

DEFENSE AND CONFIRMATION OF THE GOSPEL

BROTHERS, HEAR OUR DEFENSE



CONCERNING
BIBLICAL AUTHORITY,
THE TWOFOLDNESS OF DIVINE TRUTH,
AND THE INCARNATION

DCP
P R E S S

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DCP is a project to defend and confirm the New Testament ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and the practice of the local churches.

Phil. 1:7 – Even as it is right for me to think this concerning you all because you have me in your heart, since both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you are all fellow partakers with me of grace.

Editors' note: *The gospel*, as used on the cover and title page of this book (*Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel*), has a broader meaning than may be familiar to some readers. The fullness of the good news announced in the New Testament encompasses the entire operation of God to accomplish His purpose. The complete gospel therefore includes all of the truths unveiled in the apostles' teaching through "the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:13; Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9).

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PREFACE

In a special edition of the *Christian Research Journal* entitled “We Were Wrong,”¹ the Christian Research Institute (CRI) reassessed the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches and found them to be faithful to the essentials of the orthodox Christian faith. These findings were particularly significant because CRI was one of the earliest apologetics ministries in the United States to criticize Witness Lee and the local churches. As CRI President Hank Hanegraaff noted, that criticism became a “fountainhead of misinformation” that was instrumental in producing the misunderstanding of the teachings and practices of the local churches that has existed in the apologetics community since the mid-1970s.

CRI’s reassessment was the result of an extensive primary research project that spanned six years and involved direct dialogue with representatives of Living Stream Ministry (the publisher of the writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee) and the local churches. The main series of articles in the *Journal*, written by Editor-in-Chief Elliot Miller, examined the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches in light of criticisms published on the Internet in an open letter in 2007.² The open letter consisted of a call to Living Stream Ministry and those in the local churches to repent of teachings expressed in a series of isolated excerpts from the extensive ministry of Witness Lee. Elliot Miller’s articles contextualized the quotes, explained the theological concepts behind them, and showed how the open letter created a distorted perception of Witness Lee’s teaching.

¹ *Christian Research Journal*, 32:6, December 2009.

² The signers of the open letter, including Geisler and Rhodes, ignored two responses to their letter that were published by representatives of Living Stream Ministry and the local churches. These responses are available at both www.lctestimony.org/OpenLetterDialogue.html and [www.contendingforthefaitth.org/eBooks/OpenLetterResponse\(1\).pdf](http://www.contendingforthefaitth.org/eBooks/OpenLetterResponse(1).pdf).

Shortly after the release of the special issue of the *Journal*, Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes, two signers of the open letter, published a response on the Internet criticizing CRI's new findings. Their article contains many theological, factual, and historical errors and inconsistencies. Geisler and Rhodes' article has been posted on the open letter site; thus, it appears as a defense for all of the signers of the open letter. In fact, the open letter signers should be concerned about the poor standard of scholarship exhibited in Geisler and Rhodes' article and the teachings of questionable orthodoxy it advances.

The books in this series point out some of the more significant problems with their response.³ This book addresses three basic matters of truth:

- The error of making creeds, not the Bible, the rule of faith;
- The twofoldness of divine truth; and
- The infinite God becoming a finite man through incarnation.

Included in this volume are reprints of two published works on the twofoldness of divine truth and a compilation of quotes from scholars who affirm that the infinite God became a finite man through incarnation.

An article by Douglas Groothuis in a book co-edited by Norman Geisler states:

Apologetics must be carried out with the utmost intellectual integrity (Titus 2:7-8; Jas. 3:1-2). All propaganda, cheap answers, caricatures of non-Christian views, hectoring, and fallacious reasoning must be avoided. Sadly, some apologetic materials are too cavalier for serious use. One should develop

³ These articles cite many Christian teachers from a wide range of theological backgrounds. Quoting them does not mean that we in the local churches agree in full with or endorse all of their teachings or that they would agree with and endorse all of ours. What these quotations do show is that the teaching of Witness Lee and the local churches stands well within the bounds of orthodox Christian teaching.

competent answers to searching questions about the truth and rationality of Christian faith. This demands excellence in scholarship at all intellectual levels, even the most popular.⁴

If these standards apply to apologetics materials addressing non-Christian views, how much more should they be followed when dealing with fellow Christians such as Witness Lee and the believers in the local churches? As these articles show, Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes have not only failed to live up to this charge but have distorted biblical truth in their analysis of the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches and in their critique of CRI's research.

⁴ Douglas Groothuis, "Postscript—A Manifesto for Christian Apologetics: Nineteen Theses to Shake the World with the Truth," in *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith*, ed. by Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 404. Somewhat ironically the book consists of essays in honor of Bob and Gretchen Passantino. Gretchen Passantino was a major participant in both the early research at CRI that became a basis for much of the countercult's criticism of Witness Lee and the local churches and in the subsequent study that formed the basis of CRI reappraisal. It is this reappraisal that Geisler and Rhodes assail with scholarship and argumentation which fall substantially short of the standards articulated by Groothuis.

THE ERROR OF MAKING CREEDS, NOT THE BIBLE, THE RULE OF FAITH

In their article criticizing the Christian Research Institute's reevaluation of the "local churches," Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes claim that the local churches "refuse to accept the orthodox creedal statements on the Trinity."¹ In endnote 3 they wrote, "A doctrine is said to be aberrant if it undermines or is in significant tension with the orthodox beliefs of the historic Christian faith as based in the Bible and expressed in the early Christian creeds." By making the creeds the authoritative expression of biblical truth, Geisler and Rhodes actually make the creeds a higher rule of faith than the Bible. This is irresponsible at several levels. Geisler and Rhodes:

- Implicitly fault the local churches for taking the complete Bible as their unique standard of truth, instead of the incomplete creeds.
- Explicitly demand the use of creedal language as a yardstick of Christian orthodoxy.
- Accept as orthodox many other Christian groups that do not take the creeds as their standard of truth.
- Ignore the many affirmations of "orthodox" beliefs regarding the Divine Trinity that pervade the teaching of Witness Lee and the local churches.
- Ignore Witness Lee's extensive and balanced commentary in which he affirms many points of truth in the creeds but also points out their shortcomings.
- Practice hypocrisy given Geisler's own disavowal of binding authority for the creeds.

Our Standard of Truth—The Bible, Not the Creeds

From the very inception of the ministry of Watchman Nee in China and of the local churches established there, we have

¹ Norm Geisler and Ron Rhodes, "A Response to the Christian Research Journal's Recent Defense of the 'Local Church' Movement," 2009.

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consistently taken the stand that the Bible, not the creeds, is the unique standard of the truth. Watchman Nee wrote:

The Bible testifies of itself: “All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). For man to consider the creeds as authoritative is for him to annul the authority of the Bible! It causes man to take the creeds as the standard instead of taking the Bible as the standard!²

If creeds were necessary, God’s wisdom surely would have prepared an infallible one. God’s love would surely not have forgotten such a thing and would not have held it back from the church. The fact that God did not give us such a creed shows that such a creed is useless. On the contrary, God has given man a Bible... The condition for understanding the Bible is not great knowledge, great wisdom, or profound study, but a single-hearted desire to be a man of God. Even the poorest and the most foolish man can do this. As a result, it is possible even for him to understand the Word of God. If believers would be men of God in position and in conduct, it would not be difficult for them to understand the Bible.³

Geisler and Rhodes implicitly criticize this position by insisting on the acceptance of creedal statements as the standard of orthodoxy. They fail to explain how acceptance of the Bible as the ultimate rule of faith is in error.

² Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 5: The Christian (3)* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1992), p. 448.

³ Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 5: The Christian (3)* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1992), pp. 492-493. The latter part quoted is strikingly similar to the following portion from Calvin’s *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*:

...the Holy Spirit so tempers His style as that the sublimity of the truths which he teaches is not hidden even from those of the weakest capacity, provided they are of a submissive and teachable disposition, and bring with them an earnest desire to be instructed. (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, vol. 2*, translated by James Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 229.

Explicitly Demanding Use of Creedal Language as Proof of Orthodoxy

Geisler claims to have sent a letter to Ron Kangas, editor-in-chief of the Living Stream Ministry publication *Affirmation & Critique*.⁴ This letter is attached to the article posted by Geisler and Rhodes criticizing CRI's reassessment of the teachings of the local churches. In his letter, Geisler criticized the following excerpts from a statement of faith printed near the front of the journal:

Holding the Bible as the complete and only divine revelation, we strongly believe that God is eternally one and also eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the three being distinct but not separate.

and:

We confess that the third of the Trinity, the Spirit, is equally God.⁵

In the following statements Geisler makes the explicit use of the word "person(s)" in reference to the Trinity a requirement for orthodoxy:

First, if you desired to be considered orthodox in your "Statement of Faith," then why did you leave out the word "person" of the three members of the Trinity. To be orthodox you should have said "three [persons] being distinct" and "we confess the third [person] of the Trinity."

Judged by Geisler's standard, the Bible itself is not orthodox, and neither are the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed, as none of them use the word "person" when speaking of the three of the Trinity. Furthermore, in Geisler's letter to Ron Kangas, Geisler proffers the following definition of heresy:

Based on biblical usage, the word heresy refers to a divisive teaching or practice that is contrary to the historic Christian

⁴ Ron Kangas has no record or recollection of having received this letter.

⁵ "A Statement of Faith," *Affirmation & Critique*, XIII:1, April 2008, p. 2.

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Faith as based on the Bible and expressed in the early Christian creeds.

This definition is itself absurd. How could the “biblical usage” of the term “heresy” refer to something as “expressed in the early Christian creeds,” which did not even exist at the time of the completion of the writing of the Bible? Geisler’s criticism exhibits a preoccupation with formulaic expressions rather than a proper discernment of biblical truth, and it supplants the words of the Bible with those of the creeds.

A Double Standard: Others Who Do Not Take the Creeds as Their Standard of Truth Are Accepted as Orthodox

When Geisler and Rhodes criticize the local churches as unorthodox for not taking the creeds as their unique standard of truth, they ignore the fact that many great Bible teachers and Christian groups that are accepted as orthodox take the same standing. These Christians also recognized that the creeds produced by the ecumenical councils, although they made a significant contribution to the protection of the church from the incursion of heresy, should never replace the Scriptures as the rule of faith among the believers:

Augustine:

I ought not to oppose the Council of Nice to you, nor ought you to oppose that of Ariminum to me, as prejudging the question. I am not bound by the authority of the latter, nor you by that of the former. Let thing contend with thing, cause with cause, reason with reason, on the authority of Scripture, an authority not peculiar to either, but common to all.⁶

⁶ Augustine, quoted in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 407.

Martin Luther:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God.⁷

John Calvin:

Be this as it may, we shall never be able to distinguish between contradictory and dissenting councils, which have been many, unless we weigh them all in that balance for men and angels, I mean, the word of God.⁸

But the Romanists have another end in view when they say that the power of interpreting Scripture belongs to councils, and that without challenge. For they employ it as a pretext for giving the name of an interpretation of Scripture to everything which is determined in councils.⁹

The Westminster Confession of Faith:

All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice.¹⁰

The principle of *sola Scriptura*, of the Bible as the unique and ultimate authority in matters of divine revelation, has been an important guiding principle for the church since the time of the Reformation. As R. C. Sproul states:

[The Reformers] insisted there is only one written source of special revelation, the Bible. This is the *sola* of *sola Scriptura*. The chief reason for the word *alone* is the conviction that the Bible is inspired by God, while church creeds and pronouncements are the works of men. These lesser works may be

⁷ Martin Luther, quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1950, 1983), p. 144.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 408.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁰ *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. III, ed. By Philip Schaff, rev. by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1931, 1993), p. 670.

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accurate and brilliantly conceived, capturing the best insights of learned scholars; but they are not the inspired Word of God.¹¹

Speaking of some who measured orthodoxy by adherence to the Westminster Confession, Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, made the following very weighty argument:

Recent articles published in defense of sound doctrine have quoted the Westminster Confession for authoritative evidence as much as or more than the Word of God. Men are branded as heterodox who disagree at any point with this Confession. Having declared in ordination vows that he believes the Bible to be the *only* infallible rule of faith and practice, how can a minister go on to assign infallibility to the Westminster Confession? And if the Westminster Confession is accepted as fallible, could that acceptance be interpreted as any more than one of general agreement? Even the drafters of the Westminster Confession did not expect their statement to supplant the Scriptures. They wrote: "The authority of the Holy Scriptures; for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author, and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God." Indeed, it is not a long step from the Protestant claim that a man is heretical who does not accept in toto some dictum of the Protestant Church to the imposition of Rome which is to the effect that the dogmas of the church are equal in authority with the Scriptures. The theologian who draws his proof as much from the standards of his church as from the Bible is slipping from the true Protestant position. To a student whose conception of doctrine is gained from firsthand searching of the Scriptures, **the confessions or creeds, though appreciated for what they contain, are nevertheless characterized by what they do not contain. An overweening devotion to credal statements**

¹¹ R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 43.

may easily lead to a neglect of much important truth which is outside the range of those creeds.¹² [emphasis added]

Witness Lee pointed out several groups that affirm “no creed but the Bible”:

Although the creeds are good, they are incomplete and even considerably incomplete. In 1828 the Brethren were raised up by the Lord. After discovering the inadequacy of the creeds, they declared that they wanted no creed but the Bible. The incompleteness of the creeds is primarily due to the inadequate knowledge concerning the Divine Trinity. Following the Brethren, those in the Baptist denomination also declared, “No creed but the Bible.” Then another group, the so-called Church of Christ, also made the same declaration. The fourth group of people to make such a declaration are those who are in the Lord’s recovery. Sixty years ago when we were raised up in China, we also declared, “We do not care for the creeds; we care only for the Bible.”¹³

Of what he calls “the Anabaptist view” Geisler himself has said:

Most Baptist, Congregationalist, Charismatic, Mennonite, Free Church, and Independent Church traditions come from this tradition. Many in this tradition had great respect for the Apostles’ Creed and were evangelical in their central doctrinal beliefs, but they rejected any ecclesiastical authority, holding strongly to the view that the Bible alone has divine authority. This did not mean that they believed that confessions had no value, or that the early creeds did not contain essential orthodox doctrine. It simply means that they believed that only the Bible is infallible and divinely authoritative.¹⁴

If Geisler and Rhodes condemn Witness Lee and the local churches for taking the Bible and not the creeds as the rule of

¹² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1936, 1951), pp. 16-17.

¹³ Witness Lee, *The Revelation and Vision of God* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 2000), p. 43.

¹⁴ Norman Geisler, “The Essential Doctrines of the Christian Faith (Part 1): A Historical Approach,” *Christian Research Journal*, 28:5, 2005, p. 32.

faith, they must also condemn the Brethren, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Charismatics, the Mennonites, the Free Churches, the Independent Churches, the Church of Christ, and all others who take the same standing.

Ignoring the Local Churches' Affirmations of the Truth Concerning the Trinity

Geisler and Rhodes would have their readers believe that Witness Lee and the local churches deny the biblical revelation of the Triune God. They withhold from their readers the many affirmations of the basic truths concerning the Divine Trinity in the teaching of Witness Lee and the local churches, of which the following are a small sampling:

Holding the Bible as the complete and only divine revelation, we strongly believe that God is eternally one and also eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the three being distinct but not separate.¹⁵

We believe that God is the only one Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—co-existing equally from eternity to eternity.¹⁶

Using human terms, we may say that there are three Persons in the Godhead, one God with three Persons. I can't explain this. I can only say that God is triune, that we have one God with three Persons.¹⁷

Among the three of the Divine Trinity, there is distinction but no separation. The Father is distinct from the Son, the Son is distinct from the Spirit, and the Spirit is distinct from the Son and the Father. But we cannot say that They are separate, because They coinhere, that is, They live within one another. In Their coexistence the three of the Godhead are distinct, but

¹⁵ Living Stream Ministry, Statement of Faith, www.lsm.org/lsm-statement-faith.html.

¹⁶ *The Beliefs and Practices of the Local Churches* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1978), available at www.contendingforthefaith.org/responses/booklets/beliefs.html

¹⁷ Witness Lee, *Life-study of Genesis* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), p. 61; first published in 1974.

Their coinherence makes them one. They coexist in Their coinherence, so They are distinct but not separate.¹⁸

What the Bible mainly reveals to us is our wonderful God. This God is uniquely one (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4b; Isa. 45:5a) yet triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, who coexist simultaneously, from eternity to eternity, and are each fully God. Yet there are not three Gods, but one God in three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three temporal manifestations of the one God; rather, They exist eternally, distinct but not separate from one another.¹⁹

We affirm that the most fundamental declaration in the Bible concerning God's being is that He is one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5; Psa. 86:10; 1 Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). Yet He is also revealed to have the aspect of three: in the Old Testament He refers to Himself in both singular and plural terms (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8), and in the New Testament the explicit designations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are used (e.g., Matt. 28:19; Gal. 4:6; cf. 2 Cor. 13:14). Contrary to the commonly held notion that the three are separate and individual persons, thus implying three Gods, we hold that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three hypostases, or persons, distinct though not separate, of the one indivisible God. We affirm that the three are each equally God: the Father is God (1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:17), the Son is God (Heb. 1:8; John 1:1; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; John 20:28), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). We also believe the scriptural testimony that each of the three is equally eternal: the Father is eternal (Isa. 9:6), the Son is eternal (Heb. 1:12; 7:3), and the Spirit is eternal (9:14). Hence, we understand the three to coexist eternally. We do not hold to the notion that the three distinctions

¹⁸ Witness Lee, *The Crucial Points of the Major Items of the Lord's Recovery* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1993), pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ Various brothers representing the local churches and the editorial section of Living Stream Ministry, "A Brief Response to 'An Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the 'Local Churches,'" February 11, 2007, published in *Responses to an Open Letter from "Christian Scholars and Ministry Leaders" (1)* (Fullerton, CA: DCP Press, 2009), and available at www.lctestimony.org/ResponseToOpenLetter.html and in book form at [www.contendingforthefaith.org/eBooks/OpenLetterResponse\(1\).pdf](http://www.contendingforthefaith.org/eBooks/OpenLetterResponse(1).pdf).

in God are temporal or economic modes of His existence which successively begin and end as He accomplishes the successive steps of His economy in time. In witnessing to Their coexistence, the New Testament often portrays the three as operating together simultaneously in the harmony of one manifest action (Matt. 3:16-17; John 14:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:14-17; Rev. 1:4-5). The biblical data convince us, therefore, that the three of the Divine Trinity coexist from eternity to eternity and are each fully God without being three separate and independent persons. Mysteriously, the one God is three.²⁰

Ignoring Witness Lee's Extensive and Balanced Commentary on the Creeds

In keeping with their practice of not performing primary research, Geisler and Rhodes completely neglect Witness Lee's extensive and balanced commentary on the creeds in *The Revelation and Vision of God*, a book cited twice in Elliot Miller's article in the *Christian Research Journal*:

According to church history, the earliest creed is the Apostles' Creed. This creed originated with a group of church fathers, who were all Bible scholars, in the beginning of the second century shortly after the passing away of the apostles. Based upon the apostles' teachings, they made a thorough study of the truth concerning the Triune God in the Bible in order to give a definition to the Divine Trinity. They were serious and accurate in their study, and the items they set forth may be considered quite deep, thorough, and detailed. The only shortcoming is the incompleteness of the contents.²¹

Furthermore, although the Nicene Creed contains no heresy and is actually not bad, it is still incomplete in its contents,

²⁰ Various brothers representing the local churches and the editorial section of Living Stream Ministry, "A Longer Response to 'An Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the 'Local Churches'," December 7, 2008, available at www.lctestimony.org/LongerResponse.html and in book form at [www.contendingforthefaith.org/eBooks/Open Letter Response \(1\).pdf](http://www.contendingforthefaith.org/eBooks/Open Letter Response (1).pdf).

²¹ Witness Lee, *The Revelation and Vision of God* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 2000), p. 44.

since there were seven books [of the New Testament] that had not yet been authenticated as authoritative.²²

However, even though this revised creed [the revised Nicene Creed of 381 A.D.] is richer than the earlier Nicene Creed in contents and likewise contains no error or heresy, it is still incomplete in that seven books of the New Testament had yet to be recognized.²³

Concerning the early church creeds, Witness Lee makes the following points:

1. The earliest creeds were limited by the fact that several books of the Bible had not yet been canonized.
2. The creeds are incomplete in that they neglect at least fifteen points concerning the Trinity that are clearly stated in Scripture.
3. The Chalcedonian Creed contains a great heresy, calling Mary the “Mother of God.”

On this basis, he concludes:

Besides the heresy about “the Mother of God,” there are no other gross errors in the creeds; in fact, many of the items in the creeds are quite accurate. Nevertheless, all the creeds, besides containing some errors, are incomplete. Hence, they cannot be our rules of faith but can serve only as references.²⁴

Any fair reader can see that the criticism Geisler and Rhodes make that we “refuse to accept the orthodox credal statements on the Trinity” is unfair. They clearly did not read *The Revelation and Vision of God*, even though it was cited twice in Elliot Miller’s article. In fact, Geisler and Rhodes claim that “there is really no new evidence available since CRI did its first research,” when

²² Ibid., p. 47. The books of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation were not officially canonized as authoritative books of Scripture until 397 A.D. at the Council of Carthage, although they were known and used in the churches before that date.

²³ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

there is ample evidence that the opposite is true, but this evidence was ignored.

Stark Hypocrisy

Even worse, the accusation made by Geisler and Rhodes is starkly hypocritical. Just two years earlier Geisler himself wrote:

Many churches in Christendom deny the authority of any council, though they agree with many things stated by them, particularly in the early ones. This they do by insisting strongly that only the Bible has binding authority. All creeds and confessions are man-made. Thus, no authority is attached to any church councils, whether they be local or so-called universal councils. This view is called *solo Scriptura* by Keith A. Mathison in contrast to the Reformed view of *sola Scriptura*, since the latter read the Bible in the light of the early Fathers and creeds whereas the former do not.

By holding a free church view, **as we do**, one does not need to deny there is any value to the creeds and councils. It is simply that there is no authority in them, either divine or ecclesiastical. In fact, all orthodox Christians, Catholics and non-Catholics, agree with the basic doctrines affirmed in the earlier so-called ecumenical councils, such as the Trinity, virgin birth, deity of Christ, and Christ's hypostatic union of two natures in one person. The main concern of orthodox Christians is with attributing any divine or even ecclesiastical authority to creedal and conciliar pronouncements.²⁵ [emphasis added]

To require affirmation of a creedal formulation as proof of orthodoxy concerning the Trinity is to apply a double standard, something which Elliot Miller repeatedly pointed out as the practice of the Christian countercult apologists in their critiques of the local churches.

²⁵ Norman L. Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church?: A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 52.

Conclusion

Applying the standard of creedal conformity as a litmus test of orthodoxy undermines the authority of the Bible. It subordinates the authority of the Bible to the creeds. This is something every believer in Christ should reject. While we respect the efforts of the early church to define what they believed in the face of many distortions of the revelation in the Bible, it is the complete Bible itself that must be the rule of our faith and practice.

Norman Geisler claims to hold this opinion himself, yet he criticizes Witness Lee and the local churches for taking the same standing. Geisler and Rhodes failed to address either our plain affirmations of the common faith or Witness Lee's careful evaluation of the creeds. These omissions are particularly troubling given Geisler and Rhodes' disparagement of the need of more research, such as that performed by CRI.

A MISPLACED CRITICISM OF “THE TWOFOLDNESS OF DIVINE TRUTH”

In early 2010 Norman Geisler published a letter on the Internet that he claims to have sent to Ron Kangas, editor-in-chief of the journal *Affirmation & Critique (A&C)*.¹ In the letter Geisler challenged comments that Ron Kangas made concerning the twofoldness of divine truth in an article for *A&C*:

Fourth, what do you mean by “twofoldness” of truth. Can logical opposites both be true?

Ron Kangas did not say that opposites can both be true. Rather, he said that the truths in the Bible often have two sides, specifically, in the context of the article Geisler criticized, that God is both one and three at the same time.²

In the criticism to which Geisler’s letter is appended, Geisler and Ron Rhodes claim that Ron Kangas appealed to “[Witness] Lee’s mysterious doctrine of the ‘Twofoldness of Truth’” to defend logical contradictions concerning the nature of Christ. Their criticism is ill-informed. The teaching of the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth did not originate with Witness Lee. In the nineteenth century, the highly respected British Bible teacher Robert Govett wrote a booklet entitled *The Twofoldness of Divine Truth*. There Govett said that what appears to us to

¹ This letter was published on the Internet along with the criticism by Geisler and Ron Rhodes of the reassessment of the teaching of Witness Lee and the local churches performed by the Christian Research Institute that is the subject of this series of books. The letter was dated June 2008. Ron Kangas has no record or recollection of having received such a letter.

² Ron Kangas, “The Economy of God: The Triune God in His Operation,” *Affirmation & Critique XIII:1*, April 2008, p. 5:

The revealed biblical truth, being twofold according to the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, embraces both the oneness and the threeness of the Triune God: God is uniquely one, yet He is three-one—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

be a contradiction in the Word of God is often due to the truth having two sides. Of one example he wrote:

But are they not contradictory? That cannot be, for they are both parts of the Word of God, and contradictions cannot both be true. Both, then, are to be received whether we can reconcile them or no.³

Ron Kangas affirmed Govett's understanding in an article entitled "Reflections: The Twofoldness of Divine Truth" in the spring 2010 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*:

For many years we have presented and upheld, as foundational to the theological enterprise, the twofoldness of divine truth—the essential biblical principle that the great truths in the Scriptures are respectively of two aspects. These aspects, or sides, although they might appear to be inconsistent, are by no means contradictory; rather, they are complementary.⁴

Both Govett's original book and Ron Kangas' article convincingly demonstrate the value of the principle of twofoldness in understanding the divine revelation in the Bible.

Geisler's misattribution of the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth to Witness Lee is telling. Four articles on the Web site contendingforthefaith.org,⁵ three articles in

³ Robert Govett, *The Twofoldness of Divine Truth* (Harrisburg: Christian Publishers Inc., n.d.), pp. 7-8; the entire booklet is reproduced on pages 43-67 of this book.

⁴ Ron Kangas, "Reflections: The Twofoldness of Divine Truth," *Affirmation & Critique*, XV:1, Spring 2010, p. 91; the entire article is reproduced on pages 27-41 of this book.

⁵ The four articles are:

- Ron Kangas, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation of the Triune God according to the Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1976);
- "Concerning the Scriptural Meaning of the Triune God," *Orange County Register*, October 22, 1977;
- Ron Kangas, *The Triune God: A Testimony of Our Belief And Experience* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1976); and
- "The Truth Concerning the Study of the Bible," *Orange County Register*, October 15, 1977.

Affirmation & Critique,⁶ as well as other publications by Living Stream Ministry⁷ all attribute this principle to Govett and his booklet. Had Geisler and Rhodes done their homework, they would have known this.

Geisler made a further insinuation that is noteworthy, particularly for its complete misrepresentation of the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth and for its possible overtones of ethnic bias. Geisler wrote:

Seventh, how would you distinguish your view from the Yin-Yang of Taoism where ultimate reality is beyond distinctions like true or false and opposites can both be one?

Would Geisler have asked the same question had he known that the principle he was rejecting was first articulated by a British theologian rather than Witness Lee?⁸ The writings of Robert

⁶ The three articles in *A&C* are:

- Ron Kangas, “Becoming a Person Who Knows the Triune God,” *A&C I:2*, April 1996, pp. 27-37;
- Ron Kangas, “The Subjective God: The Trinity in Christian Experience,” *A&C II:1*, January 1997, pp. 28-43; and
- Ron Kangas, “Word, Breath, Flesh: The Processed God in the Gospel of John,” *A&C X:1*, pp. 3-13.

⁷ Examples include:

- Witness Lee, *Life-study of 1 Corinthians* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1984), p. 190;
- Witness Lee, *Young People’s Training* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1976), pp. 64-65; and
- Witness Lee, *Lesson Book, Level 5: The Church—The Vision and Building Up of the Church* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1990), pp. 77-78.

In *Watchman Nee: A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1991), p. 262, Witness Lee wrote that Govett’s booklet was translated into Chinese as part of Watchman Nee’s publication work.

⁸ Geisler is not the first to use Witness Lee’s Chinese lineage to imply that his teaching contains elements that are foreign to the Christian faith. Certain countercult writers seem predisposed to label anything they do

Govett, Witness Lee, and Ron Kangas are based on the Bible and are replete with biblical examples. An examination of their writings quickly demonstrates that Geisler's association of the twofoldness of divine truth with the Yin-Yang of Taoism is utterly baseless. Geisler depends on the natural mind limited by the principles of Western philosophy and logic to try to apprehend what is spiritual in nature, something which the apostle Paul told us will not work (1 Cor. 2:14, cf. 1:22-23). It is Geisler, not Robert Govett or Witness Lee or Ron Kangas, who subjects the study of the Bible to an external set of philosophical principles. Robert Govett, Witness Lee, and Ron Kangas are students of the Bible, following the tradition of the loving seekers of the Lord to receive the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17-18; cf. Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:6) to apprehend the unsearchable riches of Christ unveiled in the Holy Bible (Eph. 3:8), and their expositions on the twofoldness of divine truth reflect their commitment to the Word of God.

For an extensive and enlightening commentary on the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, please read Ron Kangas' article "Reflections: The Twofoldness of Divine Truth," reproduced by permission from the spring 2010 issue of *Affirmation & Critique* on pages 27-41 of this book. Govett's original text is also reproduced on pages 43-67.

not understand or disagree with as cultic or Eastern mysticism. The truth is Witness Lee was raised in a Southern Baptist home and attended Christian schools. His teaching is thoroughly biblical, and he often cited his indebtedness to the many Bible teachers from the West whose writings he carefully studied.

REFLECTIONS: THE TWOFOLDNESS OF DIVINE TRUTH

by Ron Kangas

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For many years we have presented and upheld, as foundational to the theological enterprise, the twofoldness of divine truth—the essential biblical principle that the great truths in the Scriptures are respectively of two aspects. These aspects, or sides, although they might appear to be inconsistent, are by no means contradictory; rather, they are complementary. Recently, strident critics of our work, among them a religionist and philosophical apologist highly regarded in certain fundamentalist circles, have raised objections and posed questions concerning our testimony of the twofoldness of the divine truth in the Word of God. Not all the objections and questions are reasonable, for some spring from a serious lack of understanding, and others, from speculative predilections that are contrary to the emphasis of the New Testament revelation. Nevertheless, it is fitting, and perhaps timely, for the benefit of interested, objective readers and even of those influenced by biased critics, to restate and reaffirm our understanding of and commitment to the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth.

Set Forth by Robert Govett

Contrary to the suppositions of some, the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth did not originate with either Watchman Nee or Witness Lee, and thus this principle cannot accurately be called “Lee’s mysterious doctrine of the ‘Twofoldness of Truth.’” For our understanding of the twofoldness of divine truth, we are indebted to Robert Govett, a meticulous and perceptive student of the Word of God, and to his essay that bears this title, and several extracts and examples will be given both to recognize

Govett's contribution and to explain the meaning and significance of this precious principle in the Word of God.

"The oneness and harmony of Divine Truth as contained in the Scripture," Govett observes, "is a pleasing and profitable subject of contemplation" (3). He then goes on to say, "Yet it must not be forgotten or denied, that there are continually exhibited within its pages, in bold relief, truths seemingly opposed to each other" (3). Here with the words *truths seemingly opposed to each other* Govett introduces the twofoldness of truth, and then he identifies his purpose: "To trace out some of these, and set them before the reader, with the ground on which they are to be received, is the main object of the present tract" (3). *Some of these* include the role of God and human beings in the change of a person from enmity against God to love for Him, the extent of the redemption procured by the death of the Lord Jesus, perseverance and justification, the nature of God as uniquely one yet triune, the justice and mercy of God, the divine and human natures of Christ, the God-ordained way of worship, how the church is to be built up, the various dispensations of God, and salvation by grace alone and reward according to works.¹ Regarding such instances of the twofoldness of truth and pointing out that in nature God "is continually acting with two seemingly-opposed principles," Govett says,

The twofoldness of truth as offered to our view in Holy Writ, is one strong argument of its not being the work of man. It is the glory of man's intellect to produce *oneness*. His aim is to trace different results to one principle, to clear it of ambiguities, to show how, through varied appearances, one law holds. Anything that stands in the way of the completeness of this, he eludes or denies. (3)²

¹ Regarding the divine and human natures of Christ, Govett says, "But, against this twofold truth, human unbelief has ever wrecked itself. One set of heretics denied the manhood of Jesus: one denied the divinity" (13).

² This prevails today, especially among philosophically oriented systematic theologians who cannot receive a biblical truth that does not harmonize

Understanding this tendency of the unrenewed human mind, Govett argues against the attitude that we are free to choose between seemingly opposing truths and that, if we are unable to reconcile these truths in the doctrinal system of our preference, we have the liberty to embrace the one and discard the other. “This is sheer unbelief,” he declares. “The same God who spake the one, spake also the other. Do you ask then—‘Which you are to believe?’ Which? Both!” (6). Next, addressing the impulse of fallen persons to harmonize conflicting truths, Govett asserts, “It is not necessary to reconcile them, before we are bound to receive and act upon the two. It is enough, that the Word of God distinctly affirms them both” (6). Insisting that twofold truths are not contradictory, he goes on to say, “Nay, that cannot be; for they are both parts of the Word of God; and contradictions cannot both be true. Both, then, are to be received” (8). In this way God tries His people. “Will they trust Him, when He affirms that view of truth which runs counter to their temperaments and intellectual bias? or will they trample on one of His sayings, in the zeal for the other?” (11).³

with their fabricated system. For example, the New Testament explicitly states in Luke 24 that the resurrected Christ has a body of flesh and bones objectively; nevertheless, Paul emphasizes the fact that Jesus Christ is in us subjectively, even being formed in us and making His home in our hearts. Sadly, some believe the objective matter—that Christ in resurrection has a body of flesh and bones—but avoid, if not deny outright, the subjective matter—that the resurrected Christ is actually within the believers. Being uncomfortable with the subjective aspect of the truth regarding the resurrected Christ, and not truly believing that Christ Himself as a person dwells in the believers, they may resort to explanations such as “Christ in the Holy Spirit is in us,” or “the resurrected Christ is in us through the Spirit,” or “Christ is in us in the sense that the indwelling Holy Spirit represents Christ.” In fact, denying the perspicuity of Scriptures as it pertains to the believers’ experience and enjoyment of the indwelling Christ, they reject, or at least sidestep, the clear and evident testimony of the Word of God related to Christ Himself as a living and wonderful person being in the believers.

³ This is the sad, even tragic, situation among countless religious leaders and theologians today. In their zeal for a truth that matches their

Govett specifically applies the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth to the nature of God:

The same twofoldness of truth appears in the Scripture statements concerning the NATURE OF GOD. It affirms His unity...But the Scripture as plainly affirms the distinction of persons in the Godhead. ‘Unity in plurality and plurality in unity’ is the great assertion here. This master-truth, which takes its rise in the nature of the Godhead, flows out into all His works. (12)

We should note with care Govett’s statement that this “master-truth...takes its rise in the nature of the Godhead.” In other words, God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures, being twofold, is an expression of the nature of God.⁴ The two aspects of God’s intrinsic, eternal, immutable being—that He is three being one and one being three—are testified by the twofoldness of the truth of His revelation in the Scriptures. “Thus the Scripture is twofold in character, like the God who gave it” (20). The challenges to the human intellect and fleshly wisdom implied in the twofoldness of divine truth are intentional.

disposition, that harmonizes with their system (often regarded as “orthodox”), and that can be reconciled with their philosophical outlook, they actually trample on certain divine truths. This is the case in particular with truths concerning the indwelling of the Spirit, the genuine divine birth by which believers receive the divine life, and being one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). This will no doubt continue until all the believers, having been humbled and broken under the mighty hand of God, will experientially be brought into chapter 42 of Job and thus will repent of their folly and confess that they did not truly know the God for whose revelation they were supposedly contending so earnestly.

⁴ If we would truly know the Triune God in revelation and experience, we need to recognize the twofold truth concerning God in His Divine Trinity. To say that God is triune is to testify that He is three-one. He is uniquely one, yet He is distinctly and inseparably three. In the Godhead the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct but inseparable; in God’s being one there is no separation among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and in God’s being three there is a distinction among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The three of the Trinity cannot be separated, yet there is a distinction among them. This is the twofoldness of the divine truth in the Word of God concerning the Triune God.

From this twofoldness of truth DESIGNED difficulties arise. Thus does God try mankind. Thus does He try His people. Will they receive both His statements on His simple assertion? Most will not. They are one-sided. They will force everything to unity...They ignore all evidence that tells against their views. (21)

Govett concludes with the illustration of a house that can be viewed from more than one perspective:

The Scripture is a house with more than one front. He who will always approach it by the eastern path, may assert that its colour is *black*. He who never will enter it by any but the western road, may affirm, with equal resoluteness and with equal truth, that its colour is *white*. But he who will tread both paths, and go round the house, viewing it in its every aspect, may see how the black wall and the white, the front, the back, and the gables, make up one consolidated edifice, deep rooted in the nature both of God and man. He who will receive but half the truth, is ever liable to revulsions: and these are the more vehement, the more unmingled and one-sided they are. (24)

Some of the Twofold Divine Truths in the Word of God

As illustrations of the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth enunciated by Govett, let us identify, with utmost brevity, some of the numerous twofold divine truths in the Scriptures:

Salvation is absolutely by grace through faith, but the reward of the coming kingdom is according to works. The believers' eternal salvation is absolutely by grace through faith, not by the works of the law, "because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified" (Gal. 2:16). Paul's word on this matter is emphatic: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). This is echoed in 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 3:5. In the former reference Paul says that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace." This is reinforced by his declaration in Titus 3:5: "Not out of works in righteousness

which we did but according to His mercy He saved us.” This great truth is balanced by the truth that when believers appear before the Lord at the judgment seat, they will give an account of their works and then receive a reward (either positive or negative) based upon their life in the Lord and their service to Him. “For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to His doings” (Matt. 16:27). The Lord Jesus emphasized this in one of His last utterances recorded in the Scriptures: “Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one as his work is” (Rev. 22:12). This reward is specifically related to reigning with Christ in the coming millennial kingdom (2:26-27).

God’s complete salvation is both objective according to the righteousness of God and subjective in the life of God. These two aspects are portrayed by the best robe and the fattened calf in Luke 15. The best robe, signifying Christ as our righteousness covering us in the presence of God for our justification, is objective; the fattened calf, signifying Christ processed to be our life supply for our nourishment and growth in the divine life, is subjective. Hence, God’s complete salvation is both objective and subjective. Paul addresses both in Romans 5:10: “For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled.” On the one hand, believers in Christ have been saved eternally according to God’s righteousness objectively; they have been justified by faith and reconciled to God through the death of Christ. On the other hand, there is “much more,” and this is the need of being saved in Christ’s life. This salvation in life, as a careful study of the book of Romans discloses, includes sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification, all of which are predicated upon subjective experiences of Christ, who is our life (Col. 3:4). In keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of the divine truth, God’s complete salvation is both objective and subjective, both an accomplished fact and an ongoing process.

Christ is both at the right hand of God in the heavens and in the believers. Romans 8:34 says, “It is Christ Jesus who died and, rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” The statement is perspicuous, and its meaning is clear: Christ is at the right hand of God. We should be conscious of this as we read Paul’s word in verse 10, where he speaks of Christ in us, a remark that is also perspicuous. According to these verses, Christ is at the right hand of God, and Christ is in the believers—a twofold truth. The same twofoldness is found in Colossians. “If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (3:1). Where is Christ? As Paul makes clear, Christ is at the right hand of God. But there is another aspect of this truth, and it requires equal attention. “To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). Significantly, both mentions of the locations of Christ are related to glory. In 1:27 the Christ who dwells in us is the hope of glory; in 3:4 the Christ who is at the right hand of God (and who simultaneously is our life) will be manifested in glory, and we will be manifested with Him. The same twofold truth concerning Christ is presented in Ephesians. In 1:20 we see that, through the operation of the surpassing greatness of God’s power, Christ has been seated “at His right hand in the heavenlies,” yet in 3:17 Christ is making His home in our hearts through faith. Therefore, He is both at the right hand of God and in us who have believed into Him.

Christ is the only begotten Son in the Godhead and the firstborn Son among His many brothers. In the unique, eternal, unchanging Godhead, Christ is the only begotten Son, and several portions of the New Testament testify concerning this. John 1:14 speaks of Him as “the only Begotten from the Father.” Verse 18 goes on to say, “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” Motivated by vast, immeasurable love, “God so loved the world that He gave

His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life” (3:16). If we would have eternal life—the indestructible life of God—we must not only believe the only begotten Son but also believe into Him. “To believe Him is to believe that He is true and real, but to believe into Him is to receive Him and be united with Him as one. The former is to acknowledge a fact objectively; the latter is to receive a life subjectively” (Recovery Version, v. 16, note 2). One who believes into Him is not condemned. However, “he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God” (v. 18). Although “God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him” (1 John 4:9), and although we, by God’s grace, have believed into the only begotten Son and thereby have received the life of God, we need to see and realize that, in His resurrection, Christ, the only begotten Son of God in the Godhead, is now the Son of God in another sense. He is the firstborn Son of God, implying, as the Scripture elsewhere states explicitly, that He has many brothers and that God the Father has many sons (John 20:17; Heb. 2:10-12). We believe into the only begotten Son, but we are being conformed to the image of the firstborn Son. “Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). As the only begotten Son in the Godhead, Christ the Son of God is unique in His deity, and as such He cannot have brothers. But as the firstborn Son in resurrection, Christ, possessing both divinity and humanity for eternity, has many brothers, whom God the Father predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Firstborn for the corporate expression of God in Christ the Son with the believers as the many sons. Furthermore, when God sent His Son through incarnation, the Son was the only begotten Son, but when Christ returns with His bridal army, He will be the firstborn Son (Heb. 1:6).

The resurrected Christ has a glorified body of flesh and bones, yet He is the Lord Spirit, the life-giving Spirit. According to the Gospel of Luke, when the resurrected Christ manifested Himself to the disciples, “they were terrified and became frightened and thought they beheld a spirit” (24:37). Assuring them that He was not a ghost or a specter, the Lord Jesus said, “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you behold Me having” (v. 39). This fact was further verified when “they handed Him a piece of broiled fish; and He took it and ate before them” (vv. 42-43). According to John 20:20, the resurrected Christ, in manifesting Himself to the disciples, “showed them His hands and His side” (v. 20). Eight days later He said to unbelieving Thomas, “Bring your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side” (v. 27). The resurrected Christ surely has a body of flesh and bones, albeit a spiritual body—a body saturated by the spirit—and a body of glory—a body saturated with God’s glory (1 Cor. 15:44; Phil. 3:21). Nevertheless, the New Testament testifies that this resurrected Christ with a spiritual body is a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) ready and able to be received by us, to enter into us, to dwell in us, and to live in us. As such, He is the Lord Spirit, a compound title which testifies that, as Paul asserts boldly, “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Because the resurrected Christ has a glorified spiritual body of flesh and bones, He can be seated on the throne in the heavens, and because the resurrected Christ is the Lord Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, He can dwell in us and even be one spirit with us (1 Cor. 6:17).

Although the believers in Christ have been chosen to be holy and have been predestinated unto sonship, they nevertheless have some degree of genuine human freedom. The debate among theologians related to God’s sovereignty and foreknowledge and to human responsibility and freedom is unending. There can be no doubt that God is sovereign and that His elect have been chosen to be holy and have been predestinated unto sonship (Eph. 1:4-5). As noted

above, the believers have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God; thus, no matter what the level of human responsibility and freedom may be, the God-determined outcome is certain. Nevertheless, there is biblical ground to maintain that in the Scriptures there is a harmony of divine determination and human free choice and that this harmony involves another twofold truth—the truth of God’s sovereignty and of human freedom and responsibility. Evidence of this is the record in Exodus concerning the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. The Bible clearly says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and that Pharaoh hardened his heart himself. In Exodus 4:21 God says, “I will harden his heart”; however, 8:15 informs us that Pharaoh “hardened his heart.” In 9:7 we are told that “the heart of Pharaoh was stubborn,” and in verse 35, that “Pharaoh’s heart hardened.” On the one hand, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, an exercise of divine sovereignty and predetermination; on the other hand, Pharaoh himself hardened his heart, an instance of human responsibility and freedom. What was exhibited in the case of Pharaoh—a harmony of predetermination and free choice in the hardening of a human heart—demonstrates the twofold truth that God is sovereign and that human beings have responsibility and at least some kind and some degree of freedom.

God in His eternal Godhead is immutable, but God in His economy has been processed and consummated. In keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, we should believe in and testify to both the immutability of the Triune God in His eternal Godhead and the process of the Triune God in the outworking in time of the divine economy. God’s immutability is related to His being eternally, and God’s process is related to His becoming temporally, that is, to a series of experiences within the limits of time which, to the human mind, involve a time sequence.⁵ For

⁵ The divine perspective of events in time is different from the human perspective; for example, although Christ was crucified at an exact time

God to be immutable means that He is not capable of change or susceptible of change; He is not subject to change, for He is unchanging, invariable (James 1:17; Heb. 6:17). He is immutable in His essence (Exo. 3:14; Rev. 1:4), in His attributes (Psa. 89:14; Eph. 2:4), in His promises (Heb. 6:18), and in His purpose (Psa. 33:11; Isa. 46:9-10; Eph. 3:11). Although God is immutable, in Christ He has passed through a process, a series of progressive and interdependent steps, to become the Spirit (John 1:1, 14; 7:37-39; 20:22) so that He might dispense Himself into us. The fact that God has passed through a process for the carrying out of His economy is indicated by certain terms used in the New Testament to describe the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14): “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7), “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9), “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19), “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2), “the Spirit” (John 7:39; Gal. 3:14; Rev. 22:17), and “the seven Spirits” (1:4). Now, as the Spirit, the Triune God can reach us, enter into us, dwell in us, fill us, and overflow from within us. Nevertheless, in His eternal Godhead He remains immutable, even as He continues to flow for eternity in the New Jerusalem (22:1-2). Thus, in Himself God is unchanging, for His essence is immutable, His nature is unalterable, and He can never become either more or less than what He is and always will be. The complementary aspect of the twofold truth is that this eternal, immutable, unchanging Triune God has, in Christ, passed through a process in time in order to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose.

Avoiding Misunderstandings

To hold to the twofoldness of the divine truth in the Word of God is not to embrace contradictions. Neither is it a violation of the principle, or law, of noncontradiction to testify of the two aspects of any particular truth. According to the law of noncontradiction, two

and place, Revelation 13:8 speaks of Him as “the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.”

opposite statements cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. We would never say that it is possible for something to be true and not true at the same time and in the same way. For example, the desk in my office cannot be made of wood and not made of wood at the same time. To say that Judas hanged himself and that he did not hang himself would be a contradiction, but to assert, as the New Testament does, that Judas “went away and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5) and that “falling headlong, he burst in the middle, and all his inward parts gushed out” (Acts 1:18) is not contradictory, for this involves two noncontradictory ways of referring to the same death of the person. Regarding the twofoldness of divine truth, we do not say, and we would never say, that something is and that it is not in the same respect and at the same time. The Bible does not claim that the resurrected Christ has a body and that He does not have a body, or that Christ is in the believers and that He is not in the believers. However, the New Testament does reveal more than one aspect of the resurrected Christ—that He has a glorified body of flesh and bones and that He is a life-giving Spirit. In like manner, Paul declares that the resurrected Christ is both at the right hand of God and not at the right hand of God. These statements are not contradictions, and it is not a violation of the law of noncontradiction to affirm them.

Nevertheless, some critics see contradictions where such do not exist, a perception that is often due to distortion caused by adherence to a particular theological system. For instance, God’s sovereignty and predestination do not rule out human responsibility and freedom of choice. This means that there is no contradiction between divine predestination and human freedom of will, no matter how strongly this might be disputed by some. Since the fallen human mind displays the dreadful noetic effects of indwelling sin, we would be well advised not to be hasty in condemning other believers of violating the law of noncontradiction, for in so doing we, seeing contradictions where none

exist, may wrongly accuse these believers, misrepresent them, and bear false witness against them.

We should also be cautioned not to demand of those who set forth the twofoldness of the divine truths that they systematically reconcile these truths to our satisfaction before we desist from accusing them of teaching contradictions. The Bible does not demand that we reconcile God's predetermination with human free will before we accept both aspects of the truth. God does not require that, to satisfy the insistence of the natural human mind, we mentally reconcile the truths regarding objective and subjective salvation, the kingdom of God being both present and future, and Christ coming both from the heavens and from within the glorified believers. Who are we, then, to require of fellow believers what God Himself does not require? Earnest, educated believers may reasonably maintain two aspects of a specific truth, believing that these aspects are not contradictory but complementary. Instead of dismissing their testimony as contradictory and thereby demeaning them as foolish believers who speak contrary to philosophical principles and of naively believing contradictions, we should carefully, prayerfully, and with an open, unbiased mind search the Scriptures in order to prove all things according to the Word of God and thus ascertain the biblical basis for the teachings in question. Otherwise, we may criticize someone's doctrinal position without truly understanding it, a practice that, sadly, is rampant among religious persons today, including theologians and apologists.

Witnessing of the twofoldness of divine truth is not a way of speaking about a so-called union, or reconciliation, of opposites—a union which some believe to be achieved philosophically and which others insist is arrived at mystically by entering into a supposed ultimate reality where there are no distinctions of any kind and where opposites become one. To maintain the twofoldness of divine truth is altogether different from and incompatible with the philosophical notion, propounded by Heraclitus and Cusanus, of the unity of opposites or

the union, reconciliation, or coincidence of opposites. This is the proposition that, ultimately, all pairs of opposites are reconciled or harmonized according to some kind of universal unifying principle. Apparently, it is claimed, certain things stand in opposition to each other; actually, they are parts of a whole that can be perceived intuitively by those with special insight. For Heraclitus, Sweet says, by “understanding the essential interdependence and harmony of things in opposition, we may come to recognize the hidden harmony and underlying unity of these things” (59). Correlative to this assertion is that a beautiful harmony comes from things seemingly at variance with one another.

This is a hidden harmony, superior to any perceivable concordance... It is discernible only by the person with wisdom ... that is, one who understands the lawful order and systematic connectedness that underlies the apparent diversity and disjointedness of appearances. (60)

We are informed by Bond that the view of Cusanus is similar: “Coincidence of opposites, as coined by Cusanus, is a state or condition in which opposites no longer oppose each other but fall together into a harmony, union, or conjunction” (458). Bond goes on to explain that in “Cusanus’ theology, God is not the coincidence of opposites, but rather, in some sense, opposites coincide in God but not with God” (459). Such a way of thinking is altogether alien to the divine revelation in the Scriptures, which set forth not a harmony of opposites but two aspects, or sides, of the truth.

In our attempt to speak of the twofoldness of divine truth, we are not engaged in anything that remotely resembles the union, or harmony, of opposites. We are not working with opposites; thus, there are no opposites to reconcile. At the risk of being tedious or repetitious, we wish to testify of twofold truths—biblical statements that embody not opposites but complementary aspects of divinely revealed truths. Furthermore, we are not attempting to reconcile, or harmonize, in a systematized way

the twofold truths in the Word of God. On the contrary, our responsibility before God is to recognize without bias or preference both sides of the truth and then testify the full truth without presuming to systematize what God has been pleased to reveal in an asystematic manner, revealing one aspect of a truth in a certain portion of the Word and another aspect elsewhere in the Word. The natural human mind, as Govett observes, may revel in unified systems, but God delights in the twofoldness of revealed truth. In addition, we are assured that the New Testament neither reveals nor promotes a kind of mysticism in which the devotees enter into a transcendent realm where all distinctions are dissolved, where opposites become one, and where the practitioners lose their identity in an impersonal ground of being. In contrast to all such notions, we wish, simply and faithfully, to uphold and testify to the divine truths of the Scriptures in their purposeful twofoldness without preference, without systematizing, and without seeking entry into an ultimate reality that, as some would say, is beyond all truth claims. Our desire is to know the truth, to be constituted with the truth, to minister the truth, and to be the church of the living God, the church that is the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). We invite all those who love the Lord and His Word to join us, and seeking believers everywhere, in this worthy pursuit.

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THE TWOFOLDNESS OF DIVINE TRUTH

by Robert Govett (1843-1901)

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The oneness and harmony of Divine Truth as contained in the Scripture is a pleasing and profitable subject of contemplation. Though proceeding from so many pens, under such varied conditions, at dates so distant, the Bible contains but one grand scheme.

Yet it must not be forgotten or denied that there are continually exhibited within its pages truths seemingly opposed to each other. To trace out some of these and set them before the reader, with the ground on which they are to be received, is the main object of this booklet.

The twofoldness of truth as offered to our view in Holy Writ is one strong argument of its not being the work of man. It is the glory of man's intellect to produce oneness. His aim is to trace different results to one principle, to clear it of ambiguities, to show how, through varied appearances, one law holds. Anything that stands in the way of the completeness of this, he eludes or denies, as something destructive of the glory and of the efficiency of his discovery.

But it is not so with God. In nature He is continually acting with two seemingly opposed principles. What keeps the planets moving in beautiful order around the sun? Not one force, but two—two forces pulling each particle of matter in two opposite directions at the same instant. Leave our earth to one of these and it would fly away into infinite space. Give undivided scope to the other, and the globe would soon be drawn down to the surface of the sun.

But between the two forces it moves harmoniously on its way. How is life supported? By two airs or gases of opposite qualities. If we breathed one of them alone, we would die quickly from the intense expenditure and exhaustion of the vital forces; place us in an unmingled atmosphere of the other, and life would be extinguished in a few minutes. The bodies in which we live are ever subject to the opposite action of two forces—by one the flesh and blood and bones are being continually taken to pieces; by the other, new particles are being continually added. What is the salt that we eat? A compound of two substances, either of which alone would destroy us.

It is not then to be wondered at, if two seemingly opposed principles are found placed side by side in the Scripture. “Unity in plurality, plurality in unity” is the main principle on which both the world and the Scripture are constructed.

It is the purpose of the writer then to exhibit some instances of seemingly contradictory doctrines. The widest and most obvious field of these is found in the range of those schemes of truth which are known respectively as Calvinistic and Arminian.

God’s Sovereignty and Man’s Responsibility

In some passages of Scripture, the change of man from enmity against God to love of Him, is ascribed in the clearest terms to the power of God. It is traced to a purpose of the Sovereign of the Universe formed before creation. In others it is spoken of as the act of the man himself. It is regarded as due to the means made use of. It is enforced on each as his express duty, the neglect or resistance of which will entail his just condemnation.

“Lydia...whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).

“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

“He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4).

But specimens of the other kind frequently occur.

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed” (Acts 17:11, 12).

“Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:38, 40).

“Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish” (Acts 13:40, 41).

“The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

At times the two come into startling nearness of contact.

“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you” (Matt. 11:20-22).

What is more evident, then, than the responsibility of man and that his criminality is in proportion to advantages bestowed! Yet after a similar sentiment concerning Capernaum, what immediately follows?

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Matt. 11:25, 26).

Here the sovereignty of God in the election of some and the omission of others, is as clearly asserted. Nay, the two are closely interwoven in one sentence.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13).

The first effort of Christians has been to reconcile the two statements, that is to bring them into one. Finding that impossible, the great majority have fixed on one class of these texts, rejecting the other. They have made an unscriptural oneness in their own minds by refusing to listen to the opposing truth, or by conforming the passages that speak it into as near an accordance with their views as they can. Hence have arisen the two great styles of sentiment on these points—one class calling itself Arminian, the other Calvinistic.

Much harm has resulted therefrom.

1. The Arminian has fallen into vain self-reliance, bustle, and idolatry of the means. The agency of man, his powers and activity, have come prominently into his view. The glory and praise of man have taken the place of the glory and praise of God.
2. The Calvinistic scheme, taken alone, has fostered an equally harmful effect in the other direction. Accustomed to regard God only as the Sovereign Benefactor, and man as passive and helpless only, it has fallen into spiritual sloth; and has frowned suspiciously on those who would use means to advance the salvation of men.

Extreme Arminianism has made man independent of God, and has denied either His infinite foreknowledge or His boundless power.

Extreme Calvinism has so swallowed up the responsibility of man by assertion of his passivity, as to foster inactivity, and to verge on making God the author of sin.

What then is to be done? Which are we to believe of the two statements? It is taken for granted that we are to make our choice between the two; and that, if we cannot reconcile the two systems, we are at liberty to give the preference to which ever we please. This is sheer unbelief. The same God who spake the one spake also the other. Do you ask which you are to believe? Which? Both!

It is not necessary to reconcile them before we are bound to receive and act upon the two. It is enough that the Word of God distinctly affirms them both.

The Extent of Redemption

Take another point. What is the extent of the redemption procured by the death of the Lord Jesus?

The testimony of Scripture on this point is seemingly opposed.

1. Now redemption is affirmed to have been wrought on behalf of the saints and elect, as witness the following passages:

“Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25).

“This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20).

“The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:11, 15).

“Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” (1 Thess. 5:10).

2. But again, the death of Jesus is affirmed to have been for the salvation of the world.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).¹

“Prayers” are to be made “for all men.” “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have (is willing) all men to be saved.” For the man Christ Jesus “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:1, 3-4, 6).

Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). What does the apostle mean by “the whole world”? “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19).

“We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).

Again we are brought to the same point. Here are two seemingly opposing truths. And hence Christians have gone off into opposite directions about them. Time and ingenuity have been wasted in the attempt to compass both into one. They will ever resist the pressure.

But are they not contradictory? That cannot be, for they are both parts of the Word of God, and contradictions cannot both be true. Both, then, are to be received whether we can reconcile them or no. Their claim on our reception is not that we can unite them, but that God has testified both.

¹ The attempt to turn the edge of these passages, by affirming that “the world” here means the world of the elect, scarcely calls for an answer. It is a sad perversion of the Word of God. In John, and the rest of the Scripture, “the world” means, not the elect, but the opposite company.

The Perseverance of the Saints

With regard to the perseverance of the saints on their course of holiness, there is the same diversity, or contrast of view.

1. Now the full security of the sheep of Christ is affirmed, in terms the most suited to console them.

“I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28, 29).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35, 38, 39).

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

2. And yet, how strong and awful the exhortations against falling away! How absolute the terrors threatened in case of so doing. What is the Epistle to the Hebrews, but a long plea against such apostacy?

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?” (Heb. 2:1-3).

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall

fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:4-6).

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26, 27).

Justification—by Faith or by Works?

Look at the question of justification. On this point almost all true believers agree that a man is justified by faith, without works.

“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of (in) Jesus Christ unto all (men), and upon all them that believe...” (Rom. 3:20-22).

Yet, on this doctrine, the assertions of Scripture seem opposed.

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

But what says James?

“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).

How then are we to hold in the same heart and understanding, views of truth so contrasted? Very easily. The Bible is the Word of God. Contradictions cannot both be true. Therefore there are no contradictions in the Word of God. And opposite views of truth arise from different parts of the subject being viewed at different times. God is one, and His Word is one, though its beauty and its glory is that it views truth on all sides. “Look! those two trains will surely dash one another to pieces! With frightful speed they are rushing toward one another! They have

passed! Neither touched the other. They move on the same railway, but not on the same line of rail.”

Are we to believe God when He tells us that His saints are safe in His hand? Yes, God is infinitely worthy of credit.

But He testifies also that it is our solemn duty to watch over ourselves most carefully; and that if anyone apostatize from the truth, recovery is hopeless. This doctrine comes from the same source; it is then infinitely worthy of credit also. Whether we can see how the two principles harmonize or not, we must receive both and act upon both. We may try to see at what point they run into one, but we are to believe them at once and to act on them at once. Do we intend to call the Almighty to the bar of our weak and erring intellect, and trust Him only so far as we can see our way alone?

So with justification. God, who knows the opposite directions in which the sinful heart of man goes astray, has provided two antagonistic yet harmonizing truths to meet these opposite errors. “Man,” says Luther, “Is like a drunken peasant; help him up on one side of his horse, and he falls over on the other.” Here were Jews, expecting by their works to be justified before the God of strict justice. Paul pulls down this building, stone from stone. But there are others who seek to make the gospel a plea for license, and while holding the truth in the intellect, to deny it all power in the life. Against these is directed the inspired teaching of James which proves that the faith which will justify before God is a living faith, from which proceed works good before men.

Both faith and works are to be found in the Christian; and the Word of God, with bold voice, claims both. But here Christians generally fail.

The Scripture, while it proclaims that everlasting life is a free gift, yet asserts also that believers shall be rewarded for their works and in proportion to them.

52 HEAR OUR DEFENSE (1): CONCERNING BIBLICAL TRUTH

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Yet again it is written:

“Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (I Cor. 3:8).

“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6).

“All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Rev. 2:23).

Two hedges define the road; from two abutments springs the bridge. Does the bird fly with one wing? No—with two. Cut off one and it must forever keep to the surface.

Thus does God try His people. Will they trust Him when He affirms that view of truth which runs counter to their temperaments and intellectual bias? or will they trample on one of His sayings in their zeal for the other? The humble, child-like saint will acknowledge and receive both; for his Father, who cannot err, testifies to each alike.

The wisdom of God, foreseeing men’s passion for oneness, and yet the opposite errors with which different classes are affected, has provided in the unity of His Word the medicines suited for each disorder. In His Word there are many instances where He recognizes the tendencies of men to deviate in two opposite directions.

“Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (Deut. 5:32).

The king was to write a copy of the law, “that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside

from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left” (Deut. 17:20).

But the disobedience of human nature would show itself; and the two opposite tendencies—to add what is human to the Word of God, and to take away from what is God’s on the warrant of human wilfulness and pride—were sadly seen in the days of our Lord.

The Pharisees overpowered the Word of the Most High, by adding thereto the traditions of the elders. The Sadducees destroyed its power upon their hearts and lives, by cutting off from it whatever displeased them. For both these deviations the Word of the All-wise was prepared.

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it” (Deut. 4:2).

The same tempers and tendencies of human nature appear in our own day. Rome has smothered the light and warmth of the gospel beneath human commands and traditions. Rationalism lops off from the tree of God whatever boughs seem to disfigure its unity. With critical shears it clips the hollybush into shape.

The Nature of God

The same twofoldness of truth appears in the Scripture statements concerning the nature of God. It affirms His unity.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4).

“God is one” (Gal. 3:20).

“It is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom. 3:20).

But the Scripture as plainly affirms the distinction of persons in the Godhead. “Unity in plurality and plurality in unity” is the assertion here. This master-truth, which takes its rise in the nature of the Godhead, flows out into all His works.

“And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Gen. 3:22).

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8).

“I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter...even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16).

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:1, 2).

The Character of God

Shall we inquire concerning the character of our God? The same twofoldness of truth meets us. God is strictly just; He is Infinitely merciful.

Paul states, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

Yet, John says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

The Romanist, speaking wholly of His severity, shuts out His love and grace as a father. The Unitarian, insisting wholly on His paternal character, thrusts out of view His infinite justice and vengeance against sin. The cross of Christ presents both attributes perfectly distinct, yet gloriously reconciled.

The Nature of the Saviour

Shall we turn our eyes to the nature of the Saviour? Still the same twofoldness meets us.

Is He man? Yes.

“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

“His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3).

But is He man only?

“Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, Is for ever and ever” (Heb. 1:8).

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

In some passages the two aspects are joined.

“Of whom (the Jews) as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. 9:5).

“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh...” (I Tim. 3:16).

But against this twofold truth human unbelief has ever injured itself. One set of heretics denied the manhood of Jesus; one denied the divinity. The Jewish sect perceived in Him the mere man. The Gentile philosophers, believing that matter was evil, refused to admit that He took a human body. Gentile philosophy in our day denies His divinity.

But this glorious truth was foreshadowed of old in the furniture of the tabernacle. The altar of the burnt-offering was composed of wood and brass. The one, able to stand the fire; the other, fuel for it. The altar of incense was framed of wood and gold. The ark of the covenant, by God’s direction, consisted of two materials: wood and gold. One of these was vastly more precious than the other; yet both in union were set in the inner presence-chamber of God.

The Status of the Saviour

Similarly, His history takes a twofold type. The prophets foretold Him glorified on the earth; reigning at Jerusalem, worshipped by angels, served by kings, adored by the nations.

“Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients (elders) gloriously” (Isa. 24:23).

“Every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16).

“And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee it shall come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem” (Mic. 4:8; compare Acts 1:6).

“He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth...Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him” (Psa. 72:8, 11).

On such prophecies the Jewish mind fastened. These it expected to be fulfilled the moment Messiah appeared. Hence, when Jesus appeared in meekness and without regal power, the nation rejected Him. But were these the only passages that spoke of Messiah? No, there were others that, as unequivocally, foretold His humiliation.

“I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isa. 1:6).

“Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God” (Isa. 49:4).

“Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship” (Isa. 49:7).

“They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn” (Zech. 12:10).

Now, as the Jews could not see how to reconcile both these classes of passages, they took the set which pleased them best, and rejected the opposite series. Hence, with minds blinded by prejudice—a prejudice which refused to receive the entire compass of God’s testimony, they understood not the clearest assertions of the Saviour respecting His approaching sufferings. “Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked,

and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:31-34).

But now the opposite result has taken place. Christians, finding that the promises to Jerusalem, to the Jews, and to Jesus as the King of the Jews, have not yet been accomplished, have decided in their own minds that they are never to be literally fulfilled. But they have decided rather that they belong to some future and indefinite expansion and victory of the Church of Christ.

Thus, have they, like the Jews of old, believed only the half of what the prophets have declared, and fall under the lash of the Saviour’s rebuke to the two mourning disciples that traveled to Emmaus: “O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”

Worship

From exactly the same defect of human nature have sprung the many errors of Christians in regard to worship. Jesus commanded immersion of His disciples in the name of the Holy Trinity; the washing of each other’s feet; the Supper of the Lord. The Divine Redeemer knew that doctrine could not subsist without rite, and that rite is worthless without doctrine. Hence in His parable of the old and new wine and the old and new wine skins, He showed the necessary connection between rite and doctrine, and the necessity for new rites to embody the new doctrines of the gospel. But Rome has added to the simplicity of the Saviour’s rites a multitude of her own. And, on the other hand, the Quakers cut off rite altogether. So spiritual is the gospel to their eye that it is to have no outward ceremony. Thus the unruly will of man has displayed its willfulness by deviating from God’s pathway, both to the right hand and to the left.

Means of Edification

So again—How is the Church to be built up? How are sinners to be brought in?

1. Some say, By being taught by the preacher's living voice. Without that, the Bible might be sent to every land, yet scarce a soul be saved. Does not the Holy Spirit say that men will not believe, because they will not hear, unless the feet and voice of some gospel messenger bear them the glad tidings?
2. But the reply of others is opposite, Do you ask, how are we to learn? By Scripture! This alone is infallible truth. Preachers are ever erring; now on this side erroneous or defective, now on that. Would you grow wise? Study the Scriptures. Does not Jesus call the Jews to the study of the Word of God, that they might learn whether or not His mission were of God? Does not Paul assert that the Scriptures are able to make wise unto salvation?

If any then should inquire which of these testimonies we are to receive, the answer is, as before, both! Thrust not out of your understanding or your heart either pillar of the truth. You will not have the whole of God's testimony, unless the two parts become one in your hand. Let those that will, seek to force asunder distinct truths.

Do you retain both? Where did the gospel prosper most? At Berea. And why? Because there both these means were vigorously plied. Apostles preached, and brought before their hearers views quite new and strange. But they affirmed them to be borne out by the law and the Prophets. The Bereans therefore searched to see whether the new tidings were confirmed by the vouchers to which appeal was made. The living Word they found confirmed by the written, and they bowed their souls to the grace of the gospel.

Thus the written Word is the check upon the preacher. It presents either the proof, or the refutation of what he teaches. Without a preacher, the great majority might read their Bibles daily and yet would pass the most important truths unnoticed. And yet, on the other hand, from man's constant tendency to evil, and the teacher's tendency to abuse the truth for his own interests, it is needful that there should be some stronger proof of his doctrine than that the preacher says so, and that he is wiser than the hearer.

Hence the well-instructed Christian turns to his Bible to see whether the doctrines set forth are found in the Book of God.

On this point, again, human nature goes off in two opposite directions. Rome shuts up the Word of God from the laity, thus making the people dependent on the authoritative word of the priest. Some, on the other hand, maintain the ability of every believer to discover all truth for themselves from simple perusal of the Word of God. These refuse the office of a teacher.

The Spirit of Worship

The Spirit of Worship is another exemplification of the same truth.

1. He who would go before God must approach with the deepest reverence, remembering the Infinite Majesty of Him whom we address. The Christian is a servant (slave).

“Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28).

2. Yet God loves not the distant spirit of fear by itself; but labours to infuse into the minds of His people love towards Himself as the great peculiarity of the gospel. The believer is a son.

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15).

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:19, 22).

Steadied by these two dissimilar principles, we shall neither worship afar off; nor yet offend, by levity and fulsomeness of words and manner.

The Means of Grace

Again, the same truth holds with regard to the means of grace. True religion cannot flourish without public meetings of the saints.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (Heb. 10:25).

Yet again, a religion which consists solely in public meetings is most unhealthy and inoperative upon the temper and demeanor. Man consists of an outward and visible body, and of an inward and invisible soul. So must religion be made up both of rite and of doctrine; both of private prayer and of public meetings for worship and hearing. The tree consists of two parts—the visible stem, limbs, and leaves; and the unseen roots that keep it firmly in its place.

The gate of Truth is one; but its posts are two.

Some seem to think that in driving through the entrance, they have only to beware of the right-hand post. They steer so strenuously to the left, that they wreck their vehicle on the opposite side. Others, clearly seeing the left-hand gate-post, shatter themselves as mercilessly on the right.

The Church

For another example, let's look at the Church.

1. Sometimes it is presented as a great unity in which every believer in Jesus slain and risen, is a member.

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church...Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it...that he might present it to himself a glorious church” (Eph. 5:23, 25, 27).

“He is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18).

“On this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18).

2. Sometimes, on the other hand, it is viewed as composed of distinct and separate parts in which there are local offices.

“I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea” (Rom. 16:1).

“I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your messenger (apostle)” (Phil. 2:25).

3. The Saviour addresses each of the seven churches of Asia separately, as under the guidance and control of a separate angel or presiding officer, who is held responsible for the state of the church committed to him. Smyrna is not made responsible for the state of Ephesus; nor Philadelphia for that of Laodicea.

Both then must be held as truths. The Church of Christ is one; the churches of Christ are many. “Unity in plurality, plurality in unity” is the law here also.

The Dispensations of God

The Dispensations of God offer another example of the same truth. God is unchangeable: yet, it is no less true that He has given, at different times, different views of Himself and has founded thereon different series of commands. These dispensations are to be kept distinct, if we would understand and follow out “the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” But here, as in other cases, the blind, hasty, perverse mind of man has wrought confusion by breaking, in opposite directions, through the hedges which have been set by the Most High, on the right hand and on the left.

1. The ancient and most awful error consisted in setting up the Church of Christ against the Jewish dispensation, and in affirming that commands and principles so different as those embodied by each of these, could not be from the same God. Christianity was from the good God; therefore Judaism was from the evil God, the Creator. This was the Gnostic view, the theory of the self-confident philosopher of old.
2. That system of blasphemy and error passed away, though it is destined to revive again in our times, and to recall the ancient blasphemies of language and abomination of practice. But when nominal Christianity gained the ascendancy and the favor of emperors, another system arose. The Jewish and the Christian systems were confounded and amalgamated. Christianity became hereditary and national; infant baptism was established; the elders of the Christian church became the sacrificing priests of the Jewish temple; and the earthly promises to the Jew were claimed as the portion of the church. This is the fundamental error of Rome. She has made religion a matter of forms and ceremonies, and has brought back to the law of works the professing Christians who trust in her. Rome is Babylon, meaning confusion. In this sad position many, in some cases even servants of Christ, still partially abide. But this error must soon pass away from the minds of the true-hearted in Christ, by the force of the light which the Holy Ghost has lately caused to shine from the pages of His Word on this subject.

The Word of God

For some final examples turn to the Word of God.

1. Parts of Holy Scripture are confessedly mysterious and hard to be understood. On these the church of Rome takes her stand; and asks if so dark a book ought to be put into the hands of the ignorant of mankind. She asks triumphantly what the poor man, unfurnished with scholarship, can know of the principles of interpretation.

2. But the answer to her taunts lies in the other aspect of the Word of God. Not all is mysterious; not all requires deep research, knowledge of languages, and the laws of interpretation. Parts of the Word are simple, and level to the capacity of a child. And while the Holy Spirit confesses some things hard to be understood, which some evil hearts might wrest to their perdition, the Lord Jesus rebuked the Sadducees as erring because they did not know the Scriptures. And the Holy Spirit approves the conduct of the Jewish mother who taught the Holy Scriptures to her son from his childhood.

Thus the Scripture is twofold in character, like the God who gave it. Here, His will, which is to guide us, is inscribed in letters which he who runs may read. There, we stand on a rock above the shoreless, unfathomed ocean of His eternal purposes; and mystery with irremovable, palpable weight oppresses us. We can but cry with one who knew far more than ourselves, "O the depth!"

Look at the epistles. Man has an understanding. The epistle enlightens him with instruction; and gives him to apprehend those relations of himself to God and the things unseen which nature could not have discovered. But light in the understanding is not enough. Man is an active being, an Intelligent and contemplative one. The epistle then is not doctrinal only, but practical also.

Here the Word of God is literal; there, figurative. Shall we affirm either principle to the exclusion of the other? God forbid! Mischief lies in pushing either of these principles out of its province. Divines have literalized the application of the law to us. Then come in infant baptism, holy water, sacred garments, sacred places and days, war, oaths. But they have spiritualized the prophets, and thus made the promises to Judah and Jerusalem the heritage of the church; and have made of prophecy a tangled web, which is to speak only the internal experience of each believer. Reverse this process!

The Status of Men Before God

Let us, Christian brethren, take the Scripture as a whole. Some value the Scripture as it teaches and embodies the conservative principle, and with bold and steady voice, asserts the diversities of privileges, ranks, and abilities both in the world and in the church.

Others can see in it only its threatening denunciations against the iniquities of the ruler and the rich, its principles of advance and of amendment. They grasp with eagerness its assertion of the one origin of man, the equality of the souls of all before the Great Judge, and the responsibility of all alike to Him.

But the Bible holds both these truths. It is the Book of God, and not the book of man. The Most High holds the scales even—now telling us of the sins of kings, and now of the iniquities of the people.

Conclusion

From this twofoldness of truth designed difficulties arise. Thus does God try mankind. Thus does He try His people. Will they receive both His statements on His simple assertion? Most will not, for they are one-sided. They will force everything to unity. They are impatient at the breaks and “faults” which appear in the strata of Scripture. They ignore all evidence that tells against their views. Such must be left. The simple-minded will listen. When it is made a question of fact—“What hath the Lord spoken?”—Christians will be brought nearer together. When we see and testify that God’s truth is not to wait for reconciliation to our theories, we shall be far advanced on the road towards unity.

What is that mighty power which speeds us so swiftly on our journey by land or sea? It is the product of fire and water. Remove the fire, or the water, and the engine must remain a lifeless mass. They are natural opposites; yet when brought into contact but kept distinct, what wondrous results follow!

Now might not a perfectly true account of a steam-engine be given to savages—a story which to them would seem quite absurd and contradictory? Show them the steam-engine at work! And might not two parties arise among them—the firemen, who attribute all the power to the furnace? and the watermen, who regard all its powers as due to the fluid alone? Like this seems to be the unreasonableness of Calvinism or Arminianism, where either excludes the other.

Preacher! two reins are put into your hand. Do not always pull at one of them, lest you land yourself and your horse in the ditch!

The reader then is exhorted to receive what God has asserted, though in seeming inconsistency, concerning His sovereignty and unlimited power on the one hand, and concerning man's freedom and responsibility on the other simply because God has testified it. This is ground amply sufficient for its reception. It does not need first to be reduced to system and brought under the arrangement of a theory.

Yet, in conclusion, the writer desires to offer to the reader's notice a conciliating and apologetic thought or two.

The Bible contains the whole truth, the whole counsel of God, His full character. But God's character is twofold. God is the Just Governor, requiring obedience from His subjects. But He is also the merciful Sovereign, dispensing benefits to His creatures. Viewed in turn from the summits of these two mountainous attributes of God, man takes a twofold character. Do we regard God as the Sovereign Creator whose purposes must stand and whose eternal counsels provided from the beginning for every derangement? O then, man is a thing! a mote of the sunbeam, subjected to undeviating laws! All his goodness must be from the Creator's outflowing.

But we may and should regard God as the Ruler of the Universe; the Law-giver, who expects to be obeyed, who promises and

who threatens—whose promises are eternal life, whose threats are endless fire and torment. O then man is a person? a free independent potentate, able to choose as he wills, and to be dealt with justly according to his works. In this view, man is the rebel, breaking God's laws, grieving God's heart, and suffering the penalty of his provocations of the Righteous Governor throughout eternity.

Both these views are distinct; both broadly true. Scripture maintains them both. Man is active, as related to the justice of God. Man is passive, as related to the sovereignty of God.

How insuperable, without the gospel view of the cross of Christ, would be the contrary demands of the justice and mercy of God! There, in infinite harmony, appear the perfect justice and the perfect mercy of God. Each of these attributes shall be in as harmonious exercise in the future judgment and award to men as that evidenced in the wondrous event of the cross. But without the revelation of the gospel, man could not have discovered how the antagonistic claims of these two attributes should be met in regard to the sin of men. It is not astonishing then, if, with regard to the harmonious action of these two attributes, in relation to the conduct and destiny of mankind, we should find difficulty in the attempt to balance and adjust their demands. In attempting it we step out of our province.

Here is a chemist making up a prescription. One enters his shop and looks over the paper. He asks him whether the prussic acid can be good when mixed with the quinine. He inquires as to how the chemist can be content to mingle in the same phial the tonic and the antiphlogistic. What possible good effect can come of the union of ingredients so opposite? Would not the chemist's reply be, "Why, sir, that is not my business. This prescription is made out by one far more skilled in medicine than I am. I am only following orders.

The issue of the medicine does not rest with me. My duty is to mix these things together. For that alone I am responsible. For

the effects on the sick man, I am not liable to be called in question." Shall that be a sufficient reply for the chemist, because of his inferiority of knowledge to the physician? And shall it not be ample justification for the servant of God, who in preaching and teaching combines truths seemingly opposite, on the authority of the all-wise Physician of souls? Yes! Chemist of the divine dispensary! Make up the prescription as ordered! Leave the result to Him who wrote the recipe!

The Scripture is a house with more than one front. He who will always approach it by the eastern path, may assert that its color is black. He who never will enter it by any but the western road, may affirm, with equal resoluteness and with equal truth, that its color is white. But he who will tread both paths, and go round the house, viewing it in its every aspect, may see how the black wall and the white, the front, the back and the gables, make up one consolidated edifice, deep rooted in the nature of both God and man. He who will receive but half the truth is ever liable to revulsions—and these are the more vehement, the more unmingled and one-sided they are. The vehement Arminian, who, by some potent antagonist, or by the force of truth, is convinced of the sovereignty of God, not unfrequently passes into the hard and rigid Calvinist; and he who begins by making too much of good works, may end by denouncing and reprobating them.

The Lord give us a single eye, and the teaching of His Holy Spirit that each part of His Word may leave its due impression on our judgments, our hearts, and our conduct!

THE ERROR OF DENYING THAT THE INFINITE GOD BECAME A FINITE MAN THROUGH INCARNATION

In a June 2008 letter that Norman Geisler claims¹ to have sent to Ron Kangas seeking clarification² concerning points in Kangas's article "The Economy of God: The Triune God in His Operation"³ (hereafter, "Economy"), Geisler denied that the infinite God became a finite man through incarnation, a point that "Economy" resolutely affirmed. Geisler wrote:

Fourth, what do you mean by "twofoldness"^[4] of truth. Can logical opposites both be true? You seem to say that Christ was both divine and human in one nature. For example, you

¹ Although Geisler claims to have sent the letter, Ron Kangas has no record of its delivery. He only became aware of the letter when it was posted on the Internet as an appendix to the 2010 article by Geisler and Ron Rhodes assailing the Christian Research Institute's positive reassessment of the teachings and practices of the local churches.

² While Geisler claims to have sought "dialogue" with Ron Kangas and a "clarification" of his views, the tone of his letter is one of contentiousness and not one of seeking genuine understanding in a spirit of Christian fellowship. In fact, his letter is sadly reminiscent of the insidious questioning of the Pharisees, who sought to entrap our Lord by seizing upon His words and using them, wrongly interpreted, to accuse Him of error (see Luke 20; for a helpful note concerning the Pharisees' questioning of the Lord Jesus, see Luke 20:40, footnote 1, in the Holy Bible Recovery Version, published by Living Stream Ministry).

³ *Affirmation & Critique*, April 2008 (3-14). The entire article is available at: http://www.affcrit.com/pdfs/2008/01/08_01_a1.pdf.

⁴ For an explanation of the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth and biblical examples demonstrating its application, see "Reflections: The Twofoldness of Divine Truth," by Ron Kangas in *Affirmation & Critique*. For a brief overview of how Geisler's criticism of this principle is in error, see "A Misplaced Criticism of 'The Twofoldness of Divine Truth'."

In the context of this article, it is noteworthy that Ron Kangas's mentions of the principle of twofoldness in "Economy" were not in reference to the incarnation; rather, they were in reference to 1) the oneness and

affirm he is both “infinite God and a finite man.” You say that “God is infinite, and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one.” This is not the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity which never affirms that God (the infinite) became man (the finite). Rather, it asserts that the second person of the Godhead became man. Certainly, the Father and the Spirit did not become human. Only the Son became human. That is, he (who was the second person of the Godhead from all eternity) assumed another distinctly different nature and thus was both God and man united in one person (but not in one nature).

Geisler’s analysis contains several serious errors:

1. Ron Kangas does not imply (nor did he write) that “Christ was both divine and human in one nature,” as Geisler alleges. Geisler’s claim disregards Ron Kangas’s clearly defined use of the word *mingling* to describe the relationship between the two natures, the divine and the human, in the one Person, the incarnate Christ.
2. Geisler’s assertion that “the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity ... never affirms that God (the infinite) became man (the finite)” suggests that Christ is not the infinite God.
3. When Ron Kangas writes that “God is infinite, and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one,” Geisler interprets the statement with a definition of “became” that neither Ron Kangas nor the Bible intends.
4. Geisler forbids any involvement of the Father and the Spirit in the incarnation of Christ and teaches, based on a law of logical non-contradiction, a Trinity in which the three Persons are not only distinct but also separate.

threeness of the Trinity, 2) Christ having a physical body and yet being the life-giving Spirit, and 3) the essential immutability of God and the economical process that He went through to accomplish His eternal purpose. If Geisler contends that the principle of twofoldness is invalid because it violates the law of logical non-contradiction, then he must be prepared to repudiate these (and other) seemingly contradictory declarations of the Scriptures.

Further, statements on the incarnation of Christ from Geisler's *Systematic Theology* contradict his arguments to Ron Kangas, thus calling into question whether or not he is clear or consistent about what he believes and teaches.

Geisler Misrepresents the Words of Ron Kangas and Disregards His Definition of “Mingling”

Geisler creates a “straw man”⁵ by misrepresenting Ron Kangas's assertion that the infinite God became a finite man. Geisler states, “You seem to say that Christ was both divine and human in one nature,” yet nowhere in “Economy” did Ron Kangas state, or even imply, that Christ has only one nature. On the contrary, he refers to Christ as a “unique divine-human *person*, [who is] both the infinite God and a finite man” (6, emphasis added), not to an alleged divine-human *nature*. Further, he states, “Through incarnation our God, the Creator, the eternal One, became mingled with man, a God-man who had human blood to shed for redemption and who was able to die for us” (8), and he defines *mingling* as follows: “the oneness of mingling is a matter of two natures—divinity and humanity—being mingled together without the producing of a third nature” (12).⁶ As should be

⁵ Geisler offers the following definition of a straw man argument:

Another way to stack the deck against the opposition is to draw a false picture of the opposing argument. Then it is easy to say: “This should be rejected because this (exaggerated and distorted) picture of it is wrong.” The name of the fallacy comes from the idea that if you set up a straw man, he is easier to knock down than a real man. And that is exactly the way this fallacy works: set ‘em up and knock ‘em down. It is argument by caricature. It avoids dealing with the real issues by changing the opposition's views. (Norman Geisler and Ronald Brooks, *Come, Let Us Reason*, p. 101)

Despite his recognition of a straw man argument as a logical fallacy, Geisler does not show any hesitation to employ such an argument against Ron Kangas.

⁶ Christ is one person with two distinct natures, the divine and the human, and A&C is replete with affirmations of this cardinal truth of the Christian faith. For a particularly helpful review of the doctrine

clear to any reader familiar with historical theology, Ron Kangas included the qualifier “without the producing of a third nature” to make clear that he is not teaching monophysitism, an ancient heresy that obliterated the distinction between the two natures in Christ. Despite this clear statement by Ron Kangas in his article, Geisler wrote:

Sixth, how would you distinguish your view from the heresy called monophysitism which co-mingled the two natures of Christ? How can he be both finite and not-finite (in-finite) at the same time in the same sense?

A fair reading of “Economy” makes clear that Ron Kangas affirms Christ’s two natures, the divine and the human.

Critics have wrongly assumed that we in the local churches use *mingling* to teach that the two natures in Christ are so united that they lose their respective distinctions and that a third nature, neither divine nor human,⁷ results from the combination. However, in our use of the word *mingling*, which is the use employed by Ron Kangas, we understand that the two natures in Christ do not lose their respective distinctions; rather, as the formula of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) affirms, the two natures in Christ exist “inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably.” It is, therefore, perfectly permissible to state, as Ron Kangas has, that the infinite God and the finite man became one because Christ is the infinite God in His divine nature and a finite man in His human nature, the two natures remaining distinct in the one Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ. No teacher of orthodox Christian theology would contest this. Sadly, Geisler

concerning the two natures in Christ and the rejection of early heresies that undermined that doctrine, see “‘Mingling’—Was There Ever a Better Word?,” *A&C*, July 1996, pp. 31, 62. Of the many affirmations concerning the two natures in Christ that have been offered in *A&C*, Ron Kangas offers the most succinct of all: “Christ has two natures: humanity and divinity” (“The Heavenly Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *A&C*, October 1998, p. 9).

⁷ Historically this has been referred to by the Latin *tertium quid*, or “third thing.”

has misrepresented Ron Kangas's careful articulation of this precious and fundamental truth.

Geisler's twisting of Ron Kangas's words is particularly egregious. Even if Geisler was influenced by old misunderstandings concerning our use of the word *mingling*, he still should not be excused from promulgating a false charge that has been repudiated repeatedly in various media.⁸ In short, he should have done his research. It is not too much to expect that he understand what we teach before he critiques it and to adhere to his own stated principle that "it is not possible to evaluate another viewpoint fairly without first understanding it."⁹ At a minimum, we should be able to recognize our own teaching in any representation of it, but Geisler has so thoroughly distorted our teaching that we are unable to detect even a trace of it in his alleged representation.

Geisler Suggests that Christ Is Not the Infinite God

Geisler resolutely states that it was not the infinite God but only the second Person of the Trinity who became man, as his letter to Ron Kangas demonstrates:

...the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity...never affirms that God (the infinite) became man (the finite). Rather, it asserts that the second person of the Godhead became man.

In making this careless and unsettling assertion, Geisler has made another significant misstep. Here it seems that Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, is something other than God the

⁸ The charge has been duly and thoroughly answered in sources too numerous to list here, but a few examples available in print are: "Mingling'—Was There Ever a Better Word?," *Affirmation & Critique* I:3, July 1996, pp. 31, 62; *A Confirmation of the Gospel: Concerning the Teachings of the Local Churches and Living Stream Ministry* (Anaheim, CA: DCP Press, 2009), 24-29; and John Campbell, "The Ministry of Christ in the Stage of Incarnation," *Affirmation & Critique* III:2, April 1998, 4-13.

⁹ Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, 2002), p. 13.

Infinite because, in Geisler's estimation, it was not the infinite God but only the second Person of the Trinity who became a man. But here is a strange contradiction. In his *Systematic Theology* he affirms that Christ was infinite in His divine nature:

Christ has two natures, and they must not be confused—what is true of one is not necessarily true of the other. For example, Christ was infinite and uncreated in His divine nature, but He was finite and created in His human nature. Likewise, as God, Christ was omnipresent, but as man He was not.¹⁰

While we agree with this passage, we are still hard-pressed to discover what Geisler believes in light of his contradictory statements to Ron Kangas. In the letter he states that the infinite God did not become a finite man. In his *Systematic Theology* he states that Christ was infinite in His divine nature. If Geisler believes that both propositions are true (and he must because he has made them both), then he has violated the law of logical non-contradiction that he evidently prizes. But there is more at stake here. If Christ Himself is infinite, yet the infinite God did not become a finite man, then Christ, if we are to follow Geisler's statements to their logical conclusion, is not fully God. He is something less than fully God yet, inexplicably, He is somehow infinite. Moreover, Geisler's statement that "the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity ... never affirms that God (the infinite) became man (the finite)" strongly suggests that in his theological formula Christ is not the infinite God, despite what he says elsewhere concerning Christ being infinite in His divine nature. How are Geisler's readers to reconcile these statements? Is Christ the infinite God or is He not? If He is infinite, then what is wrong with saying, "The infinite God became a finite man?" Is this not the story of the incarnation?

¹⁰ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2: God, Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), pp. 177-178.

Geisler Interprets the Word “Became” with a Definition that neither Ron Kangas nor the Bible Intends

Geisler seems to take particular exception to the word “became” in Ron Kangas’s statement that “God is infinite, and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one,” and apparently he applies a definition for “became” that neither Ron Kangas nor the Bible intends. In his *Systematic Theology* Geisler writes:

The Eternal did *not* become temporal, nor did the divine nature become human at the Incarnation any more than the human nature became divine. As a matter of fact, this is the monophysite heresy condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 454 [sic¹¹]: It is a confusion of the two natures of Christ. In the Incarnation, the divine nature did not become a human nature or vice versa. Rather, the divine *person*—the second person of the Trinity—became human; that is, He assumed a human nature in addition to His divine nature. Notice carefully the words of Scripture: “The Word was God.... the *Word* became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:1, 14, emphasis added). It does not say that *God* became flesh. It is as impossible for God to become man as it is for an infinite to become a finite or an uncreated to become created. As Athanasius (c. 293-373) would say, the Incarnation was not the subtraction of Deity, but the addition of humanity. God the Son did not change His divine nature; rather, He added a distinct human nature to it.¹²

For Geisler, then, any thought that the infinite God became a finite man compromises the essential immutability of the Godhead by suggesting that the divine nature has metamorphosed into (i.e., “became”) a human nature. But that is not what Ron Kangas means by his use of the word “became,” as even a cursory reading of “Economy” makes clear:

¹¹ The Council of Chalcedon was held in A.D. 451.

¹² Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2: God, Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), pp. 109-110.

At this point it would be profitable, and perhaps necessary, to restate the twofold nature of the truth regarding God in His Godhead and God in His economy, that is, the truth of the immutability of God and the process of God, both of which we must believe. God's immutability is related to His being in His essence, and God's process is related to His becoming in His economy. In particular, God's process is related to the two becomings of Christ: His becoming flesh through incarnation (John 1:14) and His becoming the life-giving Spirit (the Spirit) through resurrection (7:39; 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:45). These two becomings, as stages of God's process in Christ, are an economical, not essential, matter; they are changes that involve God's economy, not God's essence. (10)

The divine essence with the divine nature cannot change, and no change to it was effected through the incarnation or the resurrection, as Ron Kangas clearly enunciates. Nonetheless, as Ron Kangas also affirms, the Bible does state that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14) and that "the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45), and these declarations indicate that God in Christ has passed through a process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection for the carrying out of His eternal plan, or economy. In that process, Christ took upon Himself a genuine human nature for the redemption of mankind (John 19:5; Heb. 2:14; 10:5), and He retains an uplifted and glorified humanity forever (Acts 7:56; 1 Tim. 2:5; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:7, 9). Further, in resurrection Christ's humanity was pneumatized, that is, made spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Phil. 1:19), and as the Spirit—the life-giving Spirit—He imparts His divine life and uplifted humanity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people (John 20:22; Rom. 8:9-11). The process that God underwent in Christ is economical, that is, it was undertaken for the accomplishment of His divine economy, and the divine essence suffered no change but was preserved eternally in the divine process. God, therefore, remains eternally transcendent and the Godhead eternally inviolable; yet in His move for His economy, God has become

what we are so that we may become what He is, as Athanasius also recognized.¹³

Geisler's efforts to define "became" within the context of his own theological paradigm are severely strained. He seems able only to separate the persons of the Trinity to arrive at an explanation for the incarnation (i.e., that the Son came into humanity apart from the Father and the Spirit). But by contending for his own contrived definition of "became," it seems that Geisler's real argument is not with Ron Kangas but with the language of the Bible in John 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:45 because it does not conform to his theological presuppositions. When Ron Kangas used the word "became," he was simply quoting the Bible; when Geisler challenges the word "became," he is objecting to the Bible's own wording. For Geisler, the use of "became" to describe the incarnation implies that in becoming a finite man, Christ ceased to be the infinite God. Therefore, Geisler actually insists that we abandon the language of the Bible. In interpreting others' words, he applies his own definitions to supersede both the words of the divine revelation in the Bible and the carefully explained definitions of those whom he criticizes. Christ certainly "assumed a human nature in addition to His divine nature," as Geisler states, but the Christ who assumed that nature was conceived of the Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), worked by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28), and indwelt the Father and was indwelt by the Father (14:10, 20; 17:21); thus, "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). To be sure, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the infinite God—the Triune God—and is not merely one-third of God. Any insistence to the contrary bears tritheistic implications and, therefore, runs the risk of heresy. Regardless of how much

¹³ Athanasius wrote, "For He was made man that we might be made God." ("The Incarnation of the Word" [54:3], *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol. 4*, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1891, 1978], 65).

the notion of God becoming man chafes against Geisler's philosophical biases, it is the revelation of the Bible. After all, is this not the mystery of the incarnation, that is, the mystery of godliness, that God Himself became a man (1 Tim. 3:16)?

Two contemporary theologians who have expressed wonder that the infinite God could become a finite man are Wayne Grudem and Alan K. Scholes.¹⁴ Grudem writes:

At the end of this long discussion, it may be easy for us to lose sight of what is actually taught in Scripture. It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.¹⁵

Scholes concurs:

Now it is time to try to answer what is undoubtedly one of the most perplexing questions in all of theology. How is it possible for the infinite God to fit inside a finite human mind and body? How is it possible for the omnipresent God to walk the hills of Galilee and to be in only one place at a time? How can the omniscient and omnipotent God be “increasing in wisdom and stature” as Luke describes Jesus? In short, how is it possible for God to become a man?¹⁶

We doubt if Geisler would imply that respected theologian Wayne Grudem is heretical for stating that “infinite God became one person with finite man,” and we are certain that he would not harass Alan K. Scholes, a fellow signer of “An Open Letter to

¹⁴ For a sampling of quotes from others, see “Scholars Who Affirm That the Infinite God Became a Finite Man.”

¹⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 563.

¹⁶ Alan K. Scholes, *What Christianity Is All About: How to Know and Enjoy God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1999), 89.

the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the ‘Local Churches,’” for asking (in reverent awe and not in contentious doubt) how it is “possible for God to become a man.” And yet Geisler seeks to impugn Ron Kangas for expressing the same thought.

Geisler Separates the Persons of the Trinity

While Geisler undoubtedly would balk at the suggestion that he harbors latent tritheistic inclinations, the evidence from his own writing and reasoning at least raises the question in a discerning reader. If logic is what Geisler depends on for his formulation of Trinitarian doctrine, then one must recognize that his arguments concerning the Divine Trinity and the incarnation of Christ logically lead to the conclusion that the Persons of the Trinity are indeed separate from one another and are, therefore, three separate Gods.

In the passage cited from his *Systematic Theology* above, Geisler makes the following nonsensical argument:

Notice carefully the words of Scripture: “The Word was God...the *Word* became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:1, 14, emphasis added). It does not say that *God* became flesh.

The absurdity of this statement, which abuses the language of the Bible, cannot be overstated. If the Word is God and the Word became flesh, then why does Geisler take issue with the assertion that God became flesh? Is Christ not fully God? He certainly is. In fact, the Scriptures confirm that He is God “manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16) and that the blood He shed was God’s “own blood” (Acts 20:28). It seems that for Geisler the complete, infinite God is an amalgam of separate persons who each share a portion of the divine essence but who are not fully God in themselves and who do not coinhere. In the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* he writes:

By saying God has one essence and three persons it is meant that he has one “What” and three “Whos.” The three Whos (persons) each share the same What (essence). So God is a unity of essence with a plurality of persons. Each person is different, yet they share a common nature.¹⁷

Under the influence of this definition, Geisler’s insistence that only the second Person of the Trinity, and not “God,” became flesh might make logical sense. But this is not “the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity,” which Geisler purports to defend. Rather, the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity recognizes that the three Persons coinhere, or mutually indwell one another

¹⁷ Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), p. 732. In his *Systematic Theology* Geisler elaborates further:

Like the Trinity, the Incarnation is also a great mystery. Some even claim it is a contradiction, for it affirms that in Christ God became man, and this is impossible, since God is infinite and man is finite—an infinite cannot become finite. The Eternal cannot become temporal any more than the Uncreated can become a creature. How then can we claim that the Incarnation does not violate the law of noncontradiction?

The answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the misstatement of what the Incarnation really is. It was not God *becoming* man, but the second person of the Godhead *adding* humanity; in other words, the Son of God did not stop being divine in order to become human, but rather He embraced another nature—humanity—in addition to His divinity. In the Incarnation, the infinite nature of God did not become finite; the second person of the Godhead, who retained His infinite nature, also assumed another nature (a finite one). As we put it before, in God there is one *what* (nature) and three *whos* (persons).

In the Incarnation, Who took on What, a human nature, in addition to the What He retained (His divine nature). This is not a contradiction because the infinite did not become finite, nor the Uncreated become the created, which would be a contradiction.

In the Godhead there is one What and three Whos; in Christ, the second person of the Godhead, there is one Who and two Whats. In the Incarnation, one Who in God assumed another What, so that there were two Whats (natures) in one Who (person). Again, this is an amazing mystery but not a contradiction. (Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002, pp. 93-94.)

(John 14:10-11; 17:21), and cannot be separated from one another (10:30; 14:9; Matt. 1:18, 20; 12:28; Heb. 9:14).¹⁸ Further, the divine essence is undivided and indivisible, but Geisler's statement that the Three persons (the personal "Whos") share the divine essence (the impersonal "What") strongly suggests that, in his assessment, the divine essence is instead apportioned among them. However, by virtue of their coinherence, each of the Three persons possesses the divine essence with the divine nature in its entirety and is not each a separate God sharing an indefinable "What." Each is the complete God, yet—wondrously!—there is only one God and not three Gods (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4).

Prior to stating that "the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity ... never affirms that God (the infinite) became man (the finite)" in his letter to Ron Kangas, Geisler poses the question, "Can logical opposites both be true?" Geisler is insistent that the pronouncements of Scripture must be reconciled within a framework of logical uniformity to be properly understood.¹⁹ While such order

¹⁸ These verses are discussed in more detail in "The Error of Denying the Involvement of the Father in the Son's Work" and "The Error of Denying That the 'Son' Is the 'Eternal Father' in Isaiah 9:6" in Volume 2 of this series.

¹⁹ We affirm, as the Scriptures do, that God is a God of order and not of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33; Isa. 45:18). We also profess that the order inherent in logical principles bears witness to the orderliness and wisdom of the Creator. However, as the Scriptures also testify, God transcends human logic and is not bound by it (cf., Isa. 55:8-9). Philip Schaff is helpful here:

The person of Jesus Christ in the fullness of its theanthropic life cannot be exhaustively set forth by any formulas of human logic. Even the imperfect, finite personality of man has a mysterious background, that escapes the speculative comprehension; how much more then the perfect personality of Christ, in which the tremendous antitheses of Creator and creature, Infinite and finite, immutable, eternal Being and changing, temporal becoming, are harmoniously conjoined! (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. III: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910, 1994], p. 749.)

may satisfy a theological bent for systematization, the divine revelation is not confined to the limitations of man-made logical systems of thought. The coinherence of the Three Persons of the Divine Trinity certainly explodes all such systems as there is not even a corresponding illustration of it in the creation. Coinherence may appear illogical since in the natural realm two entities (not to mention three!) cannot live within each other at the same time. If we apply such constraints to our understanding of God, we will conclude that it is not the infinite God who became a finite man but only one-third of God (i.e., the Son) who was involved in the incarnation. This, however, is not the revelation of the Bible.

Significantly, the error that ensnares Geisler (i.e., that the Son is separate from the Father and the Spirit) is one that Ron Kangas addressed in “Economy” in order to combat tritheism, the heresy that there are three separate Gods. It is helpful to reproduce that part of the article at length here with its quotations from the ministry of Witness Lee:

The God who is uniquely one, self-existing, ever-existing, and immutable is essentially triune; He is three-one—three yet one, one yet three. From eternity to eternity the unique God, the Triune God, is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father is God (1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:17), the Son is God (Heb. 1:8; John 1:1; Rom. 9:5), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). The Father is eternal (Isa. 9:6), the Son is eternal (Heb. 1:12; 7:3), and the Spirit is eternal (9:14). All three co-exist; they exist simultaneously and immutably. Among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the eternal Godhead, there is distinction but no separation. The Father is distinct from the Son, the Son is distinct from the Spirit, and the Spirit is distinct from the Son and the Father. However, they are not separate, and cannot be separate, because they coinhere, dwelling in one another mutually:

The relationship among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is not only that They simultaneously coexist but also that They mutually indwell one another. The Father exists in the Son and the Spirit; the Son exists in the Father and

the Spirit; and the Spirit exists in the Father and the Son. This mutual indwelling among the three of the Godhead is called coinherence... We cannot say that They are separate, because They coinhere, that is, They live within one another. In Their coexistence the three of the Godhead are distinct, but Their coinherence makes them one. They coexist in Their coinherence, so They are distinct but not separate. (Lee, *Crucial*^[20] 9-10)

This is neither tritheism nor modalism. Tritheism, an error on the side of the threeness of the Triune God, is the bizarre notion that the three persons in the Godhead are three separate Gods. This is heresy. Modalism, an error on the side of the oneness of the Triune God, is the strange concept that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are merely three modes, three temporary and successive manifestations, of the one God, who is not regarded as essentially triune. This also is heresy. The revealed, biblical truth, being twofold according to the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, embraces both the oneness and the threeness of the Triune God: God is uniquely one, yet He is three-one—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit....

At this juncture, it is necessary to point out the difference between the essential Trinity and the economical Trinity. The essential Trinity is a matter of the essence of the Triune God for His eternal existence; the economical Trinity is a matter of God's arrangement for His operation in His move to accomplish His eternal purpose. An excellent presentation of this distinction is offered by Witness Lee:

The essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence. In His essence, God is one, the one unique God (Isa. 45:18b; 1 Cor. 8:6a). In the essential Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere at the same time and in the same way with no succession. There is no first, second, or third.

Essentially, God is one, but economically He is three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). In God's plan, God's administrative arrangement, God's economy, the Father takes the first step, the Son takes the second

²⁰ Witness Lee, *The Crucial Points of the Major Items of the Lord's Recovery Today* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1993).

step, and the Spirit takes the third step. The Father purposed (Eph. 1:4-6), the Son accomplished (vv. 7-12), and the Spirit applies what the Son accomplished according to the Father's purpose (vv. 13:14). This is a successive procedure or a succession in God's economy to carry out His eternal purpose. Whereas the essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence, the economical Trinity refers to His plan for His move. There is the need of the existence of the Divine Trinity, and there is also the need of the plan of the Divine Trinity.

The Father accomplished the first step of His plan, His economy, by working to choose and predestinate us, but He did this in Christ the Son (Eph. 1:4-5) and with the Spirit. After this plan was made, the Son came to accomplish this plan, but He did this with the Father (John 8:29; 16:32) and by the Spirit (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20; 12:28). Now that the Son has accomplished all that the Father has planned, the Spirit comes in the third step to apply all that He accomplished, but He does this as the Son and with the Father (John 14:26; 15:26; 1 Cor. 15:45b, 2 Cor. 3:17). In this way, while the divine economy of the Divine Trinity is being carried out, the divine existence of the Divine Trinity, His eternal coexistence and coinherence, remains intact and is not jeopardized. (*Crucial* 9-10)²¹

If Geisler takes issue with the exposition found in this long passage from the very article that he faults for advancing an unorthodox theology, then we must wonder whether he believes that the Three of the Trinity are not merely distinct but also separate, a position that is contrary to the biblical record. To say that the Three are not only distinct but also separate is the basic error of tritheism. But in fact the Three of the Trinity coinhere from eternity to eternity; thus, when Christ took upon Himself flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14)—and it is He who did so and not the Father or the Spirit—He did not do so alone. Rather, He did so by the Spirit, of whom He was conceived, and with the Father, whom He embodied. Therefore, the infinite God—the

²¹ Ron Kangas, "The Economy of God: The Triune God in His Operation," *A&C*, April 2008, pp. 5-6.

Triune God—became a finite man in Jesus Christ while yet preserving His immutable essence and eternal, infinite deity.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate, even troubling, that a man with Geisler's recognized standing in the Christian apologetics community could so unabashedly misrepresent and then attack the writing of a teacher of the Bible. Geisler's attack, however, actually exposes the shortcomings of his own understanding of the Triune God and the incarnation of Christ. In his misdirected zeal to find fault, he cries "heresy" where there is none and exposes his own error in the process. By insisting that the infinite God did not become a finite man in Jesus Christ and by relegating the incarnation to the entrance of one-third of God into humanity, Geisler has laid bare the shortage in his understanding of the incarnation and of the coinhering oneness of the Divine Trinity.

SCHOLARS WHO AFFIRM THAT THE INFINITE GOD BECAME A FINITE MAN

And through the flesh He wrought divinely those things which are proper to divinity, showing Himself to have both those natures in both of which He wrought, I mean the divine and the human, according to that veritable and real and natural subsistence, (showing Himself thus) as both being in reality and as being understood to be at one and the same time infinite God and finite man, having the nature of each in perfection, with the same activity, that is to say, the same natural properties... But between God the Maker of all things and that which is made, between the infinite and the finite, between infinitude and finitude, there can be no kind of comparison, since these differ from each other not in mere comparison (or relatively), but absolutely in essence. And yet at the same time there has been effected a certain inexpressible and irrefragable union of the two into one substance, which entirely passes the understanding of anything that is made. - Hippolytus, "Against Beron and Helix," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V, translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1851, 1981), p. 231

Although the assuming nature in Christ is infinite and the assumed nature remained finite, yet because of the hypostatic union such a relationship is produced between the infinite and the finite that one hypostasis is constituted. - Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, translated by J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1578, 1971), p. 96

But this assumption of our nature into hypostatical union with the Son of God, this constitution of one and the same individual person in two natures so infinitely distinct as those of God and man — whereby the Eternal was made in time, the Infinite became finite, the Immortal mortal, yet continuing eternal, infinite, immortal — is that singular expression of divine wisdom, goodness, and power, wherein God will be admired and glorified unto all eternity. - John Owen, *Christologia*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/christologia.vii.html>

Here, then we see one great spiritual fact, one great law and mystery, that between God and man there is a person who is both Man and God; consubstantial with the Creator and the

creature, the finite and the infinite; that by one consubstantial unity He is God, by the other, Man. - Henry Edward Manning, *Sermons*, vol. 4 (London: William Pickering, 1850), p. 185

I like to think of the Holy Spirit handling such things [testifying concerning Christ]. They seem so worthy of him... Now is his mighty mind among the infinities when he has to deal with Christ, for Christ is the Infinite veiled in the finite. Why, he seems something more than infinite when he gets into the finite; and the Christ of Bethlehem is less to be understood than the Christ of the Father's bosom. He seems, if it were possible, to have out-infinite the infinite, and the Spirit of God has themes here worthy of his vast nature. - C. H. Spurgeon, *Sermons*, vol. 37, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons37.xxxii.html>

...So we may say of Christ that He is finite and infinite; that He is ignorant and omniscient; that He is less than God and equal with God; that He existed from eternity and that He was born in time; that He created all things and that He was a man of sorrows. It is on this principle, that what is true of either nature is true of the person, that a multitude of passages of Scripture are to be explained. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 392

The divinity of Christ, and his whole mission as Redeemer, is an article of faith, and, as such above logical or mathematical demonstration. The incarnation or the union of the infinite divinity and finite humanity in one person is indeed the mystery of mysteries. "What can be more glorious than God? What more vile than flesh? What more wonderful than God in the flesh." Yet aside from all dogmatizing which lies outside of the province of the historian, the divinity of Christ has a self-evidencing power which forces itself irresistibly upon the reflecting mind and historical inquirer; while the denial of it makes his person an inexplicable enigma. - Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1: *Apostolic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910, 1991), pp. 107-108

The person of Jesus Christ in the fullness of its theanthropic life cannot be exhaustively set forth by any formulas of human logic. Even the imperfect, finite personality of man has a mysterious background, that escapes the speculative

comprehension; how much more than the perfect personality of Christ, in which the tremendous antitheses of Creator and creature, Infinite and finite, immutable, eternal Being and changing, temporal becoming, are harmoniously conjoined! - Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, vol. III: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910, 1994), p. 749

Thus, the person of the God-man is unique. His birth had no precedent and His existence no analogy. He cannot be explained by referring Him to a class, nor can He be illustrated by an example. The Scriptures, while fully revealing all the elements of His person, yet never present in one formula an exhaustive definition of that person, nor a connected statement of the elements which constitute it and their mutual relationships. The "mystery" is indeed great. How is it possible that the same person should be at the same time infinite and finite, omnipotent and helpless? He altogether transcends our understanding. - A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Gleanings_Godhead/godhead_30.htm

To claim that Jesus Christ is not God himself become man for us and our salvation, is equivalent to saying that God does not love us to the uttermost, that he does not love us to the extent of committing himself to becoming man and uniting himself with us in the Incarnation. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Spring, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992), p. 59

The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe. - Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 563

Thus the Incarnation constitutes the one actual source and the one controlling centre of the Christian doctrine of God, for he who became man in Christ Jesus in order to be our Saviour is identical in Being and Nature and Act with God the Father revealed in and through him. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 18

The incarnation. This is the new act of the eternal God whereby God himself becomes man without ceasing to be God, the Creator becomes creature without ceasing to be Creator, the transcendent becomes contingent without ceasing to be transcendent, the eternal becomes time without ceasing to be eternal. *ibid.*, p. 214

Now it is time to try to answer what is undoubtedly one of the most perplexing questions in all of theology. How is it possible for the infinite God to fit inside a finite human mind and body? How is it possible for the omnipresent God to walk the hills of Galilee and to be in only one place at a time? How can the omniscient and omnipotent God be “increasing in wisdom and stature” as Luke describes Jesus? In short, how is it possible for God to become a man? - Alan K. Scholes, *What Christianity Is All About: How to Know and Enjoy God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), p. 89

The union of the two natures concurs in one Person, who is the eternal Son of the Father. The union, then, of the divine and the human in Christ is a personal one; more specifically, the union is the act of the divine Person who is the Son of God. Here we approach the very heart of the mystery of the Incarnation. No one can say how the infinite God could become a finite man. Naturally, however, theologians have thought a great deal about the matter; Chalcedon does not mark the end of all inquiry. - Walter Elwell and Philip Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), p. 267