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# The Logic of Trinitarian Doctrine

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When I was growing up in the faith, I heard a lot about the doctrine of the Trinity, but never learned what the doctrine was. In high school and college I worshipped at faithful, Biblical churches in which pastors often affirmed the importance of the Trinity, even preached whole sermons on how important it was, yet never told us what the doctrine actually said. To find that out I had to go to graduate school and read the Church Fathers. This article and its sequel are intended to pass on what I learned from that reading to anyone else who thinks the doctrine is important but has never actually learned what it is. In the first article I will discuss the logic of the doctrine (i.e. the things it says and how they hang together) and in the second its history. In this first article I will do my best to stick to convictions that all orthodox (i.e. Nicene) theologies have in common.

To begin with, in talking about the Trinity it will be convenient to distinguish three levels: first, there is talk about the holy Trinity itself, i.e. about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Second, there is talk about the trinitarian faith: because our God is the holy Trinity, our Christian beliefs, worship and prayer are (or should be) trinitarian. Thirdly, there is talk about the *doctrine* of the Trinity, i.e. about the propositions and concepts by which we give a theoretical account of the shape of our trinitarian faith. This article focuses on the third (and least important) level of discourse. Church life consists largely of the second—which is in turn directed at the first, i.e. at God himself.

The trinitarian faith is inseparable from the worship of any Biblical church, for the Trinity is the Biblical God. Hence to grow up without learning the doctrine of the Trinity is not to miss out on the trinitarian faith. Rather, it is to miss out on something much less important but still indispensable for thinking Christians: an explicit formulation of the basic assumptions of trinitarian faith. In the Biblically-faithful churches of my youth I did learn the trinitarian faith, even though I did not learn the doctrine of the Trinity. I learned to pray "our Father," to call Jesus "Lord," and to glorify the Holy Spirit as God. What I did not learn was how all these practices of prayer and worship hang together with the Christian view of the nature of God. That is what the doctrine of the Trinity is about: it articulates how the trinitarian Christian faith is grounded in God himself.

## Formulating the Doctrine

The doctrine of the Trinity is the view of the nature of God that goes along with the confession that Christ is God. Of course the divinity of Christ is a theme of the doctrine of Christology as well as of the doctrine of the Trinity, but there is a difference: Christology is concerned with the relation between Christ's divinity and his humanity, while the doctrine of the Trinity is concerned with the relation between his divinity and the divinity of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The humanity of Christ, in other words, is strictly speaking a theme of Christological rather than trinitarian doctrine.

Unlike the Trinity itself, the *doctrine* of the Trinity is not incomprehensible or beyond our understanding. It consists of human words meant to be understood by human beings. And it can be formulated without using abstract or unbiblical language. All it takes is seven simple propositions.[1] First and foremost are three propositions which together confess the name of the Triune God:

1. The Father is God.

2. The Son is God.

3. The Holy Spirit is God.

Then come three propositions which indicate that these are not just three names for the same thing (ruling out the heresy known as Modalism or Sabellianism):

4. The Father is not the Son.

5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.

6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.

Finally there is the clincher, which gives the doctrine its distinctive logic:

7. There is only one God.

These seven propositions are sufficient to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity—to give the bare bones of what the doctrine says and lay out its basic logical structure. The logical peculiarities of the doctrine arise from the interaction of these seven propositions.

Of course it is not hard to see what is peculiar about the logic—or rather the arithmetic—of these propositions. After describing three distinct things as God in propositions 1-6, we turn around in proposition 7 and claim there is only one God. This arithmetic is odd but distinctively Christian, and more familiar than it might seem. It is woven into the very texture of Christian worship, as for example in the opening of the Episcopal Sunday service:

> Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
> And blessed be *his* kingdom, now and forever.

It is as if Christians had their own special grammar when speaking of God: after mentioning these three distinct names for God, we go on to speak of *his*, not *their* kingdom.

Trinitarian grammar avoids plurals. Like the Bible, the traditional trinitarian liturgies always speak of God in the singular. Even in abstract doctrinal discussions, Nicene theologians avoid using plural terms whenever possible.[2] Hence our seven propositions use no words in the plural. Notice that even the word "three" is absent—and in general, it is a word worth avoiding. To call God "three in one" is certainly not wrong, but it is at best only a label for the doctrine,

not a way of stating it. After all, three peas in a pod are "three in one," but they are not at all like the holy Trinity. Notice also that our seven propositions do not contain any abstract language such as "essence" or "hypostasis." Such language is not needed to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity, though it is indispensable in defending the doctrine against certain heresies and misunderstandings.

In fact, the words we need to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity make a very short list:
We need the Triune name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We need the general concept "God."
We need the word "one."
We need to grasp the notion of identity and its negation—i.e. that when we say "the Father is not the Son", etc. (in propositions 4-6) what that means is that the Father is not identical with the Son, but different.

## Trinitarian Grammar

The most important words on the list are clearly the names: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are what give the doctrine its particular content, anchoring it in the Biblical narrative. The word "God", by contrast, is rather vague and general (after all, you do not have to be trinitarian or even Christian to talk about God) and in trinitarian grammar its reference is actually rather unstable. That is to say, Christians can use the word "God" to refer to the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, or to the Trinity as a whole—and it is often hard to tell which. (However, as a rule when the Bible or Christian worship speaks of "God" without qualification, it is most often referring to the Father in particular.)

The peculiar logic of the seven propositions makes this vagueness and instability inevitable: the first three propositions refer to each member of the Trinity as God, and then proposition 7 claims there is only one God, which implies that the Trinity as a whole—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is God. Thus the term "God" is hard to pin down, because it floats between four possible reference points: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the whole Trinity.

There is nothing particularly wrong with this vagueness. It just means that for trinitarian grammar the word "God" functions as a general term, while the concrete reality of God is represented by the words "Father," "Son" and "Holy Spirit," which are names rather than general terms. This has important consequences for the practice of the Christian faith. The vagueness of the term "God" causes no problems as long as our talk of God is trinitarian—i.e. so long as we remember to use not only the general term "God" but also the proper names "Father", "Holy Spirit" and "Son" (as well as "Christ"). But when Christians get into the habit of talking about God without mentioning the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the result is that they may literally forget what they are talking about. Their talk becomes abstract and far removed from the particularities of the Christian faith—becomes, in fact, less Christian and more generic. If we are not talking about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then we are not talking about the Christian God but only about some general concept of God that is shared with other religions and philosophies.

What is true of the word "God" is true of general descriptions of divine attributes as well—including words like "holy" or "eternal" or "creator." Each of these terms applies equally to Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and the Trinity as a whole. Because they describe attributes *of God*, these words get drawn into the same peculiar trinitarian grammar as the word "God." Consider for instance what happens to the little sentence "God is the creator" when the doctrine of the Trinity gets a hold of it. It implies that the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Creator, and the Holy Spirit is the Creator (like propositions 1-3), and yet that there is only one Creator (like proposition 7). Thus the word "Creator" has the same vagueness and instability of reference as the word "God": it can refer to the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, or the whole Trinity. The same can be said of words like "Redeemer" and "Sanctifier," or "Holy" and "Most High."

One important consequence of this peculiarity of trinitarian grammar is that we cannot adequately state the doctrine of the Trinity by talking about "Creator," "Redeemer," and "Sanctifier." There is nothing particularly trinitarian about these three terms—no more than (say) "Eternal", "Infinite" and "Omnipotent." All these terms apply to Father, Son and Holy Spirit alike, and therefore cannot be used to distinguish Father from Son, Son from Holy Spirit, and Holy Spirit from Father. You cannot use general terms to distinguish the three members of the holy Trinity; you have to use the names, or something closely related to them. (This is a deep and important point to which we shall return later).

For instance, when we say "God created the world" we may of course have God the Father specifically in mind, yet it would be a mistake to deny that the Son or the Holy Spirit created the world. For the Son also is the Creator, and so is the Holy Spirit—for the Son also is God, as is the Holy Spirit. Indeed the Son is the Creator precisely *because* he is God—and not a different or inferior God either. He is not a different God from the Father (as if he were an uncreative God) nor a lesser God (as if he were not powerful enough or pre-eminent enough to be the Creator of all things). And of course the same must be said of the Holy Spirit.

Hence when we call the Father "the Creator," we are not denying that Jesus Christ is the Creator. Indeed very little of what we say about the Father excludes Christ, and likewise very little of what we say about the divinity of Christ excludes the Father and the Holy Spirit. Let me give two more examples of this, taken directly from Christian worship. First, in the Nicene Creed Christians confess that God the Father created "all things, visible and invisible." This is a phrase that the Bible originally applied to Christ (Col. 1:16). This transfer of language from Son to Father is entirely appropriate, for the Father did indeed create all things, visible and invisible—and he did so through the Son.

Second, in the *Gloria*, Christians extoll the glory of Christ, saying:

> You alone are Holy,
> You alone are the Lord
> You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ...

Does this thrice-repeated "alone" imply that the Father is not Lord, or the Holy Spirit not Holy? Not a bit of it, as the song immediately indicates when it continues:

> With the Holy Spirit

In the glory of God the Father.

Just as the Father, who alone is the Creator, does not create the world without his Word (which is the Son), so Jesus Christ alone is holy and Lord and most high, in the sense that no other creature is holy and Lord and most high like him—but of course the Father too is holy and Lord and most high, and so is the Holy Spirit.

Hence even when we use words like "alone" or "only" in speaking of one of the Trinity, that does not necessarily exclude the other members of the Trinity. It is perfectly good trinitarian grammar to say "Christ alone is God"—for it is understood that the word "alone" does not exclude the Father or the Holy Spirit. And it is perfectly fine to say that "the Father is the one true God", for that does not exclude the Son or the Holy Spirit from being the one true God. Much misunderstanding of Biblical usage will be avoided if this little grammatical rule is understood!

## The Arithmetical Peculiarity

Orthodox talk about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit has a very peculiar grammar, and it is important to understand that grammar in order to speak the language of Christian faith well. But now we must move on to a different and more intractable peculiarity—one that is better known but even less well understood. And that is the peculiar arithmetic of trinitarian doctrine.

It is here that we must begin introducing abstract philosophical terms. So far, I have been talking rather loosely about "members" of the Trinity, in contrast to the "whole" Trinity. But that sort of talk can be misleading. When we see why it can be misleading, the value of the more abstract terminology will start to become clear. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not "members" of the Trinity the way arms and legs are members of a human body. They are not parts of a whole. If they were, then there would be no logical peculiarity about the doctrine of the Trinity after all: God would have three parts, and when you put all three parts together you would get one whole God. But that is clearly not how the doctrine of the Trinity works. Each "member" of the Trinity is fully God, not just a part of God. Our first proposition does not say "The Father is part of God" but rather "The Father is God." Likewise, the Son is never called a "part" of God—for a part is an incomplete thing, and the Son is a complete individual being that is God. So what we need, rather than loose talk about "members," is a term for "complete individual being." The word for that, in technical trinitarian parlance, is "hypostasis" (from the Greek) or "subsistence" (from the Latin).

Now it is clear what the key logical difficulty in the doctrine of the Trinity is: Christians confess three distinct individual beings, and say each is God—and yet also say that there is only one God. That is the arithmetical peculiarity: the three hypostases of the Trinity do not "add up" to make three gods. It is as if when talking about the Trinity we forget how to count.[3]

In other words, the logical difficulty of the doctrine of the Trinity lies in the arithmetic. In fact, if our seven propositions are interpreted using ordinary arithmetic, they produce a flat logical contradiction. Hence any logic that makes sense of the doctrine of the Trinity will be a logic without arithmetic. But this is less of a problem than you might think. As a rule, modern

logicians devise their systems of logic without any mathematical concepts built in, and then add on set theory, arithmetic and other mathematical concepts. In talking about the Trinity, we are in effect using a logic that does not have these added features—which is a perfectly respectable thing for any modern logician to do.

Still, that does not solve all our problems. For what does the word "one" mean in proposition 7, if it is not a piece of arithmetic? It must mean a kind of oneness that is deeper and logically prior to the arithmetical number one.[4] This may sound strange, but in fact there are many philosophies which have such a notion of oneness, including the leading school of philosophy (i.e., neo-Platonism) at the time of the Church Fathers. Hence the Church Fathers claimed that God is One in a deeper sense than mere arithmetic, they did not get any objections from contemporary philosophers.

A defense of the logical consistency of the doctrine of the Trinity hinges on the meaning of proposition 7. That is what must be interpreted in a peculiar way if the seven propositions, taken together, are to escape being logically contradictory. Which is to say: the logical difficulties of trinitarian doctrine cluster around the peculiar trinitarian notion of the oneness of God.[5] Notice that there is no hint of logical inconsistency until we get to that last proposition—the monotheistic claim that there is only one God. Up to that point, our talk is perfectly consistent—like that of perfectly consistent polytheists. A pagan, for instance, could say:

1. Zeus is God
2. Apollo is God
3. Poseidon is God
4. Zeus is not Apollo...

and so on down the line, until he got to proposition 7, where the natural conclusion would be: there are three gods. But Christians are too Jewish to say that. And that is why the doctrine of the Trinity is so difficult, interesting and strange.

## Why Not Three Gods?

Why not say there are three Gods? That was an urgent question facing the Church Fathers as they worked out the logic of trinitarian doctrine. Of course they knew the Bible would not allow them to say there were three Gods, and they were determined to follow the Bible. But they needed a logical answer to their heretical opponents, who were asking questions like: how can you say those first six things and not conclude there are three Gods? Doesn't the logic of your Trinity lead you away from Biblical monotheism? For example, if Christ is God just like the Father (proposition 2), and yet is not identical to the Father (proposition 4), then is he not a second God (contradicting proposition 7)?

To understand the Church Fathers' answer to this question, we will need some abstract philosophical terms. But four will be enough:[6]

1. *Hypostasis,* or "concrete or particular being," e.g. a human being, a cat, a tree or a stone—or God the Father, or Jesus Christ.

2. *Essence* or nature, such as humanity or divinity (or "Godhead") or a species of animal or other *kind* of thing. Depending on which philosopher you ask, "essence" can mean something

very different and very complicated, but Trinitarian doctrine does not have to take sides on such questions. It is enough if we associate "essence" (Greek *ousia*) with a *kind* of thing, as opposed to "hypostasis," which refers to particular or individual things—so that essence is to hypostasis as human nature is to Paul. Note that essences are always singular: there are many human hypostases, but only one human essence—many men and women, but only one humanity. [7]

3. *Quality* is not a complete individual thing, but rather something that is *in* a thing. E.g. when we say Mary is old and brown and wise, we are talking about her qualities. *She* is a hypostasis, but "wise" is one of her qualities. (Qualities are typically referred to by adjectives rather than nouns—though of course you can make a noun out of the adjective, like "wisdom," and call that a quality as well).

4. *Relations* are not *in* a thing like qualities, but *between* two things; e.g. Mary is *taller than* Paul, or *standing to the right of* Peter, or *the daughter of* Anna. As you can readily see, some relations are rather superficial (e.g. "standing to the right of") while others may be a deep part of your identity (e.g. "daughter of").

First let me make clear what the answer was not. The Church Fathers did not argue that God is One because of having only one essence. Of course they did affirm that there is only one divine essence, but that does not mean there cannot be three gods. For there is only one human essence (i.e. one human nature) and yet there are many human beings. And a pagan could perfectly well say there is only one divine essence and still affirm that Zeus, Apollo and Poseidon are three different gods.

So why did the Church Fathers say there is only one divine essence? Why, in the Nicene creed, do we bother to confess that Christ is "of one essence [*homo-ousios*] with the Father"? Precisely because that means he is not a different kind of God than the Father—not a lesser or lower or later divinity (as the heretical Arians had claimed). This *homo-ousios* clause has the job of repudiating the Arian heresy, and it does that job quite well. It serves as a commentary on proposition 2, to the effect that when we say the Son is God, we mean "God" in exactly the same sense as the Father—not a different kind of God. Hence the *homo-ousios* clause does not rule out tritheism (the doctrine that there are three Gods), but that is not its job. We rule out tritheism by the simple expedient of confessing that there is only one God (proposition 7).

So the question still needs to be answered: why *not* conclude, logically, that there are three Gods? Of course the basic answer is still: because Scripture forbids it. But what answer can we give to the criticism that in confessing three distinct hypostases as God, we are falling into tritheism, whether we mean to or not? Peter, Paul, and Mary are three human hypostases, and whether we like it or not, they add up to three humans. So if Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three divine hypostases, why don't they add up to three Gods?

The basic answer given by the Church Fathers is this: each of the three hypostases of the Trinity has exactly the same *qualities* as the others. For example, the Father's wisdom is exactly the same as the Son's, which is exactly the same as the Holy Spirit's. And the Father's greatness is exactly the same as the Son's, which is exactly the same as the Holy Spirit's—and so on. This is quite different from three distinct human hypostases like Peter, Paul and Mary. Peter may be just as wise as Mary, but his wisdom is not exactly the same as hers. And he may be just as

brown as Mary, but his brownness is not exactly the same thing as hers. As a rule, different individuals have different qualities. But the Trinity breaks that rule. In the Trinity, all three hypostases have exactly the same qualities. That is why Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not add up to three Gods— unlike Peter, Paul and Mary, who add up to three humans.

Notice how this answer fits the peculiar grammar of trinitarian doctrine. A word like "wise" or "omnipotent" works just like the word "God" or "Creator." It can be applied to either Father, Son or Holy Spirit, or to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—but it can never be applied in the plural. Just as there are not three Gods, so there are not three wisdoms or three creators in the Triune God. Indeed, there are not three Gods precisely because there are not three wisdoms, not three creators, etc.[8]

This answer to the question, "why not three Gods?" is so radical that it immediately provokes the opposite question: if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each have the same qualities, then what makes them three? How can you tell them apart? What makes them different from each other, if everything about them is the same? The answer is that not everything about them is the same. Their *qualities* are all the same, but the *relations* between them are not. The Son is different from the Holy Spirit because he is *the son of* the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not. "Son of" is a relation, and what makes the Son different from the Holy Spirit is that he has this relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit does not. There is another way of putting this, which amounts to the same thing. It is to say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinguished from one another by their *mode of origination* (Greek *tropos hyparxeos*): i.e. the Son is begotten from the Father, the Father is unbegotten, and the Holy Spirit is not begotten but proceeds. (This is how theologians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition tend to put it, while the Western tradition prefers talking about relations.)

## Conclusion

At this point we have the basic logic of the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is shared by all the Nicene churches, East and West. We can briefly summarize the historical development of this logic thus: (1) First and most fundamental is the Biblical conviction that *Christ is God* (proposition 2, above). (2) The council of Nicea (325 A.D.) in effect appends to this conviction the commentary: Christ is not a different kind of God than the Father (the *homo-ousios* clause). (3) Once proposition 3 (above) is interpreted in the same way (i.e. the Holy Spirit too is confessed as God in exactly the same sense as the Son and the Father) then the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity is completed. This takes place at the council of Constantinople in 381. (4) Meanwhile, however, a serious question arises: *why not say there are three Gods*? The answer to that question, given a generation after Nicea by the Cappadocian Fathers, establishes the basic rules of trinitarian grammar: that all qualities in God are one, not three. Hence we always describe God in the singular: one God, one Creator, one Wisdom, one Omnipotence. (5) In that case, what distinguishes the Father, Son and Holy Spirit from one another? The Cappadocians answered: their relations of origin, e.g. the fact that the Father begets the Son but not the other way around.

In arriving at the relations of origin, we have come from the *logic* of trinitarian doctrine

to what we could call its *dynamics*—its description of cause and effect. At this point things become richer, more complicated, and more controversial. Let me simply in conclusion mention a doctrine that all Nicene traditions agree on. Since the Father begets and is not begotten by the Son, he is cause rather than effect—and similarly with respect to the procession of the Holy Spirit, where the Father is cause of the procession rather than its effect. The Father is the cause of the other hypostases, and therefore he is "the source of divinity" (*pege theotetos* in Greek, *fons et origo totius divinitatis* in the official Latin formulation). Here the notion of *ousia* comes in for a richer use than in the *homo-ousios* clause. The Father gives his *ousia*, his very being and divinity and all his divine attributes, to the Son. Hence the Son is all that the Father is, except being Father. That is why all their qualities are the same. This complete self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son's receiving his whole being and self from the Father, is one of the great starting points for Christian meditation on who God is. "All that the Father has is mine," says our Lord Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to "take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:15).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**:

Church Fathers on the Trinity

A. Collections

(FoC) Fathers of the Church series (Now published by Catholic U. of America Press). Contains most of the important works of the Church Fathers in separate, medium-sized volumes.

(NPNF) Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series (reprint edition, T & T Clark and Eerdmans) The old standard, originally published in the 19th century, gives you 500pp. of Athanasius in one double-columned volume, and similarly voluminous but tightly-packed editions of other Church Fathers. This is still the only affordable way to own much in the way of patristic texts. The translations are in Victorian prose but usually reliable (the Greek less so than the Latin). The scholarship is of course dated, and the footnotes must sometimes be taken with a grain of salt.

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B. Treatises:

Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith* (really a treatise on the Trinity) and *On the Holy Spirit* (its sequel). Not as deep and difficult as Augustine, Ambrose's treatises provided the West with an introduction to Cappadocian trinitarianism, and still offer that service today. The whole production is long and repetitious, but you could try book 1 (20 pp.) and see what you think. Available in NPNF.

Augustine, *On the Trinity*. The great classic of Western trinitarianism. Massive and not

for beginners. Available in NPNF, FoC, and a new translation with extensive introductions and helps for the reader in the series *The Works of Saint Augustine: a translation for the 21st century*.

Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*. This short treatise (50 pp.) is a splendid introduction to Eastern trinitarianism. Basil's *Letters* (in the same volume in NPNF, but available separately in FoC) give us snapshots of Nicene orthodoxy in the making. See esp. letters 8, 38, 52, 125, 189, 214 and 236.

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John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, Book I, chapters 5-8. Perhaps the last Church Father and probably the first systematic theologian, John has written the most comprehensive brief (15 pp.) statement of Greek trinitarian doctrine. Available in NPNF and FoC.

## NOTES

1. These seven propositions are extracted from Augustine's summary of the doctrine of the Trinity in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* 1:5.

2. It is not always possible in abstract doctrinal discussion to avoid using plurals, but you might be surprised how ingenious a serious Nicene theologian can be in the attempt to avoid them. The most common exceptions to the rule "avoid plurals" are found in negations (e.g. "there are not three Gods") and in the use of a phrase like "three hypostases."

3. See Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* §44.

4. Cf. Basil, Letter 8.2.

5. More precisely: both unity and identity are concepts that take on a peculiar meaning in trinitarian doctrine. For just as applying ordinary arithmetical notions of oneness to our seventh proposition produces a contradiction, so also using ordinary notions of identity produces a contradiction. I.e. the following interpretation of proposition 7 makes it logically inconsistent with the others: "For all x and y, if x is God and y is God, then x = y." The equal sign represents the predicate "is identical to", which would normally figure in propositions 4-6 as well (i.e. The Father is not identical to the Son, etc.). For an example of a non-standard concept of identity used in a logical system in which trinitarian propositions come out consistent, cf. P. van Inwagen, "And Yet They are Not Three Gods But One God," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. Morris (U. of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 241-278.

6. The basic philosophical resource here is Aristotle's treatise, *Categories*, which Augustine drew upon extensively in his treatise *On the Trinity*.

7. In ordinary Greek the two terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* had been more or less synonymous. But in the interest of clarity, the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil and the two Gregories) proposed restricting *hypostasis* to the sense of "concrete individual being" (which Aristotle called "first ousia" or "primary substance") and reserving the term *ousia* for "essence" (which Aristotle called "second ousia" or "secondary substance"). Basil spells out this distinction in his Letter 38 (which may have been written rather by his brother Gregory of Nyssa), but see also Letters 214.4 and 236.6. In order to bring out this Cappadocian distinction as clearly as possible, I prefer to translate ousia (at least in connection with the *homo-ousios* clause) with the word "essence" rather than "substance" or "being" (which are also very common and quite respectable translations).

8. This is why the "Athanasian" Creed says:

> Such as the Father is, so is the Son and so is the Holy Spirit...[e.g.] The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal—and yet not three eternals, but one eternal....
>
> So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty and the Holy Spirit Almighty, and yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
>
> So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet not three Gods, but

one God.

(The "Athanasian" Creed—or *Quicumque Vult*, as it is also known from its first two words—is named in honor of the great Greek Church Father Athanasius, but was undoubtedly written by a Latin theologian working under the influence of Augustine).