

The Trinity and the Tripartite Soul

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According to the Second Council of Constantinople (2 June 553) there is 'one divinity in three hypostases or persons'. Today it is commoner to say that there are three persons in one God. No doubt these formulations come to the same thing, but what is that?

The English word 'person' translates the Latin *persona* and the Greek *prosopon*, expressions for the masks actors wore on the ancient stage. Since the same actor might appear in different masks, playing different roles, in the same play, the word suggests that the Persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Spirit, are three roles the one God plays, three appearances or aspects he presents. The word 'hypostasis' is a philosophical term for something that exists on its own like a living organism; so to call the Father, Son and Spirit 'hypostases' is to suggest that they form a kind of three-membered society. Both these suggestions are unorthodox. The first is Sabellianism, the second tritheism, and these are the Charybdis and Scylla between which the speculative theologian is supposed to steer. But is such a course possible? The use of both terms by Constantinople II rather poses the problem than solves it.

Do we need to solve it? In these days when speculative theologians look more to Heidegger and Wittgenstein than to Augustine or Aquinas, attempts to capture Christian beliefs in propositional formulations arouse misgivings. Should we even try to state a consistent doctrine of the Trinity? If what I shall be arguing is correct, Christians cannot afford not to make the attempt. They are committed by a tradition of belief and practice which goes back to pre-Christian Judaism to three distinct conceptions of God, and if these cannot be reconciled in a doctrine of the Trinity, the whole of their religious thinking lies open to charges of confusion and incoherence.

What is true is that religious beliefs should not be conceived on the model of theoretical beliefs about mathematics or physics. The belief that there are three Persons in God is not like the belief that there are three quarks in the proton, or three prime numbers between

2 and 10. A theist is one who holds that the universe depends on a divine person, a person not in the ancient sense of a mask, but in the modern sense of an intelligent, purposive agent. Theology may be a theoretical discipline, but actual beliefs about God are like our beliefs about the people and animals around us. Such beliefs are all practical in character: they all involve interpersonal engagement, sympathy or antipathy.

That is recognised up to a point in the first great attempt to give a philosophical account of the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine looks for models for the divine Persons in the human psyche. He moves from a lover, the beloved and love, through a mind that knows and loves itself to a division of mind into memory, understanding and will. But he does not consider the practical aspect of attributing mind to human beings—he does not seem to see any radical difference between thinking someone an intelligent, purposive agent and thinking something round or square—and though anyone who reads the *De Trinitate* must be impressed by Augustine's intellectual honesty and perseverance, I think few will feel he deals adequately with the ontological status of the one God and the three Persons. Lovers and knowers are persons in the modern sense, whereas memory, understanding and love are capacities, dispositions or activities.

Augustine is not the only trisector of the human psyche. A different division was proposed by Plato in the *Republic* and arrived at much later and more or less independently by Freud. In my opinion the Plato-Freud trisection (at least if properly developed) is extremely useful for the purpose for which it was originally designed, namely to obtain insight into purposive human behaviour with a view to improving it. I shall argue here that it can also be used to shed light on the doctrine of the Trinity. And I shall not overlook the practical dimension. I shall try to show how our practical thinking about other human beings requires us to distinguish three psychic 'parts', and then suggest that traditional beliefs about God require Christians to distinguish, not three divine parts, but three divine Persons.

Plato divides the psyche into a Desiring Part, a Spirited Part (the *thumoeides*) and a Reasoning Part; these correspond roughly to Freud's Id, Superego and Ego respectively. The best way of understanding this (or so I have argued elsewhere) is as a division between types of motivation or ways in which we can be motivated. Sometimes we act (or refrain from acting) in order to obtain something that benefits us or to avoid something bad for us as more or less isolated individuals. Painful sensations are objects of aversion

to us and pleasant sensations objects of desire, independently of any consequences, and the unimpeded exercise of intelligence and skill is another kind of pleasure we seek for its own sake as solitary individuals. A second kind of motivation is duty. When we have a duty to do something, doing it becomes an end in itself, and when we have a duty to refrain from doing something doing it becomes an object of aversion for its own sake. Whereas we seek pleasure and shun pain and boredom as solitary egoists, duty motivates us as social beings (and conversely we live as social beings in living with an eye to the rules and customs of our society). Thirdly we sometimes act as altruists out of disinterested concern for other intelligent or sentient beings (and in exceptional cases we can act out of disinterested malice). That others should achieve what is good for them, whether as egoists, as social beings or as altruists, becomes an end in itself to us: their goals become ours.

This differentiation of ways in which we are motivated does not, strictly speaking, entail a division of the human agent into parts. We do not think that one part of us pursues what is good for the individual and another does what is a duty; rather a single human agent sometimes acts egoistically and sometimes dutifully, and much human behaviour is a compromise between egoistic, dutiful and altruistic motivations. So it might be feared that using this trisection as a model for the Trinity will inevitably lead to a Sabellian doctrine. Certainly it will involve steering closer to that hazard; whether we must be caught by it remains to be seen.

The account I have sketched is highly theoretical: how in practice do we think of people as egoists, social beings and altruists? In all three cases we ourselves think as altruists. I cannot think that a cat, or even an insect, is moving to avoid pain without either feeling concern, and wanting it to escape the pain, or feeling cruel joy and wanting it to suffer. That is part of what it is to think that something is *for the sake of* something: such teleological understanding is incompatible with indifference. And if thinking of others as acting egoistically involves disinterested concern, so, *a fortiori*, does thinking of them as acting out of duty or altruism. It is part of our normal intelligent understanding of the behaviour of our friends in practical perplexity to ascribe motivations to them of all three kinds. Perhaps only a philosopher can state lucidly how they differ, but we all learn how to balance them against one another.

The way in which I wish to apply the psychological distinction to God is simple. I would compare the Father to a human being acting as an egoist, the Son to one acting as a social being, and the Spirit to one

acting disinterestedly to benefit others. I shall first show how these comparisons illuminate what is traditionally said and thought about the divine Persons, and then try to clear my account of the charge of Sabellianism.

There is a folk song which contains the words 'One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so'. I do not know if they are intended to refer to God, but they express a conception of God we sometimes find in the Old Testament. He has no origin himself and is the origin of everything else, acting alone. Later thinkers conceive of God as having a life independent of creation. When they ask themselves in what this life consists, they tend to model it on theoretical human thinking, like pure mathematics. If God is above considering the properties of numbers and shapes, perhaps he thinks about his own nature as an intelligent being. Now it would, of course, be impossible for us to do mathematics if we did not live in societies and have friends. Still, theoretical thinking is something we enjoy as fairly solitary individuals, and so is artistic creation. So insofar as we think of God as a creator and a contemplative thinker, we think of him as a sort of egoist.

How far, and in what practical context, do we think of God in this way? To think he created the universe is not to think he made it out of pre-existent material, still less out of a non-material called 'nothing'; it is not to have a cosmological hypothesis. It is to think that natural processes begin and go on because he so desires; that he is responsible for them as we are for the limb-movements we make on purpose. For what purposes do we think he wants the course of nature to continue? Perhaps he finds creation enjoyable as we can find it enjoyable to write or to read what we have written. But surely he chiefly has in view the good of the organisms that arise in the course of nature.

Now if I think that your hands are moving in order that there may be an interesting novel I must think either that the words which appear on the page constitute such a novel, in which case I might say 'That's good. Go on!'; or I must think you are writing trash, and try to dissuade you. Psalms like 93, 104 and 148 show a reaction like the first to the divine creation. They do not encourage God to proceed—that would be patronising—but they are exclamations of admiration.

If I think you are breeding birds, say, for the benefit of the birds, either I think the project worthwhile, want it to succeed and care for the birds, or I think it a waste of time and detest the birds. If we think God wants the course of nature to continue for the benefit of living organisms we no longer think of him purely as an egoist: we attribute

altruism to him, and perhaps we cannot attribute to him a creative part without also attributing to him an altruistic. But in any case, the belief that creation is for the benefit of living creatures involves either concern for creatures generally or hostility to them. In the Psalms I have mentioned and in many other Old Testament prayers like Daniel 3.52 ff and Job 40-41 we find an exultant enthusiasm for even those living organisms least useful or most dangerous to human beings, and a desire to give life even to inanimate nature. 'Look at Behemoth, what strength he has in his loins, what power in his stomach muscles'; 'Praise God from the earth, sea monsters and all the depths, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy winds that obey his word': these are utterances that express the belief that God created heaven and earth.

But there are other Old Testament prayers that reveal a completely different conception of God. He appears as a person who has entered into verbal communication with human beings, especially with Abraham and his descendants, and who has made covenants with the Jewish nation. Under these covenants the Jews are found to keep certain rules and offer certain sacrifices; while God for his part is bound to protect them and support them against other nations and their tutelary powers. God is the Jews' god, they are his people, and in this context he is frequently angry with them and asked to have pity on them. Although the two conceptions of the universal creator and the tribal protector are often blended, as in Psalms 33, 89 and 147, the difference between them to the modern reader is patent. Many people feel that while the notion of an unapproachable creator is edifying and sublime, the notion of the tribal god who experiences anger, jealousy and pity is primitive and disreputable.

What is less noticeable is that the notion of duty has no place in thinking of God as the universal creator. A creator has no duties to creatures. A creator can be kind or cruel, but kindness and cruelty motivate us as altruists; being kind and refraining from cruelty is not a duty but a kind of rationality. Neither have creatures as such any duties towards their creator. Duties are attached by societies to various relationships and roles, and different societies attach different duties to the same role or relationship—to wives, say, or doctors, or old women or lunatics. The relationship of creator to creature is not one in which two members of a society can stand to one another; neither is being a creator a social role.

Perhaps it will be felt that creatures have duties to their creator in gratitude. But what is gratitude? Either it is returning such benefits as is customary or obligatory in society; or it is the particular friendly

concern one feels for an agent who has benefited one in the past, such as the lion felt for Androcles. The lion had no duty to Androcles but only goodwill arising out of Androcles' former kindness to it. In some societies people have a duty to worship the gods, but that is a duty they owe to other members of their society, not to the gods themselves, and to Aristotle, at least, the notion of friendly concern for gods seemed ridiculous. As soon as we start thinking we owe anything to God we have moved from the notion of God as universal creator to a much more anthropomorphic conception.

No conception could be more anthropomorphic than the Christian conception of Christ. But it may be thought that the human form of the incarnate Son is entirely a consequence of his incarnation during the reign of Augustus. That was not quite the opinion of the early Fathers. They thought they desecrated the Son intervening in human affairs in the Old Testament. According to Eusebius (*History* I ii 7-13) it is he who appears to Abraham at *Genesis* 18.1, wrestles with Jacob at *Genesis* 32.26 and addresses Moses from the burning bush at *Exodus* 3.1-6; similarly Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV 10.1. These speculations have not become orthodoxy; but it is significant that when Old Testament writers wish to show God addressing human beings in words they like him to do so not directly but through a 'messenger' who seems not to be a creature, as angels are conventionally conceived to be, but divine: *Genesis* 16.7, 22.11; cf *Exodus* 14 19; *Wisdom* 18.15.

Christians certainly believe they have duties to Christ as head of the society he founded; they are bound by his commandments as their lord and teacher. But do they have duties only to the Son and not to the Father? Not exactly. Christ as priest of the society he founded has the duty of offering worship to the Father, and other human beings have a duty to offer it through and with him.

The problem that faces those who believe that the universe depends on a personal creator is that there can be communication with and obligation to people only when there is society with them, and creatures can have no society with their creator. The Christian solution to this problem is surprising. It depends on a duplication of divine Persons. The God who enters into communication and social relations with us and to whom we owe obedience is not the God who is worshiped but an intermediary who worships. The creator can be worshiped because he has a relationship to this intermediary, and because the intermediary also has relations with creatures they can worship through him. They acquire an adoptive relationship to the creator.

Christ regularly uses a word meaning 'father' to refer to God. He means it to refer, not to one member of the Trinity, something of which his hearers knew nothing, but simply to the one God of Jewish monotheism. Part of his purpose in using it, however, is to claim a relationship to the creator analogous to the father-son relationship recognised in all or nearly all human societies. That has a biological basis in begetting, and theologians looking for a model for the relationship between the divine Persons try to find something comparable with begetting. It is traditional to propose a thinker's formation or production of a concept. Elsewhere I have suggested a modification of this: a conscious agent's decision to be a person of a particular sort. We say that the child is father to the man, meaning that I am responsible when young for the adult personality I acquire, for the purposive agent I come to be. We can compare a human being's decision to be a person of a certain sort, a person who will act because of certain sorts of reason and in spite of others, to God's decision to be a God that has society with creatures. The God who speaks to them and instructs them is the offspring of that decision; and he can be faithful to himself as decider and accept the duties of an intermediary.

We must think of God as a social being if we want to communicate with him and worship him, even if as a social being he is rather the intermediary than the ultimate addressee of our prayers. And there is another way in which Christians must think of God as a social being. They aspire to a supernatural life with him that can continue after death. Some Christians have no doubt imagined this on the model of life in a pleasant suburb. In Heaven we shall each have our own detached villa to which we can withdraw and from which, when we feel sociable, we can emerge to visit God or our dead friends and relatives. But there is a tradition that to transcend our mortal condition we must actually share in God's life. A model for this is not a suburb but a living organism—Christ uses a vine as an example (*John* 15 1-5, which looks back, of course, to many passages in the Old Testament prophets). A branch of the vine shares in the life of the whole, but does so only by being united with the other branches and the trunk.

Life which is shared in this way, which we have as parts of a larger living thing, is social life. I share in the life of a human society when doing what society holds to be my duty appears to me good as an end in itself, and doing what it holds I ought not to do appears shameful or horrible. Christ announces the inauguration of a supernatural society (the 'kingdom of Heaven') which like human

societies has rules and customs. We would share in its life by living with regard to its rules. But in addition Christ instituted sacraments, above all the Eucharist, by receiving which Christians are supposed to share in his divine life. In passages like *John 6* he teaches that it is only through union with himself that we can participate in the life of God. Keeping his rules and receiving the sacraments we have the same life as he, so if he is God as a social being we have the same life as God. But, at least on the face of it, there is no other way in which we could share directly in the life of the creator. Our notion of a sharable life comes from biological organisms, and that sort of life cannot be attributed to God as creator at all, but it must be to any person that acts as a social being.

To suggest that the second Person of the Trinity is God as a social being is not, of course, to imply that if Christ was an incarnation of that person he can have acted only as a social being. As a man he must have had an egoist and an altruist part to his psyche, and the Gospels plainly show him as sensitive to hunger, thirst and pain and as acting out of concern for individuals, for instance at Cana and Bethany. Nevertheless it is significant that they represent him as a model for us chiefly as social beings. He loves his nation and its capital city without chauvinism; he is conscientious in performing his religious duties but is neither bigoted nor uncritical of customary practices. We are not told that he had striking qualities as an individual, that he was strong, good looking or particularly skilful either at intellectual or at manual tasks. But he has outstanding courage and loyalty, virtues which attach to us principally as social beings, and he is conspicuously free from the vices that attack us in that capacity, greed for power and status, snobbery, cowardice and fear of public opinion.

The conception of a universal creator is different from that of an anthropomorphic tribal god, but so is a third notion of God found in the Bible. 'You overlook people's sins, so that they can repent. You love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you' (*Wisdom 12.22-6*). Besides speaking of God as his personal father, Christ describes him as a loving and compassionate parent, endlessly forgiving, who cares for all living creatures as individuals (e.g. *Matthew 6.12, 10.29-31*). People often feel that there is an irresolvable tension between these passages and those which speak of God as imposing on people rules that admit of no exceptions and inflicting punishment on them for breaking these rules. They may also feel that a creator would not be an angry, punitive judge, but that is less because he would have concern for every organism as an

individual than because he would have no concern for creatures at all. The nature of a creator would be like that of the Epicurean gods:

Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,
Nec bene promeritis capitur nec tangitur ira.

Christ's use of the word 'father' may make a modern reader connect God's concern for individuals chiefly with the Person of the Father. But as I said just now, Christ did not assume in his hearers a knowledge of a plurality of divine Persons; at most he wants them to see that a notion like that of parental concern for the individual child applies to the one God. This conception of God is most powerfully expressed, both in the Old Testament and in the New, through the image of God's breath.

'You take back your breath and they die and revert to dust; you send out your breath and life begins' (*Psalms* 104.29-30). Breath here symbolises or actually carries life, and the idea is that God gives life to creatures by putting his own life into them (similarly *Ezekiel* 37.14; *Wisdom* 15.11; and the *Wisdom* passage quoted above ends 'for your breath is in everything'). This is different both from creation, in which physical processes go on because that is God's desire, and from entering into society with creatures. In the Pauline epistles the divine breath of life becomes the Spirit that dwells in the faithful (*Romans* 8.9) and is the source, not just of our natural vital functions and (cf *Exodus* 31.3) artistic creativity, but of knowledge of God (*1 Corinthians* 10.16, of non-egoist behaviour (*Galatians* 5 17-24) and in general of divine life (*Romans* 8.11; 8.14-15; *Galatians* 4.6-7).

These passages do not describe sharing in a common life, however supernatural. The point is not that we all live in a larger whole but that God lives in each of us. To believe this we must conceive God as acting as we do when we act altruistically. It is significant that in *Romans* 5.5 the Spirit is given us by God out of *agape*, the Pauline term for disinterested concern. When we act out of concern for others we identify ourselves with them as agents, that is, their achieving their goals becomes our goal. But we cannot actually act within other agents. We can only help them, removing obstacles or evils or giving them information or pleasure. But the Christian belief about God's gift of the Spirit is that God can work for our wellbeing from within us.

The wording of the letter in *Acts* 15.25-28 indicates the different ways in which the first Christians thought of the Son and the Spirit: 'We have decided unanimously to elect delegates and send them to

you with our well beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have committed their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to impose on you any burden beyond these essentials... 'The name of their Lord Jesus is that of a leader they follow and obey; the Spirit is not a person they obey but is present in them as officers of Christ and members of a deliberative body: their decisions are the Spirit's.

The Psalmist's picture of God animating creatures by filling them with his own breath may seem unsatisfying to the modern Christian in two ways. First, we do not think God has breath: the model we are offered for his action in the individual is physical, and when we remove physical interaction from it nothing is left. Secondly, if God did breathe life into us as we breathe air into a balloon, it would be his life, not ours, as it is our breath in the balloon, not the balloon's. But the belief that God acts in us out of concern for us must be taken along with the belief that we share in the life of God as a social being. Even at the natural level social and altruistic motivations complement each other. Acts of kindness create social duties and social relationships foster individual friendships. The rules of society help us to resist egoist emotions when they move us to act cruelly or disrespectfully, and concern for individuals helps us to resist the social motives of ambition, competitiveness and fear of disapproval, and to break or try to change rules that there is reason to change. In Christian belief the relation between sharing in a social life with Christ and having God act in us is simple and intimate. By keeping Christ's commandments and receiving the sacraments we welcome the Spirit into us, and the more the Spirit dwells in us the easier it is to live according to the Christian code.

Christianity supplements the model of artificial respiration, in which the person being revived is passive, with the model of a bridal couple. Bride and groom are in fact united, or should be, both as social beings, since in every society the marriage relationship carries duties, and as altruists, since they are supposed to care for each other as individuals. Christ refers to himself as a bridegroom (*Matthew* 9.15 etc.), and seems to have in mind primarily the social aspect. He seems to think of himself as the bridegroom of the people of God, as is the tribal god of the Jews in some Old Testament texts (*Isaiah* 54.5-6, *Hosea* 2.4 etc.) But bride and groom receive each other sexually, and this reception can be the expression of their concern for each other as individuals. In particular each desires to experience pleasant sensations, and desires this not just as an egoist, but because it is what the other desires. That the beloved should experience pleasure is an

end in itself to the lover, and therefore doubly an end in itself to the beloved who reciprocates loving concern. In the same way the creature can desire to receive the gifts of God and what theologians call 'grace', not just because they are beneficial, but to fulfil God's desire to benefit.

It is possible, of course, to want to share in the life of the Christian community out of concern for Christ, because that is what he wanted for us. But it seems that he chiefly wanted us to share in the life of the community because through that we have the Spirit present in us as individuals. The remarks reported at John 16, which follow his use of the image of the vine, strongly suggest that he desires the plenitude of divine life to be mediated for us not by himself as the vine but by a different divine Person.

We have now distinguished three ways in which God appears in Judaeo-Christian thinking. He is the unique, solitary source of everything else—a view we take in admiring creation and respecting living organisms generally. He is a tribal god who herds us as a shepherd and gives us laws as a people or race. We think of him in this way to the extent to which we think we have duties to him, fear his judgements on us, feel what he orders is good and what he forbids is bad, and desire to live as members of a divinely instituted community. And we think he has concern for us as individuals, we think this insofar as we act in order to receive his supernatural gifts as individuals and attain to the kind of supernatural life for which he destines us. These three ways of thinking of God correspond to our three ways of thinking of ourselves. We are material objects, parts of a physical world; we are social beings; and we are the objects of, and reciprocate, individual concern.

There can be no doubt that Christians do think of God in the three ways described. I hope it will be agreed too that these ways of thinking of God are similar to the ways in which we think of human beings when we think of them as egoists, as social beings and as altruists. But a human being is not three persons; a human being is surely one person that acts in three ways. Why should we say that God is three persons rather than a single person who created the universe, decided to enter into social relations with creatures, and acts within creatures? It is time to face the Sabellian charge.

Even when we are speaking of human beings, it is not quite accurate to say that it is the same person who acts in the three ways. If the trisection of the psyche I have been using is correct, we have strictly speaking three distinct notions of a person or intelligent, purposive agent. There are egoist agents, social agents and altruists,

and we have no single generic concept of anything common to all three. All act for reasons and purposes, but their reasons and purposes are heterogeneous. Egoist, dutiful and altruistic acts are all understood teleologically, but there are still three varieties of teleological understanding. That being so, we can say that a person identified at one time or in one way is the same person as one identified at another, only if we can say it is the same egoist, or the same social agent, or the same altruist. We can say 'The artist who created that picture is the same egoist as the gourmet now enjoying that wine.' But we cannot say 'It is the same person as the officer who risked his life to save the men in his platoon' since it is neither the same egoist nor the same social being—unless it is as a social being and not just as solitary hedonist that the ex-officer is now enjoying the wine. Similarly we can say 'The officer who saved the men under him was the same social being as the husband who was unfaithful to his wife', but we cannot say 'It was the same person as the bird-lover who looked after the blackbird with the broken wing' unless it was not just out of duty but out of concern for the men under him as individuals that the officer risked his life for them. It is not that we cannot claim that the artist, the officer and the bird-lover are identical, but it is better to say that they are the same human being. For the concept of a human being is precisely the concept of a living organism that has these three modes of agency. If that is right, we cannot say that the person who created the universe is the same person as the one who decided to enter into society with creatures or even the one who makes the good of individuals his own objective. The most we can say is that it is the same God. And being the same God is very different from being the same human being.

That is because God, at least in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, has no body. A human being is an organism with limbs it learns to move as it wishes and sense-organs. Any action for which a human being is responsible is either action by those limbs themselves or else caused by movements of them. The gallant officer is the same human being as the wine-drinking painter and the bird-lover who cherishes the blackbird because the hands that drag the men to safety are the same as those that lift the wineglass and bandage the wing. Further, any action for which a human being is responsible must be for a reason correlated with a physical state of that organism's sensory system. We should not think Othello responsible for Desdemona's death if we did not think he moves his limbs for the reason that she loved Cassio; and we should not think his movements were for that reason if we did not think her loving Cassio was implied by words

uttered by Iago that affected Othello's ears. But God is not supposed to have either limbs or sense-organs. I suggest that the role of the body in the identity of a human being is our ground for saying that a human being is rather a single thing with three aspects than a trinity. The body is what provides something for the aspects to be aspects of. Because God does not have a body, what in our dealings with a human being would be thinking of different aspects, in our dealings with him is thinking of different persons.

But if the body is what unifies the three aspects of a human being, and God is bodiless, what unifies the divine Persons? What stops them from being three Gods? Does not this circumnavigation of the Charybdis of Sabellianism expose us to the Scylla of tritheism?

Judaeo-Christian monotheism is founded on the belief that the universe depends on a single creator: light shines, rain falls and physical processes generally go on because that is the will of one God. The monotheist rejects the possibility that some processes should go on because one God so wishes, and others because another; and superhuman agents who, like the Olympian gods, are not creators, are not allowed to be genuine Gods at all. If the Son, therefore, were not the same God as the creator he would not be truly divine, and even if we could share in his life, that would not be sharing in divine life. The same goes for the Spirit: the gift of the Spirit can be a gift of divine life only if it is the same God that creates the world and that dwells in organisms. Tritheism is not a live option.

As I said at the beginning, the doctrine of the Trinity is best viewed, not on the model of a scientific theory as a description of God's nature, but as a formulation of the conception of God underlying Christian attitudes towards the natural world, the Church, religious practices and other people. We find that though Christians think there is only one God—they do not praise one creator for corn and another for doves and pigeons—God plays in their thought the three distinct roles that human beings do when they are thought of as egoists, as social beings and as altruists. But they cannot think just that God is one thing with three aspects as they think a human being is. For a human being is a living organism, whereas God is supposed to be bodiless. So it is best to say that they think that the divine nature subsists in three distinct Persons, or that there are three Persons in God.