be a figment, a 'phantasm', of the imagination. Hobbes' materialism was not crudely anthropomorphic: God is 'a most pure, simple, invisible spirit corporeal. By corporeal I mean a substance that has magnitude, and so mean all learned men, divines and others, though perhaps there be some common people so rude as to call nothing body, but what they can see and feel.' It must be stressed that belief in God's corporeality was not exceptional in the seventeenth century. Biddle for one espoused a far cruder belief that God had a body, which he believed to be the understanding of the Bible.[6]

Even if one were to convict Hobbes of atheism, an investigation of Hobbes' theological thought is still important. According to Raymond Polin, the real problem is not the truth or falsity of Hobbes' atheism, but the role that God and the Church have in Hobbes' philosophy.[7] Hobbes' writings on the Trinity reflect an understanding of the word 'person' and throw light on his use of the word in other contexts. Even if Hobbes were an atheist, his writings on the Trinity are still important, as both they and the sharp responses of his critics contribute to the contours of the broader story we are telling. Conversely, greater knowledge about

[5] Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), chapter 5. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes', in his *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 148–201, describes these types of argument as 'esoteric' (pp. 160f.). Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 285. The main thrust of explanations put forward for Hobbes' atheism are analysed in Wallis B. Glover, 'God and Thomas Hobbes', in K. Brown, ed., *Hobbes Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 141–68 (esp. pp. 146–9).

[6] *E.W.*, IV, p. 313, and see note 31, p. 51.

[7] Raymond Polin, *Hobbes, dieu et les hommes* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1981), p. 11.

these debates and disputes can help us understand Hobbes better. What follows is intended as a contribution to the continuing re-connection, contextualization and elucidation of Hobbes' thought as well as discovering more about understandings of the doctrine of the Trinity in the mid-seventeenth century.[8]

Let him Take a Schoole-Man into his Hands

Before we can investigate Hobbes' reflections on the Trinity we need to establish some preliminary pointers about his understanding of the nature of theology. His departure from accepted theological expression was undoubtedly one of the reasons for the execration of his contemporaries, but the vehemence of their feelings is not an immediate indication of the value we should place upon their judgements. When Hobbes is attacked for his theology other concerns are clearly not far from the surface. His biting anti-clericalism alienated the ecclesiastical establishment, and the divines were enraged by his portrayal of their teaching as an adulterated amalgam of the wheat of biblical faith and the tares of false philosophy. His critics also sometimes conflate acceptance of a doctrine with the arguments advanced for it. The so-called Johannine Comma (1 Jn 5:7) is a case in point; Hobbes, along with the Catholic biblical scholar Simon, denied the authenticity of the text and received opprobrium for doing so. We need to be more cautious than many of his contemporary critics: to reject an argument is not to reject a doctrine.[9]

As we noted previously, during the mid-seventeenth century we see signs of a growing impatience with the subtleties of scholastic

[8] According to Patricia Springborg, 'Hobbes's eccentric doctrine of the Trinity is a further employment of the *persona* fiction'; Patricia Springborg, 'Hobbes on Religion', in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 346–80 (360). See Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 44–9, for an examination of this fiction in the foundational realm of politics.

[9] See *Leviathan*, ch. 44. He also denied that the use of the plural in the phrase from Gen. 1:26, 'let us make man after our own image', implied pluralism in God. He cited Cardinal Bellarmine as an ally: 'neither I nor Bellarmine put [these words] out of the Bible, but we both put them out of the number of good arguments to prove the Trinity; for it is no unusual thing in Hebrew . . . And we may say also of many other texts of Scripture alleged to prove the Trinity, that they are not so firm as that high article requireth.' *An Answer to Bishop Bramhall, E.W.*, IV, p. 317. For an analysis of the controversy surrounding the so-called Johannine Comma see the Appendix of that title in Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983).

discourse, fuelled in part by the privileging of the univocal in language. Hobbes himself was a keen advocate of everyday speech in philosophy, and constantly jeered at the tags and labels of the older scholastic method. The stylish polemic found at the end of the eighth chapter of *Leviathan* hit ecclesiastics, theologians and universities alike:

> There is yet another fault in the Discourses of some men; which may also be numbred amongst the sorts of Madnesse; namely, that abuse of words whereof I have spoken before . . . by the Name of Absurdity. And that is, when men speak such words, as put together, have in them no signification at all . . . And this is incident to none but those, that converse in questions of matters incomprehensible, as the Schoole-men . . . But to be assured their words are without any thing correspondent to them in the mind . . . let him take a Schoole-man into his hands, and see if he can translate any one chapter concerning any difficult point; as the Trinity; the Deity; the nature of Christ; Transubstantiation; Free-will, *&c.* into any of the moderne tongues, so as to make the same intelligible . . . When men write whole volumes of such stuffe, are they not Mad, or intend to make others so?[10]

Such impatience was not confined to Hobbes, as we have already seen, but it found in him an eloquent and formidable ally.

We must also be cautious in evaluating the strong apophaticism in Hobbes' theological thought that stands in marked contrast to the confident rationalism of many churchmen. Some have seen this as an indication of covert atheism, but apophaticism is hardly the mark of an unbeliever. As the philosopher Peter Geach has noted, 'Hobbes' agnostic expressions about knowledge of God's attributes have been one reason alleged for accounting him an atheist: but these sentiments can be easily paralleled from Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* or from either *Summa* of Aquinas'. Hobbes may well be tapping into a deeper stream of Christian thought than is often realized.[11]

[10] *Leviathan*, ch. 8.

[11] Geach, p. 551. For Hobbes' theological antecedents, see Jeffrey Barnouw, 'The Separation of Reason and Faith in Bacon and Hobbes, and Leibniz's Theodicy', in John W. Yolton, ed., *Philosophy, Religion, and Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1990), pp. 206–27. Barnouw's basic contention is that

However, the extent of his apophaticism should not be underestimated. He suggests that we can have no natural knowledge of God beyond the fact that he exists: 'And whereas we attribute to God Almighty, seeing, hearing, speaking, knowing, loving, and the like; by which we understand something in the men to whom we attribute them, we understand nothing by them in the nature of God . . . The attributes therefore given unto the Deity, are such as signify either our incapacity, or our reverence.'[12] One of his more acute contemporary critics was to challenge him on the implications of this denial, but for the present we should simply note that, if Hobbes shares Biddle's impatience with scholastic modes of thought, he most certainly does not share in his crude literalism.

Much of his apophaticism rested on his conception of philosophy which 'is such knowledge of effects or appearances, as we acquire by true ratiocination from the knowledge we have first of their causes or generation: And again, of such causes or generations as may be from knowing first their effects'. The method of science *and* philosophy is seen to be one of resolution and composition. Complex ideas can be broken down into simpler ideas and the propositions resulting from these can be matched to sense. For this reason philosophy excludes theology: 'The subject of Philosophy, or the matter it treats of, is every body of which we can conceive any generation . . . or which is capable of composition and resolution. Therefore it excludes *Theology*, I mean the doctrine of God, eternal, ingenerable, incomprehensible, and in whom there is nothing neither to divide nor compound, nor any generation to be conceived.'[13] The table of knowledge in chapter 9 of the *Leviathan* does not include theology, and he sees no possibility for natural theology, with the seeming exception of the demonstration of the existence of God. Our human categories break down completely when we try to describe God or ascribe attributes to him.

Hobbes is part of a tradition that stretches back through Bacon to Ockham. This tradition stressed the need for a separation of faith and reason to preserve the former. This analysis is in accord with that of Martinich, who sees Hobbes as an inheritor of the nominalist tradition of Ockham; see Martinich, *The Two Gods*, pp. 208ff. Hobbes' apophaticism may have been driven by this desire to separate faith and reason. That Hobbes is the inheritor of such a tradition is also forcefully argued by Glover.

[12] *The Elements of Law*, *E.W.*, IV, p. 60.

[13] Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, in *The Elements of Law*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 186, 191.

However, we are not completely in the dark, we *are* able to talk of God because of his gratuitous revelation. It is in that revelation alone that we are given knowledge of the Trinity. Although he would not have seen himself as a theologian, nevertheless Hobbes was driven to write about theological matters because of their political implications. His reasons for addressing theological matters in the *Leviathan* are given in *The Prose Life* where he states that he desired to 'deal with theological matters in the text, because the administrative structures and powers of the Church were in abeyance, and of no importance' as the result of the Civil War. In doing so 'he took great care not to write in any way against the sense of sacred scripture, or against the doctrines of the Church in England, as established by royal authority prior to the outbreak of the war'.[14]

In talking about God, Hobbes urged circumspection and caution about language and its use. He saw the main error of the sort of scholastic theology practised in the universities to be the application of inappropriate categories to the Godhead, and its main sin a blasé assumption that it could do so. Hobbes countered that we cannot dispute the nature of God because God's nature is not within the scope of our natural powers.[15]

This insistence on the incomprehensibility of God is reaffirmed several times in Hobbes' writings, and his works are littered with attacks upon the prevailing scholastic method and his perception of its inadequacies. Hobbes was undoubtedly drawing on his own experience as a student at Magdalen Hall, Oxford during the opening decade of the century to dismiss the philosophy practised in the universities at that time. The 'scholasticism' he attacked was specifically that which had developed in the latter sixteenth century, and the authors in his sights were not so much those of the Middle Ages but their more recent commentators. The *Leviathan* passage quoted above about the absurdity of scholastic language, for instance, attacked Suarez by name.

Hobbes was clear then that the function of theological

[14] John Aubrey, *The Prose Life* in Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, p. 248.

[15] See *E.W.*, IV, p. 60 and I, p. 217. Hobbes was very sceptical about the value of arguments of what might be labelled natural theology: 'As for arguments from natural reason, neither you, nor any other, have hitherto brought any, except the creation, that has not made it more doubtful to many men than it was before.' *Considerations upon the Reputation, Loyalty, Manners, and Religion of Thomas Hobbes* (*E.W.*, IV, p. 428).

language was not to provide a description of God. The Scriptures alone provide us with knowledge of God's revelation, and he held that our language about God is purely doxological in character:

> men that by their own meditation, arrive to the knowledge of one Infinite, Omnipotent, and Eternall God, chose rather to confesse that he is Incomprehensible and above their understanding; than to define his Nature by *Spirit Incorporeall*, and then confesse their definition to be unintelligible: or if they give him such a title, it is not *Dogmatically*, with intention to make the Divine Nature understood; but *Piously* to honour him with attributes, of significations, as remote as they can be from the grossenesse of Bodies Visible.[16]

Given this background then, what does Hobbes have to say about the Trinity?

The True God May Be Personated

Hobbes' explicit writings on the Trinity can be found in the English and Latin versions of *Leviathan*, the 'Appendix' to the latter work, his answer to Bishop Bramhall's attack on *Leviathan*, and in his narration on heresy. The concept of 'person' is central to his understanding of the doctrine. Given his general political agenda, manifest in the *Leviathan*, it is not surprising that Hobbes expounds 'person' with an eye on advancing his theory of absolute sovereignty. One of his main concerns is to differentiate 'author' and 'actor'. An 'actor' is one who performs an action, an 'author' is one who authorizes it and is thus responsible for the action. This device is developed to show how responsibility for the actions of a sovereign really belong to the subjects themselves: the sovereign acts, but, by virtue of the foundational covenant, the subjects are properly the authors of that action.

The definition of 'person' accepted by most of his contemporaries, as we have already seen, was that deriving from Boethius: 'an individual substance of rational nature'. This conception was fundamentally static, whereas Hobbes' definition in

[16] *Leviathan*, ch. 12; cf. *E.W.*, IV, p. 61.

Leviathan, focusing on actors and actions, conveyed a much more dynamic understanding of the nature of 'person'. Such dynamism was in harmony with the emphasis that he placed on motion as the primary concept in physics and philosophy. Chapter 16 is entitled 'PERSONS, AUTHORS, and things Personated' and commences with a definition of 'person'.

> A PERSON is he whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to which they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction. When they are considered as his owne, then he is called a *Naturall Person*: And when considered as representing the words or actions of an other, then he is a *Feigned* or *Artificiall Person*.[17]

So a person acts either on his own behalf or on behalf of others. (The Sovereign is, in this sense, an 'artificiall' person; the responsibility for his words and actions lie with his subjects, he is the 'actor' but not, strictly speaking, the 'author' of his actions.)

Hobbes then traces the etymology of the word 'person', noting its origins in the theatre of ancient Greece and its subsequent application in Roman courts. '*Person*, is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act* or *Represent* himselfe, or an other.' He consciously returns to a sense of person that pre-dates the Boethian definition, that found in Cicero's maxim: 'Unus sustineo tres Personas; Mei, Adversarii, & Judicis'. The act of personation has a wide application: 'Inanimate things, as a Church, an Hospital, a Bridge, may be Personated by a Rector, Master, or Overseer . . . Likewise Children, Fooles, and Mad-men that have no use of Reason, may be Personated by Guardians, or Curators . . . An idol, or meer Figment of the brain may be Personated.' And, in what was to become one of Hobbes' most notorious passages, he extended his conception of personation to render an account of the three persons of the Trinity:

> The true God may be Personated. As he was; first, by Moses; who governed the Israelites, (that were not his, but God's people) not in his own name, with Hoc dicit Moses; but in

[17] *Leviathan*, ch. 16.

> God's Name with Hoc dicit Dominus. Secondly, by the Son of man, his own Son our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, that came to reduce the Jewes, and induce all Nations into the Kingdome of his Father; not as of himselfe, but as sent from the Father. And thirdly, by the Holy Ghost, or Comforter, speaking, and working in the Apostles; which Holy Ghost, was a Comforter that came not of himselfe; but was sent, and proceeded from them both.[18]

To put it mildly this is not the standard understanding of Christian orthodoxy. The persons of this Trinity seem to be those who speak and act on behalf of God, and seem to be his representatives speaking and acting with his authority. These same sentiments were expressed in several other places in *Leviathan* as when he states that 'Moses . . . was alone he, that represented to the Israelites the Person of God',[19] and in chapter 33 we read:

> For these three [Moses, Christ, the Apostles] at several times did represent the person of God: Moses, and his successors the High Priests, and Kings of Judas, in the Old Testament: Christ himself, in the time he lived on earth: and the Apostles, and their successors, from the day of Pentecost (when the Holy Ghost descended on them) to this day.[20]

In chapter 42, in a section entitled 'Of the Trinity', Hobbes gave his fullest exposition of what it means to say that God is 'three persons'. Having just discussed the transmission of the Holy Spirit by the Apostles' laying-on of hands, Hobbes continued:

> Here we have the person of God born now the third time. For as Moses, and the High Priests, were God's Representatives in the Old Testament; and our Saviour himselfe as Man, during his abode on earth: So the Holy Ghost, that is to say, the Apostles, and their successors, in the office of Preaching and Teaching, that had received the Holy Spirit, have Represented him ever since. But a Person, (as I have shewn before, chapt.[16].) is he that is Represented, as often as he is Represented; and therefore God, who has been Represented (that is, Personated)

[18] *Leviathan*, ch. 16.
[19] *Leviathan*, ch. 40.
[20] *Leviathan*, ch. 33.

> thrice, may properly enough be said to be three Persons; though neither the word Person, nor Trinity be ascribed to him in the Bible . . . But this disagreeth not, but accordeth fitly with three Persons in the proper signification of Persons; which is, that which is represented by another. For so God the Father, as Represented by Moses, is one Person; and as Represented by his Sonne, another Person; and as represented by the apostles . . . is a third Person; and yet every Person here, is the Person of one and the same God . . . in the Trinity of Heaven, the Persons are the persons of one and the same God, though Represented three different times and occasions . . . To conclude, the doctrine of the Trinity, as far as can be gathered directly from the Scripture, is in substance this; that God who is always One and the same, was the Person Represented by Moses; the Person represented by his Son Incarnate; and the Person represented by the Apostles. As Represented by the Apostles, the Holy Spirit by which they spake, is God; As Represented by his Son (that was God and Man), the Son is that God; As Represented by Moses, and the High Priests, the Father, that is to say, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is that God: From whence we may gather the reason why those names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the signification of the Godhead, are never used in the Old Testament: For they are Persons, that is, they have their names from representing: which could not be, till divers men had Represented God's Person in ruling, or in directing under him.[21]

Before we listen to the chorus of condemnation that greeted such an eccentric exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, three points should be made in Hobbes' favour. First, unlike Biddle and other anti-trinitarians, Hobbes does not judge the doctrine of the Trinity to be meaningless, nor does he dismiss it outright as merely the deformed offspring of a mistaken marriage between Scripture and decadent metaphysics as others did. Given his intense dislike of 'scholastic' language, it is all the more noteworthy that he did not do so. This may well be a further indication of the basic sincerity of his religious convictions and a sign of an honest desire to render an understandable account of the Trinity. Secondly, Hobbes makes some attempt to investigate the language

[21] *Leviathan*, ch. 42.

used of the Trinity in order to render it less opaque. If Hobbes was prepared to accept the doctrine 'on faith' then his exposition may reflect genuine difficulties of understanding rather than a desire to subvert it. Finally, he states quite clearly that this consideration of the Trinity is 'as far as can be gathered directly from the Scripture', and is thus an account of what has been labelled the economic Trinity. He does not claim that his account takes full account of subsequent Church teaching, and in later writings, in response to criticism, he includes extra-scriptural material and is more aware of considerations surrounding the immanent Trinity.

The Catching of Leviathan

But as it stood it was clearly an inadequate account of the doctrine, as his opponents were quick to point out. As all three actors, Moses, Christ and the Apostolic band, were not acting in their own name but in the name of God, was the Trinity then merely a company of 'artificiall' persons? To speak 'in the name of' another means that one is not that other, therefore to speak in the name of God and even to exercise his power, does not mean that one is God. What then is the relationship between the persons and the Godhead? Are the persons eternal or temporal? Overall one is left with the sense that there is one real person, the Father, who is represented by two feigned or 'artificiall' personalities. These unanswered questions recur again and again in the responses to *Leviathan*.

Attacks on such an exposition of the doctrine were swift, and even Hobbes' friends had major reservations about these passages. A fellow exile in Paris during the Interregnum, John Cosin, the future Bishop of Durham, who had given the Sacrament to Hobbes when he feared he was on his deathbed during a serious illness, was quite candid in telling Hobbes that he thought the passage not sufficiently 'applicable to the mystery of the Trinity'. Others were equally frank but far more damning in their criticism.[22]

Alexander Ross (1591–1654), the Scottish Vicar of Carisbrook on the Isle of Wight and a keen supporter of Archbishop Laud, sneered that Hobbes had presented 'a strange wheemsie concerning the blessed Trinity'. The main problem, Ross argued, was that

[22] *E.W.*, IV, p. 317.

Hobbes made the three persons of the Trinity names rather than substances. The concept of 'personation' as used by Hobbes was unhelpful and would, if applied consistently to the scriptural data, yield far more than three persons. Ross defended the use of technical language in theology against Hobbes' attacks. The use of terms such as 'substance' and 'subsistence' in theology is no more inappropriate or illegitimate per se than the technical language deployed by lawyers and physicians in their disciplines.[23]

Seth Ward (1617–1689), later Bishop of Salisbury, in common with many of his earliest critics, was keen to refute what he perceived as Hobbes' materialistic atheism. This he saw arising principally from the rehashing of Epicurean and Machiavellian doctrine which he claimed to find in *Leviathan*, and which led to lack of surety and scepticism in matters of faith. In his book Ward attempted to defend the traditional attributes of God, including, of course, his incorporeality. The book helps to promote the growing impression that Hobbes was a dangerous man and that the danger he posed was greatly compounded by the undeniable beguiling style of *Leviathan*'s prose.[24]

William Lucy (1594–1677), who became Bishop of St David's in 1660, was in no doubt that Hobbes had 'spoken very dangerously of the blessed Trinity', and his critique rested on a very close reading of *Leviathan*. The divinity of Christ, which Lucy took to be the soteriological bedrock of the Christian faith, was so threatened by Hobbes' treatise that he believed there was 'no man ever writing so destructively of the principles of Christianity'. Lucy read chapter 16 as a clear attempt to subvert the doctrine and 'aymed at most profane and wicked purposes'. Echoing sentiments found in Ross, Lucy insisted that the contextuality of 'person' is essential to its meaning, and varies according to its uses in grammar, law and divinity. He rejected Hobbes use of the Ciceronian definition as otiose. Given that Cicero says 'sustineo'

[23] Alex[ander] Ross, *Leviathan Drawn out with a Hook* (London: 1653), p. 53; and see 'To the Reader' and p. 54. For an account of contemporary reactions to *Leviathan*, see Mintz, esp. chapter 3.

[24] Seth Ward, *A Philosophical Essay* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1652). The recognition of the lure of Hobbes' style was commented on by several contemporaries. It has received masterful analysis by Skinner, who argues that not only did Hobbes 'teach philosophy to speak English' but also imparted to it 'a particular tone of voice': that of the sane, rational *savant* who through satire unmasks the faintly ludicrous positions of his opponents. See Skinner, pp. 436–7.

not 'sum' it does not provide a sufficient analogy for the doctrine of one God in three persons. Hobbes' treatment of 'person' is inadequate as 'in words, we are not alwayes to consider their Etymologie, but how they are used'. As for the claim that the true God can be personated, Lucy comments that 'this phrase gave me an amazement: for I cannot call to mind any such expression made either in Scripture, or Orthodox ecclesiastical writers'. A protracted examination of the errors of Socinian exegesis and teaching served to reinforce the impression that Hobbes was to be corralled with those professing anti-trinitarian beliefs.[25]

As Many Persons as we Please

John Bramhall (1594–1663), the Protestant Bishop of Derry who was to become Archbishop of Armagh in 1661, proved Hobbes' most virulent and constant critic. Bramhall is best known for his exchanges with Hobbes on free will and determinism, but he was also highly critical of the latter's writings on the Trinity. Hobbes and Bramhall had met in Paris while both were in self-imposed exile during the Civil War. Their first clash was unintentional but set the scene for future conflicts. Hobbes had replied to an essay the bishop had written on the matter of free will and determinism. He did not intend his riposte for publication, but, much to his consternation, it was pirated and appeared in print. Bramhall was understandably indignant at what he took to be a breach of good faith, and subsequent exchanges betrayed an acrimony that only grew as the years progressed.[26]

In 1658, while still in exile, Bramhall published a biting critique of the religious doctrine found in the *Leviathan*. *The Catching of*

[25] William Lucy, *Observations, Censures and Confutations of Notorious Errors in Mr. Hobbes his Leviathan and other his Bookes. To which Are Annexed, Occasionall Animadversions on Some Writings of the Socinians, and such Haereticks; of the Same Opinions with him* (London: 1663), 'The Epistle Dedicatory', 'To the Reader', pp. 272, 275, 280, 284; and see pp. 293–385 for the attack on Socinianism. Lucy's book is also interesting in that it claims orthodoxy to be *more* reasonable than Socinianism, and is high in praise for Lully.

[26] See Flew, p. 155. Their discussion on free will can be found in Vere Chappell, ed., *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The 'Introduction' is useful in contextualizing the exchange, and the unfortunate 'leaking' of the correspondence is dealt with at pp. ix–x.

Leviathan took issue with Hobbes' materialism and also with his reflections upon the Trinity. Bramhall contended that Hobbes was trying to give an account of the unaccountable and seeking to shrink the mystery of the Trinity to nothing. Bramhall ruthlessly displayed the deficiencies of the account of the Trinity given in *Leviathan*. The Hobbesian concept of 'person' as applied to the Blessed Trinity led to ridiculous and heretical conclusions. If one accepts Hobbes' account of 'person' then

> every king has as many *persons*, as there be justices of peace and petty constables in his kingdom. Upon this account God Almighty hath as many *persons*, as there have been sovereign princes in the world since Adam. According to this reckoning each one of us, like so many Geryons, may have as many *persons* as we please to make procurations.[27]

Furthermore the *Leviathan* implied that the persons of the Trinity were merely constructions in time. Indeed it seemed as if there was a time before Christ when the second and third persons of the Trinity did not exist. Bramhall expressed the unease felt by many others with Hobbes' account which seemed to render the persons of the Trinity as 'artificiall' and temporal, and not the real, eternal persons of Christian orthodoxy.

Hobbes did not read Bramhall's book until nearly ten years after its publication, but the stinging personal nature of the attack coupled with the antagonism between them was sufficiently powerful to elicit one of his rare replies to a critic. *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall . . . called the 'Catching of Leviathan'* attempted to defend what was written in *Leviathan*, and to gloss it more acceptably. Hobbes recast his definition and exposition of 'person' in an orthodox direction: 'A *person* (Latin, *persona*) signifies an intelligent substance, that acteth any thing in his own or another's name, or by his own or another's authority.' This, he claimed, was the way in which it was used in the best Latin authors, and cited Cicero once more: 'Unus sustineo tres personas, mei, adversarii, et judicis.' According to Hobbes, this is the way 'we use the word in English vulgarly, calling him that acteth by his own authority, his own person, and him that acteth by the authority of

[27] John Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan* (London: John Crook, 1658), p. 474.

another, the person of that other'. He proceeded to discuss the Greek rendering of the Latin *persona*, echoing the unease of St Jerome about the use of *hypostasis*:

> The Greek tongue cannot render it; for προσῶπον is properly a face, and, metaphorically a vizzard of an actor upon the stage. How then did the Greek Fathers render the *person* as it is in the blessed Trinity? Not well. Instead of the word *person* they put *hypostasis*, which signifies substance; from whence it might be inferred, that the three persons in the Trinity are three divine substances, that is three Gods. The word προσῶπον they could not use, because the face and vizzard are neither of them honourable attributes of God, nor explicative of the meaning of the Greek Church. Therefore the Latin (and consequently the English) church renders *hypostasis* every where in Athanasius his creed by *person*.[28]

Hobbes conceded that his exposition of the Trinity had been infelicitously worded but denied that the bishop had spotted the real problem. Even as it stood, Hobbes contended, it was not impious. He had 'examined this passage and others of the like sense more narrowly' and altered the text accordingly, when translating the book into Latin. The bishop is quite correct in stating that there may be 'as many persons of a king, as there are petty constables in his kingdom', but this is exactly where the application of the word 'person' to the Trinity has to be treated with care. The king and his personating constables are not of the same substance, unlike the 'persons' of the Godhead. The true definition of person helps to explain how God is one substance yet three persons.

> God, in his own person . . . created the world . . . the same God, in the person of his Son God and man, redeemed the same world . . . the same God, in the person of the Holy Ghost, sanctified the . . . Church. Is not this a clear proof that it is no contradiction to say that God is three persons and one substance?[29]

[28] Hobbes, *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall*, *E.W.*, IV, p. 310, 311.
[29] Hobbes, *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall*, *E.W.*, IV, pp. 317, 316.

Hobbes saw his mistake in the English *Leviathan* as writing 'instead of *by the ministry of Moses*, in the person of Moses', and once he had seen this error he corrected it in the Latin text.[30]

Sollicited from Beyond the Sea, to Translate the Book into Latin

In this Latin edition of *Leviathan*, which appeared in 1668, Hobbes claimed that he had been 'sollicited from beyond the sea, to translate the book into Latin, and fearing some other man might do it not to my liking' translated it himself. According to Tuck it was translated specifically to answer critics. In any case, Hobbes had obviously taken account of the barrage of criticism levelled against his exposition of the Trinity and attempted to clarify his thought. A close comparison of the English and Latin of the offending passages yields important insights.[31]

While the definition of person in chapter 16 is similar, 'Persona est is qui suo vel alieno nomine res agit: si suo, persona propria sive naturalis; si alieno . . . repraesentiva', the subsequent passage about the Trinity has been substantially altered. There is no mention of personation by Moses or the Apostles and the wording is far more restrained, with Hobbes quoting the teaching of the catechism of the Book of Common Prayer on the appropriated works of the persons of the Trinity in his defence. The section at chapter 33 is omitted, as is the offending section in chapter 42. In addition to these corrections and omissions, Hobbes also published a lengthy appendix to the Latin edition of the *Leviathan* comprising three chapters, which dealt with the Nicene Creed, heresy and objections against the work.

The first chapter of this appendix is a systematic investigation of the meaning of the Nicene Creed. Hobbes noted that the word *hypostasis* is used neither in the Scriptures nor in the Nicene symbol, but deferred a fuller discussion until the whole creed has been expounded. After an examination of the derivation and meaning of such words as *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *substantia* and *ens*, Hobbes proceeded to investigate their usage in the context of the Creed.

[30] Hobbes, *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall, E.W.*, IV, pp. 316, 317.

[31] *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall, E.W.*, IV, p. 317. The Latin edition of *Leviathan* is to be found in *E.W.*, III. See Tuck, p. 89.

Hobbes focused on the significance of the word *persona*. He stuck to the tenor of his previous explanations and quoted Cicero's maxim again: 'Unus sustineo tres personas, mei, adversarii, et judicis.' He claimed that this is the understanding of 'person' at work in the Church of England catechism.[32]

Hobbes' understanding of 'person' as an actor who can speak and act on his own behalf or on behalf of another is clearly at work: 'Deus in persona propria creavit omnia; in persona Filii sui redemit genus humanum; in persona Spiritus Sancti ecclesiam sanctificavit.' It should be noted that only the Father is referred to as acting as 'in persona propria', and that, given the Ciceronian usage the other two 'persons' could still be construed as something akin to 'personalities' or offices borne by God.[33]

Polemic is rarely far from the surface in the Hobbes' writings, and his concern at this point is made clear: tritheism. He feared this was the inevitable result if the persons of the Trinity were conceived as independent entities as a reading of the Greek Fathers' use of hypostasis as substance could easily imply. Tritheism was inevitable if one defined 'person', as Bellarmine and others do, as an intelligent prime substance. To define person in this way leads to conclusions that are 'contra fidem', for if the three persons were three such substances then there would effectively be three gods. Hobbes accused Bellarmine of not understanding the full force of the Latin word *persona*. According to Hobbes, to define 'person' in terms of prime substance is to depart from the Greek προσῶπον, for προσῶπον signifies face or representation.[34]

Concluding his remarks, Hobbes noted that the words 'person', *hypostasis* and 'Trinity' are not used in the Nicene Creed, and *hypostasis* is used in the Athanasian Creed only to paraphrase the Nicene Creed. These words moreover are not found in the Scriptures and were introduced because of the pressure of heretics. Hobbes cautions that they were not intended to solve the 'riddle' of the Trinity or to improve upon Scripture. Echoing Augustine, he argues that we speak of 'person' solely to have some word to use, and dismisses further philosophical speculation on the

[32] Latin *Leviathan*, *L.W.*, III, p. 533; and see pp. 519, 533–6.
[33] Latin *Leviathan*, *L.W.*, III, p. 533.
[34] Latin *Leviathan*, *L.W.*, III, pp. 533, 534.

mystery as fruitless. Returning to his earlier justification for his language, Hobbes asserted once more that the Trinity should be conceived solely in terms of the Scriptures, and nothing should be admitted to its interpretation but what can be inferred from the Scriptures.[35]

He is no Good Christian

These revisions of *Leviathan* did little to satisfy his critics. By now they had the bit firmly between their teeth, and a campaign was under way to deal with Hobbes and his teaching by force of law. In 1666, in response to the Great Fire, a bill had been introduced into Parliament to combat heresy, and there is little doubt that Hobbes was one of its main targets. The recently re-established bishops were keen to assert their authority, and the writings of Hobbes were one of the old scores that many of them wanted to settle. The strength of feeling is best illustrated by the fact that another abusive epithet was added to the popular store of polemic when in 1669 a student at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Daniel Scargill, was forced to make a public recantation of the fact that he had 'gloryed to be an Hobbist and an Atheist'.[36]

In the following year, Scargill's tutor, Thomas Tenison, published a very cogent critique of Hobbes' theology, *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*. Tenison (1636–1715) wrote this, his first book, quite possibly as a protection against rumours that he himself was a Hobbist. A man of distinct latitudinarian sympathies, described by the diarist Evelyn as 'that dull man', Tenison was to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1695. Like many of his contemporaries, he realized that the *Leviathan* was dangerous not only for its content but also for its 'handsomeness' of style. Tenison drew up a Hobbesian creed, its first clause being: 'I believe that God is Almighty matter; that in him there are three Persons, he having been thrice represented on earth'. Tenison proceeded to make some telling remarks about this first clause. He questioned and probed the extent and implications of Hobbes' apophaticism.

[35] Latin *Leviathan*, *L.W.*, III, pp. 535, 536.

[36] D. Scargill, *The Recantation of Daniel Scargill* (Cambridge: University Press, 1669), p. 1. See Springborg, p. 348, for the moves against Hobbes.

While he agreed that God is incomprehensible, he did not see this as meaning that we cannot say anything about God. If it were impossible to make any true statements about God then phrases such as 'God is love' and 'be holy as God is holy' would be literally senseless. Tenison draws two analogies to illustrate his point: the blind can have some understanding of fire even though they cannot see it, and sailors have some knowledge of the sea even though they have not plumbed its depths. Hobbes had denied that we could ever have an idea of God because ideas result from sense perceptions. Tenison counters *ad hominem* that if God is in some way bodily, as Hobbes maintains, then it is logically possible that he could be the object of sense perception, and therefore, on Hobbes' own ground, we could have some conception of him. Tenison then hit out at what he considered Hobbes' overly restrictive notion of idea. Ideas are not necessarily images, and ideas can exist without any pictorial imagery. Hobbes had confounded image and idea.[37]

Tenison's critique of Hobbes' exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity is typical of most contemporary responses. He was so indignant at Hobbes' bold reinterpretation of the doctrine that he claimed that 'such an example of the Trinity, has not been invented by any Heretick of the unluckiest wit, for these sixteen hundred years'. Hobbes had produced a monster, for using Hobbes' conception of 'person' meant that there could well 'be rather a century, than a Trinity'. King Charles was as much a trinity as God on the Hobbesian account because he was represented by three Lord Lieutenants in Ireland.[38] The same point was made by the Earl of Clarendon, who accused Hobbes of opening the Godhead to 'as many Persons as any Body will assign to it'. He accused Hobbes of demoting Christ to the position of viceregent of God, which is 'degrading below the model of Socinus'. Clarendon feared that *Leviathan* 'would destroy the very Essence of the Religion of Christ', which Clarendon saw as Hobbes' ultimate aim given that 'he hath no religion, or that he is no good Christian'.[39]

[37] T. Tenison, *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined* (London: 1670). 'The Epistle Dedicatory', p. 8; and see pp. 8–16, 24–32. The point about image and idea will be more closely examined at the end of the chapter.

[38] Tenison, pp. 38, 39, 43.

[39] Edward Hyde, *A Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State, in Mr. Hobbes's Book, Entitled Leviathan* (Oxford: 1676), pp. 246, 6, 9, 242.

While Tenison was aware that *Leviathan* had recently been published in Latin, his criticisms reveal no acquaintance with the revised text. A Latin rejoinder of 1673, J. Templer's *Idea Theologiae Leviathanis*, took account of Hobbes' revisions but found them still wanting. Templer lambasted Hobbes as 'the Hydra of Malmesbury', a hyena imitating the voice of the shepherd. The book is comprised of two parts. The first is a defence and explanation of the right use of Scripture, the second is a syllabus of dogmatic errors distilled from *Leviathan*. Dogma VIII asserts that 'Moses is the first person in the most Holy Trinity'. Templer was aware of the correction offered by Hobbes in the appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, but deemed it insufficient. For Templer the root of the problem lay not so much in the use that Hobbes makes of his concept of 'person', but in the definition itself. Hobbes' etymology is too partial. The lexicon gives seven meanings to the word 'person', and it is context that decides which one of these is in play. According to Templer, Hobbes' definition conforms neither to the usage of the word in church, nor to forum or theatre. In theology the understanding at work is that of 'suppositum intelligens'. Although Hobbes has expunged the offending sections of *Leviathan*, the retention of the definition of 'person' means that errors cannot but remain implicitly in the text. Finally, Templer argued, the Hobbesian definition of 'person' meant that there must be *four* persons in the Trinity because God existed before Moses personated him.[40]

The criticisms made by Ross, Lucy, Tenison, Clarendon, Templer and others were to remain part of the standard attack on Hobbes' doctrine. Works were produced echoing these attacks either whole or in part. In 1683, for example, four years after Hobbes' death, an obscure country parson, John Dowel, published his critique of Hobbes' theology. The title says it all: *The Leviathan Heretical*. Dowel thought Hobbes guilty of at least two heresies. Both have been touched on before: his teaching on the corporeal nature of God, and his teaching on the Trinity. The latter heresy derives from Hobbes' refusal to countenance the technical use of 'person' in theology, which yields trinitarian persons that are temporal and not eternal. According to Dowel, Hobbes sees God's fatherhood commencing with the creation of

[40] J. Templer, *Idea theologiae leviathanis* (London: 1673), p. 77; see pp. 77–82.

the world, his sonship with its redemption. Hobbes was by then well beyond Dowel's ultimate answer to the problem posed by such heresy: the reinstatement of *De heretico comburendo*![41]

The True Intellectual System of the Universe

My investigation of Hobbes' opponents would be deficient if I neglected a group who, while not mounting a frontal assault, attempted to refute his conclusions by developing a subtle antidote to his atomistic materialism. For the Cambridge Platonists, Hobbes was simply the most pernicious example of a general drift towards materialistic explanation. They sought to refute the basic axioms of such philosophical understandings, and, drawing on an understanding formed by the neo-Platonism of Renaissance authors, insisted upon the retention of the immaterial and the spiritual as part of the universe. Human reason was a reflection of, and participation in, divine reason; properly understood it led to, rather than away from, religion. One of the lasting monuments of their erudition was *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, written by Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688), Master of Christ's College, Cambridge, and a key signatory of the decree banishing the hapless Scargill from the university. The work, published in 1678, conveyed its clear intention by its title: it was an attempt to provide an 'intellectual', as opposed to a material, account of the universe. For my purposes I shall note Cudworth's exposition of the Trinity, and also register two other trends of the thought of the Cambridge Platonists found there that were to have a profound effect upon the future reception and understanding of trinitarian doctrine.[42]

Against a background in which some authors too often and too easily equated reverence for reason with the method and tenets of Socinianism, the Cambridge Platonists insisted that reason was 'the candle of the Lord'. Its proper exercise led one to, rather than

[41] John Dowel, *The Leviathan Heretical* (London: 1683), see pp. 101–3, 111, 122.

[42] Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: 1678). An account of the Cambridge Platonists as a group and as individuals placing them in their intellectual milieu is John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1872). An examination of their method can be found in H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism* (London: Black, 1965), esp. chapters 3 and 4.

away from, the teaching of the Christian Church. The light of Scripture and the light of reason were complementary not contradictory. For some of their opponents this baptizing of reason simply served to confirm their suspicions that the Cambridge Platonists were covert Socinians. One preacher attacked them in the presence of the king, they 'impiously deny both the Lord . . . and his Holy Spirit . . . making Reason, Reason, Reason, their only Trinity'.[43] The manifesto of the Cambridge Platonists needed to be backed up by demonstration, and Cudworth attempted to show how even that most mysterious of Christian doctrines, the Trinity, was actually more in accord with reason than opposed to it. It is important to grasp that he did not intend to prove the Trinity from reason, and did not deny that the Christian Trinity was revealed only in the economy of salvation, but he did hope to show that the 'trinities' of the ancient world had a heuristic value that would remove the doctrine from charges of intrinsic unintelligibility. He argued that his approach might help those who saw the Trinity as the 'Choak-Pear of Christianity'.[44]

At the opening of the seventeenth century the finding of *vestigia trinitatis* was relatively uncontroversial. Donne and others discerned 'applied trinitarianism' in humanity, philosophy and even physiology.[45] According to Cudworth many such *vestigia* were to be found in the writings of the ancient philosophers and magi. There were presentiments of the Trinity in the teaching of Zoroaster, Mithras and Pythagoras. In pages dense with reference and argument Cudworth examined 'trinities' to be found in the writings of Ancient Egypt, the Jewish Cabbala and Classical authors. All these echoes of the Trinity were descended from a divinely revealed *prisca theologia* or primitive theology shared by Hebrew and Greek alike. Although this ancient Ur-revelation suffered decline amongst the pagans, nevertheless the simple presence of such *vestigia* told against those who argued that any notion of a Trinity is intrinsically incomprehensible. Cudworth then went on to argue that the Christian Trinity is 'not a Trinity of meer names or Words', it is a Trinity of hypostases, subsistences or persons.

[43] Quoted in Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Brighton: Harvester, 1976), p. 47.

[44] Cudworth, 'The Preface to the Reader'.

[45] See Dennis R. Klinck, '"*Vestigia Trinitatis*" in Man and his Works in the English Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981), pp. 13–27.

While accepting that the Trinity is a Mystery, he was equally insistent that it is not in plain contradiction to reason. Cudworth argued, in a claim that proved highly contentious, that the ancient Fathers saw 'God' as a common, universal substance. The Fathers were homo-ousian not mono-ousian. The consubstantiality of the three persons referred not to one numerical essence but to one universal essence. As we shall see in the next chapter, this understanding led critics to accuse Cudworth variously of tritheism, Arianism or both.[46]

Two other legacies were to be bequeathed by Cudworth and the Cambridge Platonists to later disputes about the doctrine of the Trinity debate. The first was the relative diminishing of the importance of doctrine in favour of morality. In this they were not alone, as the rise of 'the latitude men' clearly shows. As Cudworth put it: 'I persuade my self, that no man shall ever be kept out of heaven, for not comprehending mysteries that were beyond the reach of his shallow understanding.'[47] The Cambridge Platonists were insistent that divinity was for life not just for argument. In the hands of less subtle thinkers such sentiments would lead to the doctrine of the Trinity being dismissed as true but unimportant. The second was the emergence of the self-referential category of 'consciousness'. This emergence was to have profound consequences for the way in which 'person' would be conceived, and disastrous results when such concepts were applied to understand the doctrine of the Trinity.[48]

I am now in a position to draw some important conclusions about Hobbes' thought on the doctrine of the Trinity. All too often commentators have based their judgements of Hobbes' understanding of the Trinity solely on the passages that occur in the English *Leviathan*, focusing on chapter 42 in particular. From this they have quickly concluded Hobbes' rank heterodoxy, if not

[46] Cudworth, p. 558; see pp. 288, 548, 601–12. See Sarah Hutton, 'The Neoplatonic roots of Arianism: Ralph Cudworth and Theophilus Gale', in Lech Szczucki, ed., *Socinianism* (Warsaw: PWN, 1983), for a contemporary's unease with Cudworth's use of Plato.

[47] Quoted in G. A. J. Rogers, 'The Other-Worldly Philosophers and the Real World: The Cambridge Platonists, Theology and Politics', in G. A. J. Rogers, J. M. Vienne and Y. C. Zarka, eds., *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context* (Dodrecht: Kluwer, 1997), pp. 3–25 (8).

[48] We shall return to 'consciousness' in the next two chapters, but the origin of the concept in the thought of Cudworth is strongly defended in Udo Thiel, 'Cudworth and Seventeenth Century Theories of Consciousness', in Stephen Gaukroger, ed., *The Uses of Antiquity* (Dodrecht: Kluwer, 1991), pp. 79–99.

atheism, and their arguments for this conclusion often echo Bishop Bramhall. Even his more sympathetic modern commentators seem keen to display his heresy. Geach calls Hobbes a Socinian, Pocock detects a Joachimite, Martinich concedes that Hobbes may be a Sabellian. Perhaps a desire for such labelling is inevitable, but our evaluation of Hobbes' thought on the Trinity needs to go further than slogans.[49]

It is crucial to realize that Hobbes' writings do not yield one unified understanding, and that the English *Leviathan* is not his last word on the Trinity. Hobbes modified his views in response to criticism and, in later works, particularly the Latin *Leviathan*, he engages in a degree of re-expression and reappraisal. One of his earliest explicit references to the doctrine, which occurs in *De cive*, is not controversial at all, where he notes that the new covenant was not established in the name of the Father alone but in the name of Father, Son and Spirit.[50] The exposition given in the English *Leviathan* is, as we have seen, far more contentious, and generated immense heat in subsequent controversies. This is modified in the Latin *Leviathan*, both in the text and in its appendix. In earlier works the Trinity is treated in the context of other concerns. In the later works the Trinity is a primary focus for Hobbes as he tried to defend himself from accusations of heresy. It is important to acknowledge this change in focus, expression and intention if we are to gain an accurate understanding of Hobbes' writings on the Trinity.[51]

Hobbes based his reflections on the Scriptures, and his trinitarian theology is thoroughly economic in origin and expression. He takes as given that the Bible reveals God as three persons, and Hobbes attempts to explore how the *one* God could be *three* persons. In doing so he develops his own eccentric trinitarianism. But whatever its eccentricities, the exposition is grounded in the

[49] Geach, p. 552; Pocock, p. 188; Martinich, *The Two Gods*, p. 205. Martinich's position is confused. He wishes to portray Hobbes as 'a sincere, and relatively orthodox, Christian' (p. 1). Yet when discussing the Trinity, Martinich argues that if we concede that Hobbes' views are Sabellian this reinforces the contention that Hobbes was a Christian believer: 'if Hobbes were a Sabellian, then he believed in the Trinity; and if he believed in the Trinity, he was a sincere Christian' (p. 205). To be a Sabellian is surely not to be 'relatively orthodox' as Martinich would have it, it is to be plainly heretical.

[50] *L.W.*, II, pp. 376–7.

[51] Skinner comments on the neglect of the Latin *Leviathan*, p. 3, n. 15.

economy of salvation, and thus Hobbes provides a counter-example to those, such as LaCugna, who assert that reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity had become non-economic long before this time. Even the offending passages of the English *Leviathan* are scripturally based.[52]

The concept of 'person' is very important. We saw in the last chapter that men like Biddle and Fry, conceiving of person in the classical way along the lines of 'individual intelligent substance', were unable to accept the statement that 'God is three persons'. It was either meaningless (Fry), or blasphemous (Biddle). It could easily lead to a tritheistic understanding of the Godhead, as to say that there were three individual intelligent substances in the Godhead seemed to imply that there were three Gods. Biddle and others rejected the doctrine of the Trinity as idolatry. Hobbes did not. Hobbes used a different understanding of 'person', albeit one developed largely to service his political concerns, to try to understand what the doctrine might mean. The elaboration of the word 'person' that takes place in *Leviathan* chapter 16 is mainly concerned with the legal and political usage of the word, but it is in this context of 'persons artificiall' that Hobbes extends his understanding to the 'persons' of the Godhead. God is the author of the actions of the three actors who represent him as three 'artificiall' persons. Thus, according to Hobbes, to say that God is a Trinity is the equivalent of saying that God is one agent who has, so the Scriptures tell us, been personated three times in history. As we have seen, this exposition of the doctrine was completely unacceptable to his critics. They disputed his definition of 'person', pointing out that it was the truth but not the whole truth, and unsuitable for application to God. They contended that the application of this definition entailed a multiplicity of persons in the Godhead, and they suspected that the Hobbesian persons were temporal manifestations and not eternal realities. Given all this we may wonder why Hobbes initially re-cast the doctrine of the Trinity in this way.

Three main reasons present themselves: Hobbes' understanding of the nature of thought and language, his atomism and his politics. Hobbes' account of the nature of thought played an important role in determining how he conceived the Trinity. His account of thought is overtly pictorial: thoughts are 'every one a

[52] See Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 12, 210.

Representation or Appearance' of external objects. A thought is thus a mental image, and the train of thought is portrayed as a succession of mental images. Hence we cannot speak much of God as we are unable to form suitable mental pictures. In fact, as we have seen, Scripture aside, the only thing we can say about God is that he exists. We speak of God to honour him not to conceive him.[53] Words are signs that mark thoughts and are depicted largely as names for things. The purpose of speech (by which Hobbes often means what we would label 'language') is to 'transferre our Mentall Discourse into Verbal; or the Trayne of thoughts into a Trayne of Words'. Language thus seems to be purely descriptive, and there appears little place if any for an understanding that allows language to function in a formal, non-descriptive way. Given this narrow understanding of language, Hobbes may well have felt constrained to choose between two interpretations of the phrase 'God is three persons': either that there are three materially separate individuals who can all be called God, or one individual who carries three identities. The former, blatant tritheism, was clearly unacceptable, so the latter seemed more attractive. Any theory of language that sees words only as signs for thought-as-image will be unable to account for usage that sees the possibility of language and understanding functioning in a non-pictorial way.[54]

[53] English *Leviathan*, ch. 1; and see ch. 1 for an account of thought, and ch. 3 for an account of the train of thought. For the fluidity of 'idea' during this period, see Robert McRae, '"Idea" as a Philosophical Term in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1965), pp. 175–90.

[54] English *Leviathan*, ch. 4. Swift satirizes this understanding of language when Gulliver visits a school of languages on the island of Laputa; Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (ed. Peter Dixon and John Chalker; London: Penguin, 1967), pp. 230–1. Hobbes' 'nominalism' is one of the roots of his problem with the Trinity. Peter Geach has spoken of the danger that any nominalist theory poses to Christian doctrine, mentioning Hobbes amongst the nominalists, and the Trinity amongst the endangered doctrines. The root of the problem, argues Geach, lies in nominalist logic which subscribes to a version of the two-name theory. According to this theory, a statement is true if, and only if, the subject and predicate name stand for the same thing. Names are believed to be the only logical category. Such a logical theory is inadequate, according to Geach, because it cannot account for relation. At the level of trinitarian theology, relation is essential to any understanding. The persons of the Trinity do not possess relations, they are them. Geach argues that 'any doctrine in which relative terms essentially occur is bound to strain the two-name theory. It is clear in the first place that on a two-name theory there can be no relations — no *res* answering specially to relative terms.' Peter Geach, 'Nominalism', in Anthony Kenny, ed., *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 139–52 (144). But for a caution on labelling Hobbes a nominalist, see Flew, p. 160.

Hobbes' writings also reflect the process by which the importance of relationality was being lost sight of in many areas. Throughout the seventeenth century atomism exerted an influence on thought well beyond the realms of material science. Descartes had already construed the person in radically individualistic terms. The Cartesian ego could exist even if the rest of the world ceased to be, a myth echoed by Hobbes. In science the rediscovery of atomistic models had emphasized the separatedness of each part of the material universe, while in society previously unquestioned relationships were breaking down as the old hegemony finally unravelled in the Civil War.[53] Personal identity was increasingly conceived of in individualistic rather than communal terms, and Hobbes reflected this atomism in his social theory: relationship was an external constraint forced on men from fear of the state of nature, it was not seen as constitutive of their identity. Human beings were pre-formed individuals who by force of reason bound and limited themselves for the sake of peace. In this sense Hobbes' account of society is atomistic and his political science is a faithful application of the dissolutive and compositive method he advocated for the natural sciences. It was hardly surprising then that in this sort of climate a doctrine, such as the Trinity, that prized relations as constitutive of identity was disconcerting.

Hobbes' conception of sovereignty could be described as politically unitarian. His sovereign is absolute and his power indisputable. Hobbes rejected any separation of powers; there could be no other claims on the loyalty of the subject. The Church was thus subordinated to the power of the sovereign, and its claims to a higher or different power denied. (This was one of the reasons why Hobbes was keen to play down any claims that might be made to supernatural powers such as prophecy or inspiration.). If Hobbes allowed no differentiation in the earthly sovereign there could be none in the heavenly sovereign either. The earthly sovereign might be represented and so might the heavenly one, but in neither case could there be any real plurality. The political sphere and the religious sphere mirror each other. This political unitarianism reflected the emerging culture of the civic polity. The Protectorate and Restoration regimes were both concerned with the

[53] See Kishlansky, chapter 1, for social relationships.

establishment of stability and order, and while it would be misleading to cast that environment as 'absolutist', it would be fair to characterize the centripetal forces at work in the British state as 'centralist'. Although James I's desire for incorporative union between his two kingdoms was thwarted several times during his lifetime, the process of integration and subordination continued. It was realized in all but name by Cromwell's defeat of Scotland and conquest of Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century. The abolition of structures such as the Council of Wales further indicate the centralizing tendencies of the Caroline and Cromwellian state. Once again the theological and political intertwine: if power must be concentrated at the centre and 'federalism' in any form rejected, then a 'federal' Godhead becomes more unimaginable and more inconceivable.[56]

None of these reflections is intended to cast Hobbes, by innuendo if not argument, in the guise of a conscious but covert *theological* unitarian. Although Geach has placed him in the Socinian camp, and there are indeed elements of his thought that could be characterized in this way, notably his mortalism in regard to the soul, Hobbes will not fit neatly into this category. In his later writings the personhood of the Holy Spirit is emphasized to sufficient extent to rule out the Socinian depiction of the Spirit as a metaphor. It must also be noted that very, very few of his contemporary critics accuse Hobbes of being a Socinian, despite the fact that this had by now become a popular term of abuse. His acceptance of the Nicene Creed separates him from Biddle and many Socinians proper who saw that symbol as the triumph of the forces of philosophical paganism. The Racovian Catechism explicitly rejects belief in the three persons of the Godhead, Hobbes does not. While his account of the doctrine of the Trinity is highly questionable, he nowhere rejects it, or calls it unscriptural, or depicts it as the construction of a decadent Church.

It could be argued that Hobbes' avowal of 'Jesus is the Messiah'

[56] For the problems associated with generating any meaningful concept of absolutism applicable to England at this time, see James Daly 'The Idea of Absolute Monarchy in Seventeenth Century England', *The Historical Journal* 21 (1978), pp. 227–50. For the centralizing tendency of Stuart politics, see Kishlansky, pp. 45, 201, 243. That this tendency had roots in Tudor polity can be seen in the supression of Wales in 1536 and the attempt to obliterate its identity; see Adrian Hastings *The Construction of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 72.

as the *unum necessarium* of Christian belief reveals Hobbes' latent Socinianism. One could accept the statement that 'Jesus is the Messiah' without therefore being committed to accepting that Jesus is divine, and the Racovian Catechism and John Biddle had reduced the Christian faith to this slogan. However in *De corpore politico* Hobbes had expanded this *unum necessarium* in a non-Socinian direction: 'And without all controversy, there is not any more necessary point to be believed for man's salvation than this, that Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the Christ . . . and all the explications thereof are fundamental; as also are all such as be evidently inferred from thence; as belief in God the Father [and] belief in God the Holy Ghost'.[57] Belief in the Trinity is thus contained in the affirmation that 'Jesus is the Messiah'.

In all this we should not underestimate the desire of Hobbes and his contemporaries to avoid what they considered the very real danger of tritheism. We saw in the last chapter how avowed anti-trinitarians construed the doctrine of the Trinity as proclaiming three separate gods. Some, such as Best, saw the Trinity as the tip of the iceberg of Catholic polytheism, and Hobbes himself thought talk of the divine persons as 'intelligent substances' came dangerously close to positing three gods.

Hobbes' direct contribution to trinitarian thought was very limited; 'Hobbism' became another slur to smear an opponent, but the indirect legacy of Hobbes was probably greater than his contemporaries realized. Hobbes' theological reflections drove others to rationalistic refutations. According to Mintz, Cudworth and More 'tried to refute Hobbes with Hobbes' own weapon, logical analysis . . . when they argued explicitly against Hobbes they argued on his own ground, and thus gave further testimony of the growing importance which rationalism assumed in English thought during the latter part of the seventeenth century'. Mintz concludes that 'the critics were satisfied that they had cut Hobbes down to size; in fact they had yielded, slowly and imperceptibly, but also very surely, to the force of his rationalist method'. This process laid up further problems for the future.[58]

The attention and prominence Hobbes gave to the Trinity, and the interest and concern that his critics manifested about his

[57] *E.W.*, IV, p. 174.
[58] Mintz, pp. 83, 149–50.

understanding, are clear indications that the doctrine was no marginal concern in the mid-seventeenth century. It has been important to note that Hobbes' exposition is thoroughly economic and generated from Scripture. He does not dismiss the doctrine of the Trinity but reinterprets it. His use of the word 'person' is pivotal in this reinterpretation, signalling a departure from the commonplace, 'Boethian' definition of 'person' held by most of his contemporaries and marking a new attempt to explore the Christian doctrine of God. His concern to 'translate' the complexities of scholastic jargon into the 'vernacular' of ordinary language is quite apparent, but his theory of language and thought, his nominalist logic, and his unitarian politics prevented him from doing so in adequate terms when it came to the doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that he attempted to do so at all is a sure indication of the importance the doctrine still possessed for him and for others in their religious lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

So Many Wrong Trinities, and More Everyday Increasing

By 1660 most Englishmen were content to welcome Charles II to his throne. But this 'Restoration' meant much more than the mere fact that England had a monarch once again. Amidst the common relief there was a widespread belief, and a general hope, that the clock could and would be turned back. The 'experiment' of the previous decade was to be terminated, the *ancien régime* revived, and the old ways restored. The virtues of stability and hierarchy were emphasized again and again. As part of this process of reversion to previous certainties the Church of England was restored to its place as the national Church, ecclesiastical government by bishops reinstituted, and the Prayer Book again prescribed by law as the only legitimate means of worship.[1]

However, no matter how hard some tried, the clock could not be turned back completely. Many of those who had enjoyed different ecclesiastical structures and liturgical practices refused to give them up and initially some on the Anglican side pressed for accommodation and compromise. The Savoy Conference of 1661 brought together Anglican and Presbyterian divines, but in the event dashed any hopes of a broader 'Comprehension'. The conservative Anglicans triumphed. The Act of Uniformity, passed in 1662, demanded 'unfeigned consent and assent' to the Thirty-Nine Articles of religion and the Prayer Book, the renunciation of the Solemn League and Covenant, and the acceptance of the

[1] Many would argue that there were in effect two 'Restoration Settlements'; the second, of which the act of Uniformity was part, being much more conservative than the first. See Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 216, 223–30. See Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 128.

absolute necessity of episcopal ordination. As a result over seventeen hundred 'nonconforming' ministers were ejected from their livings for their refusal to accept the requirements of the act, many becoming the victims of poverty and petty persecution.[2]

In the same year a licensing act was passed which reintroduced the censorship of books by the Church and universities, albeit *after* their publication. It appeared, on the surface at least, that the days of intellectual ferment might be over. But in reality the situation was much more complex. Religious uniformity proved impossible to enforce and churchmen found it impossible to stem the growing flood of books critical of them and their teaching.[3]

The questioning spirit that had waxed during the 1650s could not be supressed, and the growing demand for 'clarity' and 'reason' in arguments of every sort extended into the realm of theology. Popular belief and official doctrine continued to be closely probed, examined and criticized. From the 1660s onwards there was a growing tendency to downplay the importance of doctrinal clarity in favour of moral rectitude, an attitude that became characteristic of the approach of many Restoration churchmen. In private, at least, some, like the poet Milton, were expunging the doctrine of the Trinity from their own beliefs. In the last decade of the century others brought these private doubts into the public domain and began a sustained and concerted attack upon the doctrine. Perhaps the most interesting and revealing aspect of the defence mounted by the trinitarians was the way in which it exhibited more than anything else their own disunity. After some opening remarks we will look in depth at the great trinitarian disputes of the 1690s.

The Naked Truth

For 20 years after the Restoration Thomas Hobbes remained the bogeyman of the ecclesiastical establishment. His materialism was anathema to nearly all churchmen, and they regarded his

[2] See John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 43f. for a survey and analysis of the numbers involved.

[3] For the 'slackness' of implementation of these measures, see John Spurr, 'Religion in Restoration England', in Lionel K. J. Glassey, ed., *The Reigns of Charles II and James VII and II* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 90–124.

subsuming of them and their function to the sovereign as effrontery. For decades afterwards works continued to be written critical of Hobbes and his *Leviathan*. The reign of Charles II witnessed a growing concern about atheism, and most attacks on it contained a sortie against Hobbes, whose very longevity seemed to affront a number of his critics.[4]

However, the clergy of the Church of England were not united defending their own corner; even among their ranks there were a significant number who were not completely satisfied with the results of the Restoration settlement. For some it seemed as if the demands of the Act of Uniformity had been drawn too tightly, in a way that precluded the development of a truly national Church. Such clergy, often influenced by the Cambridge Platonists and 'the Great Tew Circle', were out of sympathy with the rigid, dogmatic understanding of the Church and Christian faith of their High Anglican counterparts. These 'latitudinarians' sought a settlement that could take in a wider diversity of opinion and practice. Although they believed in the Trinity, their general outlook helped to develop an atmosphere in which the importance of dogma in general was downplayed.[5] The influence of Continental writers such as Acontius, whose *Satanae stratagemata* (proposing a breadth of toleration among Protestants and arguing that belief in the Trinity was not essential to Christian faith) had been translated in 1648, contributed to this outlook. Such sentiments were clearly displayed in a pamphlet published anonymously in 1675 by Herbert Croft (1603–1691), the Bishop of Hereford. *The Naked Truth* was a plea for toleration and comprehension, and sought to recover Nonconformists to the national Church. It deplored the use of force and coercion in matters of religion. Croft himself a had somewhat checkered past ecclesiastically, having converted from the Church of England to Catholicism and back again while a young man, and like many on the rebound he became virulently anti-Catholic in his later years. He believed that the disunity created by the Act of Uniformity had weakened Protestantism and encouraged Popery, which was rife throughout his diocese. Seeking some minimal standard of conformity, he

[4] See G. E. Aylmer, 'Unbelief in Seventeenth Century England', in Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas, eds., *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22–46.

[5] Toulmin argues that after the 1650s 'matters of doctrine lost their centrality', p. 131.

proposed that subscription to the Apostles' Creed be a sufficient test of orthodoxy.[6]

The pamphlet touched on several issues of controversy between the Church of England and the Dissenters. When discussing the Trinity, Croft displayed a certain amount of seemingly wilful naïveté. The Christian must believe that there are three persons and one God, but he took this as about the limit of what could be said of the Trinity as 'discourse must be of things intelligible, though Faith believes things not intelligible'. Unrestrained human reason was a dangerous guide in this area because 'by humane deduction from these three distinct persons you may prove three distinct substances; I hope you will make no such inferences in the Divine Persons'. Croft believed that simple acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity was sufficient and further expansion of this belief unwise. Attempts to elaborate the doctrine by 'school divinity' were futile and led the expositors to 'rash conclusions of divine matters, tossing them up and down with their tongues like Tennis Balls'. Echoing some of the radicals of two decades earlier, he even went as far as to dismiss the Nicene Creed as a mistake that reflected the influx of pagan philosophy into Christianity.[7]

Croft's pamphlet provoked bitter replies from High Church divines, who accused its author of Socinianism and of attacking the Trinity. *The Naked Truth* was a small cloud on the theological horizon. As the century progressed, the storm gathered, for, in private at least, others were not prepared to accept even Croft's bare exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The First of the Whole Creation

This deepening dissatisfaction with the doctrine of the Trinity, and a sign of the disintegration of the trinitarian consensus, is illustrated by a Latin manuscript discovered in 1825, which turned out to be a lost work by the poet Milton. The manuscript seemed to establish Milton's Arianism.[8] The date of the treatise is

[6] [Herbert Croft], *The Naked Truth* ([n.p.]: 1675).

[7] Croft, pp. 4, 5, 6.

[8] John Milton, *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine* (tr. Charles R. Sumner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1825). This interpretation has been challenged, and Milton's orthodoxy upheld; see W. B. Hunter, 'Milton's Arianism Reconsidered', in W. B. Hunter *et*

uncertain, but internal evidence points to the last years of the poet's life. It gives us a fascinating insight into Milton's own reasons for rejecting orthodox trinitarian belief. The work displays many of the criticisms of the radicals of the 1640s and 1650s that were to receive a fresh impetus in the controversies of the 1690s: lack of intelligibility; absence of scriptural warrant; detraction from the worship of the one true God; a corruption produced by the Roman Church; the assumption that truth and clarity are closely related.

Milton's original orthodoxy is not disputed, having been exhibited in both prose and poetry, but by the time that the *Treatise* was written Milton's Arianizing is clear.[9] He took his stance on the claim that only Scripture can guide our discourse about God, and stated that it was his reading of Scripture that had led him to reject certain doctrines. Milton displayed the same sort of literalism as Biddle: for instance, if the Scriptures tell us that God grieves, then he grieves. We are not to interpret such expressions away. He was convinced that the process begun at the Reformation for the retrieval of true Christianity from the corruptions of 1300 years was not yet complete.[10]

Chapter 5 of the *Treatise* is an exercise in Christology. Milton examined what it might mean to say that 'Jesus is the Son of God'. In doing so he cited Catholic apologists who argued that the Trinity is accepted solely on the authority of the Church as it is not found in the Scriptures as such. This was a classic move in the Catholic arsenal used to counter those who claimed that the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was unscriptural. Such arguments were not new. In 1527, for instance, John Fisher lumped together those who denied transubstantiation with the fourth-century Arians, who denied the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father on the grounds that the language was 'unscriptural'.[11] But this sort of apologetic could backfire, and in Milton's case it did. If the doctrine of the Trinity is not found in

al., eds., *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), pp. 29–51. I did not find Hunter's argument convincing. Milton's poetry was considered in Chapter 1.

[9] See Sumner's 'Preliminary Observations', in Milton, *A Treatise*, pp. xxiv and xxv, for quotations showing Milton's previous orthodoxy.

[10] See Milton, pp. 1, 7, 10, 17.

[11] John Fisher, *De veritate corpus & sanguinis Christi in eucharistia*. See Fisher, *Opera Omnia* (1599), pp. 236, 855, 1052. I am indebted to Dr Richard Rex for this point.

the Scriptures then, argued Milton, it too should be rejected along with transubstantiation. His Arian Christology seems apparent when he states that 'the Son existed in the beginning, under the name of logos or word, and was the first of the whole creation'. As the Father and the Son are different persons they are thus of different essence. They cannot be of the same 'numerical essence; otherwise the Father and Son would be one person'. To argue that the Son is personally different to the Father but essentially the same is both strange and 'repugnant to reason'. Persons cannot share the same essence; 'if one divine essence be common to two persons, that essence or divinity will either be in the relation of a whole to its several parts, or of a genus to its several species, or lastly of a common subject to its accidents'. In all this Milton urged that we 'discard reason in sacred matters, and follow the doctrine of Holy Scripture exclusively'.[12]

Milton had no intention of writing 'a long metaphysical discussion, [to] introduce all that commonly received drama of the personalities [*personalitatum*] in the Godhead'. The Scriptures are clear: there is only one God, and if God were more than one person that would surely have been revealed in the Old Testament? He took it as axiomatic that 'those who are two numerically, must also be two essentially'. For Milton, the Father alone is the *ens* of God and 'it is impossible for any ens to retain its own essence in common with any other thing whatever, since by this essence it is what it is'. Given this:

> the answer which is commonly made, is ridiculous — namely, that although one finite essence can pertain to one person only, one infinite essence may pertain to a plurality of persons; whereas in reality the infinitude of the essence affords an additional reason why it can pertain to only one person. All acknowledge that both the essence and the person of the Father are infinite; therefore the essence of the Father cannot be communicated to another person, for otherwise there might be two, or any imaginable number of infinite persons.[13]

The grammar of being begotten, which Milton sees as essentially temporal in meaning, similarly precludes coequality with the

[12] Milton, pp. 83, 85, 88.
[13] Milton, pp. 89, 92, 99.

Father: 'If he was originally in the Father, but now exists separately, he has undergone a certain change at some time or other, and is therefore mutable. If he always existed separately from, and independently of, the Father, how he is from the Father, how begotten, how the Son, how separate in subsistence, unless he be also separate in essence?'[14]

The Arian tone continued in chapter 6, entitled 'Of the Holy Spirit', where Milton traced the various interpretations that 'Spirit' is given in the Old and New Testaments, concluding that 'with regard to the nature of the Spirit, in what manner it exists, or whence it arose, Scripture is silent'. He took for granted that 'a doctrine which is to be understood and believed as one of the primary articles of our faith, should be delivered without obscurity or confusion, and explained, as is fitting, in clear and precise terms', but in regard to the way in which the Spirit is produced or spirated 'revelation has declared nothing expressly on the subject'. For Milton, the Holy Spirit was a person not a power or virtue (*pace* Socinus), but not a divine person equal with the Father. He believed the Johannine Comma to be the main generator of the trinitarian error, for it was 'on the authority of this text, almost exclusively, that the whole doctrine of the Trinity has been hastily adopted'.[15]

It is important to stress that Milton, like Biddle but unlike the Socinians proper, does *not* deny that the Father, Son and Spirit can be called three persons, but, given that in the Scriptures 'there is not a word that determines the divinity, or unity, or equality of these three', he refuses to accept their consubstantiality and coequality. In his zeal to uphold the self-sufficiency of Scripture as the only rule of faith, Milton espoused a form of subordinationism based, so he believed, upon the revelation given in the economic order. The Scriptures reveal that the Son is first of the created order but not coequal to the Father, while the Spirit is inferior to both. Fifty years later, Samuel Clarke was to wreck his ecclesiastical career by reading the Scriptures in a similar way.[16]

Milton's treatise is an indicator of the growth of anti-trinitarian sentiment during the 1670s and 1680s, and he was not alone.

[14] Milton, p. 133.
[15] Milton, pp. 153, 161, 171.
[16] Milton, p. 166; see pp. 87, 161. Clarke's reflections will be examined in depth in Chapter 6.

There was continual anxiety in ecclesiastical circles about the rise of unbelief and the growth of Socinianism. At the inception of the new regime Matthew Wren (1585–1667), Bishop of Ely, had felt it necessary to tackle these perceived dangers, and his *Increpatio Bar Jesu*, composed while imprisoned in the Tower by the Republic, dealt with the errors of the Racovian Catechism. George Ashwell (1614–1693), Rector of Hanwell in Oxfordshire and one-time tutor at Wadham College, Oxford, writing his *De Socino et Socianismo* in 1680 could speak of the wide dispersal of 'socinian books' which scholars at the universities were 'eagerly reading'. Nearly three decades earlier, his *Fides apostolica* had described Socinianism as a 'compendium of heresies'. George Bull (1634–1710) wrote his famous *Defensio fidei Nicaenae* partly to combat a strange mixture of foreign Socinians and the Jesuit, Petavius, but also because he had been assured that all students of theology were eagerly reading the Continental Socinian Sandius' destruction of the Nicene faith in his *Bibliotheca anti-trinitariorum*. In the event one pamphlet, or rather the response to it, detonated an explosion that shook the Church and plunged the orthodox into disarray.[17]

An Error in Counting

During the 1690s a fierce and acrimonious debate was to rage about the doctrine of the Trinity. The bitterest exchanges were between the doctrine's supporters. During his brief reign, James II, in an effort calculated to win greater freedom for his Catholic co-religionists, had engaged in a policy of toleration towards dissent. The censorship of books was made even more lax, and during the 1680s, as we have noted previously, a climate emerged in which radical views were freely canvassed. In 1687 Stephen Nye (1648–1719), graduate of Magdalene College, Cambridge and

[17] Matthew Wren, *Increpatio Bar Jesu* (London: 1660). George Ashwell, *De Socino et Socianismo dissertatio* (Oxford: 1680). George Ashwell, 'The Preface', *Fides apostolica* (Oxford: 1653). George Bull, *Defensio fidei Nicaenae* (Oxford: 1685), see 'Ad Lectorem' and the 'Proemium'. Despite censorship, works by Hobbes, Spinoza and Descartes were freely available; see Spurr, *The Restoration Church*, p. 229. For an account of the growth of anticlericalism, which sees it as a key element in the debates of the period, see J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Rector of Little Hormead in Hertfordshire, felt emboldened to publish albeit anonymously *A Brief History of the Unitarians.*[18]

The book takes the form of four supposed letters to a friend, concluding with a commendatory reply. The book was the first to use the word 'Unitarian' in its title, although the word itself can be found as far back as 1672 in a small pamphlet by Hedworth, a follower of Biddle. Despite its claim to be a history this was not a scholarly chronicle but a polemic against the doctrine of the Trinity, and above all an apology for unitarianism. Nye set out the Unitarian claims: they 'affirm, God is only one Person, not three', the Father alone is almighty and eternal, the Son is the messenger of God, and the Holy Spirit is a personification of God's power. The first 'Letter' provided a variety of arguments culled from a selection of scriptural texts to show that Christ and the Holy Spirit are not God. Nye claimed that the Scriptures were clear that God is one person. In the Scriptures God is referred to in the singular: I, thou, me, him. To interpret these pronouns as referring to a Trinity of persons is 'contrary to custom, grammar and sense'. He dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as 'absurd, and contrary both to Reason and to itself, and therefore not only false, but *impossible*'. To claim that there are three persons and yet one God was simply 'an error in counting'. The 'Letter' concluded by tracing a pedigree for unitarianism back to the New Testament, and attempted to demonstrate how the original apostolic doctrine had been corrupted.[19]

In his second 'Letter' Nye refuted Old Testament texts cited as proof for the doctrine of the Trinity. Nye comments slyly that the 'more learned and judicious trinitarians', such as Jerome and Bellarmine, agreed with him on this. Moreover it would be inherently odd, argued Nye, that the Jews were not corrected by Christ for believing God to be one person if God were really three. The third 'Letter' attempted a similar refutation of New Testament texts, while the final 'Letter' examined various passages advanced from the Epistles and Revelation to prove the Trinity. All these texts admit of an alternative interpretation to that given by trinitarians, which the assertions of Catholic authors, and the

[18] [Stephen Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians. Called also Socinians in Four Letters Writen to a Friend* ([n.p.]: 1687).

[19] Nye, pp. 3, 20, 24, 25; and see pp. 26–8.

concessions of Protestant ones, that the Trinity cannot be proved from the Scriptures are a further recommendation of the unitarian position. Nye therefore concluded that God is one person. The appended 'Reply' to the Letters is probably by Nye's friend Hedworth, and warmly commended the *Brief History* for its candour and clear refutation of the erroneous doctrine of the Trinity.[20]

The publication of the *Brief History*, and later unitarian tracts, had been funded by the city merchant and renowned philanthropist Thomas Firmin (1632–1697). As we saw in Chapter 2 Firmin had met Biddle while still a young man and had found his arguments against the Trinity compelling. Although formally untutored in theology, he was on friendly terms with nearly all the leading divines. John Tillotson (1630–1694), a close friend and later to become Archbishop of Canterbury, was apparently urged by Queen Anne to republish his sermons on the Trinity to convert Firmin to orthodoxy.[21] Nye's exposition was very acceptable to Firmin, who seems to have urged Nye to pen the work in the first place, and he commended the *Brief History* for presenting 'an accountable and reasonable faith, grounded on clear and evident Scripture-Arguments . . . whereas the Trinitarian doctrine is founded upon obscure and mistaken texts [and] cannot be admitted by any Man of free judgment'. Firmin dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as unnecessary for Christian belief. If it were it would be a slur on God's love as we are unable to understand it and merely confess it blindly as parrots. The 'Reply' deployed some of the standard general arguments against trinitarianism: the doctrine of the Trinity, because it cannot be found as such in Scripture, conceded ground to Papists; it sat ill with the claim that the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants; and it was the main stumbling block for Jews, Muslims, and heathen who accept 'God as a necessary existent person'.[22]

[20] Nye, p. 67; and see pp. 68, 158, 166.

[21] On Firmin and his connections, see H. W. Stephenson, 'Thomas Firmin' (Unpublished D. Phil Thesis, Oxford, 1949), and the article on 'Firmin' in the *New DNB*.

[22] Nye, pp. 168, 181; and see pp. 168–71. For Firmin, see John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England* (3 vols.; London: Strahan, 1870), II, pp. 201–2. That the 'Reply' is Firmin's, see MacLachlan, *Socinianism*, p. 321.

Nice and Hot Disputes

With the collapse of James II's regime, William of Orange's landing, and the turmoil of the 'Glorious Revolution', those who sought a more inclusive settlement for the established Church seized their chance and proposed further reform of the Liturgy. One of the proposals was that the so-called Athanasian Creed, which the Prayer Book directed to be recited twelve times during the year, be optional. The matter was referred to convocation and was subsequently wrecked by a phalanx of Tory High Churchmen, but the proposal provoked several pamphlets including another from Nye, *Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius*.[23]

Some of the sentiments of the *Brief History* and *Brief Notes* were echoed in a work published in 1690. *The Naked Gospel* evoked such outrage that its exposed author, Arthur Bury, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, found the Visitor of the College, Jonathan Trelawney, the Bishop of Exeter, summoned to depose him. Bury insisted that the bare message of the gospel is twofold: Repent and Believe. *The Naked Gospel* portrayed the doctrine of the Trinity as one of the corruptions that had brought Christianity to its present low ebb. Bury argued that Christianity

> be so changed, that were any Apostle to return into the world, he would be so far from Owning, that he would not be able to understand it . . . Whether Mahomet, or Christian Doctors have more corrupted the Gospel, it is not so plain by the light of Scripture, as it is by that of Experience . . . For when by nice and hot disputes (especially concerning the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity) the minds of the whole people had been long confounded, and by the then late stablishment of Image worship, the scandal was encreased; so that the Vulgar Understandings of the Doctrine of the Trinity appeared no less guilty of Polytheism, than that of Image-worship did of Idolatry.[24]

To be fair, Bury's polemic is characterized more by a desire to show the superfluousness of theological speculation than a wish to reject the doctrines of the Trinity or Incarnation completely. He

[23] Reprinted in *The Faith of One God* (London: 1691).

[24] [Arthur Bury], *The Naked Gospel* ([n.p.]: 1690), 'The Preface'; and see p. 9.

was convinced that we do not need to understand how exactly Christ is a person, nor the intricacies of the Incarnation, to be Christians. Bury also reflected the growing conviction that faith should be consonant with reason, going as far as to claim that 'Reason is no less the Word of God than is the Scripture', and that where faith is opposed to reason it is only 'impudent pimping for Priests' Interests'.[25]

But Bury had gone too far. After a near riot which saw the chapel barricaded against the Visitor, who was forced to take refuge in the college hall, Bury was deprived for 'bribery', 'heresy' and 'incontinence'. A university decree of 19 August 1690 condemned Bury's opinions 'to the glory of the blessed Trinity and the honour of Oxford', and the book was publicly burnt in the quadrangle of the Old Schools.[26]

The Persons . . . Are Three Distinct and Infinite Minds

The burning of Bury's book did not stop other more openly anti-trinitarian works appearing and receiving wide dissemination. The provocative republication of Nye's *Brief History* in 1690 cried out for refutation. Into the lists entered Dr William Sherlock (1641?–1707), soon to be Dean of the newly rebuilt St Paul's Cathedral in London. Sherlock was despised by many of his fellow clerics, not least for his vacillation on the question of the oath to the new regime. In the event Sherlock was to prove an example of that strange yet persistent phenomenon, the champion whose very defence wreaks more destruction and havoc than any opponent could ever hope to achieve.

It is very important to establish the proper chronological development of the trinitarian disputes of the 1690s. Redwood's account is inaccurate and inadequate, and has led others astray.

[25] Bury, pp. 17, 58; see pp. 29–33. For some reason Hunt describes Bury as 'Master of Lincoln', II, p. 195.

[26] [James Harrington], *An Account of the Proceedings of the Right Reverend Jonathan Lord Bishop of Exeter in his Late Visitation of Exeter College in Oxford* (Oxford: 1690), see pp. 24, 25, 26, 29, 38. Harrington also gives a copy of the University Decree. John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), pp. 156–9, gives a vivid account of the dispute. However, as we shall see later, Redwood unfortunately lets the drama of the proceedings at Oxford distort his judgement about the broader pattern of the disputes of the 1690s.

He overstates the impact of the Bury affair, seems unaware of the *Brief History*, and is thoroughly muddled about Sherlock. To put matters straight: it is Sherlock's book that shatters the fragile unity of the trinitarian camp, and Sherlock's explicit target is Nye's *Brief History*. The drama of Bury's removal can mask the real development in the plot. Nye is a far more significant figure. His writings provoked Sherlock, and in turn the latter's 'tritheism' provoked South and others to reply.[27]

It was Sherlock's inopportune use of the emergent category of 'consciousness' in relation to the persons of the Trinity that was to shatter the fragile unity of the trinitarian party, so before we proceed to examine how Sherlock delivered this unintended blow we need to examine some of the background behind his recasting of trinitarian doctrine. The history of the evolution of the category of 'consciousness' is very complex, and only some general markers can be given here. The general context in which the concept developed was the cluster of questions surrounding the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. These issues influenced developments in the redefinition of 'person' to allow for an adequate account of personal identity in these areas. This attempt reached its zenith in the second edition of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, but the origin and development of Locke's own thought in this area is itself the subject of conjecture. The role played by Cudworth and the Cambridge Platonists in the development of the notion of 'consciousness' was noted in the last chapter. A dissident Cambridge Platonist, John Turner, attempting to refute what he perceived to be the tritheism latent in Cudworth's exposition, pushed the concept of 'consciousness' into the domain of trinitarian theology.

A Discourse Concerning the Messias was written to show that Jesus

[27] As we shall see, at several junctures Redwood is mistaken. His bibliography alone is clear indication of his confusion about Sherlock. He cites Sherlock's *Vindication* twice, giving the authors as 'Dr. Sherlock' and 'W. Sherlock', not seeming to realize that it is the same book in different editions. He cites in the text and in the bibliography 'John Sherlock' and 'J. Sherlock' when he is clearly referring to William Sherlock. Finally, he attributes to this non-existent J. Sherlock a book entitled *The Tryal of the Witnesses*. This is actually the work of Thomas Sherlock, William's son. Hunt's chronology is correct, see II, pp. 201–205. MacLachlan does not mention Bury, but acknowledges the importance of Nye, see *Socinianism*, pp. 320–323. The otherwise excellent Placher uncritically follows Redwood, see William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), p. 175.

was indeed the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. However, as its title page explained, it contained 'a large Preface, asserting and explaining the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity against the late writer of the Intellectual System'. According to Turner, Cudworth's caution in denying that the three divine persons are one singular, existent essence led him to produce a trinity 'not of Persons but of Gods'. Specific identity, which Cudworth had endorsed on the basis of his understanding of *homoousios* was insufficient to exclude tritheism; that could be achieved only by the assertion of numerical identity. Similarly, specific unity is not enough to achieve actual unity. Turner's own solution is eccentric and need not detain us long.[28] According to Turner, the Father is the simple, omnipresent, divine substance, properly called 'God'. He is the source and fountain of the other two persons of the Trinity. The second and third persons of the Trinity are differentiated by the various acts of union of the first person with 'created immaterial nature' and 'created material nature' respectively.[29] This union generates the respective self-consciousnesses and hence persons of the Trinity. Hence the Son is the second person of the Trinity, 'resulting from the Union of the human nature with the Divine Substance . . . which Divine Substance being endued and furnished with a life by itself, is for that reason a Person by itself . . . for this is the most general and comprehensive notion of a Person, that it is a being endued with life, or with self-consciousness, or self-sensation'.[30] Whatever else we may say about Turner's understanding, we have here part of the process of recasting of the definition and understanding of 'person', from an account given in terms of substance to one that now contains a self-referential element of self-consciousness. Sherlock's application of such an understanding to the Trinity was to prove disastrous.[31]

[28] John Turner, *A Discourse Concerning the Messias* (London: 1685), p. xxii; see p. xxxvi.

[29] Turner, p. cliv.

[30] Turner, pp. cxxii–cxxiii.

[31] The genesis of the recasting of the definition of 'person' is very complex. The above analysis relies very closely on the highly informed book on Locke's *Essay*, Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology* (2 vols.; London: Routledge, 1991). Ayer's scholarship is indisputable, but I am puzzled by his claim that Sherlock 'advanced what is essentially Turner's explanation of the Trinity', see II, p. 257. Given Turner's subordinationist schema and Sherlock's apparent tritheism, while Sherlock may have borrowed Turner's ontology of person, his Trinity is hardly 'essentially' the same as Turner's. Placher is too quick to trace Sherlock's proposals to Descartes, p. 175.

The title of Sherlock's work revealed his intentions: *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God. Occasioned by the Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius, and the Brief History of the Unitarians, or Socinians, and containing an answer to both.* Throughout, Sherlock attempted to answer Nye's objections and unitarian exegeses of Scripture, and saw his book as a defence of the teaching and disputed liturgical use of the Athanasian Creed. In his 'Introduction' Sherlock claimed, perhaps somewhat ominously in the light of developments, that 'the writing of this work has given me clearer and more distinct Notions of this Great Mystery, than I had before'. This drive for clarity and distinction pervades the text, and is driven in part by Sherlock's professed impatience with Puritan mysticism, as shown in his attack on the spiritual writings of John Owen. It certainly contributed to the book's destructive nature.[32]

Sherlock insisted that the incomprehensibility of the doctrine of the Trinity is not to be taken as a sign of its untruth. We can have conceptions of what we cannot comprehend, but, of course, these conceptions must be free from contradictions. In section 4 of the *Vindication*, answering Nye's objection that the Trinity either confounds the persons or divides the divine substance of God, Sherlock outlines his concept of 'person' in the Godhead. He does not intend to fathom the mystery he tells us, but simply to show that it is not absurd. He takes as axiomatic the claim that the divine persons are real, substantial beings.[33]

He dealt first with the nature of the unity of the Trinity. Reflecting Turner, and possibly anticipating Locke, Sherlock states that the unity of a spirit lies in its self-consciousness. It knows its thoughts, reasonings, passions as its own. But, he asks, what if it were the case that there were three created spirits so united that they were as conscious of each other's thoughts as their own, surely they would be as much one with each other as a spirit is at one with itself? The divine unity, he claims, lies in this mutual-consciousness, which he equates with the περιχωρεσις of the Fathers. Sherlock declares the divine persons to be three infinite

[32] William Sherlock, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God. Occasioned by the Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius, and the Brief History of the Unitarians, or Socinians, as Containing an Answer to both* (London: 1690), 'Introduction', pp. 27f.

[33] Sherlock, *Vindication*, see pp. 2, 46–8.

minds and that their unity is maintained by their mutual consciousness. In the case of three created minds there would be only a moral union, but what is merely a *moral* union in the case of the created, claims Sherlock, is an *essential* union in the uncreated. The Trinity is thus united, not as one man to another, but as a man is to himself. To use his words, the divine persons 'feel each other in themselves', and scriptural phrases such as 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' are properly and not merely metaphorically descriptive. The Son is conscious in himself of all that the Father is and vice versa.[34]

Having thus established the basis for the divine unity, Sherlock confidently moves on to an exposition of the divine diversity. He is strident: 'the persons are perfectly distinct, for they are three distinct and infinite Minds and therefore Three distinct Persons; for a Person is an intelligent Being, and to say, they are Three Divine Persons, and not Three distinct infinite Minds, is both Heresie and Nonesense'. The persons are most certainly not powers or faculties of the Godhead, and the Socinians are quite wrong to conceive the Holy Spirit in this way. The Scriptures clearly depict the Spirit as a person, a being with understanding, will and power of action.[35]

The persons of the Trinity are thus distinguished by self-consciousness: 'each Divine Person has a Self-consciousness of its own, and knows and feels itself (if I may speak) as distinct from the other Divine Persons. The Father has a self-consciousness of his own whereby he knows and feels himself to be the Father, and not the Son, nor the Holy Ghost . . . as James feels himself to be James and not Peter.' These self-conscious divine persons are united by mutual-consciousness, and thus they are one God because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit 'do by an internal sensation . . . feel each other'. Having presented us with a model of the Trinity that resembles some cosmic *ménage à trois*, Sherlock outlines the implications of such a model.[36]

All three persons are God but there are not three personal Gods: 'we must allow each Person to be a God, but each distinct Person is not a distinct God'. Sherlock saw one of the advantages of his model as being that one needs no skill in logic or metaphysics

[34] Sherlock, *Vindication*, p. 56; and see pp. 48–50, 55, 56, 57.
[35] Sherlock, *Vindication*, p. 66; and see p. 67.
[36] Sherlock, *Vindication*, pp. 67, 68.

to understand it. One simply accepts that within the Godhead there are three infinite minds who are yet one by reason of mutual-consciousness. This mutual consciousness, which Sherlock sees as the core of the concept of *perichoresis*, is what ensures that *ad extra* there is one will, energy and power. However, at this point he seems to get somewhat confused, and some critics later pounced on this confusion. Sherlock invoked an Augustinian analogy of the mind: there is one mind but three faculties of knowledge, self-reflection and love. What are faculties in created spirits are, according to Sherlock, persons in the Godhead. But such an analogy surely tells against him: is it not the case that here we have not 'three infinite minds' but one?[37]

God . . . Cannot be Three Such Persons

Sherlock's apparent familiarity with the domestic life of the Trinity dismayed the orthodox and delighted their opponents. The novelty of the explanation, and the infelicities of the exposition, ricocheted around. One major effect of Sherlock's new account was to concentrate future disputes upon the use of the word 'person' at work in the context of the Trinity, and the exchanges between trinitarians and unitarians focused on the meaning of the word.

An anonymous, openly Arian, reply was published in the same year as Sherlock's *Vindication*. Its author claimed that Arianism was the original and genuine Christian teaching, providing a mean between the extremes of Sherlock's tritheism and Nye's Socinianism. The Arian believes 'that there is but one God, and that he exists in but One Person'. The doctrine of the Trinity is unreasonable as the three persons are quite separate and cannot therefore share one substance. It is also an inaccurate reading of the Scriptures. The author echoed some of Nye's arguments and some of his rhetorical devices: any appeal to tradition plays into the hands of Papists, who use the same argument to justify the absurdity of transubstantiation; the doctrine of the Trinity is a stumbling block to Jews, Turks and Pagans.[38]

[37] Sherlock, *Vindication*, p. 98; and see pp. 100, 130–6.

[38] [William Freke], *A Vindication of the Unitarians against a Late Reverend Author on the Trinity* (London: 1690), p. 5; and see pp. 21, 22–8. Redwood makes two errors here: he refers to Freke as Frere (see p. 160) and he gives the date of publication of Freke's work as 1687, hence letting the reply come three years before the work it attempts to answer.

Several of the unitarian replies were gathered into *The Faith of One God*, forming the first of a series sometimes referred to as the 'Unitarian Tracts'. This collection was probably financed by Thomas Firmin and distributed *gratis* by him, quite possibly along with bales of his merchandise. As well as recent tracts, *The Faith of One God* also contained a eulogy of Biddle and reprints of his works from the 1640s and 1650s.[39]

Nye himself replied to Sherlock with another piece of polemic, *The Acts of Great Athanasius*. This work was both a vicious attack on Athanasius, depicted as a scheming fornicator, and Sherlock, whose work is treated with derision. Nye argued that even on its own terms the Athanasian Creed was incoherent as it both confounds and divides the divine substance by alleging that there are three persons within it. Nye questioned the way in which the word 'person' is taken to function: if the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God, why is it not the case that the Father is a person, the Son is a person, and the Spirit a person, and yet there are not three persons but one? One thing was sure, opined Nye; Sherlock's new notions in the matter would not find support in any quarter, either in the Scriptures or in the Fathers. Nye pressed Sherlock's apparent confusion about his Augustinian analogy of the mind. Sherlock claimed that self-consciousness entails three distinct beings, but mutual-consciousness seemed to confound this to the point of making just one person. It seems as if 'the three Divine Persons being universally conscious to one another, are numerically one Person, and are hypostatically and personally united'. In any case mutual-consciousness will not do the job of maintaining the substantial unity of the Trinity, for even if one is conscious of the actions and thoughts of another, one is not aware of them in the way that the other is aware of them.[40]

Another pamphlet rejected the Trinity because it was based upon philosophical speculation and not the Scriptures, and asked 'shall my faith depend upon Plato's Ideas, Aristotle's Subtlties, Cartesius his self and mutual Consciousness and Metaphysical

[39] *The Faith of One God* (London: 1691). See MacLachlan, *Socinianism*, p. 321 for Firmin's part in the tracts. Amongst the tracts of Biddle reprinted were 'Twelve Arguments drawn out of Scripture' (1647) and 'A Confession of Faith Touching the Trinity' (1648).

[40] [Stephen Nye], *The Acts of Great Athanasius with Notes, by Way of Illustration, on his Creed* ([n.p.]: 1690); (republished in *The Faith of One God*), p. 26; see pp. 4–5, 11, 12, 20, 26.

Abstractions, more intelligible to poor Mortal Men than the Tongue of Angels?' The author was adamant that 'by God we understand a Divine Supream Person, one Numerical Being and Spirit, having the same Notion of that Unity, which we have of an Angel, a Man, a King'. Our idea of God rules out the idea of a Trinity as much as it rules out possession of a body by God.[41] *A Defence of the Brief History of the Unitarians* developed the same idea: our conceptions of God are clear and distinct enough to preclude trinitarian expression. The *Brief History* was upheld against Sherlock whose account of the history of trinitarian doctrine was derided. It was rather the case that 'the Fathers who lived before the Council of Nice, speak, like Platonic Philosophers and Arians; the Nicene Fathers like Tritheists; and the School-men like Madmen'. As for the scholastic claim that three persons are equivalent to 'Three Subsistences; Three Modes; Three relations; Three I know not whats. This is meer Nonesense: for a Person is an intelligent Being, and Three Persons must needs be Three Intelligent Beings'. We have a 'clear Apprehension' of the attributes of God and we do not mistake one for three. It is clear that 'every one knows that One God is One Intelligent Infinite Person, and therefore cannot be Three such Persons'. Sherlock's reason is at fault if he cannot see that three cannot be one. Sherlock's trinitarian exegesis is then disputed and some theological conundrums set up: if Christ is divine, then given his death and intercession what are we to make of a God who beseeches himself? Why was Christ given the gift of the Spirit at his baptism if he were already God? And if, as Sherlock claims, what are faculties in us are persons in God, why are there only three persons? As all three persons have power, wisdom, and love why aren't there nine persons in God?[42]

Dr. W's Three New Nothings

The focus placed upon the meaning of the word 'person' in the dispute led several trinitarians to posit a more nuanced

[41] [Anon.], *Some Thoughts upon Dr. Sherlock's Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity* ([n.p.]: 1691), pp. 8, 14 (republished in *The Faith of One God*).

[42] [Anon. Peter Allix?], *A Defence of the Brief History of the Unitarians against Dr. Sherlock's Answer in his Vindication of the Holy Trinity* ([n.p.]: 1691), pp. 5, 7; see pp. 9, 23, 26, 28 (republished in *The Faith of One God*).

understanding. Between 1690 and 1692 a steady stream of 'Letters' emerged from the pen of Dr John Wallis (1616–1703), the eminent and aging Savilian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford. Wallis had been a member of the Westminster Assembly and had a hand in drafting its catechism. Although his chair had been conferred by the Commonwealth, his academic renown and loyalty had been sufficient for it to be confirmed by the restored monarch. Wallis obviously felt that Sherlock's recasting of the doctrine of the Trinity had been unfortunate, and he himself sought to express the doctrine in more traditional language. Each 'Letter' drew a reply from critics, and the correspondence generated eight letters in all.[43]

In his 'First Letter' Wallis attempted to deflect attention from Sherlock's account of 'person'. The distinction in the Godhead is called 'Personality. By which word, we mean, that Distinction (what ever it be) whereby they are distinguished each from other, and thence called Three Persons.' Wallis did not think that the word 'person' was essential to an understanding of the Trinity, 'if the word *Person* do not please, we need not be fond of words, so the thing be agreed'. Nevertheless, he insisted, it is a good and useful word and it is difficult to think of another to put in its place. Wallis was aware of the analogical nature bourn by 'person' in this context: 'If it be said, It [Person] doth not agree to them exactly in the same sense in which it is commonly used amongst men; we say so too, nor doth any Word, when applyed to God, signifie just the same as when applyed to men, but only somewhat analogous thereunto.'[44]

In keeping with this stress on analogy, Wallis attempted an illustration to show how we can understand one to be three and produced the unfortunate 'trinitarian cube'. A cube with its three

[43] John Wallis, *Theological Discourses; Concerning VIII Letters and III Sermons Concerning the Blessed Trinity* (London: 1692). This is the collected version of the 'Letters'. The 'Letters' are given dates of publication, as are the sermons, which makes it easier to reconstruct the exchange. The references are to the individually paginated 'Letters'. Wallis' rather 'old school' approach is shown by this collection, the Sermons themselves having been preached nearly 30 years before the 'Letters' were written. At various points Wallis is clearly aware of an inheritance which his younger critics simply do not share.

[44] Wallis, 'Letter I', pp. 3, 10. For a general account of the understanding of analogy prevalent during the later seventeenth century, see Don Cupitt, 'The Doctrine of Analogy in the Age of Locke', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), pp. 186–202. Cupitt sees the trinitarian controversies as raising in an acute form the whole question of analogy during this period, p. 190.

dimensions can provide an analogy of the Trinity. For as length, breadth and height are necessary to form a cube, they are equal to each other and without one the cube could not exist, so likewise with the Trinity, if Father or Son or Holy Spirit were absent then God would not exist. After considering other analogies, Wallis concluded with a general warning that no analogy could give adequate expression to the nature of the distinction and unity of the divine persons in the Trinity.[45]

The cube analogy gave great sport to one of Wallis' critics, who accused him of urging the faithful to 'love God the Father, who is the length of the Cube with all their Hearts'. Redwood is quite right to claim that it was 'the age of ridicule which did far more harm to the Christian defences than did the onslaught of reason and nature', and this is particularly true in the trinitarian controversies.[46] The same critic also depicted the unsophisticated faithful when worshipping as dividing into two camps: those who worship God as one person, and those who are effectively tritheists. Wallis' opponent concludes with a summation of the argument thus far: 'In short, the Question is, whether the Term *God* includes only one Person, or three Persons? one Almighty Person or three distinct Almighty Persons? And whether the former or the latter, is the more dangerous Error, which soever is found an Error?' The proper predication of 'person' in the Godhead was thus a primary focus in the debate. Sherlock's understanding of these persons as three real substantial beings was noted and dismissed. Wallis' own appeal to tradition was sneeringly rejected as an argument that would have gone down better in 'the late king's time'.[47]

Wallis' 'Second Letter' is a reply to one from 'WJ', who sought clarification of the nature of the distinction between the persons. Wallis refuses to be drawn as the Scriptures are silent on this matter. He now explicitly rejected Sherlock's understanding of the doctrine as tending towards polytheism, and argued that

[45] Wallis, 'Letter I', see pp. 11–13, 18. Bizarre though such an analogy may seem to us, it may well not have been the unique understanding of Wallis the mathematician. Similar mathematical analogies can be found in John Scotus Eriugena (some of whose works significantly were republished in the seventeenth century by Thomas Gale), Nicholas of Cusa and the Chartres school. See Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), Appendix 2. I am indebted to Dr Douglas Hedley for this point.

[46] Redwood, p.15.

[47] [Anon.], *Dr. Wallis's Letter Touching the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity Answer'd by his Friend* ([n.p.]: [n.d.]), pp. 8, 15; and see pp. 7, 8, 6.

mutual-consciousness would lead to three gods who are mutually conscious.[48] The 'Third Letter' attempted to mollify the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed, for which reason some objected to its use in public worship, arguing that in their proper context they did not suggest the condemnation of the uneducated that they might seem to possess. In a postscript he addressed the question of the nature of the usage of 'person' once again. Echoing Augustine, he stated that there are three somewhats in the Godhead which we conventionally call persons, 'which word we own to be Metaphorical (not signifying just the same here, as when applied to men)'. He realized that the problem with the use of the word 'person' lay in the fact that in common speech the words 'three persons' implied three men, hence three persons can seem to imply three gods. Somewhat surprisingly, given the deep hostility between the two men, Wallis cites the same Ciceronian tag that had led Hobbes into controversy: 'ego sustineo . . .'. We can understand that a king and a husband may be seen as two persons but are only one man, and by analogy the same is true of God.[49]

This last analogy however might give the impression that the distinction between the divine persons is imaginary and not real, and the 'Fourth Letter' attempts to remove such a misconception. The difference between the three divine persons is not merely a notional distinction, and it is greater than the distinction we make between the divine attributes. Wallis acknowledged that all analogies are inadequate in trying to grasp the mystery, but he hoped that he had shown that the Trinity is not the *prima facie* absurdity his opponents claim. He reiterates the steps in his argument for the Trinity: first, that there *may* be three persons in the Godhead, and then that there *are* indeed such a three. These persons are not superadded to God but have existed from all eternity.[50]

This latest 'Letter' produced a very searching reply. From its style, especially its witty polemical tone, it may be another of

[48] Wallis, 'Letter II', see pp. 3–5. Wallis makes no mention of Bury in the 'Letters'. Once again Redwood seems to lose the major path of developments in the trinitarian controversy of the period; see Redwood, p. 158.

[49] Wallis, 'Letter III', p. 39; and see pp. 39, 40, 62. For Wallis' hostility to Hobbes, see Quentin Skinner, 'Thomas Hobbes and the Nature of the Early Royal Society', *The Historical Journal* 12 (1969), pp. 217–39.

[50] See Wallis, 'Letter IV', pp. 11, 21, 25.

Stephen Nye's compositions. The writer agrees with Wallis: three may indeed be one, but a thousand may equally be one in the same way. For instance, a regiment may be one regiment but a thousand men. He puts his finger on the real problem with the analogy of the cube. It limps badly because whereas one side is not a cube, one 'person' in the Trinity is God. The usual rhetorical jibes are introduced alleging that the Trinity is one of the chief articles of Popery. Echoing Hobbes, and reflecting the general drive towards a flattening on speech, the objector challenges Wallis: 'Show me the trinitarian, who dares dispute this Question (about the Trinity) in plain English.' As to the 'somewhats' and persons the objector is scornful: If we have no clarity about what these 'persons' are then we have a new Babel. To call the persons 'somewhats' is equivalent to calling them 'nothings', because we do not know what they are. If Sherlock had revived the tritheism of Abbot Joachim (a medieval mystic whose conception of 'three ages' ascribed to each of the trinitarian persons provided great stimulus to revolutionary ideas and groups) then the 'Letters' give us 'Dr. W's Three New Nothings'. Wallis it seems is really a Sabellian, for it seems as if in saying that God is three persons he implies no more than that God has three titles. The reply ends by casting the unitarians as the true defenders and promoters of the Reformation.[51]

Wallis attempted to expand his understanding of 'person' in the 'Fifth Letter'. He claimed that the word, being derived from Latin, strictly speaking signifies not a man but 'one so circumstantiated'. One man may sustain the person of a King and the person of a father, but as kings and fathers are more often than not different men the word 'person' has come to be commonly used indiscriminately as a synonym for 'man'. However, as dictionaries show, the word is often Englished as 'state, quality, or condition, whereby one Man differs from another'. The hinge of the controversy, argues Wallis, is not the word 'person' but the notion of what the 'somewhats' are. Person does not give content to the 'somewhat': the 'somewhat' determines what 'sense the word *Person* is here used'. The Scriptures reveal that God is Father, Son and

[51] [Stephen Nye], *Observations on the Four Letters of Dr. John Wallis Concerning the Trinity and the Creed of Athanasius* ([n.p.]: [n.d.]), pp. 5, 8; and see pp. 4, 17 (republished in *The Faith of One God*).

Spirit, and the Church uses the word 'person' as a way of speaking of these three.[52]

'Person' is again the focus of the 'Sixth Letter'. Wallis defended his previous understanding of the word 'person', and argues that it is the best word available to use of the three 'somewhats' of the Trinity. These persons are not just names, but neither are they three gods. The 'Seventh Letter' too revolves around the word 'person'. Wallis agrees with one of his critics that Sherlock had been better advised 'to be less Positive and Particular, as to what the Scripture leaves in the dark', and insisted that 'person', as indeed 'nature', 'essence', 'unity' are all used of God 'in a borrowed sense'. In fact, as regards 'person', we 'can spare the word, without prejudice to the Cause'. 'Person' is a fit name to use but it has to be properly understood in its context. The problem is the force that common English usage gives to the word making it virtually a synonym for man. In the theological context the distinction of persons in the Trinity is closer to the distinction *modalis* than the distinction *ut res et res*.[53]

Looking back over the previous correspondence, in his final 'Letter' Wallis stated that he wanted to give

> a full answer to the Anti-trinitarians Popular Argument (from the modern gross acceptation of the word Person in English,) as if three Divine Persons, must needs be three Gods, because three Persons amongst Men doth sometimes (not always, nor did it anciently so,) imply three men. And, when we say, these three Persons are but one God; 'tis manifest that we use this Metaphor of Persons (when applyed to God,) as borrowed from the sense of the Word Person, wherein the same Man may sustain divers Persons, or divers Persons be the same man.[54]

Wallis argued for the retention of the word 'person', despite its problematic nature: 'I am not willing to quit it, because I know not a better to put in Room of it'. In any case, if the word were to be dropped from trinitarian vocabulary now Wallis feared his opponents would claim that belief in the Trinity had been

[52] Wallis, 'Letter V', pp. 15, 16, 18; see p. 17.
[53] Wallis, 'Letter VI', see pp. 4, 6. 'Letter VII', pp. 2, 15, 16; see pp. 17, 19, 21.
[54] Wallis, 'Letter VIII', p. 10.

abandoned. 'Person' is the fittest name we can give to the distinction that exists in the Godhead.[55]

He Cryed Nonesense before he Could Speak it

On the whole the 'Letters' steered clear of castigating Sherlock, though Wallis quite clearly thought that the dean had been lacking in prudence and tact. He attempted to deflect the crisis away from the unfortunate neologism of Sherlock's theology and back to a more traditional, standard account of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is significant that Wallis was in his seventies by the time he wrote the 'Letters' and was clearly tapping into streams of thought and language alien to many of his antagonists. But Sherlock immured himself still further into the mire as he tried to back away from some of the more unorthodox conclusions drawn from his works. His general outlook remained the same and, in a pamphlet justifying himself for writing in the first place, he argued that the errors of the *Brief History* needed answering as they were boasted in every coffee house. If there are three persons in one God, he shrilled, then 'our business is to prove it, and explain it and vindicate it'.[56]

Such a self-defence just drew further criticism. One critic rounded on Sherlock's whole treatment of the doctrine and specifically cited Augustine's *De trinitate*, Book 5, which claims that 'person' is used not in a proper sense but for want of a better word. Sherlock's new casting of 'person' clearly led to tritheism and the critic was alarmed: 'I never read any Christian writer to go so far near in express terms asserting a plurality of Gods, as the Dean of St. Paul's has done.' He urged the dean to recant and burn his book, and far from allowing Sherlock to depict himself as some sort of hammer of heretics, argued that if the dean had not risen to the bait the whole dispute over the Trinity would have died down quickly, and the orthodox understanding prevailed.[57]

The dean's bitterest critic, however, was one of his erstwhile

[55] Wallis, 'Letter VIII', p. 12; see pp. 20, 21.

[56] William Sherlock, *An Apology for Writing against Socinians* (London: 1693), p. 29; see p. 10.

[57] [Anon.] *The Anatapology of the Melancholy Slander-by: In Answer to the Dean of St. Paul's Late Book, Falsely Stiled, An Apology for Writing against Socinians &c.* ([n.p.]: 1693), p. 32; see pp. 6, 68.

friends, Robert South (1634–1716), Canon of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and himself a staunch trinitarian. In 1693 he published a book that is still remarkable for the venom of its contents. Even the title was a frontal attack: *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's Book Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity &c. Together with a more necessary Vindication of that Sacred and Prime Article of the Christian Faith from His New Notions, and False Explications of it. Humbly offered to his Admirers, and to Himself the Chief of Them.* South's deep-seated hatred of Sherlock was plain on almost every page, and was undoubtedly the motor behind the book. Like Sherlock, South had grave reservations about taking the oath of allegiance to William and Mary. In the event he took it on the last possible day and, significantly, was to leave £200 to various Nonjurors in his will. Whatever passed between the two men will never be certain, but South certainly felt as if Sherlock had deserted him at the critical moment. The furore over the *Vindication* gave South his opportunity for revenge, and his attacks plumbed the depths of rancour. The 'Preface' to the *Animadversions* bore out South's lifelong reputation for ridicule and humour. Sherlock was accused of being another Abbot Joachim, of providing a deliberately treacherous and false defence of the doctrine, and even, referring to a jibe of Vincent Alsop, of having been tainted with Socinianism himself. Hitting well below the belt, South even questioned the validity of Sherlock's orders, which were conferred during the difficult days of the Commonwealth, remarking acidly that 'hardly can any one be found, who was first tainted with a conventicle whom a Cathedral could ever after cure'.[58]

South's book is extensive and closely argued, but its two main thrusts are clear: to defend and expound a more traditional understanding of the Trinity, which takes full account of its status as a mystery against Sherlock's attempts to clear it up, and to expose Sherlock as a theological clown by showing his account of the doctrine to be erroneous, inadequate and self-contradictory. In a Christmas sermon preached thirty years before, South had

[58] Robert South, *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's Book Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity &c. Together with a More Necessary Vindication of that Sacred and Prime Article of the Christian Faith from his New Notions, and False Explications of it. Humbly offered to his Admirers, and to himself the Chief of them* (London: 1693), 'The Preface'; see pp. iii, v, xvi, xviii. For a sympathetic portrait of South, see Gerard Reedy, *Robert South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

attacked the Socinians for their jettisoning of mystery in discussing the doctrine of the incarnation, and he believed that the heart of Sherlock's errors similarly lay in his optimism about the ability of reason to render the mystery of God 'plaine and easy'. South saw such an intention as futile since part of the very meaning of a 'mystery' is a truth revealed by God that is above the power of natural reason to discover or comprehend. South sought to maintain and defend the traditional, 'scholastic' terms associated with the doctrine of the Trinity such as 'essence', 'substance', 'nature' and the like. He acknowledged the difficulty of conceiving rightly of the deity and divine persons. This was not as Sherlock alleged because of the language used but more profoundly because our capacity for knowledge is ill suited to the divine. God is infinite, whereas our knowledge depends on limit and definition. In regard to the use of 'person' in the context of the Trinity we 'want of all Instances and Examples of this kind'. It is hard for us to conceive of three distinct persons in one nature as our notions are derived from the natural world, and these are only predicated of God with difficulty.[59]

Having thus affirmed the intrinsic difficulty of Godtalk, South proceeded to reject the understanding advanced by Sherlock in terms of self- and mutual-consciousness. These categories simply will not do the work that Sherlock wants them to do. According to South, self-consciousness presupposes an extant personality, the person is present *before* his act of self-consciousness, and therefore self-consciousness cannot be the formal reason of personality. Although the soul is self-conscious it is not thereby made a 'person'; it is Sherlock's residual Cartesianism that has betrayed him at this juncture. South rejected Sherlock's equation of 'mind' and 'person'. The latter is a more inclusive category. By advancing a series of syllogistic arguments to show why self-consciousness cannot be the formal reason of personality, South continued his destruction of the consciousness model of the Trinity. These were followed by another series which sought to destroy Sherlock's claim that mutual-consciousness is the formal reason of unity in the Godhead.[60]

Sherlock's claim that three divine persons are three distinct

[59] South, *Animadversions*, see pp. 2, 18, 30–5, 54. See Reedy, p. 125.
[60] South, *Animadversions*, see pp. 70–4, 94–105, 106–16.

infinite minds was then attacked with gusto. In all this Sherlock has confused 'essential' and 'personal' attributes: what belongs to the essence of God with what belongs to the divine persons. He has similarly conflated what can be distinguished with what can be separated. Although the three persons are really distinct and not merely distinguished in the mind, they cannot be separated. Compared to Peter, James and John they 'differ as really, yet . . . do not differ as much'.[61]

Having rubbished Sherlock, South then proceeded to outline a proper trinitarian grammar. A person is an 'incommunicable mode of existence', a mode being not a substance or an accident but a determining state 'as posture is to body'. A divine person is thus the Godhead subsisting under a particular mode or relation. The divine persons can be distinguished by modes but not separated, but to say that they can thus be modally distinguished is not to say that the divine persons are three modes. South ended his book as he had begun it with a blistering attack upon Sherlock for having played into the hands of the Socinians: in all 'One would think that . . . in his very cradle he cryed nonesense before he could speak it'.[62]

Meer Empty Words . . . Persons, Properties, Thingams

The evident disagreement among the trinitarians was exploited ruthlessly by their opponents. Their differences in exposition and attacks upon each other did much to undermine the trinitarian claim that theirs was the universal and traditional faith of the Church. There appeared to be as many Trinities as there were writers, and one wit wrote that it was now difficult to know what Trinity to believe in as 'there are so many wrong Trinities, and more everyday increasing'.[63]

Looking over the battlefield, Nye penned another masterpiece of polemic. The creation, argued Nye, shows that there must be a thinking, designing, all-powerful mind behind it, and this mind is obviously one not many. Given this, it is 'the very voice of nature

[61] South, *Animadversions*, p. 167; see pp. 119–30, 136–7.

[62] South, *Animadversions*, pp. 241, 370; see pp. 240–1, 247, 288.

[63] [Matthew Tindal], *A Letter to the Reverend Clergy of both Universities Concerning the Trinity and the Athanasian Creed* ([n.p.]: 1694), p. 4.

and reason', supported by the Scriptures, to conclude then that this mind is one person and one person alone. The heart of the dispute lies here, for 'all men know that the Difference between the Unitarians and their opponents the Trinitarians is (in few words) this, Whether there be more than one Divine Person, or more than one Person, who is true and most High God.' Nye then attempted to demolish the defences of the doctrine advanced by its upholders. It is the power of Nye's rhetoric, especially his ridicule, that still impresses the reader, rather than the force of his logical argument. His presentation of the writings of the trinitarian divines is partial and biased, but very effective. Each of the main players in the debate is put under the spotlight, interrogated very roughly, and then rendered ludicrous.[64]

Nye pounced first upon Wallis who had written that a 'divine person is only a mode', that is 'three Relations, Capacities, or Respects of God to his Creatures; he is their Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier; and in this Sense of the word Person, God is three Persons'. Nye thought that the Socinians would be quite happy to go along with such a minimal explanation, which he sees as effectively Sabellian. In fact, some of the anti-trinitarian wags now call themselves 'Wallisians' in his honour. Wallis' explanation is 'a Trinity only of three Denominations or Names, and of Predications purely Accidental . . . nor was it ever denied, either by Sabellians or Socinians'. Taking his cue from the 'Letters' themselves, Nye caricatures Wallis' Trinity as the *Ciceronian Trinity*.[65]

By contrast, Sherlock's Trinity lies at the other extreme and is the *Cartesian Trinity* of three infinite minds. For Nye this is clearly a revival of paganism, for we have a real Trinity of three distinct gods: 'Mutual-Consciousness maketh them to be a Consult or Council, a Cabal or Senate of Gods . . . but by no means one Numerical God'. According to Nye, Sherlock's book was originally received with approbation by upholders of trinitarian doctrine, and it was left to the Socinians to open their eyes to see the errors contained within it. Thus the battle now

[64] [Stephen Nye], *Considerations on the Explications of the Doctrine of the Trinity by Dr. Wallis, Dr. Sherlock, Dr. S__th [sic], Dr. Cudworth and Mr. Hooker; and also of the Account given by those who say, the Trinity is an Unconceivable and Inexpticable Mystery* ([n.p.]: 1693), pp. 3, 7.

[65] Nye, *Considerations*, pp. 7, 8, 9. Nye also refers to Wallis as 'the oldest Divine of England' (p. 9), which may account for Wallis' appreciation of older tradition in using the word 'person' analogically.

raging is not against Socinianism but a civil war within the trinitarian camp.[66]

Cudworth presents a *Platonic Trinity* of three persons as 'really distinct Beings, essences or Substances' but not co-equal as the Father is the head of the Son and Spirit. According to Nye, Cudworth was hard-pressed to express what exactly these three 'persons' are. They are three distinct substances but it seems as if the Father alone is really God while the Son and Spirit are dependent on him. The persons are coeternal for Cudworth, but not 'consubstantial' in the way understood by Lateran IV and later tradition. In many ways, Nye believes, Cudworth and Sherlock converge in their understanding. They both see the divine persons as three really distinct substances. They differ in their understanding of the unity that the three enjoy. Sherlock attributes this to mutual consciousness, whereas Cudworth sees the Father as the 'Principle (Root, Fountain or Cause)' of the Son and Spirit. But this derivation from a common origin is not sufficient to establish unity, for after all a son and grandson are not one person with the original father. In conclusion, Nye thought it best to describe Cudworth's position as moderate Arianism.[67]

The sharpest invective is reserved for South, who is taken as representative of the tradition of the Schools and caricatured as presenting the *Trinity of Aristotle*. According to Nye, 'The Arguments used by Dr. S__th are only metaphysical reasonings; easily advanced, and easily destroyed'. South is quoted at length about 'persons-as-modes', and then the knife is deftly inserted:

> Behold the Birth of the Mountains! We are kept in suspense seven long chapters; at length in the 8th, at p. 240. of his book he gives forth this Oracle . . . if you will have a great deal in one single word, the very Illiads in a Nut-shell; they are Postures: or what amounts to the same thing, they are such in Spiritual and Immaterial Beings, that a Posture is to a Body.[68]

Nye satirized South as the Don Quixote of theology. The disappointment that Sancho feels when he discovers that Quixote's

[66] Nye, *Considerations*, p. 12; see pp. 10, 12.

[67] Nye, *Considerations*, pp. 13, 15; see pp. 16, 14, 18–19. Cf. Sarah Hutton, 'The Neoplatonic roots of Arianism: Ralph Cudworth and Theophilus Gale', in Lech Szczucki, ed., *Socinianism* (Warsaw: PWN, 1983), pp. 133–45.

[68] Nye, *Considerations*, pp. 20, 21.

great lady is in effect a local slattern is the sort of disappointment felt when one realizes that South's great quest has ended here, in describing the Trinity as three postures. The knife is pushed deeper. Must the faithful now put their trust in and worship three postures? How does one posture beget another? Or a third posture proceed from the other two? Nye complains, 'how shall we understand such Gibberish as this? may they not tell us in plain terms, that to be Trinitarians, 'tis necessary that we should renounce at once all good sense?' He mockingly commiserates with Sherlock, 'poor, senseless, illiterate Cantabrigean Ignoramus' who 'thought these words Father, Son and Spirit implied something that was real'. Now we are left with 'personalities' not 'persons'. At least Sherlock believes in real persons, whereas South really should decide which camp he wants to be in: Socinian or tritheist. In effect, Nye teases, South accepts the unitarian position because he does not believe that there is more than one 'All-knowing, Almighty Understanding, Will and Energy'. If he accepts this then Nye is pleased to let him continue to talk about persons and the like because 'these are meer empty words ... what you add more of Persons, Properties, Thingams, and call them a Trinity, 'tis an Addition only of Words and Names; not of realities, or Persons that are properly so called'.[69]

Finally, Nye turns to the Trinity 'of the mob'. This is caricatured as the *Mystical Trinity*, because the chief arguments advanced in its favour rely on an acceptance of the Trinity as a mystery above explanation. Nye emphasizes that the unitarians do not reject the Trinity because they are unable to conceive it, but because they clearly conceive that it cannot be true. And once again we detect how Catholic polemical apologetic has imploded when Nye observes that arguments reliant on 'mystery' can be as easily pressed into service in defence of transubstantiation as they can for the Trinity. No appeal can be made to natural mysteries either; these are perceived and accepted by all, although they cannot be explained, whereas the same cannot be said about the Trinity.[70]

Nye deftly sums up the case for the anti-trinitarians:

[69] Nye, *Considerations*, pp. 22, 21, 25; and see p. 21.
[70] Nye, *Considerations*, see pp. 29–31.

> Dr.S__th's Explication is only an absurd Socinianism; or Unitarianism disguised in a Metaphysical and Logical Cant. Dr. Wallis his Explication is an ingenious Sabellianism; and in very deed differs from Unitarianism, no more than Dr. S__th's . . . Dr. Sherlock's is such a flat Tritheism, that all the Learned of his own Party confess it to be so . . . Dr. Cudworth's is a moderate Arianism . . . Mr. Hooker's is a Trinity, not of Persons, but of Contradictions . . . What the Mystical Divines teach, cannot be called an Explication; they deny all Explications: we must say therefore 'tis Samaritanism for . . . they worship they know not what.

Such variety of explanation, such difference of opinion, and such civil war shows that 'the Trinitarian Faith is at best but precarious, uncertain and doubtful'.[71]

Jangling and Wrangling about the Meaning of the Word 'Person'

Nye's sentiments were gleefully echoed by others. 'Is it supposable', wrote one, 'that God should give forth contrary manifestations of himself? That he should teach us by Nature and Reason, to apprehend one God as but one Almighty and Infinite Person; and yet command us by revelation to believe, one God is three such Persons?' Not that accepting the latter position would be a victory for the trinitarians:

> they all agree, that there are three Divine Persons: but to make this no Agreement, they are divided in explaining what is to be understood by the Word, Persons. Some say the three Persons are three Properties of the Divine Nature. But these agree not; some making them to be properties in the same numerical Nature. Others take them to be descretive Properties in the Specifick Nature. Others say, the three Persons are three Modes of Subsistence, or three Relations, or three Respects of God towards his Creatures, or three Operations. Others affirm the three Persons to be so many several or distinct intellectual

[71] Nye, *Considerations*, pp. 32, 7.

> Beings and Spirits; as distinct from one another as three humane Persons (or three Men) are.[72]

A work by Matthew Tindal (1655–1733), Fellow of All Soul's, Oxford, and a leading deist, built on Nye's foundations and showed popular perceptions of the main contours of the debate by 1694. The divines insist that the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to the Christian faith, 'yet they extreamly differ about the meaning of the word *Person*, without the knowing of which it is impossible to apprehend what the Three are'. We cannot believe without knowing what it is we are to believe, so, argued Tindal, if we have no idea of what 'three persons' might mean in this context we can hardly be expected to believe it. But on this matter 'there is nothing . . . more unaccountable and absurd, than their jangling and wrangling about the meaning of the word *Person*'. For Tindal 'Person is a term which we give to all Intelligent Beings', and 'divine person' and 'God' are convertible terms. Given this there is but one divine person because there is only one God. He reviewed and dismissed the Trinitarian models on offer, categorizing them as 'Nominal Trinitarians' and 'Real Trinitarians'; the former species including South and Wallis, the latter Sherlock, whom he parodied for supposing the three persons 'a Council or Committee of Gods, where sometimes one is President, and sometimes another is in the Chair, and accordingly things run in each of their Names, as the works of Creation in the Father's Name . . . so the Son redeems'. Tindal even insinuated doubts about the political loyalty of trinitarians: 'I wonder under what Form of Government the Trinitarians reckon that of the Universe! Monarchy it cannot be, because there is in that but one Person that is Supream, but here are Three, each of whom is Supream.' The emergent unitarian political state was clearly being projected on to the religious Universe. The rejection of mystery is also apparent: 'The Idea's we have of God's Eternity, Infinity, Omnipresence, Omniscience, and all that we are required to believe concerning them, are so clear and distinct, that an Ordinary Capacity apprehends what we mean when we say that God is Eternal, Infinite, Omniscient, Omnipresent.' He added

[72] [Anon.], *A Letter of Resolution Concerning the Doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation* ([n.p.]: [n.d.]), pp. 2, 9.

that 'Mystery can never be part of Religion, because it cannot tend to the Honour of God, since it is what we know of God, not what we do not know, that makes us honour him . . . the less there is of mystery in Religion, the brighter and clearer it appears.'[73]

Pamphlet and tract poured from the press. Some warned of the dangers of unitarianism, others continued the attack upon trinitarianism. Francis Fullwood tried to turn some of the unitarian rhetoric against its authors, arguing that the Socinians were in sinister league with the Papists for the overthrow of true scriptural religion.[74] A defender of Sherlock did little to diffuse the situation when he claimed that there was 'no Medium between a Trinity of intelligent Persons and a Trinity of Names', and implied that South was merely a Sabellian with Socinian friends.[75] One unitarian writer was glad of the company; accepting the division of the trinitarians into Nominal and Real camps, he claimed South and Wallis as kinsmen. According to this author, most of the fathers after 380 were 'Realists', whereas the Fourth Lateran Council was 'Nominalist'. He saw the 'Nominalist trinitarians' and the unitarians in agreement about the divine unity, but the former as maintaining dangerous, non-scriptural language. For the sake of peace this unitarian was prepared to agree that 'God is three persons, as any Man may be three Persons' — as a man may be king, husband and father.[76] Another author's proposal for *A Designed End to the Socinian Controversy* was simpler again: the espousal of Socinian doctrine. This work by John Smith, a London watchmaker, betrayed more than a passing acquaintance with Socinian teaching as found in the Racovian Catechism. It rehearsed some standard moves: God being one in nature is but one person, and that the one person who is truly God is the Father. It also included arguments to show that Christ was not 'true God', and referred explicitly to the Socinian doctrine that Christ had ascended into

[73] [Tindal], *A Letter to the Reverend Clergy of both Universities*; pp. 3, 5, 26, 33, 35.

[74] Francis Fullwood, *A Parallel wherein it Appears that the Socinian agrees with the Papist* (London: 1693). For some reason Redwood believes this is an anonymous work. Another work was published on Fullwood's initials alone, F F [*sic*], *The Socinian Controverste Touching the Son of God Reduced* (London: 1693), but how Redwood sees this as a defence of Socinianism (p. 159) when it argues the exact opposite baffles me.

[75] [Anon.], *A Defence of Dr. Sherlock's Notion of a Trinity in Unity* (London: 1694), p. 80; see p. 97.

[76] [Anon.], *A Discourse Concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians* ([n.p.]: 1695), p. 12; see pp. 4, 6, 40.

heaven to be enlightened by the Father before embarking on his mission. Wearied by the controversy, Smith would not have been alone in wondering whether 'the Belief of the Doctrine of the Trinity make me a more merciful and righteous Man than if I did profess the contrary?'[77]

The controversy seemed endless, and several of the key players returned to the fray. Sherlock argued that if there were indeed a distinction between the 'Realists' and 'Nominalists' then he had been in the right. The 'Nominalist' perspective had only 'one Real Person, who is God, with a Trinity of Names'. Indicating the way in which the content of the word 'person' had become a key component in the debate he formulated the question between the Realists and the Nominalists in regard to the persons of the Trinity thus: 'whether they may be called Persons in the true and proper Notion of the word Person; for one who does really and substantially subsist, live, will, understand, act, according to his Natural Powers: And whether there be Three such subsisting, living, willing, understanding Persons in the Godhead or only One'.[78]

In 1695, South accused Sherlock of heresy and appealed to the universities to censure his errors. Sherlock's recently published *Defence* was, according to South, ten times more tritheistic than the *Vindication*. The root of Sherlock's 'heresy' lay in his making self-consciousness the formal reason of 'person', but this is not sufficient to define what 'person' means. This error led Sherlock to side with the Socinians in seeing 'person' as implying separation whereas properly understood it implies distinction. God is one eternal mind not three, as 'mind' is an absolute not a relative term. South was appalled by Sherlock's ignorance in continually confusing attribution of a distinct thing to a distinct person with attribution of a thing distinctly to a person; omnipotence, for example, belongs distinctly to each of the three persons, but there is a not a distinct omnipotence for each.[79] South even wanted to deny Sherlock the grace of originality and insinuated that his understanding was plagiarized from a book published by

[77] John Smith, *A Designed End to the Socinian Controversy* (London: 1695), p. 53; see pp. 7, 9, 12f., 35–6)

[78] [William Sherlock], *The Distinction between Real and Nominal Trinitarians Examined* (London: 1696), pp. 12, 20.

[79] [Robert South], *Tritheism Charged upon Dr. Sherlock's New Notion of the Trinity* (London: 1695), see 'The Epistle Dedicatory', pp. 220, 23, 43–5, 277–8.

LeClerc in 1679, in which he had spoken of the Trinity as 'tres distinctae cogitationes' and cogitation as the product of consciousness.[80]

The University of Oxford was happy to oblige South's call for censure, and found its opportunity at the end of October 1695, when Joseph Bingham recklessly preached in defence of Sherlock at St Peter's-in-the-East, using the dean's language of 'three infinite distinct minds . . . and three individual substances'. Bingham was compelled to resign his fellowship at University College and a decree of the university issued on 25 November declared such language 'false, impious, and heretical' and 'contrary to the Doctrine of the Catholic Church and the publicly received doctrine of the Church of England'. For good measure the decree ended by noting that 'the Propositions above-mentioned, are Dr. S__ck's in his Discourse of the Trinity'.[81] Wallis and South, to mention but two, must have felt that old scores were now well and truly settled. Accusations and counter-accusations flew, and the controversy provided the disgruntled with ample opportunity to insinuate doubts about their enemies. The Nonjuring polemicist, Charles Leslie, charged the recently deceased Archbishop Tillotson with Socinianism and Bishop Burnet with heresy.[82] Surveying the scene in 1697, Nye accused the recently deceased Tillotson of being a Realist but accepted Stillingfleet's *Vindication*, which we will examine in the next chapter, as being unitarian. In all, he wrote, 'I am perswaded, that the Question concerning the Trinity, the Divinity of our Saviour, and the Incarnation; so long controverted, between the Church and the Unitarians; are a strife, mostly about Words and Terms, not of things and realities.'[83] The unfortunate Arthur Bury was appalled by the 'extraordinary heat' of the disputes, noting that 'the Tartars manage their wars with less cruelty than the clergy'. He pleaded for toleration and argued that the disputes should be let to burn themselves out, the last thing needed was the production of 'martyrs'.[84]

[80] [South], *Tritheism*, pp. 83–4.

[81] *An Account of the Decree of the University of Oxford against some Heretical Tenets* (Oxford: 1695). Hunt, II, p. 221 gives Sherlock's dismissive reaction to the censure.

[82] Charles Leslie, *The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson Considered* (Edenburgh [*sic*]: 1695). The whole work is an attack on Tillotson, for the charges against Burnet, see pp. 17–20.

[83] [Stephen Nye], *The Agreement of the Unitarians with the Catholic Church* ([n.p.]: 1697), p. 19.

[84] [Arthur Bury], *The Judgement of a Disinterested Person Concerning the Controversy about the B. Trinity* (London: 1696), pp. 3, 61, 67–8.

But the ecclesiastical authorities were of a different frame of mind and were growing quite alarmed by the damage the dispute was doing to the Church. Thomas Tenison, Hobbes' opponent and by now Archbishop of Canterbury, persuaded the king to intervene, and on 3 February 1696 *Directions to our Arch-Bishops and Bishops for the Preserving of Unity in the Church, and the Purity of Christian Faith, Concerning the Holy Trinity* was published. Amongst other things the document warned of the dangers to the doctrine that differences of opinion and expression caused, directed that 'new terms' were to be avoided and expression confined to that 'commonly used', and commanded that the scurrilous language and bitter invectives cease. The *Directions* were reinforced by the Blasphemy Act of 1698 which prescribed three years imprisonment for those convicted of anti-trinitarian belief. But by then the damage had been well and truly done.[85]

In some ways the disputants in England got off lightly. Their books might have been subject to the incendiary desires of the University of Oxford but there was no real threat to their lives. Across the border in Scotland perceived Socinianism was dealt with much more harshly. Although, as Thomas Torrance notes, 'relatively little attention after the middle of the seventeenth century was given to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity', contemporary fears about heterodoxy were strong.[86] In 1695, three years before England, the Scottish Parliament passed an Act Against Blasphemy which reinforced an act of 1661. In the winter of 1696 a nineteen-year-old medical student at the University of Edinburgh, Thomas Aikenhead, was charged under its terms. Aikenhead had allegedly scorned the Incarnation and the Trinity, saying that to speak of three in one was as foolish as speaking of a square circle. Whether this was a deeply felt conviction resulting

[85] *Directions to our Arch-Bishops and Bishops For the Preserving of Unity in the Church, and the Purity of the Christian Faith, Concerning the Holy Trinity* (London: 1695), pp. 4, 5, 6.

[86] Thomas Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. xi. Torrance echoes the judgement of an earlier work published originally in 1872: 'There are some departments in which Scottish theology is unquestionably deficient . . . it has made no contribution to the Trinitarian controversy . . . the matter was greatly more pressing on the one side of the border than the other'; see James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560–1750* (Edinburgh: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 36. Torrance and Walker discuss eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theologians who were suspected of heterodoxy in regard to the Trinity. Torrance also has an interesting discussion on the problems generated by the Westminster Confession's treatment of the doctrine, pp. 131f.

from reading literature from over the border and further afield or simply youthful bravado, Aikenhead was condemned on Christmas Eve 1696. All pleas for mercy went unheeded, and the Kirk pressed for the full force of the law to be exacted. On 8 January 1697 the youth was hanged at Gallowlee, the last person to be executed for heresy in the British Isles.[87]

It would be wrong to see the crisis of the early 1690s as unexpected, because disquiet with the doctrine of the Trinity had been growing for some time, and some of the root problems clearly lay back in the 1640s and 1650s. The influence of Continental Socinianism, although not popularly pervasive, was clearly detectable amongst the educated elite. A growing concern for the literal truth of the Scriptures, coupled with a decline of the analogical imagination, generated a climate in which the doctrine of the Trinity could not but become the subject of critical scrutiny. The relaxation of censorship encouraged such probing. The laissez faire ecclesiastical policies of both James II and William III, although intended for opposed ends, contributed to the general discounting of dogmatic rigidities, as did the growing influence of the latitudinarian school. In the event skirmishes such as that involving Bury were, *pace* Redwood, relatively unimportant despite their inherent drama. What *was* very unfortunate for the trinitarian party was the turn the crisis took thanks to the defence proffered by one of their own number. Sherlock's contribution made the debate explode. By focusing on the word 'person' he unintentionally hit the trinitarians at their weakest point, and their consensus was shattered. Augustine and others had hedged the word around in an attempt to signal its nuances and subtleties in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. Sherlock seemed to rush into this maze blithely ignorant, and his ill-considered book was a gift to the unitarians. No amount of damage limitation by Wallis and others could undo the harm done. The use of 'person' had always been problematic, but by uncritically taking into a

[87] For these Acts and their English counterparts, see Robert E. Florida, 'British Law and Socinianism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Lech Szczucki, ed., *Socinianism* (Warsaw: PWN, 1983). Aikenhead has obviously been hailed as a martyr by unitarian apologists, as can be seen in L. Baker Short, *Pioneers of Scottish Unitarianism* (Narbeth: Walters, 1963). More critical approaches include Michael Hunter, '"Aikenhead the Atheist": The Context and Consequences of Articulate Irreligion in the Late Seventeenth Century', in Michael Hunter and David Wootton, eds., *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

theological context an emergent new conceptualization based on 'consciousness', Sherlock made it very difficult for the nuances of previous expositions of the doctrine to be maintained. Sherlock's desire to make the doctrine of the Trinity 'clear and plain' simply ended in rendering it ridiculous to many of his contemporaries. The changing understanding of the word 'person' was bound to provide a crop of theological problems, and Sherlock helped those problems to germinate very quickly. William Placher has argued in Sherlock's defence that at least he 'deserves credit for taking the Trinity seriously enough to try to think it through', but when one considers the uproar that ensued he still seems to merit more blame than praise for doing so.[88]

The ethos of theology in general was changing in a very profound way. In a departure from previous perceptions that saw talk about God as inherently problematic, many of the participants in the dispute claim to have clear ideas about the nature of God. The unitarian Tindal is the clearest expositor of this new found clarity, but it is there in the trinitarian writers too. Once it was conceded that 'God' was clear but the 'mystery of the Trinity' dark, then the Trinity was bound to become a 'problem' in theology. If the disputers had been less clear about the nature of the God under discussion perhaps the doctrine of the Trinity would not have seemed so exceptionally problematic. To previous generations talk about 'God' was no easier than talk about 'Trinity'. Much of the dispute revolved around questions concerned with the best way of speaking about God: Was he one person or three? A subtle but important shift had occurred here too. Previously theology had scrabbled around to find a word that could be used to speak of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now the meaning of the word 'person' was increasingly taken as having a fixed, agreed content to which God could be matched to see if he were one such 'person' or three.

The defences of the trinitarian divines are also quite notable for the absence of what might be called the vital dimension of the Trinity. When one reads their works one is left with a feeling of indifference: even if the doctrine of the Trinity is true, so what? The loss of the economic dimension of the doctrine is clear, and

[88] Placher, William, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1996), p. 176.

the debate takes place largely as a discussion of the immanent Trinity. Any soteriological import the doctrine might possess is largely ignored, as is any liturgical, spiritual or ecclesiological significance, and knowledge of the Trinity is conceived in extrinsicist terms as a piece of information rather than a lived experience of faith.

In nearly every exchange the unitarian authors have a better command of rhetoric, and the power of ridicule is amply displayed. They appear more conscious of the nature of the audience they were trying to reach, and more aware of how to do so. Insinuation (especially in regard to suggestion of a link between trinitarianism and Popery), travesty, scorn, mockery, as well as appeals to reason were well developed in their polemics. By contrast the trinitarian authors often seem dull and rather plodding. On occasion they are caught unawares by an infelicitous phrase or analogy: Wallis' 'cube' and South's 'posture' spring to mind. Their works are more scholarly, reflecting deeper understandings both of the subject matter and the possibilities of language, but there is an overriding clerical ambience to their writings whereas nearly all their opponents speak both rhetorically and literally as laymen. The lack of a 'popular' apologist for the trinitarian cause was a very serious weakness.

Finally, the very plurality of trinitarian theologies on offer weakened the doctrine's defences in the eyes of many onlookers. The revival of trinitarian sensibility in our own day has generated a variety of presentations and explications of the doctrine. This variety is taken as a sign of the inner life of the doctrine, and as an indication of its vitality in the life of the present-day Church. In the seventeenth century it was otherwise. The plurality of theologies of the Trinity was taken as an indication of its lack of coherence rather than a recognition of the depth of the mystery the doctrine was trying to deal with. A unitarian idea of truth was hardly suited to a trinitarian imagination of the divine. From the 1690s onwards for many the doctrine of the Trinity stopped being the mystery of the Christian God and started to become a problem in theology.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Well-Willer to the Racovian Way

The execution of Aikenhead horrified many in Scotland and beyond. Such bigoted zeal was precisely the influence that those pressing for greater religious latitude were keen to curb. The news horrified John Locke, an eloquent and powerful advocate for religious toleration. Locke's shock was not purely out of sympathy for the young man: as we shall see he had his own reasons to be concerned.

John Locke (1632–1704) was a polymath: philosopher, *amateur* of science, non-practicing doctor, commonplacer, and confidant of politicians. His writings include discussions of most of the popular issues of his day: from the clipping of coins to the pruning of monarchical power, from the raising of children to the resurrection of the dead. His own life was an icon of the times, spanning as it did seventy years of rapid social, religious and political change. Locke was one of the pivotal characters around which this change occurred. On friendly terms with many of the leading figures of his day, he helped fashion new approaches to politics, was instrumental in popularizing the 'new science', and came to be an eloquent spokesman for 'anti-dogmatism' in philosophy.[1]

[1] Two standard biographies of Locke are Richard J. Aaron, *John Locke*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), and Maurice Cranston, *John Locke* (London: Longmans, 1957). Aaron's work is the more scholarly. Cranston provides more biographical and historical detail but is obsessed with constructing a romantic side to Locke! Works concerned with Locke's writings are legion. One of the best introductions is R. S. Woolhouse, *Locke* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983). The sheer extent of Locke's interests are amusingly displayed in Jean S. Yolton, *A Locke Miscellany: Locke Biography and Criticism for All* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), which includes articles, correspondence and even recipes from Locke himself.

Given his intellectual and personal absorption in the society of his day, it is hardly surprising that Locke was keenly interested in the religious concerns of the seventeenth century. His library was well stocked with theological volumes, and his reading was reflected in his works and correspondence. His writings on toleration were not mere theoretical essays but motivated by a practical concern for peace and harmony amongst competing Christian groups. In his latter years he produced works of scriptural exegesis and, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, sought to defend Christian faith against deist attacks. But on one issue he is conspicuously silent: the doctrine of the Trinity receives no investigation in any of his published works. Given the controversies of the 1690s, his silence is not simply strange, it is stunningly eloquent.[2]

In this chapter, I shall outline Locke's observations on the meaning of 'person', especially as found in his reflections on personal identity. I shall then investigate the attack upon Locke mounted by Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, having first considered the bishop's own *Vindication* of the Trinity. This assault dragged Locke into the trinitarian controversies of the decade and provoked an extensive exchange between the two men. Finally, I shall attempt a reconstruction of Locke's thoughts on the doctrine of the Trinity from various sources unpublished in his day. According to J. C. D. Clark, 'Locke's significance for the eighteenth century was not chiefly in introducing contractarianism into political theory, but heterodox theology into religious speculation.'[3] I am therefore concerned to examine Locke's thought about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Locke's 'anti-dogmatism' is brought out in John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Cranston founds this anti-dogmatism in Locke's early association with latitudinarian churchmen, see pp. 40, 124f.

[2] The importance of Locke's religious writings are increasingly acknowledged. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), roots the *Essay* in a quest to regulate belief and reform doxastic practice. He sees Book IV as the key to the rest, and the reason for the *Essay*. Marshall's *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* is a careful archeology of Locke's religious thought, tracing its themes, development and influences. For the contents of Locke's library, see John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). Aaron believes that 'religion was Locke's dominating interest in the closing years of his life', p. 292.

[3] J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 280.

We Must Consider What 'Person' Stands for

In Chapter 3 we registered the emergence of the concept of 'consciousness' in the work of the Cambridge Platonists. In the last chapter we examined the development of this concept in Turner's reflections on the Trinity, and noted South's tracing of Sherlock's errors to a seemingly similar understanding present in the work of LeClerc. The pedigree and genesis of the concept of 'consciousness' is obscure. However, according to Ayers, 'we do know from the journal entry of June 1683 that Locke did not need to read Turner's book before arriving at something like Turner's conception of a person, but that does not establish whether he was applying there to personal continuity an idea already in the air, or whether he was doing something more original'.[4]

Whatever its origins, the most famous use of 'consciousness' in the context of reflections on the meaning of the word 'person' is undoubtedly that found in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.[5]

Locke explained his concept of person in chapter 27 of the *Essay*, entitled 'Of Identity and Diversity'. This entire chapter, written apparently in response to a request from Molyneaux for something on the principle of individuation, was an addition to the second edition of the *Essay*, which appeared in 1694.[6] The *Essay* itself had, according to a contemporary account, grown out of discussions about morality and religion.[7] Part of the context for Locke's discussion of personal identity are late seventeenth-century debates about immortality and the resurrection of the body, and the latter is referred to at several points in the text. In the labyrinthine complexities of what would constitute being the 'same person' in the eschatological realm, Locke challenges previously held views and makes his own attempt at an answer. Once this dimension is realized, the 'forensic' component of the definition, the concern for apportioning of praise and blame (in the

[4] Michael J. Ayers, *Locke* (2 vols.; London: Routledge, 1991), II, p. 257.

[5] J. W. Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), remains a classic account of the milieu of the *Essay*. Ayers, *Locke*, is a truly magisterial book on the *Essay*.

[6] See Christopher Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 27.

[7] See Woolhouse, p. 7.

afterlife, as well as here and now), becomes more understandable.[8] The storm surrounding Sherlock for his use of a similar understanding of 'person' may well have affected Locke in his own reflection on the nature of personal identity. All in all, 'person' was a concept inextricably linked with questions about the resurrection, immortality and the Trinity.[9]

In the preamble to his exposition of personal identity, Locke's first move was to resist the common confusion of three different ideas: 'It being one thing to be the same *Substance*, another the same *Man*, and a third the same *Person*, if *Person*, *Man*, and *Substance* are three Names standing for three different *Ideas*'. Locke takes 'man' to refer to 'an Animal of such a certain Form'.[10] He tells the delightful story of Prince Maurice's rational talking parrot to convince his readers that it is 'form' and not rationality that determines whether or not something is called a 'man': it is 'not the *Idea* of a thinking or a rational Being alone, that makes the *Idea* of a *Man*'. To use the phrase 'same man' strictly and correctly is to apply it to an animal of a determined shape with the same continued life.[11]

If that accounts for the proper usage of the phrase 'same man', in what then does personal identity consist? How do we use the phrase 'same person' correctly? For Locke a 'person' is 'a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that Consciousness which is inseparable from thinking . . . consciousness always accompanies thinking, and 'tis that, that makes everyone to be, what he calls *self*'.[12] Thus to be the 'same person' at time t^2 as at time t^1 it is necessary and sufficient that at time t^2 one be conscious that one is the same

[8] See Ayers, II, pp. 255, 258, 263. Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), resituates the debate about personal identity within a discussion of immortality, see pp. 223–4.

[9] Yolton wonders if the doctrine of the Trinity provided some of the material for the puzzles: 'Locke may have had this doctrine of the Trinity in mind . . . when he playfully explored the possibility of different soul-substances having the same person or different persons residing in the same substance.' John W. Yolton, *A Locke Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 165–6.

[10] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (ed. Peter H. Nidditch; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 2:27.7. The references to the *Essay* are edition neutral, given by book, chapter and section.

[11] Locke, *Essay*, 2:27.8.

[12] Locke, *Essay*, 2:27.9.

person acting and thinking as at time t^1, and that one own one's actions at time t^1 as one's own at time t^2. This definition has caused endless disputes and arguments about its meaning and coherence. Locke's understanding rests on two interdependent factors, memory and concern. I am the 'same person' as at a previous time because I remember performing the actions I did then, and, crucially, because I *own* those actions as belonging to me. Sometimes this dimension of 'moral ownership' has been lost sight of, and Locke portrayed as holding simply a 'self-as-memory' theory. Memory *and* the moral concern engendered by those memories are both essential to his account.[13]

Locke's antecedents and legacy in this area are highly contentious. We can agree with Christopher Fox when he says that 'it is safe to say that prior to Locke, nearly all theoretical discussions of "person" tend to be chiefly concerned with theological doctrines rather than with "personality" in any distinctively modern sense', as long as we acknowledge the theologically charged questions that influenced Locke's exposition.[14] This concern with the human rather than the divine usage of 'person' is clearly brought out in another definition which he gives towards the end of the chapter. There Locke says that 'person' is 'a Forensick term appropriating Actions and merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law, and Happiness and Misery'.[15]

In elaborating his answer to the problem of personal identity, Locke developed various conundrums, which have fascinated philosophers ever since. These puzzles were largely intended to break up the unreflected equation of 'man', 'substance' and 'person'. He seeks to shift the definition along from 'person-as-substance' to 'person-as-consciousness' by positing the possibility of consciousness remaining the same but being transferred from one thinking substance to another. Interestingly, another conundrum shows that the opposite could also be the case: there could be two persons inhabiting one immaterial substance. Sameness of soul is not sufficient to guarantee personal identity either. Locke

[13] For an exposition of Locke's thought on personal identity, see John Yolton, *Locke: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 18–32. For an examination of Locke's thought in this area which takes full account of the element of 'concern', see David P. Behan, 'Locke on Persons and Personal Identity', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 9 (1979), pp. 53–75.

[14] Fox, p. 21.

[15] Locke, *Essay*, 2:27.26.

may well have been influenced by the dispute surrounding Sherlock as yet another puzzle posits the possibility of two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting in the same body, one by day and one by night. There would thus be two distinct persons and yet one body. Given his claim that identity of person is not determined by identity of substance, imaginatively at least, Locke should have been able to entertain the possibility of three persons in one substance. He would have found unconvincing the unitarian authors' insistence on the identification of 'substance' and 'person'. Although we can see that Sherlock and Locke were speaking very similar languages about 'person', Locke was keen to avoid participation in the dispute over the doctrine of the Trinity. He might have had some trepidation about his discussion of 'person' when the second edition of the *Essay*, complete with its new chapter on 'Identity', was published at the height of the conflict, and perhaps more when the provocatively entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was published a year later in 1695, but he could not have anticipated how he was to be dragged into the arena.[16]

Our Sense of a 'Person' is Plain

In 1697, Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699), Bishop of Worcester and a leading latitudinarian, published *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, a scholarly comment on the trinitarian controversies of the decade.[17] Stillingfleet's intention was threefold: to rebut unitarian attacks, to dismiss allegations of disunity within the trinitarian camp, and to provide a reasoned defence of

[16] Locke, *Essay*, 2:27.12–14, 23.

[17] Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: With an Answer to the late Socinian Objections against it from the Scripture, Antiquity, and Reason and a Preface Concerning the Different Explications of the Trinity, and the Tendency of the Present Socinian Controversie*, found in *The Works of that Eminent and most Learned Prelate, Late Lord Bishop of Worcester together with his Life and Character* (6 vols.; London: 1710). The *Vindication* and the correspondence with Locke are found in volume 3. All references to Locke's writings, except to the *Essay* and *The Reasonableness*, are to the edition of 1801, *The Works of John Locke* (6 vols.; London: J. Johnson *et al.*, 1801). The correspondence with Stillingfleet can be found in volume 4, as can *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Investigations that situate Stillingfleet's thought in a broader context can be found in Richard H. Popkin, 'The Philosophy of Bishop Stillingfleet', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971), pp. 303–19, and Robert Todd Carroll, *The Common Sense Philosophy of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet, 1635–1699* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975). The latter draws its inspiration from the former and makes a rather uncritical case for seeing Stillingfleet as a 'rational theologian'.

the doctrine of the Trinity. This last aim included an attack on Locke and his 'new way of ideas'. Locke was undoubtedly startled. He had been condemned not for *The Reasonableness*, which he might have expected, but for the *Essay*, one of the few books he had publicly owned. To make matters worse, Stillingfleet was regarded by most of his contemporaries as the best mind on the episcopal bench. In any case, to be attacked by such a distinguished and influential churchman was a very serious blow.

Stillingfleet's *Vindication* stands out among the many polemical works of the 1690s by virtue of its eirenical tone, and the breadth of learning displayed marks it off as a minor classic of seventeenth-century theology. Stillingfleet and the other bishops were acutely aware of the damage done to the Church of England by the controversies surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. The apparent civil war within the trinitarian camp seemed far more acrimonious than the external battle with their opponents. South, for instance, seemed more intent on ridiculing Sherlock than on refuting the unitarians. The animosity, contempt and bile oozing from the writings of some trinitarian divines was a double scandal: it offended against charity, but it also seemed to undermine the claim that trinitarianism was the universal teaching of the Church since the time of the Apostles. The *Vindication* was an exercise in damage limitation and an attempt to focus fire on those who denied the Trinity.

The bishop displayed an easy familiarity with the literature of the decade-old controversy. The lengthy 'Preface' of the book draws on Nye's satirical résumé of the types of trinitarian theologies on offer and Tindal's division of the orthodox divines into 'Real' and 'Nominal' trinitarians. Nye had pitted the 'Cartesian Trinity' of Sherlock against the 'Aristotelian Trinity' of South, claiming the former as rational but unorthodox, and the latter as orthodox but irrational. Tindal argued that the 'Nominalist trinitarians' fell into Sabellianism, while the 'Realist trinitarians' were effectively tritheists.

Stillingfleet was anxious to contest the labels and deny that the trinitarian churchmen were hopelessly divided amongst themselves. He insisted that there was a world of difference between an article of faith and the manner in which it is expressed and expounded. He rejected the unitarian claim that some of the protagonists in the controversy were 'nominalists' who saw the

persons of the Trinity as mere names and that their language of 'Modes and Properties do not make any real subsisting persons; but only in a Grammatical and Critical sense'. If the unitarians were right then, though the 'nominalists' *speak* of three persons, they believe effectively that there is only one real person in the Godhead. Stillingfleet countered by quoting South, one of the so-called 'nominalist' authors, who speaks of the Father 'communicating his essence to another'. Such a communication would be impossible, Stillingfleet argued, if this 'other' were not sufficiently distinct from the Father. 'Personality', arising from the mutual relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the 'reason of the distinction of persons in the same divine nature'. A 'person' is more than a name, it can be seen as a mode of subsisting within the same divine nature. The unitarian mistake comes from assuming that 'distinct person' must imply 'distinct substance'. Stillingfleet, unlike Locke, could agree with the unitarians that this was true in the created order but argued that is not from the meaning of 'person' but from the nature of created subjects.[18]

The unitarian accusations against the so-called 'Realist Trinitarians' were dealt with in a more perfunctory manner. The discussion contains a tone of unmistakable exacerbation. Stillingfleet clearly thought that Sherlock's exposition in terms of 'three infinite minds' betrayed a lamentable lack of caution and foresight. The model had provided an easy target for opponents and provided no end of fuel for the polemical fire. Given his eirenical agenda, the bishop stopped short of condemning Sherlock outright and argued that a mistaken explication was not necessarily an indication of heresy.[19]

Having thus attempted to neutralize criticisms of the doctrine of the Trinity based on the divisions of expression between its supporters, Stillingfleet proceeded to stress the unity exhibited in the writings of all trinitarians on several key issues. First, they agree about plurality: there are three distinct persons in the Godhead. Secondly, they agree that the unity of God is not thereby impaired: there are no separate or separable substances in God. Thirdly, they all agree in believing that the divine essence is given to the Son from the Father, and to the Holy Spirit from both, and

[18] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 415; see pp. 414–17.
[19] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, pp. 418–19.

that the mode of the essence's communication establishes both the distinction and the unity of the divine persons. Stillingfleet denied that all communications of essence necessarily entail a distinct substance being generated; the divine essence, unlike any created essence, can be communicated and yet remain one. He conceded that the nature of this divine communication is undoubtedly very complex, and we should be very cautious in trying to explain it, as the recent controversies show. It is better to stick with tried and tested language than to develop a new, untested trinitarian vocabulary. The rebuke of Sherlock was clear.[20]

While the 'Preface' situated the *Vindication* in the context of the contemporary debate, the body of the book critiqued the unitarian position. It proceeded according to Stillingfleet's 'forensic' methodology. The first four chapters denied the unitarian claim that they were the legitimate heirs of the early Christians. The succeeding chapters examined and rejected the unitarians' accusations of usurpation by the trinitarians. The argument proceeds much as it might in a court of law: the claims of the unitarians are first dismissed, and then the position of the 'true heirs' defended. The entire process is inferential and cumulative, rather than strictly demonstrative.[21]

Stillingfleet begins his brief. Is it not highly implausible that the unitarians have only now uncovered as error a doctrine that the Church has held by common consent for centuries? The unitarians' confidence rests on their appeal to reason, and their rhetoric constantly labels the Trinity as 'unreasonable'. Their understanding of reason is expressed in terms of clear ideas and distinct perceptions and, as they cannot form these of the doctrine of the Trinity, they reject it as unreasonable. Stillingfleet contested the unitarian monopoly on reason. Reason is actually broader than they will allow and he attempts to show that this broader sense of reason was at work in the period when the early Church hammered out the doctrine of the Trinity. The unitarian pretension to historical antecedents, both individual and ecclesial, are then tested and dismissed. They are a new breed previously unknown

[20] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, pp. 420–2.

[21] Carroll depicts Stillingfleet's method as the presentation of 'religious briefs', see p. 17, and see p. 43 for an example of the influence of the law on Stillingfleet's style.

in the Christian Church, and their claim to represent original and primitive Christianity is without foundation. They are not the legitimate heirs of primitive Christianity they claim to be and should be rejected.[22]

Having thus dismissed the unitarian claims for pedegree and rationality, Stillingfleet proceeded to defend trinitarian belief. He first evaluates the strength of the unitarian charge that the doctrine of the Trinity is contradictory. Much of that claim rests on the accusation that three persons implies three gods, and that three persons cannot be one substance. Stillingfleet analyses the use of the word 'person' and finds the unitarian allegation unconvincing. It is not a logical contradiction to say that there are three persons and yet one common nature. It is not a logical contradiction to say that there are three persons and yet not three gods. Although we may not clearly and distinctly conceive how propositions connected with the doctrine of the Trinity fit together, this does not entitle us to reject the doctrine as contradictory.[23]

The grammar of the word 'person' is then expounded in traditional scholastic language. Stillingfleet sees a 'person' as a peculiar manner of subsistence with incommunicable properties in a common nature. This incommunicability is the basis of the distinction between persons. To call Peter a 'person' is not to make an evaluation of any reflexive psychological state, but to say that he is an actual instantiation of 'man' existing in his own right with certain descriptions unique to him, for example being David's father. This understanding is then applied to the persons of the Trinity. The unique unity of the Godhead means that the difference of persons within it cannot be of the same kind as difference of person among men. The bishop, aware of earlier attacks upon him, denied that he held a Sabellian model of the Trinity: 'our sense of a *Person* is plain, that it signifies the Essence with a particular manner of Subsistence, which the Greek Fathers called an *Hypostasis*, taking it for that incommunicable Property which makes a *Person*'. According to Stillingfleet, the unitarians pay too little attention to the words they use. They too quickly assume that person is completely interchangeable with 'intelligent being', and

[22] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, chapters 2, 3 and 4.
[23] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, chapter 5.

then too swiftly conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity must mean that there are three such separate intelligent beings in the Godhead. The concept of 'person' is far more complex than the unitarians assume, and it can be used of God without any automatic suggestion of three distinct intelligent beings.[24] Pressing home his case, the bishop rejected the Socinian exegesis of Scripture, observing that 'the true sense of Scripture is really the main point between us'. More witnesses are introduced for the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity in the shape of the general consensus of Christian teaching throughout the ages — baptismal formulae, doxologies and the like show the very wide acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity across space and time.[25]

Christianity not Mysterious

So far the *Vindication* resembled several other defences of the doctrine of the Trinity both in method and content, as we saw in the last chapter. The book broke new ground in its attack on the philosophy of John Locke. Stillingfleet feared that Locke's 'new way of ideas' undermined the doctrine of the Trinity because it removed key components in the traditional exposition of the mystery. Stillingfleet's denunciation produced an exchange in which there were three lengthy replies and two equally lengthy counter-replies.

The tenth chapter of the *Vindication* returned to some of the book's earlier themes, attacking once more those who claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity should be rejected because it was unreasonable. The defence of the doctrine as 'a mystery beyond reason' had been challenged by many unitarians. This challenge was twofold: first, if the doctrine is a 'mystery' then it is beyond reason and we cannot be obliged to believe it; secondly, if we accept *this* mystery why should we not accept all 'mysteries' including the Papist mystery of transubstantiation. Stillingfleet was walking a tightrope, on the one hand he had to defend 'mystery' as a legitimate category in religious discourse, on the other he had to limit the extension of such a category by providing a rationale for

[24] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 455; and see chapter 6.
[25] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 469, and see chapters 7, 8 and 9.

discerning true and false mysteries of faith.[26] Stillingfleet had attempted a similar differentiation some years before in *The Doctrine of the Trinity and Transubstantiation Compared* aimed at refuting the popular Catholic 'all-or-nothing' apologetic. Such polemic, as we saw in the case of Milton, could be dangerously double edged. Rather prophetically in 1687, when the work had first appeared, the bishop had complained that this was 'a very destructive and mischievous method of Proceeding'. Stillingfleet was keenly aware of the dangerous ambiguity that such a position created, hence the desire for some means of differentiation between mysteries acceptable and unacceptable to the Protestant.[27]

The opening section of the tenth chapter of the *Vindication* condemned a book published in the previous year, *Christianity not Mysterious*. It was written by John Toland (1670–1722), rumoured to be the son of an Irish Catholic priest, a leading deist and known antagonist to trinitarianism. Although the doctrine of the Trinity was not directly referred to in the book, given the context in which it appeared, it is clear that Toland's denial of 'mysteries' in the Christian religion was aimed at some of the trinitarian defences of the doctrine. True Christianity, Toland asserted, could be defended upon grounds of reason alone without recourse to the obscurantism of 'mystery'. He recalled that reason had rescued him from the 'grossest Superstition and Idolatry' of his Catholic upbringing, and he proclaimed that reason alone was fit to shape the form of Christian belief. With the coming of Christ, he argued, what was once mysterious was now brought into the plain light of day. There were now no mysteries in the Christian religion: 'we hold that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude . . . there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it; and that no Christian Doctrine can properly be call'd a Mystery'.[28]

Toland expounded his understanding of reason along the lines that Locke had outlined in the *Essay*. Ideas provide the matter and foundation of reasoning. Ideas are 'the immediate object of the Mind when it thinks'. Knowledge is the 'Perception of the Agreement or Disagreement of our Ideas'. Knowledge arises

[26] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 502.

[27] Edward Stillingfleet, *The Doctrine of the Trinity and Transubstantiation Compared* (London: 1687), p. 43. Also in *Works*, volume 6.

[28] John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious* (London: 1702), pp. viii, 6.

from the experience of the senses, the mind's reflection, human revelation and divine revelation. We can be informed by God of truths we would not otherwise know, such as the general resurrection of the dead, but what cannot be the case, argues Toland, is that we should be required to believe that of which we can form no idea, as the doctrine of the Trinity seems to imply. Ideas may be inadequate but this does not render them mysterious. If we can have no idea of something, then no understanding is possible. Faith is a rational assent to what is intelligible. The authors of so-called 'mysteries' are the clergy of all religions, driven by their rapacity and lust for power by which means they keep the faithful subservient and compliant.[29]

Borrowed to Serve Other Purposes

Although *Christianity not Mysterious* was explicitly cited, and an attempt made to refute its claims and conclusions, Stillingfleet saw the root of the problem as Locke's 'new way of ideas'. The fundamental presupposition of Stillingfleet's position on the Trinity was that the doctrine could only be secured by using accepted language and grammar, and the understanding that underpinned these. This required knowledge of the existence of 'substance', and understanding of 'nature' and 'person' and the distinction between them. He feared that Locke's 'new way of ideas' rendered such knowledge impossible because it generated new conceptions of reason and certainty which excluded these necessary components of the doctrine. The bishop argued that the unitarian writers had an impoverished account of reason which they based on 'clear and distinct ideas'. They asserted that any idea that is not clear and distinct is uncertain. The doctrine of the Trinity contains ideas that are not clear and distinct and therefore they see it as doubtful for three reasons: taken as a composite it does not

[29] Toland, p. 11; see pp. 2–3, 18, 41, 77, 86, 134, 127, 154, 28. It should be noted that Toland, unlike Herbert of Cherbury and some later deists, does not completely exclude revelation from his system. Revelation is the conveying of information to us by God of which we would otherwise be ignorant, e.g. that there will be a Last Judgement. That we could not have obtained this information by reason does not mean that it is contrary to reason; reason is 'to confirm and elucidate Revelation' (p. vii). Toland, unlike a later generation of deists, did not reject miracles as unreasonable either. He saw them as confirming the truth of the Christian message.

provide a clear and distinct idea; some of its component parts are not clear and distinct; it is not clear how these parts fit together. According to Toland we can have no clear idea of substance, and therefore we can have no certainty of *any* doctrine that uses substance as one of its key terms.[30] Toland had obviously been influenced by his reading of Locke's *Essay*. Although the Bishop conceded that Locke's ideas had been 'borrowed to serve other purposes', he felt nevertheless that Locke had given dangerous support to the enemies of Christian orthodoxy.[31]

Stillingfleet's response to Toland's book was threefold: he denied that clear and distinct ideas alone are the basis for certainty; he defended the certainty of our knowledge of substance; and he attempted to secure the concepts of 'nature' and 'person', and the distinction between them. In the course of his response Stillingfleet dragged Locke into the midst of a quarrel the latter had striven to avoid. It proved to be a clash between two philosophies as 'the argument he was offering in opposition to Locke's empiricism was essentially one based on scholastic rationalistic metaphysics'.[32]

In Toland's view certainty came from the perception of agreement or disagreement between ideas. Stillingfleet denied this, asserting that certainty comes, not from the clearness of the ideas, but from the evidence of reason that these ideas are true. Certainty rests on the force of reason not on the clarity and distinction of ideas themselves. When we assert that something is true the certainty we have for our claim comes from the arguments we bring in support, not in the strength of the idea we have. For instance, we may have a clear and distinct idea of an infinite Being, yet however clear and distinct the idea we possess, we have not thus proved that God exists. We can still doubt that proposition. Therefore the 'idea' of God, clear and distinct as it is, is not sufficient grounds for affirming the certainty of his existence. Reason is wider in its scope than merely the conformity, clarity and distinction of ideas.[33]

The bishop hoped to secure knowledge of substance with a broader understanding of reason. Although we have no clear idea

[30] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 503.
[31] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 505.
[32] Carroll, p. 86.
[33] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 508.

of 'substance', nevertheless by reason we can conclude that it exists as accidents cannot exist without substance in which to inhere. Substance can be seen as, and indeed derives from, a 'substratum' that underpins the accidents of an object.[34] Substance can be construed as both 'substratum' and 'essence'. To the bishop's mind both of these were grounded in reason, if they were not there would be no correspondence between ideas and things. Reason acts as a reliable bridge between the object and the perceiver.

It seemed to Stillingfleet that Locke's writings had helped others to undermine the necessary concept of substance. In the *Essay* Locke wrote that 'we accustom ourselves to suppose some *substratum* wherein they [simple ideas] do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we do call *substance*'. We have no clear idea of what this substance might be, however, either in general or in particular. It is a something-we-know-not-what: 'the idea then we have, to which we give the general name "substance", being nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re substante*, without something to support them, we call that support *substantia*'.[35] Stillingfleet considered Locke's professed agnosticism in this area very dangerous, fearing it but a stepping stone to the abandonment of the idea of substance altogether. In the bishop's view, if substance were abandoned then the traditional expression of the doctrine of the Trinity simply could not get off the ground.[36]

The problem was compounded because sensation and reflection alone, the bishop warned, cannot provide an adequate account of other key factors in the trinitarian grammar either. There is a crucial 'Distinction between Nature and Person, and of this we can have no clear and distinct Idea from Sensation or Reflection. And yet all our notions of the doctrine of the Trinity

[34] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 504.

[35] Locke, *Essay*, 2, 23, 1–2.

[36] Locke's thought on the nature of substance has generated a great deal of comment and argument. The best account is found in Ayers, II, part 1. It is essential to note that Locke did not deny the existence of substance, but rather its knowability. Stillingfleet similarly did not accuse Locke of such a denial but of paving the way for such a denial. Some commentators speak as if Locke did deny the reality of substance; in so doing they miss the subtlety of the debate, cf. Thomas Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 20–1.

depend upon the right understanding of it.'[37] To counteract this threat Stillingfleet set about securing these two essential ingredients and the relationship between them.

Reason tells us, argued Stillingfleet, that there is something in things beyond the powers and properties we discern by our senses that makes them what they are. This something we often call 'nature'. It is because of this 'nature' that we can sort individual things into common groups with certainty. We do this not because we have devised some nominal essence that these things match up to, but rather because these things share some real essence common to them all. Our sorting is thus based on real and not nominal similarity and distinction. For instance, Peter, James and John are men not simply because they fit some notional abstraction 'man', but because they share the real common essence of man. Stillingfleet was convinced that if 'substance' and 'nature' were taken as only notions in the mind then the doctrine of the Trinity would collapse as it could be assumed that they bore no relation to the reality of the Godhead.[38]

Having defended the reality of 'nature', Stillingfleet then attempted to secure the key term 'person'. He drew on what he had said previously: 'person' refers to that by which we are able to distinguish individuals who share a common human nature. The distinctions between men are based not just on external considerations, such as place and form, but on the manner of subsistence which the common nature adopts. We call this 'manner of subsistence' personality. 'Therefore a *Person* is a compleat intelligent Substance, with a peculiar manner of Subsistence.'[39] Finite human persons seem to require distinct finite substances, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that an infinite substance could belong to more than one person without division. The oddness of speaking of three persons in one substance is only superficial, and is obviated when we remember that the substance under consideration is the divine substance.[40] Stillingfleet closed the *Vindication* with an appeal for the retention of the older language in these

[37] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 509.
[38] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 509.
[39] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 511.
[40] He had made the same point some ten years earlier in *The Doctrine of the Trinity and Transubstantiation Compared*; see *Works*, VI, p. 632.

matters, as new usage couched in terms of ideas does not help understanding.[41]

Without Any Thought of the Controversy

Locke was highly alarmed by the bishop's attack. To be set upon by such a weighty opponent and to be corralled with the unitarians was a real danger in a country in which trinitarian orthodoxy was still upheld by law. The recent execution of Aikenhead in the other kingdom was a powerful reminder of the perils of heterodoxy. Locke replied quickly and at length. Over the next three years he and Stillingfleet engaged in a vigorous exchange and counter-exchange. Only the bishop's death in 1699 stanched the flow of correspondence.

Having been meticulous to avoid the trinitarian controversies, Locke was clearly annoyed to find himself propelled into the ring. His silence on this one topic is all the more eloquent when set beside his eagerness to join in almost every other hot issue of his day, even if anonymously. He felt that Stillingfleet had accused him unjustly. The *Essay*, he stated, had been written 'without any thought of the controversy between trinitarians and unitarians', and contained nothing that touched upon the doctrine of the Trinity. If others had made ill use of his ideas then they, and they alone, were responsible for such actions. The bishop rested his case solely on 'guilt by association'. In any case, he had not attempted, as Stillingfleet claimed, 'to discard substance out of the reasonable part of the world', but simply to highlight difficulties connected with the concept. If anything, he had kept substance *within* the reasonable world, although he could not pretend to know anything of its true nature. He had drawn attention to the fact that the idea is obscure but had not discarded it. In this Locke claimed that he was not far from the position of Stillingfleet who himself seemed no clearer about what substance actually might be.[42]

[41] See Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, p. 515.

[42] John Locke, 'A Letter to the Right Reverend Edward, Lord Bishop of Worcester, Concerning some passages relating to Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding, in a Late Discourse of his Lordship's, in Vindication of the Trinity', pp. 68, 5; see pp. 4, 8, 10. This 'Letter', referred to below as 'Letter 1', can be found along with the other replies in *Works*, IV.

Locke was indignant that the Bishop had attributed to him views he simply did not hold: 'I do say, that all our knowledge is founded in simple ideas; but I do not say, it is all deduced from clear ideas; much less that we cannot have any certain knowledge of the existence of anything, whereof we have not a clear, distinct, complex idea.' In response to Stillingfleet's insistence that the doctrine of the Trinity depended upon a proper understanding of 'nature' and 'person' and the distinction between them, Locke countered that if his conceptions of these are inaccurate, that made him a bad philosopher rather than a heretic. Locke pressed Stillingfleet to show how we could have any understanding of a thing's general essence beyond the idea we have of it. We sort things into kinds by matching them to the idea we have of that kind, not by perceiving in some occult way a general essence in which it shares. Stillingfleet himself seems to equivocate on the meaning of nature, speaking sometimes as if it refers to essential properties and at other times as if it refers to substance. Summing up, Locke reiterates his defence. He was dragged into the trinitarian controversy against his will, lumped with those who have misused his thought, and judged guilty by association. He has written nothing touching the doctrine of the Trinity. He is in good faith, accepts revelation and the existence of mysteries in Christianity. His faith is firmly based on the Scriptures.[43]

The reply did not satisfy the bishop, who returned to the prosecution of his case a few months later. He covered much the same ground as before. The unitarians lay the basis of certainty in clear and distinct ideas. If there is no clear and distinct idea of 'nature', they argue, then there can be no certainty about it, and the doctrine of the Trinity is thus dubitable. Locke's teaching, intentionally or not, has brought about this unhappy state of affairs. His claim that certainty comes by ideas has thus been used by others to promote scepticism and has led to a loss of certainty in matters of faith. Toland has only applied to Scripture what Locke applied to propositions in general. Therefore, despite his protestations, there is a case for Locke to answer. Furthermore, if 'nature' and 'person' are only notions and accord with no real essence, then the doctrine of the Trinity is undermined

[43] Locke, 'Letter I', p. 47; see pp. 68, 83, 73, 94–6.

still further. To claim, as Locke seems to, that 'there is nothing beyond Individuals but *Names* . . . utterly overthrows the Difference of *Nature* and *Person*'. If this were true, then to speak of three persons in the same nature makes no sense. One would actually be saying that three were one and one was three unequivocally, which is exactly the unitarian reason for rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity.[44]

In a grudging postscript the bishop acknowledged that Locke did not employ the style of many of the Socinian pamphleteers. Their populism was destructive and, reflecting the concern of many churchmen, he noted that 'their greatest Hopes are in such readers who love to see Matters of Religion ridiculed'. He closed by lamenting the 'swarms of Pestilential books' that were now abroad attacking the Christian faith. Although Stillingfleet was clearly aware of the rhetorical power that such publications expressed, he was unwilling, or more probably unable, to write in a similarly populist vein. The lack of a champion who could deploy a witty and satirical tone was, as we saw previously, a serious defect in the trinitarians' armoury.[45]

Locke's reply to the bishop's reply betrayed a growing exasperation with the whole matter. He too rehearsed much of the argument he had previously presented, but the tone is notably less cordial and respectful. He denied yet again that he had taught that certainty lies in clear and distinct ideas. He questioned Stillingfleet's right to label Toland a unitarian, given that Toland laid no claim to any such title or opinions in his book. Even if Toland were a Unitarian, this is not Locke's fault as he cannot be held responsible for the use another makes of his ideas. Guilt by association is not enough. He taunted Stillingfleet that even if he, Locke, was right in his philosophical claims, then surely the bishop can still defend the doctrine. If the truth be told, Stillingfleet himself is doing greater damage to the doctrine of the Trinity by claiming that we need clear and distinct ideas about 'nature' and 'person', and then failing to provide them. Locke found himself 'so little enlightened concerning nature and person' that the bishop's book ought to be ranked amongst those that undermine the doctrine. Having insisted on the importance

[44] Stillingfleet, 'Reply to Mr. Locke's Letter', p. 554; see pp. 521–2, 526–7, 532, 549.
[45] Stillingfleet, 'Reply to Mr. Locke's Letter', p. 558; see pp. 557–60.

of a clear idea about 'nature' and 'person', Stillingfleet has singularly failed to produce such clarity.[46] In satirical vein Locke highlighted the damage that Stillingfleet seemed to be doing to the very cause he wanted to uphold: 'his lordship's way, without ideas, does as little ... furnish us with clear and distinct apprehensions concerning nature and person, as my Essay does; I do not see but that his lordship's Vindication of the Trinity, is as much against the doctrine of the Trinity, as my Essay ... I know no book of more dangerous consequence to that article of faith'.[47]

The ailing bishop's final salvo was bad tempered, obscure and rambling. Stephen Nye claimed that reading the bishop was on a par with cracking nuts, and his jaw ached from trying to puzzle out the meaning of the text.[48] The familiar ground is covered once again. Stillingfleet was still puzzled by what he took to be Locke's new language, lamenting that 'the World has been strangely amuzed with Ideas of late'. The way of ideas does not seem to allow certainty about 'nature' or 'person' and so destroys our understanding of the Incarnation. If 'nature' and 'person' are only abstract ideas and have no other reality, then the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be sustained. Stillingfleet again accused Locke's method of shaking belief in general and certain doctrines in particular. He affirmed once more his conviction that we can know the real essence of things by virtue of reason. If Locke has not directly opposed the mysteries of faith, he has provided others with the means of doing so, and for this he should be called to account. Stillingfleet remained convinced that he had been right to 'lay open the consequences of your Way of Ideas with respect to the Articles of the Christian Faith'. In response to Locke's outlining of 'person' in terms of consciousness Stillingfleet uttered a *cri de coeur*: 'How comes person to stand for this and nothing else? From whence comes Self-consciousness in different times and places to make up this Idea of a Person ... hath the common use

[46] Locke, 'Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Letter', referred to as 'Letter 2', p. 156; and see pp. 103, 105, 114, 109, 146, 148, 158, 175, 176. Swift's 'Houyhnhnms' may well be indebted to Locke's reflection at this point that we could distinguish horses by 'personality' in the same way; see the consideration of this in Rosalie L. Collie, 'Gulliver, The Locke–Stillingfleet Controversy, and the Nature of Man', in Yolton, *A Locke Miscellany*, pp. 300–4.

[47] Locke, 'Letter 2', p. 163.

[48] [Stephen Nye], *The Agreement of the Unitarians with the Catholic Church* (n.p.: 1697), p. 50.

of our language appropriated to it this sense?' The differences between the two men remained as acute as before. Stillingfleet lay dying, but a whole way of understanding 'person' was also passing away.[49]

My Bible Is Faulty

Locke's final response was equally rambling (over 300 pages long, it may well have been intended as a parody of the bishop's reply), repetitious and abusive. Once again he reminded Stillingfleet that this was 'a controversy you, my Lord, dragged me into'. He struck back at Stillingfleet by remarking that his own contribution to the dispute about the Trinity, the original *Vindication*, had added to the general confusion surrounding the doctrine. Locke mockingly deplored the waste of the Bishop's talents. He should have been an Inquisitor as he has deftly adopted their methods of insinuation and innuendo. Locke wearily stated his position on ideas once again: 'certainty consists in the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas, such as we have, whether they be in all parts perfectly clear and distinct or no'. Feeling pilloried for views he did not hold, Locke gave way to exasperation: 'My Lord, the words you bring out of my book are so different from those I read in the places you refer to, that I am sometimes ready to think, you have got some strange copy of it, whereof I know nothing, since it so seldom agrees with mine'.[50]

In this last reply Locke ventured more into the open about his personal views. His reflections rested on the strands of Scripture and reason. Returning to the Scriptures, which he saw as the only rule of faith for the Protestant Christian, he claimed that he simply could not find what Stillingfleet found there:

> My Lord, my Bible is faulty again; for I do not remember that I ever read in it either of these propositions in these precise words, "that there are three persons in one nature, or, there are two natures in one person". When your Lordship shall show me

[49] Stillingfleet, 'An Answer to Mr. Locke's Second Letter', pp. 579, 563, 578; see pp. 569, 575, 577, 580, 612.

[50] Locke, 'Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter', referred to as 'Letter', pp. 193, 213, 408; see pp. 193, 200f.

> a Bible wherein they are set down, I shall then think them a good instance of propositions offered me out of Scripture . . . they may be drawn from the Scripture: but I deny that these very propositions are in express words in my Bible.[51]

Locke's words were obviously chosen with great precision. He was careful not to deny that the doctrine could be drawn from Scripture, but stopped well short of asserting that it should. But as well as probing the nature of the scriptural basis for the doctrine, Locke also questioned its intelligibility *per se*. He professed that he had simply no clear idea of the meaning of words such as 'nature' and 'person' as they are used in this context. 'Nature' has several meanings as is shown in its different uses. For instance, Peter can be classified both as an animal and as a man, does this mean that he has two real natures? Locke claimed that he could not conceive how several individuals of a common nature could be distinguished from each other in the absence of external criteria. Once again the bishop is taunted with having abetted the very errors he has sought to extirpate: 'If this be your lordship's way to promote religion, or defend its articles, I know not what argument the greatest enemies of it could use.'[52]

For all its repetition and lack of mutual engagement, I think there is something of interest to our investigation in this bad-tempered exchange. On one level we are witnessing the clash between two opposing philosophical methods. Locke's contention about the inherent unknowability of the nature of 'substance' seemed to Stillingfleet to strike at the very heart of the doctrine of the Trinity. For Stillingfleet, the language of the doctrine, and its conceptualization, seemed to demand some understanding of 'substance'. If nothing could be known beyond its bare postulation then the doctrine was in imminent danger of collapse. If 'substance', 'nature' and 'person' were only notions in the mind, and not reflections of reality, as Stillingfleet took Locke to be claiming, then the doctrine of the Trinity risked collapsing into incoherence. Locke's scepticism was not necessarily the death blow to the doctrine that Stillingfleet feared, and there were to be those who attempted to use the Lockean

[51] Locke, 'Letter 3', p. 343.
[52] Locke, 'Letter 3', p. 482; see pp. 344, 363, 434.

language and method in their explication of the doctrine. It did prove a serious threat, however, to the sort of 'rationalist' apologetic that the bishop espoused. For Stillingfleet, doctrine and language were inextricably linked. If the language of the doctrine were abandoned, then the doctrine itself would suffer a similar fate.

Not all trinitarians proved as dismissive of Locke's 'way of ideas'. Other divines attempted to develop a theology of the Trinity that could encompass Lockean method and language. In 1696, for instance, Francis Gastrell published *Some Considerations Concerning the Trinity*. If we are to believe the disclaimer at the end of the work, it was written before the publication of the Royal Injunction, and before Stillingfleet's own book on the Trinity. Gastrell's target was Sherlock, who he believed had produced an incomprehensible and dangerous account of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, unlike Stillingfleet, Gastrell had no hesitation in employing Lockean language and method. Gastrell accepted that before we can believe anything the terms and simple ideas of the proposed belief must be clearly and distinctly understood. To understand what might be meant by saying that the same God is yet three persons we need to examine the notions we have of 'God', 'unity', 'identity', 'distinction', 'number' and 'person'. In treating of this last concept Gastrell identified two ways in which the word can be used. Reflecting a keener perception of the way in which the word actually functions in the language than many of his contemporaries, Gastrell noted that 'person' can signify *either* a particular intelligent being *or*, as Hobbes had noted, an office or character, or some such complex notion applicable to such a being. This lack of univocity in the concept means that when speaking of God we must be clear about which understanding of person we are using; God is not one and three in the same respect.[53] God can be spoken of as three persons, but there is also a legitimate sense in which God can be spoken of as one person:

> For when I say, that God is Holy, Wise, or Powerful, I only say *explicitly and in part* what I said *implicitly and in full* when I

[53] [Francis Gastrell], *Some Considerations Concerning the Trinity*, 2nd edn (London: 1698), see pp. 19, 26.

> pronounced the Name of God . . . a Holy, Wise, Powerful Being . . . All which Perfections, though considered separately . . . being really one simple Idea, can be applied to but one *Single Person* as it signifies a particular *Intelligent, Being, Nature* or *Principle* . . . all the *Personal Distinction* we can conceive in the Deity must be founded upon some Accessory Idea's Extrinseal to the Divine Nature; a certain Combination of which Idea's makes up the Second Notion signified by the word *Person*.[54]

We may think that Gastrell's explanation needs expansion at this point (Sherlock was quick to accuse him of Sabellianism) and the legitimizing of talk of God as one person unfortunate, but we clearly have here an example of theology in Lockean mode using the language of ideas. And the realization of the importance of examining concepts, by breaking them down into their component ideas before use, would have pleased the philosopher who advocated a keen attention to language. Gastrell realized that his explanation is too easy to be strictly true, and that our conception of the unity and diversity in the Godhead is ragged. For Gastrell, talk of three persons represents a distinction that is more than nominal but of which we have only a confused perception. He is also refreshingly insistent that the doctrine is not a piece of useless abstraction but an attempt to guarantee the proper understanding of the love of God present in the life of the Christian: God the Father acts in Christ and sanctifies us in the Holy Spirit, the Father's love is shown by the sending of the Son. This soteriological aspect of the doctrine, present in older works by Cheynell, Owen and others, is conspicuously absent from many other discussions of this period.[55]

Perhaps then Stillingfleet's anxiety about the demise of the 'traditional' language of the doctrine of the Trinity was misplaced. The great defender of Athanasian orthodoxy in the next century, Waterland, was to quote Locke with approbation.[56] However, although his published reasons for concern were insufficient to justify his unease, Stillingfleet's 'nose' for unorthodoxy

[54] Gastrell, *Considerations*, p. 31.

[55] Gastrell was attacked by Sherlock and in reply published *A Defence of Some Considerations Concerning the Trinity* (London: 1698).

[56] For the subsequent reception of Locke by Anglican theologians, see Alan P. F. Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth Century Divines* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

had not let him down: as we shall see shortly, John Locke was not a trinitarian believer.

Jesus Is the Messiah

Stillingfleet's charge opened the floodgates of orthodox polemic against Locke. One of his bitterest critics was the Calvinist divine, John Edwards, son of Thomas Edwards, author of the poisonous *Gangraena*.[57] His splenetic assaults upon Locke mark him clearly as his father's son. Edwards produced several works attacking what he took to be the doctrine of Locke's *Essay* and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. The attacks themselves are of little intellectual worth, proceeding largely by calumny, insinuation and innuendo. They remind one of the court scene in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* where the verdict is given before the evidence is considered.

In *The Socinian Creed*, Edwards denounced Locke as a 'Well-Willer to the *Racovian* way'. He attacked what he called 'the one article men', that is those who claimed that the acceptance of 'Jesus is the Messiah' was the only necessary article of Christian faith. The praise that Locke's works received from professed deists and unitarians was presented as further evidence of their tainted nature. Edwards' polemic produced more heat than light but Locke obviously felt scorched by the innuendo. Henceforth his orthodoxy was suspect, and he was considered a fair target of abuse and condemnation. Was this merely libel or was there substance to the accusations? The modern historian, Justin Champion, for one has concluded that Edwards was correct.[58]

Locke's most complete published statement of his theological position is to be found in *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*.[59] This work reflects his mature thought, his reaction to the increasing emphasis placed on reason in matters of

[57] John Edwards, a Cambridge divine, should not be confused with Jonathan Edwards, an Oxford divine, who, complicating matters further, also wrote against Socinianism.

[58] John Edwards, *The Socinian Creed* (London: 1697), pp. 120, 128. J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), see p. 112, n. 27.

[59] John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (ed. with an introduction and notes by John C. Higgins-Biddle; Bristol: Thoemmes, 1997). This critical edition is very useful to the student of Locke, but as I will argue later I think that Higgins-Biddle is not correct in his defence of Locke from charges of anti-trinitarianism.

theology, and his own growing personal preoccupation with matters religious.[60] Locke claimed that his views were derived from the Scriptures alone. There he found 'the only gospel-article of faith . . . Jesus is the Messiah'. This is the only doctrine necessary for salvation. Other doctrines may help us to live the belief that Jesus is the Messiah but they are not essential in the same way, and we must beware of fitting the scriptural truth into our preconceived systems. Sell tries to construe this slogan as 'a portmanteau claim rather than a minimalist one', but then has to concede that 'it is not specially helpful on the doctrine of the Trinity, in which he [Locke] believed, and did not deny, but did not affirm with fervour or examine in detail'.[61]

No mention is made of the Trinity in the entire book. Some have seen this as exonerating Locke from the charge of being anti-trinitarian. Sell, for example, has argued that Locke had not intended to write a compendium of Christian doctrine, or claimed to be a systematic theologian, and that his silence on the Trinity is thereby explained. If the trinitarian controversies of the decade had never happened such a claim might pass for an explanation, but in the circumstances the silence implies lack of belief rather than lack of concern. Even Sell is driven to acknowledge that 'while Locke protested that he never denied the doctrine of the Trinity, he never took the trouble to affirm it'.[62] Aaron claimed that 'the *Reasonableness* does not deny the doctrine of the Trinity, but it does stress the unity of the Godhead, and it omits the doctrine of the Trinity from the list of reasonable doctrines . . . he definitely states that he is no Socinian, that he does not deny Christ's divinity, nor any of the main Mysteries of the Christian religion'.[63] Aaron seems rather naïve to take Locke at his word in this matter. Even within *The Reasonableness* certain phrases set off alarm bells, and given the context of the

[60] It is important to stress that Locke was not a deist, as a perfunctory survey of the history of religious thought might suggest. See Higgins-Biddle's Introduction for a conclusive refutation of such a claim, and Dewey D. Wallace Jr, 'Socinianism, Justification by Faith, and the sources of John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*', in John W. Yolton, ed., *Philosophy, Religion, and Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1990), pp. 152–69.

[61] Sell, p. 203.

[62] Sell, pp. 212–13; see pp. 202–3. Sell claims to find trinitarian speech patterns in *The Reasonableness* but does not display them.

[63] Aaron, p. 298.

trinitarian controversies of the 1690s it is difficult not to construe the following as a dismissive comment upon them: 'The writers and wranglers in religion fill it with niceties and dress it up with notions which they make necessary and fundamental parts of it; as if there were no way into the church, but through the academy or lyceum. The greatest part of mankind have not the leisure for learning and logic, and superfine distinctions of the schools.'[64] On such a view, the 'niceties' of the doctrine of the Trinity are rendered the preserve of dilettante churchmen and cannot possibly be relevant to common Christian experience. Higgins–Biddle who has produced an admirable critical version of *The Reasonableness* is similarly at pains to exonerate Locke from charges of heterodoxy. He correctly notes where Locke disagreed with Socinian tenets and exegesis, and is right to claim that Locke was not a Socinian in any strict sense. But he is still left with Locke's uncharacteristic and awkward silence. His contention that this reticence was due to Locke's reluctance to engage in complex theological speculation sits uneasily with the breadth and depth of Locke's reading and competence in theology. Looking at the infighting around him and events across the border in Scotland, Locke may well have concluded that safety lay in silence, but I think that policy was even more attractive given three other considerations that bring Locke's acceptance of the Trinity into question: his associates, his correspondence and his unpublished work.

Locke was aggrieved by Stillingfleet's attack on the *Essay* and claimed that the Bishop rested his case on the grounds of guilt by association. While one can have some sympathy for Locke's defence — he could hardly be held responsible for the use to which others put his ideas — Stillingfleet's innuendo may not have been wide of the mark. The bishop and Locke moved in the same circles, and he may well have been in possession of information that led him to doubt Locke's orthodoxy in regard to the Trinity. His attack in the *Vindication* may have been intended to smoke Locke out. It was well known that Locke was one of a group who met at the house of the self-confessed Unitarian merchant, Thomas Firmin. Locke's *Epistle on Toleration* had been translated by another known Unitarian, William Popple,

[64] Locke, *The Reasonableness*, p. 157.

seemingly with Locke's connivance and involvement.[65] Locke's earlier latitudinarianism encouraged a disposition that discounted the value and importance of doctrine. While in exile in Holland, Locke had also been in close contact with Remonstrant theologians, especially Limborch, whose own trinitarian commitment was suspect. The Remonstrants emphasized moral concerns over doctrinal ones and sought to build a minimalist creed of agreed fundamentals of Christian faith. They also, significantly, admitted professed Socinians into communion with them. This was quite in accord with Locke's views on religious toleration that unitarians should be encompassed but Papists excluded.[66] Moreover, Locke's claim that he had never read any Socinian books seems highly implausible. We know that he possessed several works by English and Continental unitarians, including Biddle, Nye and works in the *Bibliotheca fratrum polonorum*. We know that he was aware of the *Unitarian Tracts*, even going so far as to send a copy of *A Brief History of the Unitarians* to LeClerc.[67] To possess a book is to be sure not an indication that one has read it or that one agrees with its content, but Locke's claim that he had not read any of the Socinian authors seems at best to rest on a blatant equivocation.[68]

More conclusive proof about Locke's clandestine unitarianism comes in the form of his correspondence with Limborch, some of which concerned the unity of God. In these letters there appears to be a pincer-like attack on trinitarian doctrine: firstly, an examination of the concept of 'God', and secondly, an examination of those who attempt to put unity and plurality together. Locke based some of his argument against a plurality of gods on the divine attributes. Given that the word 'God' is used to designate an all-knowing Being, Locke argues that one could not conceive of two beings of this kind. Considerations of the omnipotence of God lead to the same conclusion. To be all powerful, Locke asserted, a being must determine the will of all others. If there

[65] See Mario Montuori, *John Locke on Toleration and the Unity of God* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1983). Montuori makes out a good case for collusion between the two men, and undermines those who portray Popple as proceeding on his own unwarranted initiative.

[66] See Cranston, pp. 233f. See Marshall, pp. 331–6.

[67] Marshall claims that by 1681 Locke had already read Croft's *Naked Truth*, and made notes from unitarian works including the Racovian Catechism; see pp. 139 and 391–2. See Montuori, p. 135, for the gift to LeClerc.

[68] Marshall traces the trajectory that he believes brought Locke to his evident Socinianism, see pp. 330–51.

were two seemingly all-powerful beings one would have to have its will determined by the other for one of them at least to warrant the description 'all powerful', the other therefore could not properly be described as all powerful and consequently could not be called 'God'. In an Occamistic stroke Locke asked why we should *want* to posit more than one all-powerful, all-knowing Being in any case.[69]

Having examined the concept of God, Locke proceeded with the other arm of his pincer movement to dismiss those who maintain that they can account for unity and plurality in God. He argued that they fail in their endeavour as the 'sameness' of the persons reduces them to an undifferentiated unity. We might say that we had two intelligent beings who knew, willed and were continually the same and could not have a separable existence, but this plurality would be just a matter of words as in effect we would have one simple unity.[70] Again we have echoes of the controversy with Stillingfleet when Locke confessed himself at a loss to conceive how diversity could be established between two beings if there were no external differences generating different ideas.

The final confirmation of Locke's antipathy to the doctrine of the Trinity is found in notes for a projected theological work he never wrote. This *Adversaria theologica* dealt with several controverted theological issues, including the Trinity. The evaluation proceeds largely by the citation of texts pro and contra the doctrines in question, on facing pages. Interestingly, Locke cites Biddle several times, quoting from the republished works found in *the Faith of One God* of 1691. Such citation casts further doubt upon his declaration that he had never read Socinian books. He may have meant the term 'Socinian' in the strict sense, but this republication of Biddle exposed Locke to a great amount of popular

[69] Montuori, 'Three Letters from Locke to Limborch on the Unity of God', in his *John Locke*, see pp. 189, 204, 216, 211. Limborch in his reply evidently saw things Locke's way: 'nemo qui attente secum considerat quid voce Dei intelligamus, pluralitatem Deorum asserere potest', cited by Monuori, p. 199.

[70] Montuori, 'The Socinianism of John Locke and the English Edition of the Letter Concerning Toleration', in his *John Locke*, p. 125, n. 16. 'Si l'on suppose, la même, qu'ils ont aussi la même connoissance, la même volunté et qu'ils existent également dans le même lieu, c'est seulement multiplier le même être, mais dans le fonds et dans la verité de la chose on ne sait que reduire une pluralité supposée à une veritable unité. Car supposer deux êtres intelligens, qui connoissent, veulent et sont incessament la même chose et qui n'ont pas une existence separée, c'est supposer en paroles une pluralité, mais poser effectivement une simple unité.'

unitarian argumentation.[71] A quick indication of Locke's antipathy to the doctrine of the Trinity can be gauged by the fact that just two texts are cited in favour and over twenty against. Locke also presents the outline of two arguments against the Trinity. 'Because it subverteth ye unity of god, introducing 3 gods. Because it is inconsistent with ye rule of prayer directed in ye SS. For if god be three persons how can we pray to him through his son for his spirit?' The unitarian smear of 'polytheism' is thus quite evident, but also, interestingly, a concern for the economic dynamic of prayer. As we have seen before, the perceived mismatch between the scriptural record and popular understanding of the doctrine of three coequal persons had a part to play in leading some to reject the doctrine.[72]

These sentiments are echoed in two other sections of the *Adversaria*, one concerning the divinity of Christ, and the other the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Again the texts and arguments urged for the proposition 'Christus non deus supremus' greatly outweigh those advanced for the contrary, 'Christus deus supremus'. Commenting on the text, 'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28), Locke is quick to dismiss the trinitarian interpretation that what is subjected is Christ's human nature because he believes the distinction on which it rests cannot be found in Scripture. It also begs the question at issue by supposing what is disputed, that is the two natures of Christ. Such an interpretation could well lead to the conclusion that there are two persons in Christ, one of which is subject to the other.[73]

The same procedure is used in regard to the divinity of the Holy Ghost: texts for the proposition 'spiritus sanctus deus' are pitted against those that imply 'spiritus sanctus non deus'. As previously, many more texts are cited against the Spirit's divinity than in favour of it. This last section is particularly interesting as in it Locke discusses what he sees as the proper usage of 'person' in Godtalk. We certainly should not talk of God as an impersonal

[71] Bodleian Library, MS Locke c. 43. The pages are numbered. Mortuori suggests that the *Adversaria* was the collating of proof texts for an already developed theology rather than an attempt at clarification, p. 229.

[72] MS Locke, pp. 12, 13.

[73] MS Locke, pp. 26, 27.

essence, 'To talk of God impersonally is ridiculous', but the question remains of how we should talk of God in personal terms. He implies that the Holy Spirit is not divine because in Scripture the Spirit is distinguished from God. The trinitarians argue that such distinction is personal not essential – the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Father and Son, not from the essence of the Godhead. But Locke counters that the 'person' and 'essence' of God are not distinct and that such a distinction is not found in the Scriptures. He goes on to argue that if the 'person' and 'essence' of God are distinct, then either 'person' is a finite term, in which case there is something finite in God, or if 'person' is infinite we have three infinites in God.[74]

On this last point some comment seems appropriate. If Locke is making the point that in talking of God we use 'personal' language, we talk of 'Him', ascribe personal attributes such as love, then we can concede the point that we do speak of God personally. But it is difficult to see how Locke, given the understanding of 'person' he presents in the *Essay*, could predicate personhood to God at all. Is God subject to forensic judgements such as praise and blame? Does God have a history of which he is conscious? If he possesses consciousness of himself, is this, as in human beings, separable from his substance? If these are not the case, and it seems as if Locke would not wish to claim that they were, then his conception of 'person' seems to rule out talk of God as *a* person as much as God as *three* persons. Locke perhaps undermined far more than he realized.

I realize that none of the foregoing is absolutely conclusive of Locke's rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. Accusations of Socinianism by his contemporaries should definitely not be taken at face value. Locke did not explicitly reject the doctrine as far as we know but he certainly did not assert it. To adopt Stillingfleet's 'forensic' outlook, I think that, while it cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt that Locke did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, his conviction on the balance of probabilities is far more certain.

This chapter has not intended to give an exhaustive account of Locke's religious position, but to focus on his thought about the doctrine of the Trinity. For Locke and his contemporaries the

[74] MS Locke, pp. 30, 31.

question could be a matter of life and death, and Locke's reticence is understandable.[75] The genesis of Locke's recasting of 'person' is complex and its pedigree unclear. Understanding was shifting from categories of 'substance' to categories of 'agency'. As we shall see in the next chapter, 'person' was far more likely to be defined as 'intelligent agent' than 'intelligent substance'. The concept of 'person' was becoming less fixed and more dynamic. Locke definitely contributed to this shifting conceptualization, even if he were not its sole author or propagator. What is certain is that the *Essay* provided such an effective vehicle for popularizing the new tone suggested by 'person-as-consciousness'. There is a piquancy in the fact that less than 50 years separates Stillingfleet's bewildered 'How comes person to stand for this' from David Hume's confident claim that 'Most philosophers seem inclined to think, that personal identity *arises* from consciousness.'[76] The subsequent development of Locke's thought on persons and personal identity has been very fecund, what is of interest from our perspective is that it arose, in part at least, from considerations surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. Even if there was a widespread crisis in the interpretation of the doctrine, and growing rejection of trinitarian belief and sentiment, the Trinity was hardly yet of negligible concern as some commentators have implied.

[75] Locke has also been deemed Socinian from other theological considerations. See Dewey D. Wallace Jr, 'Socinianism, Justification by Faith, and the Sources of John Locke's "Reasonableness"', Yolton, ed., in *Philosophy, Religion and Science*, pp. 152–69, and Nicholas Jolley, 'Leibniz on John Locke and Socinianism', in Yolton, ed., in *Philosophy, Religion and Science*, pp. 170–87.

[76] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1 (ed. D. G. C. MacNabb; Glasgow: Collins, 1962), p. 330.

CHAPTER SIX

The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity

If the ecclesiastical and civil authorities had any hopes that the Blasphemy Act of 1698 would put an end to the doctrinal battle that had been raging for nearly a decade, they were to be rudely disappointed. The flood of controversial literature abated, but a steady stream of books and pamphlets still flowed from the presses. Works were now written to 'explain' what the Thirty-Nine Articles and the new act really meant. The issues raised in the 1690s were now simply too contentious to go away. New, practical problems also began to surface: could a clergyman of unitarian dispositions sincerely subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles and use the Prayer Book Liturgy as it stood? Should unitarian sympathizers be admitted to communion within the established Church? *The Moderate Trinitarian* disagreed with those who sought to excommunicate any who denied the divinity of Christ. Despite its title and eirenical preface, its author, Daniel Allen, stirred the fires of controversy by arguing that the Father alone should be worshipped.[1] Reflecting a debate about the true nature of Islam, which had been rumbling since the publication of the Qur'an in English during the middle of the previous century, one opponent of the unitarians feared that the logical conclusion of their arguments was the substitution of Islam for Christianity.[2]

The fallout from the explosion of the 1690s is evident in the

[1] Daniel Allen, *The Moderate Trinitarian* (London: 1699), see pp. 36, iii, 34–5.

[2] [Anon] *A Letter to a Friend* [Re: A Brief Enquiry & The Socinian Slain] (London: 1700). The reception of Islam and the use it was put to in debates is discussed in J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 108ff. Edwards accused Locke of Mahometanism. See also N. I. Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

writings of all those engaged in the controversies of the new century. The opinions and positions of the protagonists of that decade, if not always their names, were still well known and all sides were soon to find new comrades in arms. The same concerns are also clearly manifest about the true nature of Protestantism and the extent of the Reformation, the acceptability of non-scriptural language in a Reformed Church, and above all the meaning and proper application of the word 'person'. There is also a marked shift from the classical Anglican position, which had given a reverential weight to the Fathers and early tradition as an interpretive matrix, to one that stressed the individual as the final arbiter of scriptural meaning. The latitudinarian party grew in strength, and doctrinal issues came to be seen by many as irrelevant niceties. In the second decade of the new century renewed conflict broke out over the doctrine of the Trinity and a fresh wave of apologetic and polemic hit the Church of England.

Not in the Ordinary and Vulgar Sense

In the first year of the new century Stephen Nye, the catalyst of the controversies of the previous decade, published *The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity*. Nye obviously felt neither inhibited nor intimidated by the Royal Injunction of 1695 or the Blasphemy Act of 1698 as the book, unlike his previous works, appeared in his own name. The genre was familiar: letters from the author to an enquirer requesting true teaching in regard to the Trinity. The book manifests Nye's obsession with the dangers of tritheism, and is in part a diatribe against the Huguenot refugee, Peter Allix, and his allegedly heterodox writings. For Nye, Allix represented the zenith of tritheism. If others fought shy of out and out espousal of such a doctrine, preferring to speak like Sherlock of three infinite spirits or the like, Allix had no such reticence and felt quite at liberty to translate one of the opening lines of Genesis as 'The Gods created'. Nye's animosity was further fuelled by Allix 'outing' him in print as the author of *The Brief History of the Unitarians*, an accusation that Nye rather lamely rejected.[3]

[3] Stephen Nye, *The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the Manner of our Saviour's Divinity; As they Are Held in the Catholic Church, and the Church of England* (London: Bell, 1701). For Nye's accusation of tritheism against Allix, see pp. 5–7; for Nye's disingenuous denial of previous authorship, see pp. 165–6.

Nye had obviously taken account of the controversies of the last decade. His views had been modified in a more orthodox direction and the book reveals a mind now acutely aware of the grammar of trinitarian discourse. In it he stated that although God is numerically one there is 'a modal Distinction in God; that thereupon he is called, and is three Persons: not in the ordinary and vulgar sense, of the term Persons; but in the Theological'. The bulk of the subsequent letters attempted to expand and explain what this 'theological' sense of person might mean.[4]

Conceding that the nature of this modal distinction can be expounded with some latitude (citing the mind-based analogies of Augustine and the puritan Baxter as examples), Nye proceeded to expound his own understanding of the nature of this distinction in the Godhead. The first point to grasp is that all language in this area is of necessity analogical: 'When we say, the Trinity is *a Mystery*; 'tis because, *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit*, are not here understood in the vulgar and ordinary sense; and neither is the term *Persons*. *Persons, Father, Spirit, Generation, Procession, Spiration, Begotten*, in the Divinity, are so called; as was before said, only by Analogy (or *remote likeness*) to things natural, and *by condescension to the Human Understanding*.'[5] This analogical speech marks a relevant and important difference in talking of God as 'three persons' as contrasted with three human persons. In nature persons differ in substance, will and mind, in God the difference of persons is not of this order but rather 'as a Mind and its Acts'. The classic Augustinian analogy is clearly at work here, but so too is a desire to reject anything that would smack of Sherlock's proposition that there are three infinite minds in the Godhead. Nye explicitly rejects the Sherlockian language, arguing that we can say that each person is God but certainly must not say that each person is 'a God' as Sherlock had unfortunately done. Nye provides a lexicon that examines the terms of trinitarian discourse — 'acts', 'properties', 'idioms', 'characters', 'notes', 'notions', 'ideas', 'relations', 'modes', 'subsistences', 'personalities', 'persons', 'essence', 'substance' and 'trinity' — and how these terms are appropriated to the divine persons.[6]

[4] Nye, *Doctrine*, p. 18.
[5] Nye, *Doctrine*, pp. 21–2.
[6] Nye, *Doctrine*, p. 20; see pp. 24–7 for the lexicon.

Some may object that this is a peculiar use of words and, especially in regard to the word 'person', simply illegitimate. Nye counters that every art and science adapts words and has its own peculiar use of terms, and that consequently theology is justified in doing the same. 'Person' and 'relation' when used of God are 'artificial Terms; and therefore have a peculiar meaning in Theology . . . PERSON, in common speech and use, is a particular Being distinct from all other Beings; and that hath sundry Properties or Modes belonging to it: But in the Science of Theology, when we speak of God, it is only a mode or Property; as such Mode is considered together with the Divine Essence, Godhead, or God.'[7]

Nye, exhibiting a keen eye for grammar, noted that God is sometimes spoken of as *a* person — for instance, blasphemy is seen as a sin against the person of God — but this is speaking in a vulgar, non-exact sense. When we wish to speak with theological exactitude we speak of God as 'three persons'. Hence it is important that we pay close attention to the context in which a statement is uttered if we are to interpret it correctly for 'there are two very different significations of the term *Persons*; the Theological and the Vulgar: so in speaking of God, we sometimes call him a *Person*, sometimes three *Persons*'. Nye saw the error of the Racovian Catechism laying in ignorance of this subtle but highly important nuance. One meaning of the word 'person' may well be 'an intelligent essence', but it is wrong to construe the doctrine of the Trinity as saying there are three infinite intelligent essences in the Godhead.[8]

Despite his public adoption of trinitarian language and grammar, one is left with lingering doubts about Nye's orthodoxy. In his zeal to repudiate tritheism has he not perhaps strayed into Sabellianism? If 'person' when used of God is 'only a mode', what exactly is the status of such persons? Given his previous approbation of Wallis for using the language of modes in his explication of the mystery, and Nye's claim that such a position was very close to that of the unitarians, we are justified in questioning how full-blooded Nye's own understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity

[7] Nye, *Doctrine*, pp. 33–4.

[8] Nye, *Doctrine*, p. 151. See pp. 153–7 for comments on the Racovian Catechism. Other authors too will allow the usage of God as 'a person', as we shall see later. Given the circumstances, Nye's caution seems exemplary.

was. Nye denied that he was reviving Sabellianism by arguing that this heresy proposes that the difference in the Godhead is only the result of external relations to creatures, whereas the Catholic view insists on the internal reality of the modal relations. The former position denies any real relations within the Godhead, the latter position insists that the external relations found in the economy of salvation are, as it were, reflections of the inner dynamic of the life of God. But despite such protested orthodoxy his text is not replete with instance or illustration of relations between the divine persons. To say that a divine person is 'only a mode' seems to detract from the reality of the distinction between the three persons — by speaking of Father, Son and Spirit we are speaking of more than merely modes of the Godhead.[9]

Nye's book stands out against a backdrop of several other contemporary works that lack the acute perception of the complexity of the issues under investigation. These writings share a common concern with the perceived menace of Socinianism, unitarianism and other related errors. In an age that was almost neurotically conscious of the damage inflicted on civil society by disputes in the religious sphere, such threats were not lightly dismissed. An attack on doctrine could well be the prelude to an attack on the foundations of the social order. It is easy, perhaps too easy, to construe an attack on the Trinity in religion as an attack on a trinity in politics. I voice this caution because it is by no means clear which social or political trinity should be taken as the dominant analogy. J. C. D. Clark sees the attack on the religious doctrine as in part an attack on the trinity of 'Church–King–Parliament'. But similar trinities were constructed with different components: for instance, 'King–Lords–Commons', or the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland. The safer conclusion is that an attack on the Trinity was an attack on the established order in religion, which could be the prelude to an attack on the established civil order.[10] The published defences of the doctrine of the Trinity often pose as comments on the controversies of the 1690s. In general they are content to dismiss rather than engage the questions and difficulties raised during that decade.

[9] Nye, *Doctrine*, p. 162.

[10] J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 277.

An Essay towards shewing the Reasonableness of the Doctrine of the Trinity, by Erasmus Warren, is typical of the rather superficial nature of this genre. Warren assumes rather than argues the truth of the trinitarian position. His explicit target are unitarians who argue that there is but 'one PERSON in the GOD-HEAD' and decry trinitarianism as contrary to reason. Warren claims that the converse is true. Whereas Nye sought to discern how the One could be three, Warren assumes the reality of three persons and then proceeds to ask in what sense these three are One. According to Warren, the common analogies based on 'Mind' and the Wallisian cube start in the wrong place because they presume the divine unity and then proceed to the divine Trinity. The starting point for reflection should be the divine trinity. One must accept that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit as this is plain in Scripture, which teaches that God simply is three persons. If the Son and the Spirit were annihilated then there would be no God. Created likenesses of the relationship of *perichoresis* (the mutual interpenetration of the three divine persons), which is natural and essential to the Godhead, are difficult to find, a claim that Warren unwittingly confirms when he finds the closest similitude in the interpenetration of angels! This 'threeness' of the Godhead shows its vitality and fecundity, but he is keen to stress that although we know *that* God is a Trinity we do not know *how* God is a Trinity. Such a limitation should not worry us as it is not peculiar to this doctrine alone. Warren affirms, that although there are undoubtedly three persons in the Godhead, these persons are not quite the same as human persons: 'between them and us is this Difference; that they are three PERSONS by different *Modes* of Subsisting, and we by virtue of particular *Essences* appropriate to our respective Beings'.[11]

Charles Leslie (1650–1722), an ardent Jacobite and Nonjuror, provided a survey of recent Socinian tracts. In six dialogues between 'Socinian' and 'Christian' he sought to argue a unitarian converted by the *Brief History* back to trinitarian orthodoxy. In the first he admitted the superficial plausability of the Socinian case, but pressed for a deeper investigation of the way in which 'person'

[11] Erasmus Warren, *An Essay towards Shewing the Reasonableness of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: 1709), p. 19, and see pp. 4, 6, 31. Twenty years later Hawarden would use the argument about annihilation against Clarke with great effect.

could be used in ordinary speech and should be used in theology. The persons of the Trinity are not to be seen as faculties of the Godhead. They are called 'persons' because they have personal actions attributed to them. They are eternal and equal. Leslie provided several illustrations to illuminate his case but he was insistent that these natural illustrations should not be taken as parallels in the incomprehensible God.[12] In the fourth dialogue Leslie sought to draw out the implicit trinitarianism of the Apostle's Creed against those who wanted to use its apparent reticence as a means of establishing common ground to which both trinitarian and unitarian could subscribe: 'God is named at first as a Nature or Species . . . then the several Persons follow in their Order'.[13] Speaking from the position of one whose refusal to accept the legitimacy of the Glorious Revolution had cost him dearly, Leslie also dismissed Socinian claims of persecution. They had 'long had a meeting house in Cutler's Hall' and their toleration was a matter of fact if not of law.[14]

The Queen's Majesty . . . the Most Apposite Emblem

The continuing focus provided by the word 'person' and disputes about its legitimate usage surface again and again in works of this period. In many cases previous arguments were simply rehashed and served up again, but a book appeared in 1710 that was far more *sui generis*. The *Tractatus Philosophico-Theologicus de Persona or, A Treatise of the Word Person* is the product of a forensic investigation of the doctrine of the Trinity by the lawyer John Clendon.[15] The book is a testimony to the continuing popular interest in the controversies of the previous decade, and Clendon's concerns are those of many of his contemporaries. He was very suspicious of those whose positions seem to verge or fall into tritheism. On occasion this fear affected his judgement quite badly; few others could have lumped both Sherlock and South together as tritheists!

[12] Charles Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd* (London: 1708), see Part I, pp. 1, 6, 10–11, 16.

[13] Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, Part IV, p. 11.

[14] Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, Part VI, p. 40.

[15] John Clendon, *Tractatus philosophico-theologicus de persona or, A Treatise of the Word Person* (London: 1710).

He was suspicious about the effects on Christian faith of philosophy in general and university scholasticism in particular. And, as the title of the work clearly shows, Clendon believed that the word 'person' was at the heart of many of the problems surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. He intended his work as a defence of the Blasphemy Act of 1698, of which he was inordinately full of praise, viewing it as the benchmark against which all trinitarian schema were to be judged. He was well aware that others did not share his admiration, and his book aimed to refute those 'scanty scriblers' who threatened the peace wrought by William's act.[16]

One of the 'scanty scriblers' cited was Charles Leslie, who had smeared Archbishop Tillotson as a secret Socinian sympathizer because of his long friendship with the unitarian merchant Firmin. The charge was undoubtedly motivated more by the fact that Tillotson had accepted the see of Canterbury when his predecessor, William Sancroft, was deposed as a 'Nonjuror' for his refusal to recognize William III as king, than any properly theological concerns. If Nye had lumped Tillotson with the 'Realists' then Clendon was astounded by the realism of Leslie's exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. Commenting on *Socinianism Discuss'd*, he expresses his disgust:

> God is named first as a nature or Species to Individuals. I believe in God. Then (says he) 'the several Persons follow in their Order, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Now what plainer and more impudent Tritheism than this can be asserted by Man? That God signifies the Divine Nature, or species of Deity, and that the three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are Three individuals under that Nature or Species? Surely nothing can be more?[17]

Despite his express desire to stick solely to the language of the Scriptures Clendon found himself driven into extra-scriptural terms. He speaks of the persons of the Trinity as 'manifestations' of the Godhead in the acts of creation, redemption and sanctification. This original understanding was corrupted by Alexandrian innovations, which introduced Platonizing conceptions of a trinity

[16] Clendon, 'To the Reader', in *Tractatus*, not paginated.
[17] Clendon, 'To the Reader'.

of hypostases, a perversion that was exacerbated and further corrupted by the work of the Schoolmen.[18]

Clendon's own account of the Trinity seems based solely on external, economic considerations: how the three persons 'show' themselves in the history of salvation. There is no discussion of the possibility of these 'showings' revealing anything about the reality of the immanent Godhead. His account of 'person' is reminiscent of Hobbes. A man can bear several persons in himself, and Clendon cites Cicero, as Hobbes had done before him, as backing for his view. Some usages of 'person' demand numerical distinction, other usages rely on numerical identity. For instance, Peter, James and John are three numerically distinct persons, whereas Peter can be legitimately called three persons in that he can be described as wise, learned and religious. Clendon illustrated this latter case with dreadful sycophancy: 'I do think the Queen's Majesty, with respect to her three Kingdoms, to be the most apposite Emblem of the Personal Triplicity in the Divine Unity. She is in each respect a particular Person, and yet in every respect she is one and the same Royal Essence.'[19]

Clendon vehemently opposed those he labelled 'three hypostases men'. One of the worst offenders, to Clendon's mind, had been Samuel Hill, a bit player in the conflict of the previous decade. Hill's *Vindication* of 1695, Clendon feared, had created three immanent hypostases of Mind, Reason, and Spirit who seemed then to take on the 'personalities' of Father, Son and Spirit in the economic order. Instead of starting with the economically revealed Father, Son and Spirit who are subsequently called 'persons', Clendon alleged that Hill, and others of his tendency, started with the concept of three divine persons and then tried to fit the economy of salvation to this preconceived schema. He saw the root problem here resting in the belief that 'every Person is a Particular essence or being of itself; which will never do as to the Persons in the Divine Trinity'. And in this he is surely right: neither logically nor practically do we start by believing in three divine persons and then look for those persons in the scriptural record. Rather, beginning with the scriptural record, we find there revealed three who are Father, Son and

[18] Clendon, 'Dedication', in *Tractatus*, not paginated.
[19] Clendon, 'Epistle Dedicatory', in *Tractatus*, not paginated, and see pp. 15–16.

Holy Spirit, and subsequently call them 'persons' for want of a better name.[20]

Thus the starting point of trinitarian reflection for Clendon was the opposite pole from where Warren had begun his investigation; we first know the divine unity and then try to understand the divine Trinity: 'God is one in the strictest sense of Unity; and the Persons in the trinity must be so construed as to be consistent with this unity'. In Clendon's schema a 'person' seems to be little more than an external manifestation of God. In some ways both his language and his examples seem to rely on the ancient understanding of *persona* first used by Tertullian with its connotations of 'mask', or better, 'role'. The same tendency in interpretation is clearly present in Hobbes, and there is little in Clendon's book that leads to the conclusion that *within* the Godhead itself there is distinction. The fears of readers alarmed by such an absence of the immanent Trinity are hardly assuaged by the partial rehabilitation of Sabellius, who is described as 'not so foul a heretic'. According to Clendon, 'person' can mean either 'a particular Intelligent Being; or an office, Character, or some such complex Notion applicable to such a Being'. When used of the Trinity he had no doubt that it was the latter sense that should be understood, and the way in which he conceives the distinctions between the divine persons appears to be largely dependent upon the human perceiver; for instance, when we think of God as 'Creator' we cannot be thinking of him as 'Redeemer'. That the influence of Locke is at work here is shown by Clendon's claim that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit include the whole idea of 'God' and some other ideas besides. Personal distinction in the deity thus seems to be depicted as extrinsical to the divine nature and reliant on the combination of ideas flowing from office and character. In Clendon's schema we know that God appears as a trinity of persons, but we seem to have no way of knowing whether this appearance is generated by an underlying reality.[21]

Clendon and others were obviously concerned about the disruption that would be caused in Church and state if the disputes of the 1690s broke out again. Their fears were soon to be realized. Some of the controversialists in this new storm were to agree that

[20] Clendon, p. 139. For the discussion of Hill, see pp. 124–32.
[21] Clendon, pp. 159, 218. See pp. 189, 220–1.

God was one and that the Trinity were three persons; what they denied was that those persons were coequal and consubstantial.

Primitive Christianity

It still comes as a surprise to some people to realize that Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) was as interested in theology as he was in science. Now that many of Newton's working notes and manuscripts have been published or made available to scholars the extent of his interest is clear to see. In 1667 Newton was elected a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. In order to retain his fellowship custom dictated that he should be ordained as a priest of the Church of England. In the event a royal dispensation freed him of this obligation, but during the early 1670s Newton had begun an extensive study of the Scriptures, the early Fathers, and theology. By 1672 he had become convinced that the prevailing trinitarian doctrine of three coequal persons was not the teaching of the Scriptures or the early Church. Trinitarianism was not the Ur-religion that Cudworth held it to be; on the contrary the doctrine of the Trinity was a fraud perpetrated by Athanasius and a corruption of the original Apostolic preaching. The conclusion chimed in well with Newton's conviction that the essence of God lay in dominion, which he ascribed to the Father alone. At one stage Newton wrote two letters expressing these convictions to John Locke for anonymous publication by Jean LeClerc, a leading Dutch Remonstrant theologian who advocated the unfettered use of reason in matters of religion. At the last moment Newton panicked and withdrew his permission for publication and made no public comment on the doctrine for the rest of his life. How far Newton was further influenced by the studies and conclusions of the unitarian propogandists of the 1690s and how far he directly influenced them is beyond the scope of this book. What we will examine though are the writings and fate of two of his 'disciples', William Whiston and Samuel Clark.[22]

[22] This paragraph is heavily indebted to articles in James Force and Richard Popkin, *Essays on the Context, Nature and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990). The correspondence with Locke can be found in Isaac Newton, 'Notable Corruptions of Scripture' in Isaac Newton, *The Correspondence of Isaac Newton* (ed. W. H. Turnball, 7 vols.; (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959–77), III, pp. 83–122.

There can be few mathematicians who have lost their positions because of heresy, but this was the fate that befell William Whiston, Newton's successor as Lucasian Professor at Cambridge, in 1710. One modern historian captures the man well: 'William Whiston (1667–1752) was an eccentric, a perennial Cambridge type, of immense and many-sided learning, combined with feeble judgment, and complete faith in his own opinions'.[23] Whiston explicitly revived and propagated a form of Eusebianism, a heresy similar to Arianism in subordinating the Son to the Father but differing from it in denying that there was a time when the Son did not exist. This he took to be the true doctrine of the early centuries, a fact shown by the title of his four-volume work, *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd*, published a year after his deprivation. Like several other contemporaries, including Newton, Milton and Locke, Whiston's protracted investigation of the Trinity prompted by the controversies of the previous decade had convinced him that the 'Athanasian' understanding of the doctrine, with its talk of three coequal persons, was a corruption of early Christianity. The Reformation process begun two hundred years before would only be complete when this last relic of Popery, the consubstantial Trinity, was removed. Then, and only then, would the original, pristine, authentic doctrine of Christ and his Apostles prevail.[24]

His espousal of Eusebianism rested largely on his reading of *The Apostolical Constitutions*, a work he took to be an authentic first-century document, and which he became convinced was the apex of the New Testament canon and to be treated as such. From his reading of *The Apostolical Constitutions* Whiston concluded that the Father alone was 'God' in the proper sense, and alone worthy of worship. He proceeded to draw up 21 propositions, which he hoped exhibited the true faith of the Church of the first two centuries in regard to the Trinity and Incarnation.[25] The prevailing trinitarian orthodoxy of three coequal persons was in fact a

[23] Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688–1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 249.

[24] William Whiston, *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd* (4 vols.; London: 1711). Volume 1 contains Whiston's self-defence; volume 2, the Greek of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and his translation; volume 3, an essay purporting to show this work is the most sacred canonical book of the New Testament; volume 4, a reconstruction of the faith of the first two centuries drawn from these augmented Scriptures, presented in propositional form.

[25] These propositions can be found in volume 4. See propositions 22 and 23 for the nature of the distinction and unity of the Father, Son and Spirit.

corruption of Athanasius. For Whiston, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are beings and persons, really and numerically distinct from each other, although not entirely separable. The Son is subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit to both. Hence the reality and plurality of the persons is maintained but the unity of the Godhead resides solely in the Father's monarchy. Whiston felt obliged to adapt the Liturgy of the Prayer Book to reflect this subordinationism accordingly, as we saw in the first chapter. For his pains he was deleted to the Bishop of Ely, and eventually, after proceedings in convocation at Cambridge, he was deprived of his chair for heresy on 31 October 1710. His writings only escaped formal condemnation by the convocation at Canterbury by the reluctance of Queen Anne to give the Royal Assent to a motion of censure. Whiston was to die outside the established Church in 1752, having become a member of the General Baptists, who were more tolerant of his views.[26]

Whiston's writings exhibited many of the beliefs, worries and hopes to be found in the more radically Protestant wing of the Church of England during this period. He was not alone in believing that the Reformation needed completion, and there were others, as we have seen, who sought to purge the Church of what they considered to be the last and greatest error of all: the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity. Whiston was convinced that until this corruption were purged, the Reformation was incomplete.[27] If Scripture alone was to be the rule of faith (in a canon augmented by *The Apostolic Constitutions*), then creeds, councils and convocations were of little interest to the biblical Christian. Indeed in Whiston's view general councils had proved themselves 'the grand engine of the Devil'.[28]

Despite his obvious integrity, learning and the suffering that the synthesis of these two qualities was to bring him, Whiston had little impact upon the theological debates of his day, and his views were sufficiently outré to be self-marginalizing. He was, however, an important straw in the wind. Whiston's concerns, and his desire to return to 'Primitive Christianity', were shared by others. The debates of the 1690s had been prematurely closed, and the

[26] Whiston's own account of his removal is given at I, pp. cxxxvii ff.
[27] Whiston, I, p. xxxi.
[28] Whiston, Appendix, IV, p. 20.

doctrine of the Trinity, its truth, status and meaning, remained a contentious issue on the theological agenda. Among Whiston's circle of close friends was the Rector of St James', Piccadilly, Samuel Clarke. His writing was to prove far more dangerous to the unstable and uneasy truce reached by the end of the previous decade, as we shall now see.[29]

Arius redivivus

Samuel Clarke was one of the leading figures of his age. A prodigious classical scholar in his youth, he had become keenly interested in 'the new science' while at Cambridge. Friendship with Newton followed, and a very promising career in the established Church beckoned. Clarke was highly regarded as a theologian and, after Locke's death, was acclaimed as the leading metaphysician in England. His two sets of Boyle Lectures, delivered in 1704 and 1705, were hailed as a masterly synthesis of theology and science, an apologetic tour de force. To this day his exchanges with the German philosopher Leibniz are read by students of philosophy. In 1709 he became Rector of the prestigious living of St James', Piccadilly. His three predecessors were all translated to bishoprics, and two, Tenison and Wake, became Archbishops of Canterbury. Clarke was undoubtedly in line for a mitre himself and may well have become yet another successor to St Augustine if his reflections on the doctrine of the Trinity had not destroyed his chances completely.[30]

In 1712, after several years researching texts and studying the controversies of the 1690s, Clarke published *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*. The work was a masterpiece of method, and the title gives a clear indication of intention: to discover and outline the

[29] A very sympathetic study of Whiston can be found in Maurice Wiles, *Archetypical Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), see pp. 93–110 for Whiston's friendship with Newton and Clarke.

[30] I have used throughout Samuel Clarke, *The Works of Samuel Clarke* (4 vols.; London: 1738). The Clarke–Leibniz exchange can be found in volume 4. The accolade of 'leading metaphysician' is given in the *DNB*. For biographical details I have used J. P. Ferguson, *An Eighteenth Century Heretic: Dr. Samuel Clarke* (Kineton: The Roundwood Press, 1976). See Thomas Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), for a very sympathetic study of Clarke. The relationship between Clarke and Newton is discussed in chapter 4.

Scripture doctrine of the Trinity. The 'Introduction' to the book reaffirmed many of the commonplaces we have discovered elsewhere: from the fourth century onwards philosophical speculation and 'metaphysical uncertainties' have been intruded into the Christian religion; this process of corruption reached its nadir in the writings of the scholastics; the Reformation represented a concerted attempt to recover the true meaning of the Scriptures and sought to remove the unwarranted accretions of the previous millennium; whatever Christ taught and whatever the apostles preached, that and that alone is to be accepted as the rule of faith; the Bible alone is the rule of faith for the Protestant, and there can be no appeal to tradition or authority. Clarke applies this last maxim with rigour: we should not 'read' Scripture through the creeds, but rather 'read' the creeds through Scripture. This refocusing is necessary because words shift their meaning and thus the creeds need reinterpretation to make them reflect the teaching of Scripture. (That such a shift of meaning might occur in regard to the Scriptures too was unthinkable to Clarke and most of his contemporaries. In an age in which biblical criticism was embryonic, the assumption that the Scriptures were literally inspired and thus preserved from any error was still quite tenable.) The good Protestant could go to his Bible and find there the fullness of the teaching of Jesus against which all subsequent developments could be judged.[31]

Clarke also emphasized the importance of the use of reason in interpreting the Scriptures. One could only accept as part of the deposit of revelation what one was reasonably convinced was actually part of it. If one could not accept that a putative article of faith was to be found in the Scriptures then one ought not to accept it. Obedience to an external authority alone, however prestigious, could not take the place of the probative force of reason. Quotes from Fathers and councils could be used for illustration, they should not be appealed to as means of settling the interpretation of a disputed text or point. One simply has to see for oneself that an article of faith is indeed such: it is 'the Duty, and in the Power, of every particular Christian [with] Helps and assistances . . . to understand for himself, whatever is necessary for his own

[31] *The Scripture Doctrine* is found in volume 4 of *The Works*. For the corruption of the original deposit, see p. iv. For questions about interpretation, see pp. x–xii.

salvation'. Clarke reminded his readers of Chillingworth and Tillotson's emphasis on the essential part played by reason.[32]

Clarke rejected the traditional 'scholastic' language used of the Trinity, terms such as 'nature', 'essence', 'substance', 'subsistence'. He retained only language that he labelled 'properly theological'. Such proper language, he believed, referred to the distinct powers and offices of each of the three persons, and their respective honour. The true Scripture doctrine, according to Clarke, lay between the extremes of tritheism and Socinianism, and Clarke concluded by challenging his critics to show where he is wrong from Scripture alone.[33]

Clarke's methodology and erudition were impressive. The book was comprised of three sections: 1, 251 texts gleaned from the New Testament relating to the Trinity (Part I); 55 propositions based on these texts (Part II); and principle passages of the Prayer Book relating to the Trinity (Part III). To provide a focus for our examination I will focus attention on the parts of this work that deal with 'person' and its usage, as this is the main issue discussed by our previous authors.

Part I of *The Scripture Doctrine* was divided into four sections: those that spoke of God the Father, those that spoke of God the Son, those that spoke of the Holy Spirit of God, and finally those which spoke of all three. From the outset the subheadings of each investigation betrayed the trajectory along which Clarke had travelled in his investigation. Those concerning the Father bear titles that stress his pre-eminence and singular claim to be styled 'supreme God'. Those concerning the Son open with passages where he is 'supposedly' called God. Those concerning the Holy Spirit stress passages that show the Spirit's subordination to Father and Son.[34]

The treatment of the 1, 251 texts is thorough but atomistic; phrases and sentences are cited with little regard for their context. Whilst this sort of approach was characteristic of the treatment of Scripture in general, the degree of atomism is a reflection of the influence of the 'new science', an influence found in the

[32] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. viii. For Tillotson, Chillingworth and Stillingfleet, see pp. v–vi.

[33] See Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, pp. xii–xiii.

[34] See Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, 'The Contents' pages.

philosophical thought of Hobbes and Locke. Throughout this textual examination, and in subsequent exchanges, Clarke insisted that the word 'person' signifies, and is equivalent to, 'an intelligent agent'. Clarke sticks to the intentions declared in his 'Introduction' of examining the offices and powers of each person of the Trinity. He acknowledged that each is a 'person' and that each is pre-existent to the universe. He based himself solely on the economic Trinity presented in the Scriptures and excluded any speculation about the inner life of the Godhead. From this purely economic examination he derived highly contentious propositions. Clarke concludes his perusal of the 1, 251 texts by claiming that 'from all these Passages, it appears beyond Contradiction, that the Words "God" and "the Father", not "God" and "the Three Persons" are always used in Scripture as synonymous Terms'.[35]

Clarke proceeded to develop the implications of such a claim in 55 propositions, all of which are cross-referenced back to the texts themselves. The substance of Clarke's thesis, and the preconceptions underlying it, are contained in his first proposition.[36]

> Proposition I. There is One Supreme Cause and Original of Things; One simple, uncompounded, undivided, intelligent Agent, or Person; who is the Alone Author of all Being, and the Fountain of all Power . . . For *Intelligent Agent*, is the proper and adequate Definition of the Word, *Person*; nor can it otherwise be understood with any distinct Sense or meaning at all.[37]

Having attempted to demonstrate in his Boyle lectures the rationality of belief in God, Clarke was keen to stress that this God was not the remote entity of recent deist speculation but rather the 'personal' God of Christian faith. The influence of Locke in the definition of 'person' in terms of 'intelligent *agent*' is apparent, and

[35] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 121. It is interesting to note that Karl Rahner agrees with Clarke's exegesis although not with the theological conclusions to be drawn; see '*Theos* in the New Testament', in Karl Rahner *Theological Investigations* (tr. Kevin Smyth; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), I.

[36] I have concentrated on the propositions as more useful to our investigation than the textual examination itself. If one wants to see examples of Clarke's discussion of person and its proper application to the Godhead then the texts examined on pp. 1, 4, 55, 104, 117 should be of help. Clarke, as one would expect, rejects the Johannine Comma, p. 121.

[37] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 122.

the prevalent discounting of any other than univocal usage of language is also clear in the qualificatory 'distinct', which effectively rules out any other definition. However, to assume then that this God could only be one 'person' was a logical shuffle that many of Clarke's contemporaries were not to allow.

The restriction of trinitarian consideration to the economic sphere alone is starkly asserted in the fourth proposition:

> Proposition IV. What the proper Metaphysical Nature, Essence, or Substance of any of these divine Persons is, the scripture has no where all declared; but describes and distinguishes them always, by their PERSONAL Characters, Offices, Powers and Attributes . . . All Reasonings therefore, (beyond what is strictly demonstrable by the most evident and undeniable Light of Nature,) deduced from their supposed metaphysical Nature, Essence or Substance, instead of their PERSONAL Characters, Offices, Powers and Attributes delivered in scripture; are uncertain and at best probable Hypotheses.[38]

The desire to rid Christian reflection of what was considered the illegitimate importation of alien philosophical categories is manifest. For Clarke, and others like him, true Protestantism should speak only the language of the Scriptures. But, as we shall see, some of Clarke's critics were to accuse him of infidelity to his own requirements in this regard. Moreover, the extra-scriptural language used to express the doctrine of the Trinity is not simply rejected as unscriptural, it was also deemed by Clarke to be incomprehensible:

> Proposition XVIII. The Schoolmen, (who, as an excellent writer of our Church [Tillotson] expresses it, wrought great parts of their Divinity out of their own Brains, as Spiders do Cobwebs out of their own Bowels; starting a thousand Subtilties --- which we may reasonably presume that they who talk of them, did themselves never thoroughly understand;) made This Matter also, as they did most Others, utterly unintelligible.[39]

[38] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, pp. 122-3.
[39] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 147.

The middle ground in religion as in politics is much sought-after territory, and Clarke wished to depict his understanding as the *via media* between two extremes. He attempted to highlight the hidden dangers of Sabellianism, which he feared were lurking in some of the standard accounts of the Trinity:

> Proposition XXIII. They who are not careful to maintain these personal Characters and Distinctions, but, while they are solicitous, (on the one hand) to avoid the Errors of the Arians, affirm (in the contrary extreme) the Son and Holy Spirit to be (individually with the Father) the self-existent Being: These seeming in Words to magnify the Name of the Son and Holy Spirit, in reality take away their very Existence; and so fall unawares into Sabellianism (which is the same with Socinianism).[40]

Exegesis that argued that the entire Trinity should be implicitly understood as the referent of the word 'God' in Scripture was wholly unacceptable to Clarke. The word was singular and as such referred to a single 'person':

> Proposition XXXIII. The Word, God, in Scripture, never signifies a complex Notion of more Persons (or Intelligent Agents) [*sic*] than One; but always means One Person only, viz. Either the Person of the Father singly, or the Person of the Son singly.[41]

Any honour due Christ is only on the basis of his role in the economy of salvation. He is to be reverenced and worshipped because of his mediatorial position:

> Proposition L. He [Christ] is described in scripture as invested with distinct Worship in his Own Person [. . .] as the Alone Mediator between God and men.[42]
>
> Proposition LI. This Honour [. . . is] not upon Account of his metaphysical Essence or Substance, and abstract Attributes; but of his Actions and Attributes relative to Us; his Condescension . . . his Redeeming, and Interceding for, us.[43]

[40] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 149.
[41] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 155.
[42] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 187.
[43] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 189.

The last proposition is virtually a slogan for his entire position:

> Proposition IV. God in Scripture-language, does not signify the Trinity, but the First Person of the Trinity.[44]

If this were true then a whole tradition of exegesis had been successfully undermined, and the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was scripturally based would be no longer tenable.

Before we proceed to examine some of the critical contemporary responses to *The Scripture Doctrine*, we could benefit from pausing to take stock of Clarke's position in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. It should be noted that while this study has focused on Clarke's understanding of the usage of the word 'person' in this context, many other issues are, and were, raised in response.[45]

The delineation, which Clarke thought 'a proper and adequate definition', of 'person' as 'intelligent agent' reveals a similar shift in understanding of the word as we found epitomized, if not originating, in Locke's reflections. A 'person' is no longer seen primarily as an intelligent *substance* but as an intelligent *agent*. Such a conception was more dynamic, and may well reflect the growing importance of motion as one of the key concepts in physics. Given such an understanding, Clarke clearly believed that trying to hold to the traditional formula of three persons and one God verged on the unintelligible: if three persons are conceived as three intelligent agents they cannot be the one intelligent agent that he believed the Scriptures depicted as the supreme God. By insisting that his definition is sufficient Clarke insisted upon a univocity of use, which precluded any analogical use of 'person' in speaking of the Trinity. (This assumption of univocity provided a focus for the attack of several opponents.) There is no awareness, as there is in Augustine, that 'person' is the least worst option, the best stab at language in

[44] Clarke, *The Scripture Doctrine*, p. 191.

[45] There are several studies of Clarke's theological position. That of Pfizchmaier focuses on *The Scripture Doctrine*, which claims that Clarke was not so much Arian as Eusebian — a judgement made by some of Clarke's contemporaries such as the Jesuit Hawarden, the essential difference being that Eusebius and Clarke did not believe the Arian claim that 'there was a time when He (Christ) was not'. Clarke seems to have believed that the Son existed from all eternity but subordinately. There are several points that would repay careful study: the influence of Newton and the 'new physics'; questions surrounding biblical inspiration and interpretation; Clarke's departure from previous Anglican understandings of the nature of Protestantism, especially in regard to the part played by Creeds and Fathers, to cite but three.

an area in which we are all at sea. Instead of finding a word that it is just about possible to use of the 'three' revealed in the Scriptures, Clarke proceeds from a strict definition of 'person' to considerations of its proper application to the Deity. Clarke did not think, as some had done before him, that some of the three cannot be referred to as persons, neither did he degrade them to mere manifestations, nor did he reduce the Son and Spirit to creaturehood. It is the claim that the three persons share equally in the divine nature that he found totally unacceptable. The problem had become not whether there are three persons in the Godhead, but what these three persons are, and how they relate to each other. Clarke's solution is a subordinationist schema, in which the supreme God is the Father alone. Clarke's stress on the monarchy of the Father leads to the subordination and inequality of the Son and Spirit. And in doing so, despite his initial disclaimers, Clarke had drawn conclusions about the immanent Trinity.

Equally Unscriptural

It continues to be a matter of conjecture whether Clarke was naïvely innocent in putting forward his reflections, courageously fighting for truth, or fatally overawed by his own ability. What is certain is that a new storm broke during which his career was swept away. One of his first opponents, the veteran polemicist and vilifier of Locke, John Edwards, was in no doubt that Clarke's writings were part and parcel of an older debate. He fulminated that 'It is now about Twenty Years since the Disputes concerning the Trinity were started among us, occasioned by some Foreign and English Socinians, who call'd themselves Unitarians . . . Mr. Whiston and Dr. Clarke, have reviv'd those Heretical Opinions.' With his usual charity Edwards rubbished Clarke's scholarship, claiming that his patristic quotes were stolen from the works of Bull and Petavius. Clarke was little worried by such a spiteful attack, but other adversaries were to be far more subtle, and a flood of criticism flowed from their pens.[46]

[46] John Edwards, *Some Animadversions on Dr. Clark's* [sic] *Scripture Doctrine, (As he stiles it) of the Trinity* (London: 1712), p. 5, and for allegations of theft, see p. 41. Clarke replied to some of these critics, who replied in their turn. The sheer volume of the flow of correspondence precludes a blow by blow account of it, which would be tedious in any case. My sifting of these pieces has been done so that only the 'wheat' relevant to this study is left.

Although Clarke was attacked on several fronts, what follows focuses on those who took issue with him for his understanding of the word 'person'. Most questioned Clarke's restriction of the word to a univocal use. Edward Wells (1667–1727), Rector of Cotesbach, Leicestershire, concentrated his fire on Clarke's 'Introduction', chiding him for his neglect of the Old Testament, mistaken understanding of the way in which Scripture functioned as a rule of faith, and denial of the authority of the Fathers. He could not accept Clarke's claim that the statement 'there are in the Godhead Three Persons of the Same Individual Essence' was a contradiction, or above understanding. He insisted that Clarke was mistaken about the nature of theological language, and wrong to deny its analogical nature: 'neither the word *Individual*, not yet the word *Person*, when applied to the Three in the Deity, is to be taken in the Same Sense, as when applied to Created Intelligent Beings'.[47]

These same concerns were echoed in an anonymous pamphlet written by Francis Gastrell, by now Bishop of Chester, and a veteran of the controversies of the 1690s: 'Intelligent Being and Person are all along used by him as synonymous terms; so that according to his scheme, the three *divine Persons* must be *three different Beings*, individually distinct from each other; and . . . must be of a different *Nature* too'.[48] Having attacked his synonymous use of 'person' and 'intelligent being', Gastrell then protested against Clarke's equivocal use of the word 'God' in saying that the Son and Spirit may be called 'God' in some sense. In this he parts company both from the Socinians, who thought 'God' applicable only to the Father, and from the orthodox who apply the word unequivocally to Father, Son and Spirit. The modern Arian equivocated applying 'God' in one way to the Father and in another to the Son and Spirit.[49] Finally, Gastrell punctured Clarke's rhetoric about the use of scriptural language. While he may have avoided scholastic jargon, Gastrell argued that Clarke's hypotheses were couched in 'intirely Philosophical' language, and 'equally unscriptural'.[50]

[47] For Wells' original strictures, see Edward Wells, *Remarks on Dr. Clarke's Introduction to His Scripture Doctrin* [sic] *of the Trinity* (Oxford: 1713). For his subsequent reply to Clarke, see *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Clarke. In Answer to his Letter to Dr. Wells*, (Oxford: 1713).

[48] [Francis Gastrell], *Remarks upon Dr. Clark's* [*sic*] *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Clements, 1714), pp. 6–7.

[49] See Gastrell, *Remarks*, pp. 125–6.

[50] Gastrell, *Remarks*, pp. 129, 136.

Further pamphlets resonated with the concerns of Wells and Gastrell. Stephen Nye argued that Clarke was not so much an Arian as a tritheist. He accused Clarke of believing in three divine beings and of replacing the divine monarchy with an aristocracy of gods. The root of the problem lay in Clarke's insistence that person, mind and intelligent being were all equivalent terms.[51] Writing in 1718, Thomas Bennett, Vicar of St Giles, Cripplegate, agreed with Nye's diagnosis and denied that the word 'person' admitted only of univocal application. When applied to the Son and Spirit it 'does not signify a distinct intelligent Being . . . tho' we can't exactly define what a Divine *Person* is, yet we can say what 'tis not. And consequently the three Persons of the Godhead are not three Persons in the same Sense, in which three Men are three Persons.' The manner of the distinction of the persons of the Trinity is incomprehensible, but then 'we know so little of the substance of anything', adds Bennett with a Lockean twist, that we have no adequate idea of God and yet still believe in him, and are right to do so as Clarke himself claimed in his Boylean lectures. Part of Clarke's problem lies in his definition of 'person'. In Proposition 1, for example, Bennett chides Clarke that 'you manifestly make, as you do elsewhere, intelligent Being and Person to be synonymous and convertible Terms'. In common speech Bennett concedes this is so; it is even possible to speak of 'the supreme cause' in this sense, but there is another sense in which the supreme cause is three persons.[52]

One of Clarke's most acute critics was a country clergyman, Robert Mayo, who denied that Clarke's conclusions were the correct ones to reach from reading Scripture. He believed that Clarke made a number of unwarranted leaps in his hermeneutic. He had conflated the immanent and economic Trinity:

> We are to distinguish between the Trinity of Persons in the Divine Nature, and the Manifestation of the Trinity in the Christian Oeconomy or Dispensation; and the latter is depending upon the former. The Trinity of persons is natural and necessary to the Divine Being . . . but the manifestation of the

[51] Stephen Nye, *The Explication of the Articles of the Divine Unity, the Trinity, and Incarnation* (London: 1715), pp. 10, 37, 153.

[52] Thomas Bennett, *A Discourse on the Everblessed Trinity in Unity, with an Examination of Dr. Clarke's Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: 1718), p. 231.

> Trinity in the Christian Dispensation, is arbitrary of his own Free-will.[53]

Clarke's reply to Mayo was a clear statement of his position.

> By the Word God, when used absolutely, I mean that supreme intelligent Agent which governs all things; and the Words Intelligent Agent are the definition a Person . . . Your conclusion therefore, (if meant literally) one God IN Persons three, is a Language of which I understand not the terms. One Intelligent Agent in Three intelligent agents, or three intelligent Agents in one intelligent Agent, are English words, but have no English signification.[54]

In reply Mayo explored the nature of the analogical language used when speaking of three persons in one God. Echoing Augustine, he claimed that the distinction of the three found in Scripture admitted of no better distinction than 'personality'. This is a remote analogy based on the way in which distinction is made in human creatures. The schools had spoken of 'three modes subsisting', using the language not to divide but to distinguish. A mode is a permanent unchangeable property whereby one person is distinguished from another. If we are to read the Scriptures correctly, we have to keep in mind that it speaks in two ways: of one God *essentially* and of the three *personally*.[55]

Clarke's reply crudely dismissed such scholastic language, deriding such thought as beyond his capacity, 'as different from Reasoning in any other Science, as a sixth sense in the Body would be different from the Five we now have'.[56] Clarke's reply highlighted the differences between him and his opponents, and revealed a fundamental disparity in the very basic models of God at work in the debate: 'I have no other Notion of God, but his being Supreme Governor of the Universe, and that He derived this Power from none, but had it eternally of Himself, being Self-existent. This is the Notion of God by the Light of

[53] [R. Mayo], *A Plain Scripture-Argument against Dr. Clark's [sic] Doctrine Concerning the Ever Blessed Trinity* (London: 1715).

[54] Mayo, p. 8. Mayo reproduces Clarke's replies in his text.

[55] Mayo, p. 11; see p. 10.

[56] Mayo, p. 27.

Nature.'[57] This is very much the Newtonian God. Such an understanding could not but lead to a monarchical, unitary deity. The same imaginative difficulty beset this model, originating in the 'new science', as beset Hobbes' absolute monarchy in the political sphere: plurality at the apex of either model threatened to destroy it. But this was by no means the only understanding of God on offer and, as Mayo pointed out, some were logically prior to that of Supreme Governor – God was God before there was any universe to govern. In retrospect perhaps it is not Clarke's difficulties with the Trinity that stand out, but the *ease* with which he felt he could talk about God. This God, ironically, seems far from the loving creator, redeemer and sanctifier revealed in the Scriptures and much more like the 'classical' barely personal, remote, transcendent, sovereign deity satirized by modern 'process theology'.[58]

No Reasoning Can Make it Plainer

Clarke's career was destroyed by an attack of the Lower House of Convocation in 1714. The clergy, concerned that Clarke's book perverted the meaning of the Articles and Liturgy, urged the bishops to action in early June. The bishops requested an *Extract* of Clarke's work, upon which he himself was to comment. Clarke provided a spirited reply to this *Extract* of the Lower House at the end of June, which took issue with their accusations. At the beginning of July, however, Clarke presented a much briefer *Paper* to the bishops. In it he seemed to cave in to pressure. He also gave two assurances: that he would not preach on the Trinity nor write on the subject any more, which seemed to give the *Paper* the flavour of a recantation. The nature of his comment has remained a matter of some speculation. To some like Whiston it seemed as if their champion had betrayed them. The Lower House were unconvinced but as the bishops were content to lay the matter to rest they could only register their unhappiness that Clarke had got off so lightly. Wake, the Archbishop of Canterbury, shielded Clarke from further persecution and the matter was dropped. But

[57] Mayo, p. 27.

[58] See Mayo, p. 29. See William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996) pp. 177–8.

Clarke's career was finished. The same Wake was adamant, along with Gibson, the Bishop of London and others, that Clarke should never join them on the bench. A few years later they blocked his elevation for ever.[59]

It would be a great mistake to think that Clarke wanted for defenders. John Jackson, a convert to Clarke's views on the Trinity, using the pseudonym *Philalethes*, commended him for his stand against the relics of Popery and his defence of the principle of private interpretation.[60] In his own name, Jackson praised Clarke's methodology and his synthesis of Scripture and reason. Jackson regarded *both* sides of the battles of the 1690s, epitomized by Sherlock and South, as wrong. Clarke had opened his eyes: 'Three Persons, that is Three Intelligent Agents, in the same individual, identical Substance; is so self-evident a Contradiction, that I think no Reasoning can make it plainer than Intuition'.[61]

A number had been scandalized by what they took to be un-Christian persecution. An anonymous diatribe emerged from the pen of the veteran theologian Daniel Whitby. We know from his posthumous memoirs that his faith in trinitarian orthodoxy had been shattered by reading Clarke, and that he became a covert Arian.[62] His book *A Disuasive from Enquiry* is a biting, ironic letter to an interlocutor determined to investigate the doctrine of the Trinity. This task is fraught with difficulties, warned Whitby, demanding the reading of a large number of books. The doctrine has little practical value, and the Fathers are a labyrinth in which the unwary get lost for ever. In regard to the use of the word 'person' in the context of the Trinity, Whitby gave this advice to the young would-be enquirer: 'Let me advise you not nicely and curiously to enquire into the proper import of the Word *Person*; the

[59] A contemporary, and favourable, account of Clarke's trials can be found in [John Lawrence], *An Apology for Dr. Clarke* (London: 1714). For an in-depth account of the convocation and the 'recantation', see Ferguson, chapter 7. For Wake's part in the affair, see Norman Sykes, *William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1657–1737* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), esp. pp. 155–9. Voltaire's oft-quoted story about Gibson's response to Queen Anne's desire to elevate Clarke — 'Mr. Clarke is the wisest and most honourable man in the Kingdom. He lacks only one thing . . . He is not a Christian' — can be found in Placher, p. 164.

[60] Philalethes, *Reflections upon the Present Controversie Concerning the Holy Trinity wherein Are Set Forth the Inconveniencies of some Vulgar Explications* (London: 1714).

[61] [John Jackson], *Three Letters to Dr. Clarke from a Clergyman of the Church of England* (London: 1714), p. 31.

[62] See the entry in the *DNB*.

greatest men, even Bishop Stillingfleet, seem to have failed in that attempt . . . the word Person when applied to God, is used in a Sense infinitely different from what it means, when used of Men.'[63] Given this infinite disparity of use, argues Whitby, how could we know whether or not a statement contains a contradiction? Much of the debate boils down to the question: What is a person? Is it a mode, a relation as the 'systematical' divines prefer? Or is it a distinct intelligent existence as advanced by Clarke? If one uses reason to settle such questions then one must answer further questions, and new problems arise.[64]

Finally, Whitby warns if one reaches 'unacceptable' answers, one risks the prospect of losing one's living if not one's life. All in all the search is not worth the candle, and subsequent lack of interest in the Trinity was to be in part dictated by prudential desire to avoid the fate of Clarke and Whiston. Whitby was not alone; Francis Hare, later Bishop of Chichester, gave similar advice to his young student, remarking cynically that it seemed as if 'Orthodoxy atones for all vices and heresy extinguishes all virtue'. Benjamin Hoadly, afterwards to become Bishop of Bangor, wrote at least two satires attacking those who would make the formularies of the Church of England more infallible than those of the Church of Rome. (Hoadly was to find himself under suspicion for his own orthodoxy in regard to the Trinity by William Law among others.) To the distaste for speculation was added the distaste of persecution, especially as the niceties in hand seemed to many of a latitudinarian disposition to be unimportant for the virtuous life of religion, which was to them, as Clarke had written, 'the end and purpose of religion'.[65]

Alterum Athanasium

If Clarke was perceived as the 'new Arius', it was Daniel Waterland who was acclaimed as 'another Athanasius'. Waterland, born in 1683, became a scholar at Magdalene College, Cambridge, at

[63] [Daniel Whitby], *A Dissuasive from Enquiring into the Doctrine of the Trinity: or, the Difficulties and Discouragement which Attend the Study of that Doctrine*, (London: 1714) p. 24.

[64] Whitby, pp. 29–31.

[65] Whitby, see pp. 4, 5, 8, 12, 17, 22. For Law's suspicions, see William Law, *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor* (London: 1717), p. 67.

sixteen, and remained there for the rest of his life. His mastership of the college lasted from 1713 until his death in 1740. In 1717 he became Regius Professor of Divinity at the university. His importance in these new trinitarian controversies may be gauged by the fact that of his ten volumes of collected works, five contain material exclusively concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity and attendant controversies.[66]

Such an output occurred almost by accident. Apart from his BD thesis in 1714, which disputed the lawfulness of Arian subscription, a subject he was to return to ten years later, Waterland published nothing on the controversies until 1719.[67] His involvement even then was with reluctance. He had answered privately some queries sent to him by John Jackson, Clarke's supporter. Finding that Jackson had published these together with his replies, Waterland felt compelled to enter the fray. The Victorian church historian Van Mildert claimed that 'from the time that Waterland took the field, the reputation and authority of Dr. Clarke perceptibly declined'. What is certain is that Waterland's mind was as agile and learned as Clarke's. He proved a formidable opponent seeing himself as the defender of Bull, the great defender of Nicene orthodoxy in the previous century. But Waterland's concern extended beyond the narrowly scholarly, and for the next twenty years he engaged in battle against the 'new Arians' wherever he found them.[68]

A Vindication of Christ's Divinity, published in 1719, exhibits most of the arguments and positions of Waterland's subsequent writings. The *Vindication* made public the answers given in response to 31 'Queries' sent by Jackson. Waterland was keenly aware of the nuances of theological language and this was reflected in all

[66] Throughout the references are to the van Mildert edition, *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland* (ed. William van Mildert; 10 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1823). This collection is itself an indication of the esteem with which Waterland was held even after his death. He was considered by many to be one of the finest ornaments of the eighteenth-century Church of England. The first volume opens with a glowing appreciation of Waterland by van Mildert. For the account of the accolade with which this section begins, see vol. 1, p. 312, note a.

[67] Clarke's work occasioned a great debate about the exact meaning of the Thirty-Nine Articles to which all clergy in the established Church had to 'subscribe' before receiving their benefices, and the liberty of interpretation allowed to those who so subscribed. Some of Clarke's opponents accused him of prevarication in this regard. See Ferguson, pp. 72, 73 and *passim*.

[68] Waterland, I, p. 57.

his writings.[69] Jackson's second 'Query' concerned the meaning of the word 'God'. Hoping to create the possibility of a Clarkean equivocation in the use of the word, Jackson asked 'whether the word (God) in Scripture can reasonably be supposed to carry an ambiguous meaning, or to be used in a different sense, when applied to the Father and the Son, in the same scripture, and even in the same verse?' Waterland deftly turned the argument against his opponent. The important distinction to bear in mind when using the word 'God' is not some alleged 'supreme/subordinate' distinction, but rather one between proper and improper usage. Clarke's restriction of the notion of God to dominion is too narrow: 'God' means far more than that. Further, priority in the Godhead does not imply, as Clarke assumes, subordination and inferiority. Waterland dealt with many of Clarke's claims in this way, by simply demanding that arguments be given for assertions made.[70]

The response to Jackson's 22nd 'Query' provides the substance of Waterland's critique of Clarke's usage of 'person': 'Whether his (the Doctor's) whole performance, whenever he differs from us, be any thing more than a repetition of this assertion, that being and person are the same, or that there is no medium between Tritheism and Sabellianism? Which is removing the cause from Scripture to natural reason, not very consistently with the title of his book.'[71] This is Waterland's position in a nutshell. He disputed Clarke's identification of 'being' and 'person'. He denied that the language of 'three coequal persons' drove one on to the rocks of tritheism or Sabellianism. Furthermore, despite his claims, Clarke's work is as 'metaphysical' as those he derides. It is not the fact of the Son's 'subordination' by virtue of generation that Waterland disputes, but the consequences that Clarke derives from it. The Son is indeed 'begotten' of the Father, but this does not mean that he is thereby inferior. Clarke supposes rather than proves his point.

Waterland pushed further. Clarke does not prove that 'being' and 'person' are interchangeable terms. 'Being' can have two meanings, as Waterland pointed out in his response to Jackson's

[69] Waterland, I.
[70] Waterland, I, p. 34; for Waterland's reply, see pp. 34–51.
[71] Waterland, I, p. 231.

ninth 'Query': being as 'existence' and being as 'a separate entity', a being.[72] While it is true that *x* number of *separate* persons are indeed *x* number of intelligent beings, that does not exclude *united* persons from being one being. Waterland demands that those who object that this is not possible prove their case rather than assert it. The Scriptures reveal three persons but deny that there are three gods. The Fathers denied the equation of 'person' and 'being'. Waterland thinks it is ironic that it is Clarke and his sympathizers who are in fact the polytheists: their language leads them to posit three Gods, a greater, a lesser and a least.[73]

The attack continued in the consideration of Jackson's tenth 'Query'. Given his delineation of God in terms of 'dominion', Clarke had demanded to know why, if there are three divine persons each with dominion, there is one God not three. Clarke saw the only way of preserving the reality of the persons and avoiding tritheism as a subordinationism in which only one person, the Father, is God in the absolute sense. Waterland countered by arguing that, if one is speaking of God *essentially*, there is a sense in which *none* of the persons is God *simpliciter*. He rejected Clarke's claim that the Father is God in some exclusive sense. When reading the Scriptures and doing theology, the grammatical structure of a phrase needs to be examined so that we can see if we are referring to God essentially or personally. Speaking *personally* it is legitimate to say that one person is God because that one person is a divine hypostasis and as such 'possesses deity'. We can equally say that God is three persons because then we speak of the divine *essentially*. Each divine person is an individual intelligent agent but subsists in one substance. When considering God *essentially*, as that one substance, we speak as if there is but one intelligent agent. Waterland urged reverence for the mysteries under consideration: 'you seem to consider every thing under the notion of extension, and sensible images. A reverential silence may well become us in so awful a subject. In which imagination has nothing to do.' We cannot 'picture' the Trinity readily in our thought or language as the very subject matter defies easy speech. In all this Waterland believed he had the witness of fourteen centuries of church history on his side, including the Reformers themselves,

[72] Waterland, I, pp. 119–22.
[73] Waterland, I, pp. 231–42.

and all who thought that 'religion is not a thing to be coined and recoined every month'.[74]

We Have No Third Way

Over the winter of the same year Waterland delivered his 'Lady Moyer's Sermons'. These were explicitly intended as a supplement to the *Vindication*. The 'Preface' set out some general points: the sermons were didactic rather than polemical; it was a priori odd that the Church could have been deceived for so long about such an essential matter; the orthodox reading of the Scriptures was the most probable. Part of his aim in the sermons was to answer some recent defences of Clarke's position. One such pamphlet alleged that to say that a divine person is an intelligent agent subsisting in one substance, and to say that this substance itself can be seen as an intelligent agent, brings us to the absurdity that three persons are one person. To this Waterland countered that firstly, 'person' and 'intelligent agent' are not reciprocal terms, and secondly, that problems are bound to arise in this area because there is no fixed principle of individuation applicable to human and divine persons alike.[75]

The sermons are well-crafted pieces aiming to persuade the listener of the truth of Christ's divinity. Sermon IV touched most explicitly on the language of 'person' at work in trinitarian doctrine. Waterland asserts the fundamentally analogical nature of theological language. The language of 'person' is no exception. In a refreshingly candid section of the sermon he admits that 'Our ideas of *persons* are plainly taken from our conceptions of *human* persons, and from them transferred to other subjects, though they do not strictly answer in every circumstance. Properly speaking, *he* and *him* are no more applicable to a *divine* Person than *she* or *her*: but we have no *third* way of denoting a person; and so of the two we choose the best, and custom familiarizes it to us.'[76] Herein lies the general problem of any references to God in personal language. We reject speaking of 'it' or 'that' as unworthy, we use 'he'

[74] Waterland, I, pp. 250, 335; see Question XXIII, pp. 245–8. For the value of tradition, see Question XXIX, p. 335.

[75] The Lady Moyer's Sermons are to be found in volume 2 of the *Works*. See p. xxviii.

[76] Waterland, II, pp. 83–4.

and 'him' to stress the personal attributes of God, but we could legitimately, on occasions, speak of 'they' and 'them'. While Clarke is correct to claim that the majority of references of 'God' in the Scriptures are to the Father, nevertheless in theological language 'God' can refer to one person or three.[77]

Waterland clarified his position further in the following year in *An Answer to Dr. Whithy's Reply*. Whitby's basic mistake, in Waterland's eyes, was that he made 'essence' and 'person' equivalent terms. This, he argued, as in the case of Clarke, is merely a supposition. The unity of the divine persons may be mysterious, indeed as Bull admitted that there was no human resemblance for περιχωρεσις, but this does not mean that such a union is impossible. Whitby has misrepresented Waterland by claiming that he regards the divine persons as mere modes. The modes rather distinguish the divine persons: 'modes of existing, was not designed to denote the persons themselves, but their distinguishing characters'. Whitby has similarly misquoted and misrepresented South who, in his *Animadversions*, had categorically denied that 'the three persons are only three modes of the Deity'.[78]

The fundamental problem in Whitby's identification of 'essence' and 'person', according to Waterland, lies in the fact that, for all his talk of 'same numerical essence', no certain principle of individuation can be fixed: 'you know not precisely what it is that makes one being, or one essence, or one substance'. This ignorance, once acknowledged, entails that we cannot exclude different persons sharing the same essence, as is the case with the Trinity. Whitby *supposes* that one intellectual essence equals one person, he cannot prove that three real, divine persons are not one numerical essence.[79]

This denial of exact identification of 'person' and 'essence' may be found in other parts of Waterland's trinitarian writings. In a supplement to *The Case of Arian Subscription Considered*, a reworking of his BD thesis which appeared in 1721, Waterland argued that although an intelligent agent can be a person, nevertheless 'intelligent agent' and 'person' are not interchangeable terms.[80] *An*

[77] Waterland, II, p. 85.

[78] Waterland, II, *An Answer to Dr. Whitby's Reply*, pp. 213–14; and see pp. 208, 211.

[79] Waterland, II, p. 215; see pp. 216, 276.

[80] Waterland, *A Supplement to the Case of Arian Subscription Considered* in *Works*, II, p. 364. *The Case of Arian Subscription Considered* is in the same volume.

Answer to Some Queries printed at Exon, relating to the Arian Controversy proceeded in similar vein. Although the word 'God' may sometimes refer to one person, it does not always do so. Three distinct persons does not imply three distinct beings, as 'intelligent being' and 'person' are not reciprocal terms. God is three united persons in one intelligent being, the persons are real and distinct but so united as to be only one being. Opponents of the doctrine of the Trinity have not proved their case, preferring simply to assume the logical identity of 'person' and 'intelligent being'.[81]

Another reply to John Jackson, the *Vindication of Christ's Divinity*, covered the same ground as before. Waterland pushed hard at Jackson's claim that the three persons could be one only in a tritheistic schema. Jackson had argued that two beings could not be one being, that two substances could not be one substance. This, Waterland points out, is the very subject under discussion: Are the three one being, one substance or not? We know that these three persons are one God even though we do not know *how* they are.[82]

In 1724 Waterland published his last contribution to a debate that he was now finding both tedious and annoying. He was accused of saying that many Gods in one substance are not many Gods, and rejects such an absurdity completely: 'Though the union of the three Persons (each Person being *substance*) makes them *one substance*, yet the same union does not make them *one Person*; because *union* of *substance* is one thing, *unity* of *Person* is another: and there is no necessity that the same kind of union which is sufficient for one, must be sufficient for the other also.'[83] A 'person' is 'an intelligent acting substance', but this is not an exhaustive definition, nor can the terms of such a definition be regarded as reciprocal, for the same reason that while it is true that man is an animal it is not the case that 'man' and 'animal' are interchangeable terms. Throughout, Waterland claims, his opponents have not shown that more than one person cannot be one being, one substance, one God. One is reminded of Locke's

[81] Waterland, *An Answer to Some Queries printed at Exon, relating to the Arian Controversy* in *Works*, IV, pp. 341, 343, 344. For an account of the Exeter controversy see Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 374–5.

[82] Waterland, *A Second Vindication of Christ's Divinity or A Second Defence of Some Queries relating to Dr. Clarke's Scheme of the Holy Trinity in Answer to the Country Clergyman's Reply* in *Works* III, see pp. 298–303.

[83] Waterland, *A Further Vindication of Christ's Divinity*, in *Works*, IV, p. 22.

discussion of personal identity which dissolved the facile equation of identity of person with identity of substance.

Waterland's skill in controversy cannot be denied, but neither should his scholarship. In addition to these carefully honed pieces of polemic he produced a major scholarly work on the Trinity in the form of *A Critical History of the Athanasian Creed*, which appeared in 1723. It was a magisterial discussion of the origins, age, authorship and value of the Athanasian Creed. It was undertaken partly because 'the Athanasian Creed becomes the subject of common and ordinary conversation'. A very methodical study of manuscripts and opinions that surrounded the Creed, it remained a standard in the theological arsenal well into the nineteenth century.[84]

This Wretched Argument

But for all Waterland's skill and learning, it was a question from a Jesuit at court that stopped Clarke short. Edward Hawarden asked Clarke a simple but profound question: Did he believe that the Father could annihilate the Son and Spirit? Clarke paused and admitted that he had never thought of the question. He gave no answer, and died soon after without providing one. Hawarden provides us with a useful summary of the entire debate, and helps to clarify the nuances involved in speaking of 'person' in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity at this time:

> If you ask me, what the Word, *Person*, means; I answer, that it has a known, but yet a different signification, when it is apply'd to Creatures, and when it is apply'd to the B. Trinity . . . When apply'd to Creatures: a person is an intelligent Being, or an intellectual Agent, whose Nature is divided from that of any other . . . But when we speak of the B. Trinity: a Person is *one, who has a common and undivided Nature with another*: or *it is one, either Father, Son, or H. Spirit, who has the Godhead in common with the other two, and with each of them.*[85]

[84] Waterland, *A Critical History of the Athanasian Creed*, in *Works*, IV. The reader has only to look at the tables provided to see the breadth of Waterland's scholarship.

[85] [Edward Hawarden], *An Answer to Dr. Clark* [*sic*] *and Mr. Whiston, Concerning the Divinity of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (London: 1729), p. 5.

Such an adaptation of terms is legitimate because 'new Perceptions . . . require new *Words*; or at least new *Senses* of the same Words, by taking in more or fewer Ideas, than they had before'. (Here, as elsewhere in Hawarden's text, the influence of John Locke, especially his 'new way of ideas', is clearly present.) It is a lack of appreciation of this point, Hawarden believes, that led Clarke into his errors. Indeed 'Dr. Clark's System is chiefly grounded on this *wretched Argument*: Three Persons, in Creatures, are *three intellectual Agents*, as three Angels, or three Men: Therefore they must be so in the Blessed Trinity.' Hawarden proceeded to analyse *The Scripture Doctrine* and Clarke's replies.[86]

In his own exposition of the doctrine Hawarden insisted first on distinguishing what we can know by reason from what we learn by faith:

> That there is one divine and self-existent Person, Reason informs us. But three divine persons we know only by Faith. Reason tells us, that there is a Person, who is *God from no other*. And Faith teaches us, that there are two Persons who are *God from God*.[87]

The word 'God' therefore functions differently in the grammars of faith and reason. 'The Word, *God*, frequently denotes a self-existent Person' as in philosophy, and even in the collects from the Liturgy. However, in Christian faith 'when we say, that *the Blessed Trinity is God*, the meaning is, the first Person is *God* from no other; that the second is *God* from the Father; and that the Holy Spirit is *God* from the Father and the Son'. As Hawarden puts it in his 'Addenda', God is a logically (but not physically) higher term than any of the divine persons, and as such signifies nothing that is peculiar to any of them. For his pains Hawarden was voted the thanks of the University of Oxford, an indication of their support for his position, and all the more remarkable given that Hawarden was not only a Catholic but a Jesuit priest![88]

[86] Hawarden, pp. 5, 7. Interestingly, Hawarden labels Clarke a Eusebian rather than an Arian, p. 15. This is the judgement of Pfizenmaier, a modern-day admirer of Clarke, see *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke*, p. 217.

[87] Hawarden, p. 35.

[88] Hawarden, pp. 36, 37. The 'Addenda' is at the end of the book. For the vote of thanks, see the *DNB*.

Acquaintance with the Three Divine Persons

Most wars are conducted on a number of fronts. In the intellectual sphere the war seemed to be moving in the direction of trinitarian orthodoxy. By a combination of scholarship and extraneous ecclesiastical and civil pressure, the threat from various anti-trinitarian forces seemed to be waning. The meaning of the word 'person' was sufficiently disputed to allow for a lack of clear-cut univocal usage, and this aided those who upheld the doctrine of the Trinity to a certain extent. Few were prepared to risk airing alternative views and lose all like Whiston, or invite the ruin of their careers like Clarke. But underneath the surface of conformity the picture was somewhat different. Disenchantment with the whole business of the Trinity was discernible, one has only to think of Whitby's cynical advice to see those forces at work, and, even if the doctrine were not directly disavowed, it was being moved to the ideological lumber room. It is surely salient that the bishops required Clarke's silence rather than his recantation, and that some of the later bishops thought that Clarke had been pilloried for hair-splitting niceties. In many ways Waterland's last work in this area, *The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity Asserted*, showed an awareness that an 'academic' victory alone was not sufficient and that the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity had to be reasserted. The book was written not for those who disbelieved the doctrine, nor those who had suspended judgement, but for those who assented to it but downplayed its importance. This threefold division is probably an indication of the general mood of the country. Waterland hoped his investigation would show that the doctrine of the Trinity was clear, practical and scriptural. The comparative weakness of his reflections on the second claim showed that all was not well within the orthodox camp.[89]

According to Waterland, the doctrine has practical implications in several areas. It teaches us our duties to God: if we fail to worship one person then we fail to honour the Godhead properly. It engenders the proper dispositions of mind for eternal life, by disposing towards the Trinity the better 'to be taken into their

[89] Waterland, *The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity Asserted* (1734), in *Works*, V. See pp. 1–5, 11.

friendship'. An appreciation of the Trinity strengthens the motives of Christian practice by showing us the love of God generating the economy of salvation. We gain a deeper understanding of grace as we realize the nature of the gifts we are given in the Spirit. We learn the virtue of obedience to what God has revealed which we could not have discovered by reason. In short, 'While we consider the doctrine of the *Trinity*, as interwoven with the very frame and texture of the Christian religion, it appears to me natural to conceive, that the whole scheme and economy of man's redemption was laid with a principal view to it, in order to bring mankind gradually into acquaintance with the three divine persons, one God blessed for ever.'[90]

But while Waterland's attempt to stress the 'practical' aspect of the doctrine is commendable, one cannot help feeling that the dynamic and depth of trinitarian imagination present in earlier works, such as Cheynell's, has been lost. Instead of a sense of the centrality of the doctrine to the whole of Christian experience, the reader is left with the feeling that Waterland is desperately trying to make the doctrine of the Trinity 'relevant'. The dance of *perichoresis* is reduced to a nodding 'acquaintance with the three divine persons'.

If the truth be told Waterland was fighting a losing battle against the spirit of an age which had little time for what it took to be theological minutiae. Christian apologetic had now to combat those who questioned the very existence of any personal God whatsoever, and to many the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity seemed an expensive luxury to maintain against this latest threat. The shunting of the doctrine of the Trinity into the theological sidings accelerated. Given the concession of some orthodox writers that God could be spoken of as one person, the parameters of Godtalk became increasingly blurred, and covert unitarians within the established Church hid behind the camouflage. Those clerics of the established Church who would not equivocate over subscription left to found a full blown Unitarian Church, lead by Theophilus Lindsey, Vicar of Catterick. Their reformed liturgy was based largely on the changes that Clarke had proposed to the Book of Common Prayer. The Dissenters too suffered controversies, notably in Exeter, and among the

[90] Waterland, V, p. 47. See pp. 27, 34, 35, 45, 49.

Presbyterians in particular unitarian theology made great headway. The doctrine of the Trinity remained the official teaching of the Church of England but had little impact on its life. Perhaps the tale is most poignantly illustrated by the fact that the writings of Waterland's successor as Master of Magdalene, Peter Peckard, are clearly not trinitarian in tone or expression.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The neglect of the seventeenth century is a serious lacuna in contemporary studies of the history of trinitarian doctrine. Most investigations leap over this period, frequently taking off from Aquinas or Scotus and landing at Schleiermacher or twentieth-century writers. The reader is thus catapulted over a crucial episode in the story of how the Trinity has been understood and celebrated. The developing popular appropriation and appreciation of trinitarian doctrine in our own time is enhanced and enriched by a study of its evisceration in the seventeenth century. Granted the standard story that trinitarian theology has been recovered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one would have expected that the dynamics of its loss would have been of more concern than they have been. While an understanding of the process whereby the doctrine of the Trinity was relegated to the lumber room of theology might help to prevent any similar future displacement, it certainly warns us against hubris in our own reflection on this mystery. It also emphasizes the need for the development of a vital and vibrant trinitarian imagination. It is an unfortunate myth that depicts this period as of little interest to the theologian concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity. By and large historians such as Redwood, Clark, Champion and others have been far more aware of the importance of the trinitarian disputes in the late Stuart Age than the theologians. Placher is commendable in being one of the few to realize the *theological* importance of these trinitarian disputes. This book has wanted to press the matter still further: this is not simply *a* key time in the history of trinitarian doctrine, it is *the* key time as far as the loss of

trinitarian vitality is concerned. To quote Babcock once more: to ignore this area 'leaves blank the very interval that we must need to have filled in if we are to gain some understanding of how this shift of sensibilities took place'.[1] Babcock sees the 1690s as a crucial part of this narrative, and indeed they are. I have attempted to show that the origins of these disputes lie earlier in the seventeenth century and have a potent legacy for the next, and that the disputes demand *theological* as well as historical investigation.

The sheer extent of the material alone is a ready indication of the importance of this neglected area, and the impression is confirmed by the longevity of the controversies raised. But another manifestation of their significance is shown by the stature of the protagonists they engaged: Hobbes and Cudworth, Locke and Stillingfleet, Laud, Chillingworth, Owen, Wallis, Clarke, Whiston, Waterland, Toland, any many others, were all dragged in by the vortex created by the disintegration of the Trinitarian consensus. It was only Newton's timidity and understandable personal anxiety that kept him from entering the fray publicly. Given the breadth of material, the long-running nature of the disputes, and the illustrious stature of many of its players, it is difficult to see why the trinitarian conflicts of the Stuart Age have not received more investigation. The theological neglect of this area is most puzzling as these disputes are undoubtedly as important as those connected with Arminianism, Toleration and Mortalism.

To render the material manageable I have focused on the pivotal role played by the use of the word 'person'. Not all the problems in trinitarian understanding at this time revolved around this contested concept; as we have seen, disputes about exegesis, ecclesiology and the like impacted on the general decline of the trinitarian consensus. The fading of analogical modes of discourse, and the privileging of a more univocal usage of language, was bound to prove problematic for theological discourse in general. In the case of the use of the word 'person' the difficulties were acute. Crude literalists, such as Best and Biddle, inevitably interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity as tritheism. More sophisticated thinkers found it difficult to determine the exact significance

[1] William S. Babcock, 'A Changing of the Christian God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century', *Interpretation* 45 (1991), pp. 133–56 (135).

and meaning of the word in the context of the Trinity. Attempts by the orthodox divines in the 1690s to maintain accepted nuances in understanding were ill received by their opponents. Once a situation arose in which 'person' was first defined and *then* applied to the doctrine of the Trinity serious problems were bound to emerge.

I have wanted to provide a survey of the material surrounding the displacement of the doctrine of the Trinity from theological and spiritual reflection, but I have also wanted to indicate some of the components necessary in any answer to the fundamental question: Why did this loss of trinitarian sensibility occur? All answers will inevitably be partial. The complexities contributing to any important change, be it theological, philosophical, social or political, cannot be reduced to simple formulae or admit of exhaustive analysis, and this is certainly true of the change undergone by the doctrine of the Trinity. However, several elements seem to emerge that are integral to any explanation. To aid understanding, and not because such a distinction can be rigidly applied, it may be useful to categorize these factors as 'external' and 'internal'. The former are extraneous to the theological disputes but bear upon them. The latter are *theological* and intrinsic to the arguments and reflections surrounding the doctrine during this period.

Three main external forces impinge upon the fate of the doctrine of the Trinity during this period: language, politics and philosophy. The changes taking place in the understanding of the role and function of language during the Stuart period are profound and do not admit of easy capture. The drive for clarity and precision of expression quickens pace after the Restoration, revealing the impact of the 'new science'.[2] But this tendency is not undetectable in the period before and during the Civil War, and indicates the influence of Cartesianism in England. At the risk of oversimplification we could characterize the early modern period as one in which the analogical imagination is fading and a more univocal usage of language is privileged. This tendency is reflected and reinforced by the atomistic approach to language found in Hobbes and Locke, both of whom conceive language as a structure that, in parallel to physical compounds, can be broken

[2] Toulmin and others have argued that Law gives way to science as a paradigm for rationality during this period.

down into more discrete atoms of discourse. Discourse is portrayed as a succession of images in the mind. Such a treatment of language tends to reduce meaning to mental pictures, and thus weakens the basis on which analogy functions. The Trinity is difficult to 'picture', and therefore engagement with the doctrine becomes more difficult.

The links between the political changes of the Stuart Age and the doctrine of the Trinity are not immediately apparent. It is not until well into the eighteenth century that theological heterodoxy becomes an unmistakable badge of political unorthodoxy. Trinitarian analogies were sought for in the civil sphere, but there does not appear to have been one single paradigm at work here. There is simply no easy identification of unitarianism in theology with unitarianism in politics or vice versa; the absolutist pretensions of some of the Stuart monarchs did not incline them to disbelief in the Trinity, nor did the resistance to such pretensions exhibited by Locke lead him to accept the doctrine. What we can detect, at least from the 1690s onward, are non-reflexive tendencies. Tories tended to be upholders of the doctrine, opponents of the doctrine tended to be Whigs. Another political factor impinging upon the doctrine was the centralizing tendencies of the Stuart state, which provided an atmosphere in which plurality was, if not suspect, at least not cherished. It should come as no surprise that appreciation of the doctrine of the Trinity was in sharp decline at precisely the time when the centralized British state was emerging. The subsequent 'Union' was not federal, the partners were certainly not equal, and the resultant polity was distinctly subordinationist.

The most important philosophical change impinging upon the doctrine of the Trinity was undoubtedly the process that led to the recasting of 'person'. The conception of 'person-as-substance' was a product, at least in part, of theological reflection on the Trinity and the hypostatic union. The hegemony of such an understanding was challenged initially by Hobbes' revival of an older, 'Ciceronian' usage of 'person-as-actor'. In Hobbes' eccentric theology the doctrine of the Trinity was not rejected but reconstructed: God could bear three persons in the way that any human being could. The more important challenge, epitomized by John Locke, argued for a conception of 'person-as-consciousness'. It was this understanding, or one very similar to it,

that underlay Sherlock's unfortunate explanation of the Trinity. In the event this new understanding of 'person' was not as destructive as some like Stillingfleet had feared. Unfortunately, by the time this was apparent much damage had been done and the disputes over the precise meaning of the word 'person' in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity had taken their toll.

Michael Buckley has admirably shown how the rise of modern atheism was in many ways a self-inflicted wound; a similar story has emerged regarding the demise of the doctrine of the Trinity.[3] Here, too, it is the internal factors that are the most important, interesting and poignant. Theology simply failed to keep the doctrine alive. There were a variety of causes for this, among them the fading of trinitarian imagination, fear of practical pneumatology, problems connected with exegesis, the development of what could be labelled 'over-familiarity' in talk about God, and the corrosive power of ridicule.

The fading of trinitarian imagination has been obvious throughout this study. The imaginative celebration of the mystery of the Trinity in the sermons of Donne and the non-polemical work of Cheynell gave way to the rather arid studies found in later writers such as Stillingfleet and Waterland. The same process was clearly at work on many levels, as we saw in Chapter 1. The doctrine ceases to be celebrated as the centre of faith and life and starts to be defended as something to be accepted. After the Restoration many churchmen felt vulnerable, despite their reappropriated status, and insecurity never provides fertile ground for the flourishing of new approaches to doctrine. The emergence of a climate overly anxious about the rise, growth and danger of Socinianism undoubtedly sapped the imaginative strength of the trinitarians. The fading of the trinitarian imagination was accelerated in several ways. Extraneous factors, such as those identified above, obviously had their role to play, but forces internal to theology were the major cause of this evaporation. There was a lack of fruitful interplay with the doctrine, and quite how far this interplay had been lost was clear once the controversies of the 1690s began in earnest. It was not just the crassness of Sherlock's exposition that attracted opprobrium; the sheer

[3] Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

'newness' of his exposition disturbed several of his contemporaries. Sticking to the form of sound words was, in some cases at least, more an indication of insecurity than strength of conviction. The legal restraints of the last half of the decade did not deter its detractors, but they probably had the unfortunate side-effect of warning off those who might have tried to think the doctrine out afresh. The parroting of the approved language was counted a sufficient indicator of belief, and the doctrine's lifeblood ebbed away. Those convinced of their own orthodoxy, as always, could not bear to admit that models, insights and understandings other than their own had anything to offer, and the infighting amongst the 'orthodox' did more to marginalize the doctrine of the Trinity than any unitarian tract or pamphlet. Theologians, preachers and believers grew timid of entering terrain that had become a theological minefield. Whitby's ironic warning to his young cleric against investigation of the mystery was far more than the wearied response of a cynical old man; given the fate of Clarke it was a counsel of prudence.

Nourishing this loss of imagination was a deep distrust of what we might label 'practical pneumatology'. It was no accident that the person of the Holy Spirit became even more neglected in theology. The Socinians denied that the Spirit was a person at all, and although the orthodox rejected such a demotion they became increasingly suspicious of any manifestations of the Spirit at work. In the anarchy of the Civil War there had been the blossoming of sects claiming direct, immediate inspiration through the Holy Spirit. While these sects were actually very small, they assumed the status of bogeymen after the Restoration. Any exuberance or, to use the favoured word, 'enthusiasm' became deeply suspect. Any appreciation of the Spirit's role in uniting the believer to the perichoretic life of the three persons all but vanished, and prayer was seen as the way in which the believer got in touch with the undifferentiated God. This God also increasingly had to be tracked down through the signs and clues of design he gave in creation, rather than be found revealed through scripture and worship.

This fear of 'enthusiasm', coupled with a rejection of what was seen as the arbitrary authoritarianism epitomized by the Church of Rome, led many Anglican divines to stress the role of reason in matters of scriptural interpretation and exegesis. They argued that the Scriptures, interpreted by the light of reason

alone, yielded true doctrine. Such a position was fine for trinitarianism as long as the light of reason was fed by trinitarian sentiment, but once the doctrine came under attack problems multiplied. On a strict application of the principle of *sola scriptura* it was far from clear if the doctrine of the Trinity could be regarded as fundamental to Christian teaching. Not only were the words used in the doctrine unscriptural, it was not immediately clear that the doctrine was in Scripture at all. The influence of critical scholars like Simon showed that the pedigree of some of the prooftexts used to establish the doctrine were highly questionable to say the least. To some of their opponents the trinitarians seemed to perform some kind of Indian rope trick: in strange and mystic fashion they found the Trinity in Scripture, and then, having climbed to the heights of doctrinal certitude, they pulled up after them the means of their ascent. Once a variety of readings of alleged trinitarian texts had been canvassed it became more difficult to assert that the doctrine of the Trinity was the plain teaching of holy Scripture. Catholic apologists were tempted to use the 'absence' of the doctrine in scripture as an argument in favour of transubstantiation but the resultant polemic could be dangerously counterproductive.

The increasing reliance on a narrowing conception of reason in theology, and the drive for clarity in general, produced a desire to show that talk about God was plain, simple and easy. Sherlock's opening remarks exhibited this urge very clearly. Absence of transparency and lack of limpidity were no longer seen as indications of the inadequacy of human reason when speaking of the divine, but rather as a sign that any such unclear doctrine was suspect. Again and again those who attacked the doctrine of the Trinity insisted that its obscurity was an indication of its untruth. This new-found confidence in talking about God was starkly at odds with the previous thinkers. For an older tradition God's unity was just as problematic as his trinity, indeed for Luther it was more so. The language of 'person' might be opaque when speaking about God, but it was no more problematic than other words similarly applied. In response, some of their opponents tried to provide explanations and illustrations of the doctrine in accord with reason; unfortunately many of these became hostages to fortune as the battle ranged into new areas. The seventeenth century saw the burgeoning of a process that, in Placher's telling phrase,

'domesticated' God. This God was a sober 'Governor' and a rational 'Architect', rather than an untamable 'Lover'.

It would also be wrong to neglect the role played by ridicule in the disputes, and Redwood's book is right to highlight the importance of this rhetoric. Time and again when reading the material flowing back and forth between the trinitarians and their opponents, it is the latter who have the more telling phrase, the wittier aphorism, the more trenchant bombast. The trinitarians by and large were more learned than their opponents, but their enemies could render them ludicrous with devastating effect. The jocular abuse of them and their doctrinal positions was a powerful solvent on popular estimation of the doctrine. The lack of a popular apologist for the trinitarian cause in the 1690s was a serious defect in the armoury of the trinitarian party.

The doctrine was not completely vanquished, however, and, although it dropped from sight in much popular religion and was displaced from the centre of theological endeavour, it survived, above all in the Liturgy. Two otherwise opposing theologians have recognized the crucial role played by the public forms of prayer in the maintenance of trinitarian belief. Catherine LaCugna advanced as an almost timeless axiom that 'the liturgy far more than theology kept alive in Christian consciousness the trinitarian structure of Christian faith'.[4] This 'axiom', when applied to the seventeenth century, finds endorsement in the lament of the unitarian theologian John MacLachlan, who sought to account for the ultimate demise of unitarianism in the established Church:

> one reason for this, often overlooked, was undoubtedly liturgical. In the Church the Prayer Book used by Unitarian clergymen (however criticised by them anonymously in print) familiarized the minds of worshippers with addresses and petitions to the three persons of the Trinity. Whatever the parson said or left unsaid from the pulpit could not sink into the mind as did the prayers from the reading desk and the responses from the pews repeated Sunday by Sunday.[5]

[4] Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 210, although it must be emphasized once again that one of the weaknesses of LaCugna's book is the passing over of the seventeenth century in complete silence.

[5] H. John MacLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 334.

The sheer rhythm of the Liturgy familiarized churchgoers with belief in the Trinity. It provided a vocabulary in which that belief could be preserved, expressed, reinforced and celebrated. The doctrine of the Trinity was ultimately not discarded but displaced. It was to take a couple of centuries before the doctrine's value was seen once more and the process of restoration begun.

We live in a very different world to the people of Stuart England. This book has tried to bring that period alive by examining the trinitarian debates that engaged a great deal of their attention and concern. In doing so it contributes to the critique of the present that every past age provides. It has sought to provide an account of the 'loss' of the doctrine of the Trinity spoken of by many of our contemporary theologians, by doing so I hope it has provided some contribution to the recovery of the Trinity as 'the central mystery of Christian faith and life'.

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Index

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the doctrine of the Trinity was still a central theme in Christian theology. By the end of the century it was fast becoming peripheral. As theologians today increasingly recognize the Trinity to be at the very heart of Christian theology, the question of 'what went wrong' three hundred years ago is a matter of growing interest.

Whereas most studies of the history of trinitarian doctrine neglect the seventeenth century almost entirely, Philip Dixon argues that this is a key period in the history and development of the doctrine and, indeed, essential for contemporary understanding.

Drawing on a wide range of primary sources, Dixon examines the Socinian and anti-Socinian writings of the 1640s and 1650s, including Biddle and Cheynell, and their legacy for the disputes of the 1690s; the trinitarian theology of Hobbes and the violent reaction of his critics; the debates from the Restoration to the 1690s, including Milton, Nye, and Bury; the writings of Locke and Stillingfleet; and the continuation and development of these disputes into the early eighteenth century. A final chapter offers some significant conclusions for students of systematic and historical theology alike.

In the breadth of its scope and in the importance of the material uncovered, this book makes a unique contribution to the understanding of trinitarian theology and practice.

Dr Philip Dixon lectures at University of Wales College, Lampeter, and is an Academic Tutor at the Maryvale Institute, Birmingham.

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