

**THE DIVINE TRINITY:
A DOGMATIC
TREATISE**

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The Divine Trinity: A Dogmatic Treatise by Joseph Pohle & Arthur Preuss

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JOSEPH POHLE & ARTHUR PREUSS

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A DOGMATIC
TREATISE**

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A DOGMATIC TREATISE

BY

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BY

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THE DIVINE TRINITY

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

I. It belongs to the first treatise of Dogmatic Theology (*De Deo Uno*) to show that God is one and personal. The pantheistic fiction of an impersonal God is sufficiently exploded by the Almighty's own solemn declaration (Gen. III, 14): "I am Who am."¹

Whether the infinite personality of God must be conceived as simple or multiplex, is a matter which human reason cannot determine unaided. On the strength of the inductive axiom, "*Quot sunt naturae, tot sunt personae*," we should rather be tempted to attribute but one personality to the one Divine Nature. Positive Revelation tells us, however, that there are in God three really distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This fundamental dogma, which essentially differentiates the Christian from the Pagan, from the Jewish, and from the Mohammedan conceptions of God, is designated in the technical Latin of the Church as "*Trinitas*," a term first used, so far as we know, by Theophilus of Antioch² and Tertullian,³ and which later became cur-

¹ Cfr. Pohle-Preuss: *God: His Knowability, Essence, and Attributes*, St. Louis 1911.

² *Ad Autolyc.*, II, 15: "Τριᾶδος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ λόγου καὶ τῆς σοφίας αὐτοῦ." (On the three books *Ad*

Autolycum, see Bardenhewer-Shahan, *Patrology*, pp. 66 sq., Freiburg and St. Louis 1908. On the word τριᾶς, cfr. Newman, *Athanasius*, II, 473 sq., 9th ed., London 1903.)

³ *De Pudicitia*, c. 21: "*Trinitas*

rent in ecclesiastical usage and was embodied in the Creeds.⁴ In the private symbolum of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus mention is made of a "perfect Triad" (*τριάς τελεία*). Didymus the Blind, Cyril of Alexandria, Hilary, Ambrose, and Augustine have written separate treatises "On the Trinity."

2. Unity, simplicity, and unicity are as essential to the mystery of the Blessed Trinity as the concept of triunity itself. Hence it is not surprising that all these momenta were equally emphasized by the early Fathers.

Thus we read in the Athanasian Creed:⁵ "*Ita ut per omnia . . . et unitas in Trinitate, et Trinitas in unitate veneranda sit*—So that in all things . . . the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped." The first canon of the Lateran Council held under Pope Martin the First⁶ reads thus: "*Si quis secundum sanctos Patres non confitetur proprie et veraciter Patrem, et Filium, et Spiritum Sanctum, Trinitatem in unitate et unitatem in Trinitate . . . condemnatus sit*—If any one does not with the Holy Fathers profess properly and truly the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity, let him be anathema."⁷ If we pay special regard to the note of threeness, the Trinity presents itself mainly as a threefold personality in one Divine Nature. If, on the other hand, we accentuate the note of unity, the Trinity presents itself as Triunity (*triumi-*

nius divinitatis, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus."

⁴ Denzinger-Bannwart, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. 19, nn. 213, 232, Friburgi Brisgoviae 1908.

⁵ Quoted by Denzinger-Bannwart, *l. c.*, n. 39.

⁶ A. D. 649.

⁷ Quoted by Denzinger-Bannwart, *l. c.*, n. 254.

tas),⁸ a term which expresses the numeric unity of the Godhead common to all three Divine Hypostases. Both points of view are not only legitimate in themselves, but demanded by the nature of the mystery and the heretical distortions to which it has been subjected. As against those Antitrinitarians who (like the Monarchians, the Sabellians, and the Subordinationists) exaggerate the notion of unity so as to deny a true and immanent Trinity in the Godhead, Dogmatic Theology has to prove the existence of three really distinct Persons. In refuting the opposite heresy of Tritheism, which exaggerates the notion of threeness and postulates three separate divine natures, substances, or essences, it is necessary to show that the Divine Trinity is a Triunity.

3. Antitrinitarianism in both of its antithetical forms is by no means a thing of the past, but under various guises still has numerous adherents.

Whilst the few remaining partisans of Günther's theological system continue to teach a sort of veiled Tritheism, present-day Socinians, Unitarians, and Rationalists move entirely within the circle of the heretical notions of Sabellius. Kantian Rationalism debases the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity by treating it as a mere symbol indicative of the power, wisdom, and love of God. The school of Hegel pantheistically explains the Father as "*das Ansichsein des Absoluten*," the Son as "*das Anderssein des Absoluten in der Welt*," and the Holy Ghost as "*die Rückkehr des Absoluten zu sich selber im menschlichen Selbstbewusstsein*"—for the meaning of which obscure phrases we must refer the

⁸ Cfr. Isidor. Hispal., *Etymol.*, VII, 4.