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# TRINITY AND POLYTHEISM

Edward Wierenga

This paper develops an interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, drawn from Augustine and the Athanasian Creed. Such a doctrine includes Divinity Claims (the persons are divine), Diversity Claims (the persons are distinct), and a Uniqueness Claim (there is only one God). I propose and defend an interpretation of these theses according to which they are neither logically incompatible nor do they do entail that there are three (or four) Gods.

According to St. Thomas, “when we speak of the Trinity we must speak with care and with befitting modesty,”<sup>1</sup> and he appeals to Augustine’s remark that “nowhere else is the error more dangerous, the search more laborious, and the results more rewarding.”<sup>2</sup> The possibility for error certainly looms large, especially in view of the number of named heresies that have developed around the doctrine of the Trinity. And the fact that the best theologians of every age have grappled with this doctrine without diminishing its mystery, surely makes modesty in addressing it befitting. Nevertheless, it is tempting to try at least to disarm some objections to the doctrine of the Trinity, and that will be my aim in this paper.

## *1. Augustine on the Trinity*

We can begin with Augustine’s statement of the doctrine.

All the Catholic interpreters of the divine books, both the Old and New Testament, whom I have been able to read, who wrote before me about the Trinity, which is God, had this purpose in view: to teach in accordance with the Scriptures that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit constitute a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality. Therefore, they are not three gods but one God; although the Father has begotten the Son, and, therefore, He who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son was begotten by the Father and, therefore, He who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and He Himself is also co-equal with the Father and the Son and belongs to the unity of the Trinity. Not that this same Trinity was born of the Virgin Mary and was crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, nor rose again on the third day, nor



ascended into heaven, but only the Son. Nor that this Trinity descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove when He was baptized; nor that this same Trinity on Pentecost, after the Lord's Ascension, when a sound came from heaven as if a mighty wind were blowing, settled upon each one of them with parted tongues of fire, but only the Holy Spirit. Nor that this same Trinity said from heaven: "Thou art my son," either when Jesus was baptized by John or when the three disciples were with Him on the mount, nor when the voice sounded saying: "I have glorified and I shall glorify again," but this was the word of the Father only, spoken to the Son; although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as they are inseparable, so they work inseparably. This is also my faith, since it is the Catholic faith.<sup>3</sup>

Augustine is, of course, aware of potential difficulties with this doctrine. He notes,

But some are troubled in this faith when they hear that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and that this Trinity is not three gods but one God; and they ask how they are to conceive it, especially when it is said that the Trinity works inseparably in everything that God works, and yet that in some way the voice of the Father spoke which is not the voice of the Son; and that no one except the Son was born in the flesh, suffered, rose again, and ascended into heaven, and that no one except the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove.<sup>4</sup>

There are at least two related questions in this passage: (i) How can each member of the Trinity be God, and yet there be only one God? and (ii) How can each member of the Trinity be God and yet differ from each other? These are the questions I mean to take up in this paper.

## 2. *The Quicunque Vult*

Before we turn to the project of examining these questions, it will be useful to have before us some lines from an even more emphatically Trinitarian statement from later orthodoxy, the so-called Athanasian Creed, or *Quicunque Vult*.<sup>5</sup>

Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold the Catholic faith.

Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit is one....

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such also the Holy Spirit. The Father is increate, the Son increate, the Holy Spirit increate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father

is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternal, but one eternal.... In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. ... Because just as we are obliged by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. *The Central Claims of the Doctrine and Inconsistency*

Both the passage from Augustine and the *Quicumque Vult* begin with a section that expresses the unity and divinity of the Trinity while insisting on a distinction between the divine persons, and both selections conclude with some specific reasons for distinguishing the persons. Both Augustine and the *Quicumque Vult* appeal to theological differences deriving from earlier creeds: only the Son is begotten; only the Spirit proceeds from the other persons of the Trinity. Augustine, in addition, appeals to different activities attributed to the Persons in scripture: only the Father said, "This is my Son;" only the Son was crucified; and only the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. Incorporating both halves of these passages—those asserting unity and divinity and those affirming diversity—suggests a way of formulating some central claims about the Trinity, perhaps claims so central as to constitute a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, even this rudimentary statement, as we shall see, seems open to the objections Augustine raises.

Appropriately for an account of the Trinity, there are three different sorts of claims about the Trinity suggested by these texts. The first fall under what we might call the

#### (A) Divinity Condition

Each of the members of the Trinity possesses various of the traditional divine attributes, for example, omnipotence, eternity, being uncreated, etc. And each of the members, in addition, is God. The second group of claims fall under what we might call the

#### (B) Diversity Condition

The three members of the Trinity are really distinct from one another. Finally, there is a

(C) Uniqueness Condition<sup>7</sup>

Roughly put: for each of the mentioned divine attributes, there is only *one* being with that attribute. In particular, there is only *one* God.

Rather than considering each of the attributions of a divine attribute to the Persons of the Trinity, I will begin by listing the claims that each is God. (We will return below to a consideration of the other attributes.) Thus, the Divinity Condition includes these theses:

- (A1) The Father is God,
- (A2) The Son is God,

and

- (A3) The Holy Spirit is God

The Diversity Condition includes the further claims that

- (B4) The Father is not the Son,
- (B5) The Father is not the Holy Spirit,

and

- (B6) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the three members of the Trinity are distinct from each other. Finally, the Uniqueness Condition is the claim that

- (C7) There is exactly one God.<sup>8</sup>

These seven theses *appear* to be inconsistent. There cannot be three distinct individuals, each having a certain property which is had by only one thing. Whether these statements really are inconsistent depends, however, on exactly how they are to be understood. That is a project to which I will turn in a moment.

#### 4. Without Confusing the Persons

First, however, I want to raise some questions about the Diversity Condition and the claims that spell it out. Recall that the second question I attributed to Augustine was the question, How can each member of the Trinity each be God and yet differ from each other? That presupposes that the members of the Trinity *are* different from each other, as the Diversity Condition insists. To thus interpret these claims as affirming a genuine difference between the members of the Trinity is to take them to be denying identify. That is, as

- (B4') The Father is not identical with the Son,
- (B5') The Father is not identical with the Holy Spirit,

and

(B6') The Son is not identical with the Holy Spirit.

But how could these three all be true? After all, the *Quicumque Vult* says,

(8) Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such also the Holy Spirit.

That naturally suggests

(9) For any property  $F$ , the Father has  $F$  iff the Son has  $F$  iff the Holy Spirit has  $F$ .

In other words, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have all the same properties. This interpretation could be supported by one reading of the Latin text, which states "*Qualis Pater, talis Filius, talis et Spiritus sanctus.*" Our word "quality" derives from the Latin "*qualis*", after all, so it is tempting to think that *Quicumque Vult* asserts, as (9) says, that the three members of the Trinity have all the same qualities or properties. But the trio of propositions (B4'), (B5'), and (B6') cannot be true if the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have all the same properties. For by the identity of indiscernibles,

(10) If  $x$  and  $y$  have the same properties, then  $x = y$ ,

it follows from the assumption that the Father and the Son have all the same properties that they are identical, and similarly for the Father and the Spirit, and the Son and the Spirit.

Now (10) is not entirely beyond controversy, but I would say that this is true only in the way that every substantive philosophical thesis has been controverted by someone or other. Still, philosophers have been willing to go to extraordinary philosophical lengths to defend the doctrine of the Trinity,<sup>9</sup> so why not deny (10), despite its apparent obviousness? Well, I would prefer to see if the diversity of the divine Persons can be stated in a way that does not require denying apparent necessary truths.

Fortunately, there is another way of interpreting (8), one that does not interpret it as affirming (9). A suggestion may be found in a confessional statement of my theological tradition, the *Belgic Confession*.<sup>10</sup> Article 8 states,

In keeping with the truth and the Word of God we believe in one God, who is one single essence, in whom there are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties—namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ... Nevertheless, this distinction does not divide God into three, since Scripture teaches us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has his own subsistence distinguished by characteristics—yet in such a way that these three persons are only one God.<sup>11</sup>

This gives us a technical term, but not yet an explanation. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, according to this proposal, do indeed have all of their properties in common, except, that is, for their *incommunicable* ones.<sup>12</sup> But what is an incommunicable property? And does not the *Quicumque Vult* rule out exceptions, anyway? The latter question is easier to answer. Recall that the relevant claim in that document is

(8) Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such also the Holy Spirit.

But (8) need not be read as asserting that the three Persons have *all* of their properties in common. As we saw, the Latin,

(11) *Qualis Pater, talis Filius, talis et Spiritus sanctus.*

might be taken to be referring to qualities or properties generally. But a better interpretation would be

(11') Whatever kind of thing the Father is, the Son is that kind of thing, and so is the Holy Spirit.

It might be tempting to take "kind of thing" to mean *essential property*, where a property *F* is essential to an individual *x* just in case *x* has *F* but could not exist while lacking *F*. But presumably *begetting someone* is essential to the Father. Accordingly, if we interpret (11') as ranging over all essential properties, we would have to say that the Son begets someone and the Spirit does, too. In that case, we would not be able to use the standard way of distinguishing the Persons.

It is fashionable these days to say that what kind of thing something is depends on what natural kinds it falls under. We should not expect to find natural kinds here, but perhaps we can appeal to *supernatural* kinds. Consider any property that is necessary for being a divine person. Such properties would include omnipotence, omniscience, being uncreated, perhaps being eternal, and, of course, being a divine person. It is certainly plausible to think that in saying that a thing has one of these properties that we are saying what kind of thing it is. For short, let us call such properties "divine attributes".<sup>13</sup> Then we could interpret (11) as

(11'') For any divine attribute the Father has, the Son has it, and so does the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

So understood, the Creed would allow that the Persons of the Trinity differ in some properties—the "incommunicable properties"—which is sufficient to ensure their non-identity, even though they have all of the same divine attributes. So neither Augustine nor the *Quicumque Vult* are guilty of an obvious inconsistency in accepting the Diversity claims, (B4'), (B5'), and (B6'). We turn next to the other half of the problem: if there are three divine Persons, each of whom is God, why are not there three Gods?

5. *Divinity and Polytheism*

Let us look more closely at the Divinity Condition. The doctrine of the Trinity holds, as we have seen,

- (A1) The Father is God,
- (A2) The Son is God,

and

- (A3) The Holy Spirit is God.

But then an obvious problem looms: the doctrine seems to be committed to *tritheism*. If there are three individuals—not identical with each other, as our previous discussion has concluded—who are God, then there are three Gods.

In fact, the problem is even worse, for no doubt orthodox Christianity holds

- (12) The triune God is God.

Augustine writes, for example, that “that the Trinity is the one and only and true God.”<sup>15</sup> Cornelius Plantinga echoes this with his assertion that “*God* is properly used as a designator of the whole Trinity—three persons in their peculiar relations to each other.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit is the same as the Trinity itself. Thus, it looks as though the doctrine of the Trinity is committed to the existence of at least *four* Gods—hence, the title of this paper is “Trinity and Polytheism” rather than the expected “Trinity and Tritheism.”

One way to avoid this problem is to reinterpret the statements of the Divinity Condition, (A1), (A2), and (A3). The Latin sentence from which these claims were derived reads

- (13) *Ita deus Pater, deus Filius, deus Spiritus sanctus.*<sup>17</sup>

Latin permits the suppression of the verb, and the pairs of nouns ‘*deus*’, ‘*Pater*’, etc., need not be taken in the order in which they are written. Thus, instead of taking this sentence to assert that three things, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are each God, we could take it to say that one thing, God, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, we could take the Divinity Claims to be:

- (A1′) God is a Father,
- (A2′) God is a Son,

and

- (A3′) God is a Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>



With this interpretation, there is no temptation to think that there are three (or four) Gods. There is just God, who is a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit. It would be analogous to saying that God is a creator, a redeemer, and a comforter, or God is strong and just and wise.<sup>19</sup> So there is no danger of polytheism on this interpretation, but that is because there is no Trinitarianism on this interpretation, either. At best it gives us the modalist heresy, according to which the Father, Son and the Spirit are just modes or aspects of God. So let us turn to another interpretation of (A1), (A2), and (A3).

A natural suggestion is to interpret these components of the Divinity Condition as identity statements, that is, respectively, as

- (A1'') The Father is identical with God,  
 (A2'') The Son is identical with God,

and

- (A3'') The Holy Spirit is identical with God.

This proposal only makes matters worse, however. If each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are identical with God, they are all identical with each other. So, like modalism, this suggestion, does not give us a trinity of divine Persons. Worse, the conjunction of (A1''), (A2''), and (A3'') with the Diversity Claims (B4'), (B5'), and (B6') is logically impossible. It is plainly impossible for one thing to be identical with three distinct things. Indeed, in the delightfully irascible phrase found by Keith Yandell, to say "that there are three Persons who are *severally and each of them true God*, and yet there is but one God: this is an *Error* in counting or numbering; which, when stood in, is of all others the most brutal and inexcusable; and not to discern it is not to be a man."<sup>20</sup> So it looks like we can escape from polytheism only at the risk of heresy or incoherence.

By now the reader who has gotten this far is likely clamoring for me to state an obvious, and obviously better, interpretation of the original Divinity Claims (A1), (A2), and (A3).<sup>21</sup> Philosophers commonly distinguish between the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of predication. Why not apply that distinction to these Divinity claims? In particular, since interpreting the copula in (A1)-(A3) as expressing *identity* leads so directly to trouble, why not interpret it instead as making a *predication*? That is, instead of thinking of 'is God' as meaning '= God', why not think of it as 'is divine'? In that case, we can interpret (A1)-(A3) as

- (A1''') The Father is divine,  
 (A2''') The Son is divine,

and

- (A3''') The Holy Spirit is divine.

Of course, whether this suggestion will help depends on what property the

predicate 'is divine' expresses. If, for example, it simply expresses the property *being God*, then we have just found a way to rewrite (A1''), (A2''), and (A3''), the propositions that lead to the brutal and inexcusable error in counting. But there is no reason to insist on this understanding of 'is divine'. In fact, we have already discussed divine *attributes* without being tempted to think that they are properties that are identical with God. More importantly, the concept of divine attributes can be employed to explain the content of "is divine". We noted above that such divine attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, being uncreated, and perhaps being eternal,<sup>22</sup> are plausibly thought to be necessary for being a divine person. Let us make this explicit and hold that a person is divine just in case that person has the divine attributes.

The heart of my suggestion then, is that the Divinity Claims (A1)-(A3) attribute—unsurprisingly—*divinity* to the three Persons of the Trinity. Furthermore, there is no contradiction between holding that there are several divine Persons but only one God, provided that what God is is a unity of these persons. And there is no error in counting here, either. The number of distinct divine persons is three; the number of Gods is one.<sup>23</sup>

### 6. English Only?

I turn next to consider two objections to this proposal. The first is the claim that, although it makes sense to distinguish the 'is' of identity from the 'is' of predication *in English*, there is no basis for making that distinction in the Latin of the *Quicumque Vult*. There is, of course, something to this objection. After all, as we saw above, the Latin sentence,

(13) *Ita deus Pater, deus Filius, deus Spiritus sanctus,*

does not even bother to include the copula '*est*'. Moreover, '*deus*' is definitely a noun; if the Latin had intended to make a predication, it could have used the adjective '*divinus*'.

Nevertheless, I think that a distinction between assertions of identity and predication is present in the Latin text. To see this, we need to look back at the series of Divinity Claims that followed the general principle,

(11) *Qualis Pater, talis Filius, talis et Spiritus sanctus,*

which I glossed as,

(11'') For any divine attribute the Father has, the Son has it, and so does the Holy Spirit.

Those claims were

(14) The Father is increate, the Son increate, the Holy Spirit increate.  
(*Increatus Pater, increatus Filius, increatus Spiritus sanctus.*)

(15) The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite.  
(*Inmensus Pater, inmensus Filius, inmensus Spiritus sanctus.*)

- (16) The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.  
*(Aeternus Pater, aeternus Filius, aeternus Spiritus sanctus.)*  
 (17) The Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty.  
*(Omnipotens Pater, omnipotens Filius, omnipotens Spiritus sanctus.)*

In each case in the Latin we have repeated pairs of an adjective and a noun, where the adjective is naturally taken as predicating a property of the referent of the noun. Moreover, each line is an instance of the general principle that any divine attribute of the Father is an attribute of the Son and the Spirit. So the English translation seems correct in treating each line as a predication, with the adjective predicating such properties as, being uncreated, eternal, infinite, and almighty, respectively, of The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (There remains an awkwardness in the second half of each claim, which I did not quote here, where the adjective is treated as a substantive, for example, there is only one "almighty", not three "almighties". But that does not detract from this translation of the first half of each claim.)

So each of (14) through (17) is an instance of the general principle (11'') that any divine attribute the Father has is shared with the Son and the Spirit. But the troublesome

- (13) *Ita deus Pater, deus Filius, deus Spiritus sanctus*

follows immediately after this list. So the most plausible way to interpret it, like the lines that precede it, is to take the first noun, 'deus' as expressing a property of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> That property is most naturally taken to be divinity, the property of being divine.

### 7. Incoherence Regained

So far I have argued in support of this proposal *as an interpretation* of the *Quicumque Vult*. Regardless of how good the proposal is an interpretation of the Creed, however, it might nevertheless lead to incoherence or an inexcusable error in counting. An objection to this effect can be found in an argument that Richard Cartwright gives against a somewhat different account of the Trinity. He writes,

My argument is very simple: every Divine Person is a God; there are at least three Divine Persons; therefore, there are at least three Gods. The first premise is a trivial truth. The second follows from the conjunction of [(A1'''), (A2'''), and (A3''') and (B1'), (B2'), and (B3'), the Divinity and Diversity Claims]. The heretical conclusion follows, by the general principle that if every *A* is a *B* then there cannot be fewer *B*'s than *A*'s.<sup>25</sup>

I had suggested that the Divinity Claims (A1)-(A3) attribute divinity to the three Persons of the Trinity. But Cartwright alleges that any Divine Person—any person who has the property of divinity, that is—is a God and that this, furthermore, is a trivial truth. So if there are three divine Persons, there are three Gods, after all. Formulating the Divinity Claims in the way

I suggested is thus of no help in resolving the problems.

Is it true, however, that

(18) Necessarily, any divine person is a God?

Well, I do not see that it is true, so I certainly do not believe that it is a *trivial* truth. What is it to be a God? I suggest that

(19)  $x$  is a God iff  $(\exists y)(y = \text{God} \ \& \ x = y)$

That is, something is a God just in case it *is* God. The *Quicunque Vult*, however, says, in effect, that something can be a divine Person without being identical with God. One might have uncritically been inclined to accept (18), but the *Quicunque Vult* denies it. One thing I think reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity does is to call into question such uncritical acceptance. Perhaps, in fact, a thing is identical with God just in case it is a trinity of divine Persons.

It might be helpful here to appeal to an idea presented by Richard of St. Victor in the twelfth century and recently revived and developed by Richard Swinburne. The former Richard claims that divine goodness and love requires that there be more than one divine person. He holds, in the first place, that "a divine person would not have anyone to love as worthily as himself if he did not have a person of equal worth. However, a person who is not God would not be equal in worth to a divine person. Therefore, so that fullness of charity might have a place in the true Divinity, it is necessary that a divine person not lack a relationship with an equally worthy person, who is, for this reason, divine."<sup>26</sup> Richard claims, in addition, that any such pair of divine persons would need a third equally worthy being in whom they could cooperate in loving. He writes, "As long as only the first is loved by the second, he alone seems to possess the delights of his excellent sweetness. Similarly, as long as the second does not have someone who shares in love for a third, he lacks the sharing of excellent joy. In order that both may be able to share delights of this kind, it is necessary for them to have someone who shares in love for a third."<sup>27</sup> For the third to be equally worthy of supreme divine love, the third must also be a divine person. Since the existence of a third is sufficient to permit divine persons to share in supreme love, the requirements of supreme divine love do not provide a reason for the existence of yet more divine persons.

According to the later Richard,

there is overriding reason for a first God to create a second God and with him to create a third God, but no reason to go farther. If the Christian religion has helped us, Christians and non-Christians alike, to see anything about what is worthwhile, it has helped us to see that love is a supreme good. ... Love must share and love must cooperate in sharing. ... I conclude (tentatively) that necessarily if there is at least one God, then there are three and only three Gods.<sup>28</sup>

I do not have space here to give a fuller exposition and discussion of this line of reasoning. Otherwise, I should certainly want to modify Swinburne's talk of one God "creating another" and his way of putting the conclusion that there are "three Gods".<sup>29</sup> But I do want to emphasize that if considerations like these that appeal to the diffusiveness of goodness and, more importantly, to the nature of a loving God can be used to argue for the triune nature of God, then the idea that God is a Trinity of divine Persons will be more attractive. And perhaps it will seem plausible that not every Divine Person is a God.

### 8. Conclusion

Jonathan Edwards assessed his own discussion of the Trinity saying, "I don't pretend fully to explain how these things are and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made and puzzling doubts and questions raised that I can't solve."<sup>30</sup> Some of the questions that remain for me are: What does it mean to say that the members of the Trinity are *persons*? How does the doctrine of the Trinity fit with, and what does it require by way of, metaphysical theories, say, on the nature of substance?<sup>31</sup> What does it mean to say that doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery? Which of the divine attributes does the triune God have? Edwards continues, with a modesty I want to share,

I am far from pretending to explaining the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it. I don't intend to explain the Trinity. But Scripture with reason may lead [us] to say something further of it than has been wont to be said, tho there are still left many things pertaining to it incomprehensible.<sup>32</sup>

What I have tried to say further is that Trinitarianism is not committed to polytheism, nor is it incoherent or guilty of poor arithmetic.<sup>33</sup>

*University of Rochester*

### NOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, 31, 2.
2. *Ibid.* The quotation from Augustine is from *De Trinitate*, I, 3. I use the English translation by Stephen McKenna, *The Trinity*, The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 45 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963).
3. *De Trinitate*, I, 4.
4. *De Trinitate*, I, 5.
5. This creed dates to the early sixth century. Despite its western origin—the Latin title is simply the first two words of the text—it was later wrongly attributed to Athanasius. An excellent account of the establishment of the text and of the history and analysis of the creed is J. N. D. Kelly, *The*

*Athanasian Creed* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1964). I use Kelly's Latin text and English translation.

6. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed*, pp. 17-19.

7. One of the referees prefers calling this the Unity Condition in order to emphasize that the three persons form a unity. I retain the term "uniqueness" to underscore the claim that there is *one and only one* God.

8. In interpreting the three conditions as setting forth these particular seven propositions, I have followed Richard Cartwright, "On the Logical Problem of the Trinity," in his *Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 187-200.

9. I count as going to an extraordinary length any of those views that retreat from identity to so-called "relative identity." This category includes Peter van Inwagen's elegant "And Yet They Are Not Three Gods but One God," in his *God, Knowledge, & Mystery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 222-259, as well as prior applications by Peter Geach.

10. The primary author of this statement was Guido de Brès. It was adopted in Antwerp in 1566, and later accepted as a doctrinal standard of the Reformed churches at the famous Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1618. My references will be to the version in *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1987), pp. 815-859.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 822.

12. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 8, 6.

13. *Being triune* is not, on this account, a divine attribute. It is not a property that is necessary for being a divine person; none of the Persons of the Trinity is triune. But I would not object if it turned out that *being a member of a trinity* were a divine attribute.

14. The formula in the *Quicumque Vult* is clearly conditional: *if* the Father has it, so does the Son and the Holy Spirit. But it seems plausible to suppose that the stronger biconditional is intended: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have all the same divine attributes. I will not bother to state the stronger version in the text.

15. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I, 2.

16. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism," in Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 21-47. The quotation is from p. 31.

17. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed*, p. 18. I assume that the capitalization is a later addition.

18. I have intentionally not phrased these as identity statements (see below). Obviously there is no point in reversing the order of the nouns if the sentences are literal identity statements.

19. The latter example is Calvin's. *Institutes*, I, 13, 4.

20. Keith Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting?: Trinity and Consistency," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 201-217. The quoted sentence, published anonymously in 1687 but attributed to John Biddle, is cited by Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 219.

21. Both Keith Yandell and Tom Senior have independently proposed such an interpretation. See Keith Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting?" p. 211, and Tom Senior, "The Incarnation and the Trinity," in Michael J. Murray, ed., *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 238-260, esp. p. 255.

22. This list is, of course, not intended to be exhaustive.

23. The view I am defending, then, is a version of Social Trinitarianism.

That view is traditionally associated with the Cappadocian Fathers, in contrast to the western, Latin doctrine, which is supposed to differ from it. See Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism," as well as his "Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity," *The Thomist* 50 (1986): 325-352. It does seem to me that Augustine's development of the doctrine, with its near reluctance to call the members of the Trinity 'persons' (*De Trin.*, V, 9) and its analogy for the Trinity of mind, love, and knowledge (*De Trin.*, IX, 4) is not social, but it is not far from modalism, either. However, if the best way to understand the western *Quicumque Vult*, with its explicit endorsement of three divine persons, is the way I am recommending, then Social Trinitarianism is an important strand of western Trinitarian thought. See also Phillip Cary, "On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner on the Trinity," *The Thomist* 56 (1992): 365-405.

24. This is why (A1'), (A2'), and (A3'), in addition to the problems with them that I identified, are not plausible interpretations of the text.

25. Richard Cartwright, "On the Logical Problem of the Trinity," p. 196.

26. Richard of St. Victor, *The Trinity*, Book 3, Ch. 2 in Richard of St. Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, Grover A. Zinn, trans. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 375.

27. *The Trinity*, Book 3, Ch. 15 (p. 389).

28. Richard Swinburne, "Could There Be More than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 225-241; the quotation is from pp. 233-234. See also his *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

29. In *The Christian God*, Swinburne speaks of "divine individuals" rather than a second and third God. But he continues to think of the relation between the first and the second, and between the first two and the third, as one of "bringing about".

30. Jonathan Edwards, *An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity, With Remarks on Edwards and His Theology* by George Fisher (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 11.

31. See, for example, William P. Alston, "Substance and the Trinity," in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O'Collins, SJ, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 179-201.

32. Edwards, *An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity*, p. 117.

33. This paper is dedicated to memory of the Rev. James R. Van Tholen (1964-2001), whose teaching sermons on the Trinity encouraged me to think that it was possible to write on this topic. Earlier versions of this paper were read at the 2001 Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Calvin College, and as the Society of Christian Philosophers' Kenneth Konyndyk Memorial Lecture at the 2002 meetings of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association. I am grateful to the various audiences, and to Erik Wielenberg, the commentator on the second occasion, and Jeffrey Brower and Dale Tuggy, the commentators on the fourth, and for useful criticism and stimulating discussion. I am indebted to Kathryn Argetsinger for advice about Latin. In addition, I owe thanks for helpful suggestions to the editor and two anonymous referees for this journal.