

Week 4 Book I and II: The Trinity, Christ as *autotheos* and the Calvinistic extra

1. 1:12; 1.13.2-3, 6-7, 16-20 Idolatry and the Trinity
2. 2.13.1, 4; 2.14.1-4 The Person of Jesus Christ

Helm, Paul. *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), chapters 2 and 3.

1. The Trinity

What is important is not just a sense of the divine, or a general religious worship, but that we know God as he has revealed himself and worship him accordingly

Calvin starts straight away with the Trinity ... even if the doctrine of the Trinity is a bit difficult to explain

pantheism confuses creator and creature, dualism separates them too far

'Unless we grasp these [three persons], only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God.' (1.13.2)

a) *Trinity and the doctrine of the simplicity of God*

'lest anyone imagine that God is threefold, or must think God's simple essence to be torn into three persons, we must here seek a short and easy definition to free us from all error.' (1.13.2)

Simplicity means that the divine essence cannot be divided into parts; that is, God is indivisible. In Gerald Brays terms: 'he is the basic minimum of divinity as well as the maximum'

b) *Technical Language*

'some hatefully inveigh against the word "person," as if humanly devised' (1.13.2)

Augustine's words: 'We say "three persons", not that it may be said, but that we may not keep silent.' (*De Trin.* V.i.9)

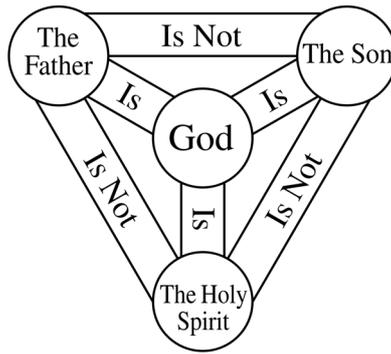
Hypostasis is now understood to be equivalent to *persona* or person in English; *ousia* is equivalent to *substantia* and nature or substance

'the Arians began most wickedly to hate and curse the word *homoousios*... Yet that mere word marked the distinction between Christians of pure faith and sacrilegious Arians.' (1.13.4)

Homoousios is in the Nicene Creed (325 AD) and is translated either 'consubstantial' or 'of the same substance'; that is, the Son has the same divine nature as the Father.

True, it is not a word from the Bible, yet it in a single word encapsulates the biblical picture in such a way that those who want to distort the truth cannot accept any creed with the word in.

Indeed, I could wish they were buried, if only among all man this faith were agreed on: that Father and Son and Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality. (1.13.4)



c) *Trinity 'explained'*

'I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three; not can I discern the three without being straight away carried back to the one.'¹

'to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity. (1.13.18)

'For in each hypostasis [i.e. person] the *whole divine nature* is understood, with this qualification – that to each belongs his own peculiar quality.' (1.13.19)

Christ with respect himself is called God; with respect to the Father, Son. Again, the Father with respect to himself is call God; with respect to the Son, Father. In so far as he is called Father with respect to the Son, he is not the Son; in so far as he is called the Son with respect to the Father, he is not the Father. In so far as he is called the Father with respect to himself, and Son with respect to himself, he is the same God. (1.13.19)

2. ***Autotheos***

Michael Servetus denied the Trinity on rational grounds and by the fact that it is not a term used in the Bible.

On Valentine Gentile: the 'essence giver' to the Son and Spirit, thereby 'cast[ing] the Son down from his rank.' (1.13.23) Dealing with this, Calvin notes 'whoever says that the Son has been given his [divine] essence from the Father denies that he has being from himself'.

'Now if we concede that all essence is in the Father alone, either it [*i.e. the divine essence*] will become divisible [*i.e. the simplicity of God, and the oneness of God, will be destroyed*] or be taken away from the Son [*i.e. the Son is less than the Father, not homoousios with him, which is the Arian heresy*].' (1.13.23)

Therefore we say that deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of his Person; indeed since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself. Those orthodox writers who formerly spoke concerning the Trinity applied this name only to the persons, since it would have been

¹ Gregory of Nazianzen, Oration 40.41 'On Holy Baptism', in Migne *PL*, XXXVI.417. Οὐ φθάνω τὸ ἐν νοῆσαι, καὶ τοῖς τριῶν περιλάμπομαι· οὐ φθάνω τὰ τρία διελετ[ο], καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐν ἀναφέρωμαι

not only an absurd error but even the sheerest impiety to embrace the essence in this distinction. (1.13.25)

So the Son is *autotheos*, as he is God and thus *autotheos*. The Son is *homoousia* with the Father because there is only one *ousia*, that is one simple divine nature.

3. The Calvinistic extra

a) So *what* is the Calvinistic extra?

extra calvinisticum: the Calvinistic extra; a term used by the Lutherans to refer to the Reformed insistence on the utter transcendence of the human nature of Christ by the Second Person of the Trinity in and during the incarnation. The Reformed argued that the Word is fully united to but never totally contained within the human nature and, therefore, even in the incarnation is to be conceived of as beyond or outside of (extra) the human nature. In response to the Calvinistic *extra*, the Lutherans taught the maxim, *Logos non extra carnem* (q.v.). It is clear that the so-called *extra calvinisticum* is not the invention of the Calvinists but is a christological concept, safeguarding both the transcendence of Christ's divinity and the integrity of Christ's humanity, known to and used by the fathers of the first five centuries, including Athanasius and Augustine. It is also clear (1) that Reformed emphasis on the concept arose out of the tendency of Reformed christology to teach a *communicatio idiomatum* (q.v.) *in concreto* over against the perceived Lutheran emphasis upon *acomunicatio idiomatum in abstracto* and (2) that the polarization of Lutheran and Reformed Christologies owed much to the debate over the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, in which the Lutherans emphasized the real but illocal presence of Christ's body and blood by reason of the communicated omnipresence of the Logos ... and the Reformed emphasized the transcendence of the divine and the heavenly location of Christ's body. Against the Lutherans, the Reformed interpreted the *extra calvinisticum* in terms of the maxim *Finitum non capax infiniti* (q.v.), the finite is incapable of the infinite. In other words, the finite humanity of Christ is incapable of receiving or grasping infinite attributes such as omnipresence, omnipotence, or omniscience.' (Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 111.)

'Necessarily, you cannot get a quart of water in to a pint pot... This is nobody's fault, and certainly not the water's... A mono receiver receiving a stereo signal necessarily receives it in mono.' (Helm, 64-65)

b) *The 'extra' in the Institutes*

In this way he was also Son of man in heaven [John 3:13], for the very same Christ, who, according to the flesh, dwelt as Son of man on earth, was God in heaven. In this manner, he is said to have descended to that place according to his divinity, not because divinity left heaven to hide itself in the prison house of the body, but because even though it filled all things, still in Christ's very humanity it dwelt bodily [Col. 2:9], that is, by nature, and in a certain ineffable way. (4.17.30)

'There are two words commonly used, Union (*unio*) and Unity (*unitas*) the first is applied to the two Natures, and the second to the Person alone.' (Helm, 65) That is, the union of the two natures is not

the same as the unity of the person of the Son. Why? Because if the two *natures* form a unity then they are blended together and the properties of each become confused, therefore in the incarnation they form a union. On the other hand, if the *person* was merely a union and not a unity then there would be a Nestorian division.

he who was the Son of God became the Son of man – not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. (2.14.1) ... We therefore hold that Christ, as he is God and man, consisting of two natures united but not mingled, is our Lord and the true Son of God even according to, but not by reason of, his humanity. (2.14.4)

c) *Helm's flow chart to reading Scripture*

Institutes written to enable people to read scripture

Does the text specify the two natures of Christ?

[If] Yes: then respect the two natures

[If] No [then:]

Does it impute what is human to what is divine? [e.g. Jn 3:13; Act 20:28; 1 Cor 2:8; 1Jn 1:1; 3:16.]

[If] Yes: then understand the text as a case of *communicatio idiomatum*

[We have not discussed this term. It can refer to 'the ascription to divinity of human properties, but he [Calvin] claims that such expressions are rhetorical and not literally the case. [This is where Calvin and Lutherans disagree, a discussion we have avoided]. Yet it is a usage that is warranted by the unity of the human and divine natures in the person of the Mediator.' (Helm, 76)]

No [then:]

Does it refer to the one person of the mediator?

[If] Yes: then respect that unity and do not assign the office of mediator to the one or the other nature separately. (Helm 90-91)