

INTRODUCTION

From around 325 to 425 A.D., the Christian trinitarian formulation took its official form and then, particularly in the writings of St. Athanasius and St. Augustine, was explained in all its significance. The idea of a trinitarian Godhead had been pervasive for over a century before the Nicene Council in 325, but it was only after this council that it became necessary for all Christians to adhere to a single normative view of God. The views of "heretics", many of whom had been indispensable for the development of the trinitarian formulation that would be adopted at Nicaea, were now held accountable to the Church's official view of the Godhead. Not until the Reformation twelve hundred years later would alternative interpretations again become possible; indeed since then a wide variety of interpretations of the Godhead have emerged, many of which have resembled interpretations explicitly rejected at the Nicene Council.

As many Christians feel less and less restricted by the traditional view of the Trinity it becomes more and more desirable, as well as more possible, to attempt to view the Trinity in its most essential form, to understand why it is important and what it means for Christianity. Karl Rahner and Raimundo Panikkar exemplify this movement away from the Nicene Trinity, though their approaches are very different. Rahner, as a strictly Christian thinker, analyzes the Trinity very much on the terms that have been used to discuss it since Nicaea and even before, attempting to definitively interpret the meanings of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", the workings of each, and their relations to each other. Panikkar, though in some sense a "Christian", approaches

the trinity much more ecumenically. He does not participate in the debate over precise definition of the Trinity, hardly acknowledging this debate even as a historical phenomenon. Instead he extracts the most skeletal elements of the Christian Trinity, explaining and demonstrating them as paradigmatic for all religious experience.

This paper utilizes both of the approaches to critique, from two different directions, the tendency toward rigidification of doctrine in the Christian Church. However, it is necessary to go beyond each of them; for though they each facilitate such a critique, each stops short.

The paper will first deal with the move toward orthodoxy in the early Church. The importance of orthodoxy for the later development of the Church is clear, as so much of what happened in Europe historically and philosophically(theologically) during the time that followed was based on the doctrine set out in the fourth and early fifth centuries. It is very important to realize, however, that orthodoxy, that is, a universal standard of belief, was in fact the greatest reason for the enormous success of the Church, that it was the standardization and universalization of Christian belief which led to the Church's institutional strength. The first section of this paper seeks to explain the emergence of orthodoxy as resulting from the rejection of alternative beliefs, and the maintenance of those principles which would be conducive to institutional strength. One of these principles is orthodoxy itself. However, it is also important to see how a belief in orthodoxy is consistent with the more specific theological conclusions that actually became orthodox. A set of orthodox beliefs alone cannot provide the basis for success in a religion. Hence, it is not the con-

clusion of this paper that one group of theologians was more desirous of popular success than the others, or that one group had a greater conscious insight into how this success could be achieved. Rather, the method by which beliefs were arrived at, and the implications of these beliefs, facilitated the emergence of Nicene Christianity from among a wide variety of aspiring doctrines.

Rahner is useful in seeing certain problems with the Nicene Trinity, and this paper will draw upon certain of his insights in its critique of that doctrine. However, his is not a radical change in approach to the notion of the trinity*, or an assessment of the "political" value** of the nicene doctrine. Indeed, his criticisms can be used to question the validity of the Nicene Trinity; in this paper, this criticism will be used more as an exercise than as a stopping place. For by finding problems with the doctrine we are not in any way coming to terms with the historical fact of its success over other possible doctrines; we are only seeing that its success was not based on logical infallibility. We must then go on to see what its success was based on.

Panikkar's approach to the trinity is much more radical and avoids association with the traditional Trinitarian formulations. He does not discuss the shortcomings of the Nicene formulation, but this is largely because, unlike Rahner's, his approach is not doctrinaire. Instead he explains the significance of a trinity (and from this as much as from anything else we can come to an understanding of why the

*- The word "Trinity" will be used in this paper to signify the traditional Christian Trinity, as well as subsequent alterations made to the doctrine. The word "trinity" will be used generically, after Panikkar
 **- "political value" will refer to the conduciveness of a doctrine to widespread popular success.

Christian Trinity might have had the incredible impact it had as a religious doctrine). From his discussion emerges a clear idea of what a trinity means and how it can be seen as fundamental to all religious experience. We need only take a short step beyond his text to reach the conclusions of this paper: while Christianity is generally successful in conceptualizing the trinitarian experience, it is this very conceptualization which is its ultimate weakness.

The fact that the Christian Church arrived at a notion of orthodoxy is not accidental. The first step toward rigidifying the conception of the Godhead in Christianity came with the very fact of conceptualization. The contradictions between Rahner's Trinity and the Nicene Trinity are intellectual, rational contradictions which result from an intellectual, rational conception of God. To locate the problems within the Nicene formulation is only to emphasize the basic impossibility of rationally explaining God and the trinity.

PART ITHE MOVEMENT TOWARD UNITY

How do we define "truth" in Christian Theology? In an objective sense we cannot and it is partly for this reason that historical theology has focused around what was called "truth" by the Church. This provides us with a historical continuity which is much harder to locate in "heretical" movements for a number of reasons: most important of these reasons are, of course, that few "heretical" movements survived persecution by the dominant religion, and of those which did survive for any substantial period of time, few records remain. This is not accidental; "historic" religions such as Christianity have derived a large part of their success from historical continuity and the establishment of something normative around which developments in a religion over time can be streamlined. Once we have removed ourselves from the association of the "normative" with the "truthful", we must look at why one belief became normative and others did not. For this we must look not only at the process of theological legitimization--i.e., support in Scripture for an idea--but also at the process of political legitimization, i.e., how did the supporters of those beliefs which would become orthodox establish their beliefs as normative for the emerging universal Church, and indeed what, if anything, made these beliefs more politically potent, and therefore more appropriate for the role of orthodoxy, than competing beliefs.

Though the Nicene Creed was the first piece of written dogma to be widely accepted as a normative addition to Scripture, the movement toward standardization of belief in Christianity certainly did not begin here. Many concepts which had become commonplace by the time of Nicaea had been serious points of contention earlier in the Church's history: What

relation did the Old Testament have to the New Testament? Should Scripture be read allegorically or literally? Was Christ in fact divine at all? Though we now take for granted the Christian answers to basic questions such as these, the solutions were not always so obvious. A look at the way in which these initial problems were solved does a great deal to show us the way Christian doctrine emerged from conflict with other beliefs. "If one wants to understand how cultures emerge and develop, it is rather on the operations that one ought to focus, to discover how they are carried out, how they are combined with each other, how they gradually coalesce into larger complexes, until eventually a kind of dynamic structure emerges..."¹ The "operations" by which orthodox Christianity emerged at the Nicene Council can be found also in its earliest stages of cultural and theological self-definition.

Whether the Gospels hold a clear message from Jesus Christ on the institutionalization of Christianity, and exactly what this message might be, has been a subject of debate among Christians for centuries. As debate concerning the Church's institutions continues today, the general theological integrity of the Church as formulated in the third and fourth centuries continues to orient the discussions, and the importance of tradition is often cited in lieu of direct Scriptural support. However, in the earliest centuries of the Church, the preachings of Christ were interpreted, and these interpretations were manifested, in extremely different ways. For some, aspects of Christ's teachings were adopted while many other aspects were ignored; more significantly, some groups with widely varying beliefs could cite full Scriptural support for their beliefs. Here the "problem" was in the tendency to orient interpretations of Christ's teaching on the terms of a pre-Christian ideology.

The development of Christian doctrine became a process of eliminating those ideas which overlapped with the beliefs of another group; but, as Christianity did not emerge from a cultural and ideological vacuum, it was necessary also to come to terms with other dominant ideologies of the time.

The dominant strains that impinged on the development of purely Christian theology in the first century-and-a-half of the Church were Judaism and Hellenism. The former had a strong claim in that Christianity was decidedly a continuation of the Jewish tradition in some sense. How Christianity would build upon and actually alter this tradition was not at first clear. The difficulties presented by Hellenism were not so much in the area of tradition and ritual as in philosophy. However, we also find the religious tradition of polytheism and mythology in the Christian Gnostics and other Christian sects. The first task of the Christian Church, then, was to distinguish itself from these amalgams and to make clear its uniqueness, as well as its comprehensiveness, as a religion.

The beliefs of Judaism and Hellenism were quite opposite; indeed, the two had been struggling with each other for quite some time. Inasmuch as it initially assumed an underdog position in the Graeco-Roman world, accepting persecution and alienation from the State as basic tenets of its existence, the Christian Church continued the Jewish cultural tradition (at least for the first three centuries) as much as it did the scriptural tradition. But, as Gibbon says, "the Jewish religion was admirably fitted for defence, but it was never designed for conquest."² This was the element of the Jewish tradition which had to be most radically departed from. While the early Chris-

tians were, like the Jews, outspoken both in their religious beliefs and in their opposition to the State, they did not conceive of themselves as pre-destined, "chosen" people but instead generally adopted a quite opposite stance, favoring missionarism and conversion on a large scale. "The inflexible, and, if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses."³

The problem, therefore, was to maintain the traditional elements of Judaism which gave Christianity a good deal of its legitimacy-- "How could we believe that a crucified man is the first-born of the ingenerate God and that He will judge the whole human race, were it not that we have found testimony borne prior to His coming as man, and that we have found that testimony exactly fulfilled?"⁴--but to broaden the base of the religion such that it might be philosophically acceptable as well as structurally accessible to the people of the Graeco-Roman world. "...it was almost inevitable that the Christians who lived under the sway of the Roman Empire should come to ask themselves how they ought to combine the religion they had received from the Jews with the culture developed by the Greeks."⁵

The continuation of the Jewish element in Christianity was brought about by discarding, albeit not easily or immediately, all elements of Judaism except for the Scriptures. Once the Old Testament had been isolated in this fashion, it was necessary to relate it to the New Testament in a way that gave it import in a uniquely Christian sense. The work of Philo is very important in this respect, although he was

a strictly Jewish theologian. He propounded the view that the Old Testament must be read allegorically in order to be understood in its deepest moral and ethical sense. In other words, he saw it not merely as a historical account of the Jewish people, but as an all-pervasive spiritual and moral guide. It was this view which provided the basis for the allegorical identification of the two testaments in later writings. A hermeneutical rather than a literal interpretation of the two made it possible to see them as conveying the same basic message.

This view of the Old Testament was, of course, unacceptable to Judaizing Christians but, as Gibbon points out, the spread of Christianity in the second century after Christ diminished the importance of Jerusalem and the Jewish-Christian perspective.⁶ Indeed we can see during this period a severe decline in the identification of Christianity with its Jewish roots. According to Origen, "if the one precedes and the other follows Christ's corporeal manifestation, there is no iota of difference between them."⁷ And later Augustine would say that "In the Old Testament the New is concealed in the New the Old is revealed."⁸ Clearly the literal interpretation of the Old Testament, particularly as regards ritual and culture, loses its significance completely as a distinct entity and only exists to give support to the New Testament.

As the Jewish element was diminished and the Old Testament was increasingly adopted as a purely Christian revelation, the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, if not theology, increased. This is not visible in the simple adoption of a particular philosopher, but in the pressure to make Christianity philosophically viable on the terms of Classical, and specifically Greek, philosophy. Again, Philo was very

important as a precedent for explaining Scripture in terms of dominant philosophical ideas. He derived his own philosophical perspective from "later Platonism",⁹ emphasizing the utter transcendence of God but also the importance of intermediary powers emanating from Him and having direct importance for our life on earth. In particular his concept of the Logos as the creation of God which is most akin to Him has important implications for later trinitarian concepts. This was not itself derived from Platonism but certainly fits more closely into the Platonic idea of a rational, divine moral order than into the mystical supernaturalism of other religions at the time which were so repugnant to the rational Greeks.

This rationalization of religion was carried to its extreme by the Gnostics who were, to Harnack, "The extreme Hellenizers of Christianity."¹⁰ Gnosticism was a polytheistic religion, based in mythology, whose central tenet was that religious revelation was attained through Knowledge. Though religious superiority was not, as in Judaism, ethnically determined, the high degree of intellectual achievement required made Gnosticism an equally elitist religion with little interest in the religious condition of the masses. Further, the Christian Gnostics did not accept the connection between the Jewish scriptures and the Christian, seeing the Old Testament as portraying a God "liable to passion and error."¹¹

The "menace" of Gnosticism was most acute because the Gnostics were able to support their beliefs through scriptural exegesis. Hence, "Orthodox" Christians found it more and more necessary to not only point to Scripture for support of one's beliefs, but to accept the "correct" interpretation of Scripture. Tertullian was inclined toward

establishing a "regula fidei", or rule of faith, which would point people in the right direction when reading Scripture. "Being by definition normative, the regula set out the purport of the gospel in a form about which there could be no debate."¹²

It is difficult to determine exactly how Christianity managed to triumph over Christian Gnosticism, but some inferences can be made about this given the way the two "Churches" conducted themselves. Kelly points to two primary reasons for the strengthening of the Church in the third century: "...the passing of the Gnostic menace...and as a result of developments in the Church's institutional life the basis of tradition became broader and more explicit."¹³ Gibbon says that, "for the most part (the Christian Gnostics) arose in the second century, flourished during the third, and were suppressed in the fourth or fifth, by the prevalence of more fashionable controversies, and by the superior ascendant of the reigning power."¹⁴ Though these are vague summaries of the demise of a very important movement, we can infer from them that these must not have been separate or coincidental developments; for it was the Gnostic lack of institutional coherence, propagated by a lack of respect for "simple religion", which seems to have made it a weaker religion. The Christian Church was more successful in expounding normative ideas, including, very importantly, ritual and worship practices. Also, the emphasis on pure Christianity, along with the increasing acceptance of a correlation between the Old and New Testaments, made it easier for the Christians to label the Gnostics as heretics than the other way around.

In the period that followed, between the submergence of the Jewish and Hellenistic influences and the formulation of an orthodox creed at the ecumenical councils at Nicaea and Constantinople, the problem be-

came one of increasingly streamlining the beliefs of the Church in the interest of unification. A wide variety of Christian movements arose, but as Lonergan says, "these movements are as the waves that rise up on the surface of a storm-tossed sea; below them is a deeper and more powerful current, namely, the drive towards drawing together the whole heritage of the Hebrews and of the Greeks, to form a new, Christian mode of thought and style of life."¹⁵ Though the issues of contention were certainly important, the desire for unification seems to have been the primary motivation for much of the doctrinal clarification at the time.

As nearly every writer on the period points out, the particular issues that were addressed by the Christian Church came to the fore-front always as responses to conflicting ideas. We can learn a great deal from Clement of Alexandria's statement that "we reach some slight understanding of Omnipotence; not that we understand what it is, but rather what it is not"¹⁶ or as Lonergan extrapolates: "...what one comes to know is not what God is, but rather what he is not."¹⁷ Perhaps the intention of this statement is simply to stress the unknowability of God, to say that we cannot know what he is. However, the statement's importance might lay more in its indication of the method by which orthodox doctrine was arrived at. The assumption became increasingly prevalent among certain theologians that the Church's interpretation of the New Testament must be universally agreed upon; hence, only when a divergent strain became politically significant was it necessary to deal with the problems that were posed by it.

It is important to see those theologians who were inclined toward orthodoxy as different from other theologians of the time, not only in

their beliefs about the meaning of Christ, but also in these methods of espousing those beliefs. We find a good example of this in the Arian conflict, which in fact led to the Council of Nicaea. In Arius' letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, one hardly detects the sort of polemical attitude that one finds in the writings of Alexander of Alexandria or Athanasius. While Arius simply states his beliefs, the latter two are writing decidedly against Arianism. The emphasis, then begins with clarifying what is not to be believed. By contrast we find what is to be believed. Further, we find no indication in Arius' writing of a belief that those who opposed his view were decidedly wrong; that is, we do not find a tendency toward enforcing orthodoxy among all Christians.

Does this imply that the ante-Nicene and Nicene fathers came upon their beliefs only through the desire to quell current popular movements? Probably not; but the tendency to present their beliefs by way of contrast to other movements was congenital with their belief in orthodoxy and seems to have provided the impetus toward institutional strength and unity which set the Nicene Church apart from other Christian and non-Christian movements and facilitated its growth. As Gibbon says, though with reference to the Christian victory over Judaizing Christians, "the more rigorous opinion prevailed, as was natural to expect, over the milder..."¹⁸ How the particular theology of the Nicene fathers fit into this political framework will be discussed in a later section; but we will show that this was consistent with the more distinctively political belief in orthodoxy in its conduciveness to the establishment of Christian unity and strength.

The new influence of the State, in the form of the Emperor Cons-

tantine, was the final step in ironing out the discrepancies in Christian doctrine. It was in fact his decision to hold the Council of Nicaea, with a determination "to re-establish doctrinal unity in the Church."¹⁹ This became the basic motivation of the Council; "whatever the theology of the council was, Constantine's own overriding motive was to secure the widest possible measure of agreement... While different groups might read their own theologies into the creed and its key-word (homousios), Constantine himself was willing to tolerate them all on condition that they acquiesced in his creed and tolerated each other."²⁰ Though the Church had been, for centuries, narrowing down its definition of itself toward something akin to orthodoxy, it was the intervention of a clear political force with no clear theological bias, except for a desire for unification and therefore orthodoxy, which finally put Christian doctrine into a concrete form. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that mere theological discourse would have ever brought about a universally accepted theology. The Nicene Creed did not even bring this about immediately, though it changed the nature of dissent. Opponents of orthodoxy could no longer claim to be right simply based on Scriptural support, however sophisticated their arguments. They had a specific normative interpretation to contend with; the argument came into the arena of politics and became less an argument against ideas than an argument against an institution.

PART IITHE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR UNITY

The Nicene Trinity, along with the conclusions built upon it by Athanasius and Augustine, was not the only possible theological interpretation of the New Testament; today a variety of convincing arguments are made against the orthodox view, showing conclusively that it was one of many possible interpretations. Because of this one might be inclined to say that the Nicene doctrine was somewhat arbitrary, being merely the winner of a political struggle. As we have shown in the first section, the coupling of a drive toward unification and a desire to remove from Christianity any beliefs that coincided with the beliefs of another religion, did give political strength to the fathers who succeeded at Nicaea. Further, in a debate over the logic of one view over against another, the result is indeed somewhat arbitrary, or at least inconclusive, as we shall show in the next section.

However, we will follow this discussion of the problems with the Nicene* doctrine with an explanation of how this belief was a necessary and effective theological formulation in the quest for a pure, unified Christianity. Though on a strictly logical, or theological, level the Nicene interpretation is not inevitable, in its political and historical context it was bound to emerge as the orthodox view.

Some Problems with the Nicene Trinity

The specific debate that was central to the Nicene Council in

 *-Discussion of "Nicene" theology in general will not be limited to the text of the Nicene Creed, but will be a discussion of orthodoxy as defined at Nicaea and Constantinople(381) and as further explained in orthodox theological writings up to the time of Augustine.

325 concerned the beliefs of Arius. The confrontation was the climax of an attempt, over the first centuries of the Church, to understand the nature of Christ's divinity; more specifically it was a conflict over the origin of Christ. "According to Arius' message, only God the Father is eternal and unoriginated. The Logos, the pre-existent Christ, is a creature, created out of nothing, and had a beginning. Arius believed that there was when he was not."¹ The opponents of Arius held the conviction that Christ, the Son, was eternally begotten of the Father, i.e., "that the act of the generation itself is an eternally continuous process."² This is not the only problem answered by the Nicene Creed, but the council itself was specifically addressed to the Arian heresy and to formulating an orthodox conception of the Trinity to be adhered to by all members of the Christian faith.

The debate over Christ's origin has many significant implications. Perhaps the most important of these is the question of Christ's equality with God the Father. "For Arius, Jesus is a demi-god, neither fully God nor fully man...He eliminated Origen's view of eternal generation and pushed his subordination to extreme lengths."³ In many ways this represents a simpler conception of the Godhead, clearly defining the roles of Father and Son. The Father became Father when he had a Son; the Son came into existence as an incarnation of a part of God the Father: His wisdom or Logos.

The Nicene formulation is a much more radical change from the monotheistic tradition. The Son and Holy Spirit are begotten by the Father and generated from Him and yet are eternal and equal to Him. The difficulty in grasping this conception arises not so much in the

relation of the three aspects of God to the world, but in their relation to each other. If the Father has the power to beget the Son and Spirit, how is he not superior to them? This was a prevalent question in the late third century. Those, such as Arius, who viewed the Trinity hierarchically, described God's motivation for begetting a Son as "will". Alexander of Alexandria refuted the idea that the Son was an act of Divine "will", also denying that the generation was an act of necessity; instead he ascribed it, finally, to what he called the "nature" of God. "Alexander apparently thought of God as two hypostases, sharing the same nature. The Father alone is unoriginate, but the Son is co-eternal with the Father, since God cannot be without the Word. The Sonship . . . of the Logos is real and natural."⁴

Although the rationale behind associating the Son with the Logos is clear⁵ it is difficult to see the relation between a man and his wisdom . . . as being identical to the relation between a man and his son. That is, the function of the Son in the world as the messenger of the Logos is clear; the change in the form of this second hypostasis seems to imply a change in its relation to the Father. Augustine's metaphor for the Trinity--"He who loves, that which is loved, and the power of love"⁶--applies well to the Son as Son. However, the Logos in the abstract, as analogous to a man's wisdom, cannot easily fit into this formulation.

This leads us to the essential difficulty in the Nicene trinitarian formula. What are the different roles of the three hypostases, why do they exist as such, and how do they each function across all the different activities of the Godhead? This question is important

to the understanding of Christ's message as he came to us on earth and to the nature of salvation. It is also one of the least certain aspects of Christian theology, becoming no clearer in dogma than it was in the Scriptures.

According to the "Augustinian-Western tradition"⁷, "each member of the Trinity is so fully God that each could perform the work of any member." The importance of this becomes clear in Augustine's argument that "the Son must be fully divine in order to carry out his work of salvation and..that the Son cannot be fully divine unless he is co-equal with the Father."⁸

As Rahner* points out, the reason for a distinction between the different persons of the Godhead becomes blurred when they become interchangeable in their functions. "If any member of the Trinity is capable of performing any of the activities of God, there is no reason to posit a Trinity at all."⁹ Rahner sees the differentiation between the persons of the Trinity as being wholly contingent on the immanence of God on earth. This bears much resemblance to the pre-Nicene conception that the Son originates with the incarnation, that "before his birth there were only two pre-existent beings, God and the Holy Spirit, the latter identified with the pre-existent Christ..."¹⁰ The differentiation of the Godhead serves the purpose of imparting the Logos(Christ) to the world; the figure of the Son as perfect man is meaningful to those people who believe in God but need to see, in clearly human terms, what is expected of them. In other words, God

*-Discussion of Rahner's views will be based on Linwood Urban's paper on Rahner's Trinity and will draw upon Urban's, as well as Rahner's, conclusions.

the Son could not exist except to serve a function in God's communication with the world.

As we will show later, some conception of a pre-existent Christ was necessary in order to establish Christ's equality with the Father. The solution to this problem took time to develop. As mentioned earlier, he was seen by some as an embodiment of the Logos, which existed eternally as a natural aspect of the Father; for others, he was "born of" the Holy Spirit, which was then associated with the Logos. In these conceptions, the Logos was thought of as eternal as a part of God, analogous to the inextricable wisdom of humans.¹¹ However, they saw the manifestation of this Logos as a "real, incorporeal being" as taking place later, to be "used by God as an instrument, or rather a plan, in the creation of the world."¹² It is not until the incarnation of the Word in Christ that we can begin to call this aspect of God "Son".

It is not until Irenaeus that the view that would eventually be held at Nicaea was arrived at; here the Logos is conceived of as having co-existed with the Father from eternity. That is to say, he replaced the "two-fold stage theory", in which the Logos first existed in the mind of God and then was begotten, with the notion that the Logos was generated, or begotten, by God from eternity.¹³ But the problem still remained of how to harmonize this pre-existent Logos, "who is represented as the pre-existent Christ, with Matthew and Luke's pre-existent Holy Spirit, who is represented as the begetter of Jesus."¹³ Again, the question is one of determining functions within the Godhead. It was the emergence of the notion in Irenaeus and Origen that the Logos was eternally begotten that made it possible to solve the problem. The persons of the Godhead here cease to be defined in terms of time

but are instead defined in terms of function entirely. The Father is not "Father in anticipation of the generation of the Logos as Son."¹⁴ He is Father in His nature, functioning eternally as the begetter of a Son. If we abandon the anthropomorphic idea that that which generates must necessarily precede that which is generated, but are instead able to conceive of a being entirely in the abstract, as defined by its natural function (as we might say that the son of a wealthy man is rich even before he is born, or that the sun is inherently the giver of light at the same time that it is the sun) then we can conceive of a Father and Son in eternal hypostatic relationship.

To this we must, however, add the third aspect of the Godhead: the Holy Spirit. A major aspect of the emergence of the Nicene Trinity was the separation of the notions of Logos and Holy Spirit. The initial association of the two concepts is found in Paul: "...there still abiding upon Jesus and inseparable from him was the Holy Spirit. To both of them, therefore, Paul assigns the performance of the same functions. First, both of them are said by him to intercede for believers before God...Second, both of them from 'heavenly places' are said by him to extend their influence upon believers. Thus...indiscriminately he speaks of 'the Spirit of God' and of 'the Spirit of Christ' and of 'Christ' as dwelling in Christians."¹⁵ The Holy Spirit and Christ are inseparable in the corporeal Christ, and in the dissemination of the Word, Christ as messenger and Spirit as "God, present and active."¹⁶ Unlike God the Father, whose sole direct relation to the earth was as its creator, the Son and Holy Spirit, or Logos and Holy Spirit, derive their meaning entirely through their relationship

to Man. This is not to say definitively that they could not exist before man--"He was neither without a Logos, that is to say without reason, nor was he without wisdom, or without power, or without counsel."¹⁷ --but that the functions which make a tripartite Godhead meaningful are directed toward Man. If "the Father is the unoriginate Creator, the Son the Incarnate One, and the Spirit the Sanctifier"¹⁸, the Trinity is meaningful only when it is immanent*.

Hence we have one purely transcendent being, the Father, and two beings whose importance are contingent on immanence. This is not to question their divinity, but to question their distinction as actors on earth. As Wolfson points out, "on purely logical grounds, there is no reason why, even with their twofold stage theory, the Apologists could not continue with the tradition of the Apostolic Fathers in identifying the Holy Spirit with the Logos."¹⁹ Indeed, if as Wolfson says the revolution in Paul's thinking about the Holy Spirit was in his conception of it as the Law of God, it becomes even more difficult to separate it from the Word, which, as in the Jewish tradition, easily lends itself to such a role. In the thinking of some pre-Nicene writers, the Holy Spirit was seen as the Word of God or Spirit of God as left behind when the corporeal Christ ascended to the heavens. Christ played the role of Son showing in his incarnation the ideal of perfect manhood and the perfect love of God the Father; the Word was thereby disseminated, and the Spirit which made each man capable of receiving the Word was left behind after Christ's departure from the earth.

*- The "immanent" Trinity is used here as it is used in Rahner. It signifies a belief in the existence of a single, undifferentiated Godhead prior to the necessity for the Godhead to perform specific functions on earth. Their functions on earth are seen as entirely defining the persons of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

However, the Nicene formulation describes the Spirit as proceeding from the Son; thus, as the Son is seen as having pre-existed, so the Spirit must have existed prior to the incarnation. Further, we can see the Nicene belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit prior to the incarnation in the statement, "We believe...in the Holy Spirit...who spake through the prophets." Hence, in his relationship to the rest of the Godhead, we must apply the concept of "eternal generation" to the Holy Spirit as we have to the Son.

The problem is in understanding why the Holy Spirit is seen to be different from the other aspects of the Godhead. His role after the incarnation is clearly different. The difficulty is in separating him from the pre-existent Christ. Before they became immanent, and therefore functional in their respective roles of Son and Holy Spirit, what significance did their difference have? A possible response is that they existed eternally in the roles that they would eventually play. In other words, the ultimate function of each was understood from eternity, and that the internal relationship of the Godhead is as eternal as His inextricable Wisdom and Reason and, by extension, plan to create the earth. This is, in fact, the conclusion drawn at Nicaea; its problem lies in its over-emphasis on the importance of Man to God. It assumes that God has always existed for Man and that the separate identities within the Godhead have no meaning of their own. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is seen as having acted in the world prior to the incarnation, as spoken through the prophets. But this does not answer the question of its role prior to the creation of the world, or prior to God's idea of creating the world, if such a time can be said to have existed.

We have seen in the first chapter of John, as already noted in the writings of many early theologians, that God's Wisdom, or Word, was part of Him from the beginning. In John, it is the "Word" which clearly became Christ. He does not truly differentiate the roles of the different hypostases, for he sees the Word as being the Creator of the world. Even if we accept Augustine's notion (successfully refuted by Rahner) that "when one of the Three is mentioned as the author of any work, the whole Trinity is to be understood as working"²⁰ we must still attempt to differentiate the specific functions therein. John helps us with this to some extent in John 1:17-18. If we retroactively apply the Nicene conception of the Holy Spirit, we can say that it was He that spoke through Moses and gave us the law. The Word, as John says, becomes Christ, and through it we receive grace and truth.

This separation of the aspects of God certainly does not imply the strict idea of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed. It indicates separate functions within the Godhead; it implies co-eternity within its aspects; finally, it lays a foundation for the concept of a functionally immanent Trinity. But, though it expresses the eternity of the Word, it does not show the Son as having existed, qua Son, before the incarnation, nor does it indicate a third person in the Godhead as having existed from eternity. Perhaps a more concise interpretation of John is something akin to the twofold-stage theory: God existed from eternity, possessing always His wisdom, but underwent a bi- or triurcation with the creation of the world, acting in three roles as this became necessary in His relation to the world. In other words, the persons of the Trinity may be eternally implicit in God but do not take on their distinctive roles before the creation of the world.

John's Gospel is not the last word on the Trinity, but, as it shows the strongest indication in any of the four Gospels of the co-eternity of the separate members of the Godhead, it is important to see how far we can take it toward the Nicene conception. When we look closely at the first chapter of John, we arrive at a place similar to that reached by the early Fathers up to the time of Origen. With John we arrive at the same problems arrived at earlier, in looking at the Trinitarian formula: what is the meaning of the "Son" prior to His incarnation? If He is in the form of Logos, how does His relation to the Father change after the incarnation? If the Word, or Logos, provides the law in the Jewish tradition, how does the Spirit then provide it in the Christian tradition?

This final question has actually not been addressed explicitly, but fits squarely into the problems with the Nicene Trinity already set forth. As Wolfson and Moule point out, the distinctive Pauline vision of the Holy Spirit as provider of the law is one of the strongest elements that distinguishes the Christian faith from the Jewish. This concept, like much of what we have discussed, presents no problem until we try to extrapolate it to the period preceding the creation of Man and the world, or, in this case, preceding Christ. If we are willing to accept that God sent His Word in some form through the prophets, it is quite difficult to see why He would allow this Word to be misleading. That is, why would the Word represent the law for thousands of years, only to be replaced by the Spirit in a later age? Can we accept that the basic nature of God's "law" changed? Or worse, can we accept that God's followers prior to the incarnation followed the wrong law?!

The Judaizing Christians had rebelled against this insinuation earlier, though to no avail.

(The Judaizing Christians) affirmed that if the Being, who is the same through all eternity, had designed to abolish those sacred rites which had served to distinguish his chosen people, the repeal of them would have been no less clear and solemn than their first promulgation; that, instead of those frequent declarations which either suppose or assert the perpetuity of the Mosaic religion, it would have been represented as a provisional scheme intended to last only till the coming of the Messiah, who should instruct mankind in a more perfect mode of faith and of worship; that the Messiah himself, and his disciples who conversed with him on earth, instead of authorizing by their example the most minute observances of the Mosaic law, would have published to the world the abolition of those useless and obsolete ceremonies, without suffering Christianity to remain during so many years obscurely confounded among the sects of the Jewish church.²¹

If the aspects of the Godhead are eternal, their functions cannot possibly change in midstream. Again, the problem is in the conception of time. If the relationship of God to the world is seen as changing with the coming of Christ, by virtue of His creation of a Son, then we might accept the emergence of a new law, a new spirit, a new religion, and a new relation of God to the world as manifest in the Trinity. If the Christian Trinity has existed from eternity, complete with all its respective functions, including a Saviour Son and a Sanctifying Spirit, why would these persons have remained inert for the first centuries of the world?

The Importance of the Nicene Trinity in the Creation of Unity

Though one can argue against particular points in the Nicene conception, it is important to attempt to understand why it emerged as the first universally accepted statement of orthodoxy within the early Church. When looking at the emergence of the early Church or specific

rituals, it has become commonplace to emphasize the importance of cohesion for an emerging institution. Arguments against the primacy of Peter or the legitimacy of the episcopacy, for instance, must ultimately yield, on the historical level, to the fact that these institutions became integrally bound to the Church and, in a sense, established their own legitimacy; the continuation and successful spread of the Church in its infancy was dependent as much on ideological and institutional coherence as it was on Scriptural consistency. "Already in the early centuries, Christian thinkers began to distinguish between that instruction which was intended to make known the word concerning Christ, and the mystery regarding him and that instruction which was intended to point to the correction of habits."²² However, the Nicene Creed, and dogma in general, go beyond simply pointing to the correction of habits. Though Wolfson suggests the possibility that "the raising of the bipartite salutation to a tripartite one may have been merely for the sake of making the Christian salutation resemble more closely the tripartite form of its original type, the priestly benediction, and no theological significance is to be attached to it"²³, it is clear that a great deal of refinement in the conception of God and Christ was behind the orthodox formulation. We cannot possibly merely toss it off as an insignificant alteration in Christian ritual.

As Scott points out, "no book... could be less fitted to serve as a touchstone for orthodox belief"²⁴ than the New Testament. The variety of belief derived from it was inevitable and indeed, "there has never yet been a heretic who could not take his stand on some text of the New Testament."²⁵ This must not have been the way it was seen at the time of Nicaea, nor for many centuries afterwards. To the contrary, it was clearly a conviction that only one belief was true, that only one con-

ception of God was right, that only one profession of faith could be Christian, which drove the Church to the writing of its first creed. In other words, the debaters at Nicaea did not see themselves as "idiosyncratic theologians"²⁶ expounding one of many possible correct theories. Theirs was the one true faith. Hence, the creed was perceived, indeed, as something like a "mere" addition to ritual, for it quite simply expressed what it meant to be a Christian.

Though it is difficult now to conceive of this train of thought, it is important to view the early theologians as men quite simply telling us what the Bible means. For those inclined toward positing a normative interpretation, though, the ultimate goal was not simply to interpret the New Testament, but to clearly define what one must believe to be a Christian. Again, the emphasis was, first, on achieving unity within the Church by standardizing belief, and second, on clearly distinguishing the beliefs of Christians from those of other religions. This was more clearly defined by ritual than anything else; and necessarily the most distinctive ritual had to be the profession of faith.

What, then, made Christianity distinctive? As we have said, Wolfson points to the Pauline conception of the Spirit as one thing. Wolfson also shows in an early chapter that it was not uncommon for gods to have human children; however, it was unusual for the son of a God to share divine and human attributes. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it was a virtually new concept of God that He might be composed of different aspects, consubstantial with each other. Lonergan argues that this was a step forward in the process of greater "differentiation" in men's minds, an increasing philosophical capacity for understanding complex concepts. The Trinity, for him, is a more soph-

isticated and dynamic conception of God, and was central to Christian self-definition. The concept of a differentiated Godhead was not entirely original with Christianity, but, as we shall show in our discussion of Panikkar's conception of the meaning of a "trinity", the Christian formulation was a uniquely effective conceptualization of the basic trinitarian ~~message~~ message.

If this, then, was central to what identified Christians, it is not surprising that its distinctiveness would be carried to the extreme. Of course Christ had to be wholly divine, as opposed to the Adoptionist or Arian ideas, or he would simply be another Messianic figure, certainly not unique at that time. Of course He had to be human, as opposed to the docetic conception, or His resurrection could not have had the significance for us that made it unique. His humanity hardly needed emphasis as it is so crucial to the Scriptures; to illuminate His full divinity, however, it was necessary to see Him as eternal. We have shown how the Holy Spirit functions as distinct from Christ after the incarnation, and the Spirit's divinity is unquestionable. Again, though the Spirit's existence from eternity is somewhat questionable, the purity of the idea makes the Christian God distinctive in a way that a God which trifurcates thousands of years after the creation of the world is not.

Probably the most important thing that had to be refuted was the heresy implicit in Arius' formulation: subordinationism. If Christ was less than God, he could not have the power of salvation which is attributed to Him (as noted before in the writings of Augustine). He would be a demi-god. If anything was crucial to the new faith, it was that Christ be of an unimpeachably divine nature. For this it was

necessary that He exist from eternity with God. Why could He not, then, have simply emanated from God in the incarnation, having existed forever as a potential but not actual aspect of God? Because the essential relationship of Father and Son could not exist in a being that was fundamentally undifferentiated. If the Son was simply born at the time of the Incarnation, as a God, the way a son born of a man is a man, He could certainly not have the full power of God. Finally, if anything defines ultimate power it is the notion of eternity. For Christ to have the importance assigned to Him by early Christians, and for God to be of the eternally loving nature ascribed to Him, it was essential that this relationship exist from eternity.

We can see that the arguments for the Nicene Trinity, particularly when placed alongside its alternatives, are strong ones in the establishment of a distinctively Christian theism. We have also seen problems with the formulation. Clearly, though, the fact of the Nicene Creed being the first piece of Christian dogma was no accident. It defined the uniqueness of Christianity, taking all the elements that distinguished it from other religions and uniting them. It produced an unequivocal (though still ambiguous) statement of what Christians had to believe to call themselves Christians. Finally, it established for centuries the notion that the Church had the power to "illuminate" Scripture, to make clear what it felt was unclear.

The rigidification of religious belief in the Nicene period seems in many ways to have violated the freedom of Christians at the time, and of course later, to accept Christ's teachings in a variety of ways. We cannot truly blame the Nicene Fathers for this, though; for their desire

to establish a normative doctrine must be seen as an outgrowth of a tendency that really began in the early Christian era, of intellectualizing God, the practice of which came to be known as theology. As we have said before early Christianity had to establish its legitimacy in the Graeco-Roman world. A very important part of this legitimization was the process of making tangible the religious beliefs of Christians. Much of the "mystery" of God, and later, "mystery" of the Trinity, had to yield to logical disputation. Initially, Christianity was even more vexatious than Judaism for it did not follow common institutional paths clearly set forth in Scripture. In attempting to clarify the meaning of Christ to the world, early Christians laid the groundwork for rigidification by rendering intellectual that which was essentially mysterious and unknowable. This is not to say that Christian Trinitarian formulations do not approach a valid conceptualization of Panikkar's "trinity", which we will discuss in the following section, or even that a concept of mystery is not allowed in these formulations; it is to say that rigidification of doctrine (orthodoxy) buries the essential importance and meaning of a trinity. Further, as we have shown in this section, the Nicene Trinitarian formulation was not chosen for its ineluctable truthfulness or logic, but for its ability to meet certain requirements of the Church at the time (as well as, of course, the firm belief of some theologians at the time that it was the Truth). Hence, the strongest criticism of orthodoxy must be that it defined as indisputable Truth a belief that was not indisputable and did not allow for the variability of interpretation that is essential to religious belief.

PART IIIPANIKKAR'S trinity AND THE CHRISTIAN TRINITY

The Trinity is the most distinctive element of Christianity, separating it from more strictly monotheistic religions such as Islam and Judaism, and from "atheistic" religions such as Buddhism, which do not center their scriptures on an orientation to God. "...in reality the Trinity is not only the theoretical foundation-stone of Christianity but also the practical, concrete and existential basis of the Christian life. This is not to say that the classic interpretation of the Trinity is the only one possible, nor even that it is impossible to transcend in theory the trinitarian dogma..."¹

Panikkar's trinity

In The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man, Raimundo Panikkar takes the Christian paradigm for the trinitarian religious experience and uses it to show how this trinity, when reduced to its essential elements, is central to all religious, or indeed all human, experience. While the Christian dogma has elaborated a view of the trinity that is basically clear and tangible, Panikkar feels that the trinity in fact underlies all religions, whether or not they have explicitly recognized this aspect of their religious views in doctrinal writings.

Although Panikkar is clearly opposed to anthropomorphization of the divine, he believes that the divine, the Father, is defined by his creation as much as we are defined by him. "God is not God by himself; he is only so for and hence through the creature."² It is the integral connection and communication between God and his creatures which gives either of them meaning and identity. However, he makes clear the distinction between the immanent God and the transcendent God. While these

are by nature consubstantial, they must also be seen as separate. God the Absolute, the Ultimate, must be beyond our comprehension, "...no one can ever see the Father, because, in the final analysis, there is nothing to see."³ This dichotomy between the unknowable Absolute and mundane humanity must be bridged somehow. This must be brought about by uniting the divine in humanity with the immanent in God in one central being. In Christianity this being is Jesus of Nazareth.

Is it necessary to have an incarnate God, such as Christ, to fill this role? Panikkar seems to feel that the Word, although it is not itself actually God, provides this link of communication. Therefore, it is not necessary that the conveyor of this Word on earth be God himself, but only that the Word be informative to humanity. Further, he does not see validity in speaking about God the Father, even in Scripture, for all words about God are incomplete and in fact blasphemous. Thus it might even be preferable to leave God out of religious discourse. But if religion is based on "interpersonal dialogue"⁴ between the mundane and the divine, how can we keep silent on this?

The answer to this is two-fold. First, we must communicate through Christ, or the mediator* to reach the divine at all. "Christ, manifest or hidden, is the only way to God. Even by definition the unique link between the created and the uncreated, the relative and the absolute, the temporal and the eternal, earth and heaven, is Christ, the only mediator."⁵ Secondly, we must not expect the possibility of communicating directly with God the Absolute for, by definition, he is beyond our reach.

*-Panikkar sees "Christ" as a generic term for the mediator between God and humanity, and not as patently "Christian".

Panikkar sees problems with the common tendencies in most religions toward "iconolatry" and personalism. By attempting to identify God in tangible, human terms, we are denying his distance and unknowability. He sees Christianity as tending in this direction and indeed sees our conception of the Christian Trinity as having lost its dynamism by losing sight of the interaction between its three extremely distinctive, but fundamentally interrelated, parts. To see our communication with God as being similar to a dialogue with another human being is to misunderstand what God is. (On the other hand, he sees our dialogue with God as paradigmatic of all relationships. Rather than seeing this as a contradiction in Panikkar's thinking, we should see it in the same way that we might view Christ: though he is "Perfect man" and therefore an ideal we wish to emulate, it would be foolish to think that mere humans could ever achieve this standard of perfection. As we will show later, however, this is the very point at which this paper departs from Panikkar's view)

For this reason he sees a positive element in beliefs which deny the existence of God, such as atheism or nihilism. They are certainly not entirely positive in his view, for they deny completely the existence of God and, therefore, the existence of a divine element in humans. "Basically it is a thirst for the Absolute in man that is at the root of the nihilist climate of thought in our day. God cannot be exclusively an idol, nor an alibi nor simply a person..."⁶ To specifically deny this aspect of humanity is to isolate each individual from "the cosmos" and from his "infinite", which is defined by his relation to God, and God's relation to the spiritual in man.⁷ However, to realize that God the Absolute is not knowable through revelation or through

ritual, but that the ultimate source of our existence is beyond our reach and our knowledge is, to Panikkar, as close to the truth as the overly personalized visions of most "theistic" religions.

It is the very fact that he takes with full seriousness his awareness of his fundamental truth that drives modern man to this impassioned search beyond everything that has existence, causing him to reject all that is only intermediary and to refuse inexorably all vain consolation, all reward, all recompense, all hope.⁸

Though Panikkar's book focuses on the Christian Trinity, he claims that this is primarily because "it is in the Christian faith where this essential mystery of the divine life, even of the whole of reality is thematically developed."⁹ He only gives passing reference to the Buddhist relation to the divine, which is unfortunate because these references reveal what may be a more complete (though less conceptualized) awareness of the "Theandric mystery" of humanity.* As with the nihilists, there is no sense that "God" can be seen or understood, though in Buddhism God is not denied explicitly. "One can well understand that to 'save' God, Buddha elected to remain silent--by doing which, i.e. precisely by remaining silent, he discovered the other face of the Divinity, his apophatic, self-emptying, dimension: the 'no face'."¹⁰ While the Christian God is revealed through his Word, "the God of the Upaniṣads does not speak; he is not Word. He 'inspires'; he is Spirit."¹¹ Hence, the Buddhist desire to open oneself up through meditation, to "empty oneself", is more conducive to receiving an awareness of the infinite than Christian prayer, though it is less consciously directed at doing so. Though Christian prayer attempts to be interaction between God and man, it is based on a pre-conceived, and to some degree anthropomorphic,

*-Theandricism is Panikkar's more universalized term for the trinity, as explained below.

notion of what God is, and is based on the impossible hope of reaching God as opposed to receiving God. On the other hand, the Buddhist goal of receiving God is not based on the hope of revelation from God, but on the enlightenment of the individual which makes him receptive to God. Hence, the responsibility for any awareness of God rests entirely on the individual.

Hence, while he says that "theandricism" is the classical and traditional term for that intimate and complete unity which is realised paradigmatically in Christ between the divine and the human and which is the goal towards which everything here below tends--in Christ and Spirit"¹²;--he is speaking of its value strictly as a paradigm, or a symbol perhaps. The Christ and the Spirit of the Christian tradition are suitable representations of two elements in the fundamental, pan-religious trinity, but he does not state that they are any the better in the Christian faith for having been elaborated in such concrete terms. "It is in fact in the Trinity that a true place is found for whatever in religion is not simply the particular deposit of a given age or culture."¹³ Only in Christianity does the trinity which he conceives take a really tangible form and for this reason he uses the terms of this faith for his discussion.

However, while never denigrating Christianity at all, he finally asserts that:

in a theandric spirituality buddhism finds its true place, but it stresses powerfully that to speak of the ultimate mystery makes non-sense, that to manipulate the Supreme, even with our intelligence, is a blasphemy and that silence is the base and source of all speech, all thought and all being.¹⁴

Paradoxically, it is the strong conceptualization of the Trinity, the

attempt to understand it intellectually, which finally weakens the Trinity in Christianity; and it is the silent acceptance of religious experience which makes the trinitarian dynamic vital in Buddhism.

The Search for a trinity in Buddhism: The Trikâya in Mahâyâna

The Trikâya in Mahâyâna Buddhism is a clear statement of a trinity in that faith, and it will be useful to see in what ways this notion fits into Panikkar's model of a pan-religious trinity--i.e., to see if we can similarly criticize the Mahayana tradition for conceptualizing the trinity--or if it is instead a separate concept unrelated to the Christian dynamic. If this is the case, we must search elsewhere for an indication that Panikkar's belief in a pan-religious trinity can indeed be applied to Buddhism, and see, further, whether or not this underlying trinity is more conducive to a genuine trinitarian experience than we have shown the ~~overly~~-explicit Christian Trinity to be.

In Mahâyâna, as distinctly opposed to Hīnayâna, Buddha is seen as a transcendent and mysterious being with virtually superhuman qualities. However, he is never seen as a god. "This is not the humanized portrait of a divine being, but an expression of the belief in an historical being, a belief which remained in spite of all the growth in the wonderful qualities attributed to him."¹⁵ Coming from this different perspective, he nevertheless filled a similar role to that of Jesus Christ in certain ways. One of these was that he set in motion The Wheel of Doctrine, which can be seen as corresponding to Christ's revelation of the Logos. This is, of course, not a feature that is unusual to these religions, for all historic religions are based on the transmission of "truth"

through prophets or messiahs. What is far more important is the way in which these figures were seen to embody truth.

The Lalita-vistara...says that unbelievers will arise who will refuse to believe in Buddha's birth from a mother, but that it was not as a god that he turned the Wheel of Doctrine, for then human beings would be discouraged, thinking, 'we are mere men and unable to reach the state of a god.'¹⁶

This is quite similar to Christ's purpose in becoming man, particularly as shown in the crucifixion. He was both perfect God and perfect man, the latter being apparent above all in his willingness to accept suffering and death in recompense for his unwavering devotion to God the Father. Though Buddhist writings may have sometimes tended toward docetism, it is very clear that Buddha is not generally viewed as divine. Nevertheless, his portrayal as spiritually 'perfect' is close to the idea of Christ as 'perfect man', and so similarly: "how was it possible that, possessed of such exalted moral and spiritual virtues, Buddha too had to succumb to the law of birth and death that is the common lot of mortals?"¹⁷ This question is also asked at Christ's crucifixion. The answer to both is similar. Christ's resurrection exemplifies eternal life, showing us that death in our worldly life is not final death. Similarly, "the Mahâyânists now argue that the reason why Çâkyamuni entered into Parinirvana when his worldly career was thought by him to be over is that by this his resignation to the law of birth and death, he wished to exemplify in him the impermanency of worldly life and the folly of clinging to it as final reality."¹⁸ In a sense, then, what binds the two together is a notion of salvation, of eternity. Though their physical bodies have died a human death, the truth which they embodied and revealed lives on. Because they were human, the implication is that, if we emulate them, the essential part of ourselves (our 'soul; or 'spi-

rit') will also live forever.

The eternal nature of Buddha and Christ also have more worldly implications. In Mahâyâna Buddhism, the Trikâya represents the three bodies of Buddha: the Nirmanakâya, or Body of Transformation; the Sambhogakâya, or Body of Bliss; and the Dharmakâya, or Body of Dharma. These represent aspects of Buddha, all of which are eternal yet paradigmatically human traits. The first represents the physical world, the forms which Buddha can take depending on the exigencies of the given situation. Different physical existences are "mind-formed" by Buddha. The purpose of these different physical forms is to enable Buddha to "work the good of all creatures."¹⁹ Hence, Buddha's physical forms are seen ultimately as mere projections of the perfect soul or mind and not as an end in themselves, nor as the mundane and restrictive casings associated with normal human bodies. This demonstrates the transience of physical existence as we know it, and the far greater importances of mind and spirit.

The second, the Body of Bliss, or Body of Enjoyment, is a state that is achieved by a Buddha after "attaining bodhi" and "with a view to preach the doctrines of Mahâyâna to the bodhisattvas and at the same time to arouse in their minds joy, delight and love for the excellent dharma."²⁰ Hence it represents both the love for and transmission of the dharma.

The third and central kâya is the Dharmakâya. "Dharma" defies direct translation, but is perhaps best conveyed as "knowledge of the way." This was the first-conceived kâya of Buddha and is the cornerstone for the other two; indeed it was acknowledged for centuries before the others were added to form a "Trikâya". "It is said to be the 'support' of the

two others, for ultimately only it exists, and is hence called essential."²¹ The concept of dharma in Mahâyâna seems to have changed from "merely the body of doctrine" to a "sense of real nature, or ultimate truth, which in the first place is enlightenment."²²

The Trikâya and the Christian Trinity

Suzuki analogizes these three kâyas to the three persons of the Christian Trinity: "...the Body of Transformation may be considered to correspond to Christ in the flesh, the Body of Bliss either to Christ in glory or to Holy Ghost, and Dharmakâya to Godhead."²³ The Nirmanakâya, being the notion of the "mind-formed" body, may indeed bear resemblance to the incarnate Christ. The Sambhogakâya, representing as it does the position of "openness in both directions"²⁴ does indeed resemble the role of Christ in glory on the one hand, and the Holy Ghost on the other, as these are complementary manifestations of the divine on earth. Finally, the Dharmakâya, which represents knowledge, certainly overlaps with the omniscient God the Father, though actual omniscience is never claimed for Buddha. Also in common, these two provide the foundation out of which the other aspects of the Trinity, or Trikâya, respectively, are generated.

To show that the elements of the two different trinities are similar, however, might be too reductionist or allegorical. To draw an analogy between the Christian and Mahâyâna trinities, Suzuki has drawn upon particular functions which are common to their different elements.* In this formulation, the Father is reduced to the position of a fount of truth; the Son is, on the one hand, given the Adoptionist role of an entirely expedient corporeal being with no fundamental connection to his

* - It must be stressed that Suzuki does not endorse this analogy, but merely posits a comparison for the purpose of illuminating the Trikâya for students of Western religion.

manifest, incarnate self, and on the other, the apotheosis of human spirituality and conveyor of the Word, or truth; the Holy Ghost, or Spirit, is coupled with the latter aspect of Christ as both representing the divine in man which is capable of receiving the Word of God, and as the messenger of the Word.

Aside from the Adoptionist analogy to the Nirmanakâya, there is nothing terribly wrong with this formulation. Of course, the separation of the Holy Spirit and the Logos, and the identification of the latter with Christ, is essential to the Nicene Trinity, as is the unity of Christ in his divine and human forms; but if we are to follow Panikkar in seeing the trinity in a slightly more flexible way than the Nicene tradition has accustomed us to, we can see that here we at least have all the attributes which make for a very basic "theandrisim". However, the Christian Trinity is not, in any of its many formulations, ever seen as simply, "The Truth, the Logos, and the Divine in Man."

The element of the Christian Trinity which is so obviously missing from the Trikâya is the inter-"personal" dynamic, the sense of relationship between the elements of the Trinity. While the Christian Trinity can on some level be reduced to more or less symbolic components (for instance, "action, love and knowledge"²⁵) the personalistic aspect, and its implication of inter-relationship, cannot be removed. The Augustinian formulation earlier cited--"He who loves, that which is loved, and the power of love"--for example, is an equally valid reduction, but one which bears no relation at all to the dynamic of the Trikâya.

Though Panikkar professes to look at the underlying trinitarianism of all religions, he clearly sees a consummation of this relationship in Christian thought. On the one hand he talks about a basic tri-

chotomy, cited above, of action, love and knowledge; on the other, the importance of the relationships within the Trinity weighs heavily in his analysis. "How, indeed, could one reach the Son without participating in his sonship? But that sonship is real only because the Father causes it to emerge as such."²⁶ And later: "If the Father and the Son are not two, they are not one either: the Spirit both unites and distinguishes them. He is the bond of unity; the we in between, or rather within."²⁷ Panikkar does not see the Trinity as three isolated aspects of the Godhead analogous to characteristics emanating from human beings. Neither does he see one Godhead which "wills" the existence of the Son and Spirit and hence basically controls them.²⁸ The eternity of the trinity, the integrity of each of its parts, and finally the dependence of each of the parts on both of the others for meaning, are essential to Panikkar's view.

The Trikâya does not fit into this for various reasons. First, as mentioned above, there is no interpersonal dialogue within the Trikâya. Second, the Trikâya cannot possibly be abstracted from human existence; that is, the three elements of the Trikâya are defined entirely in terms of the greatest enlightenment of humans, while the Christian Trinity, in theory, precedes any notion of human existence. Third, the Nirmanakâya and Sambhogakâya are dependent on the Dharmakâya for their existence. One element of the Trikâya strictly precedes the others; in Nicene Christianity, all elements are co-eternal.

It is clearly not sensible to reduce the Christian Trinity to a triumvirate of isolated characteristics. Its symbolization of relationships from earth to God, implicit in the relationships within the Trinity, are essential and distinguish it from the Trikâya. The ques-

tion, though, is whether such clear symbolization is the best purpose of religious doctrine.

Christianity speaks of God, yet describes him as unknowable. It symbolizes Him as "Father, Son and Spirit" and uses Him as a paradigm for action on earth, yet scorns iconoclasm and personalism. Finally, the movement of the Trinity from earth to God is a movement from immanent God (Holy Spirit) to transcendent God (God the Father), not from man to God. The Trikâya also does not include the unenlightened man in its formulation; hence, if we were to see the Trikâya as "the trinity" (in Panikkar's sense) underlying Buddhism, we would have to see this as a deficiency. However, we have shown that it does not fit Panikkar's model.

We will not find a more satisfactory trinitarian "formulation" in Buddhism, but perhaps this is its advantage. The Trikâya does not match Panikkar's concept of an underlying trinity, and perhaps this is why he does not discuss it in his book. This is not to say, though, that an underlying "theandrisim" cannot be discovered in Buddhism.

For Buddhists, the Absolute is completely mysterious and, therefore, not discussed. There is no speculation about "divine" beings and their qualities, but only talk of extremely enlightened humans. As suggested earlier, the "dialogue" between people and the Absolute is conducted by "self-emptying" and receptiveness to Truth, or enlightenment. By objectifying Truth as existing in someone, namely God, Christians shift the focus from attempting to know Truth, to attempting to know God. God, or the Absolute, is not in any sense seen as "a thing or a person, but as all that is truth."

The Dharmakâya is not God, but is, rather, truth as received by

people in a highly enlightened state. The Sambhogakâya is not, like Christ, a unique apparition in the hands of God, but the revelation of truth by human beings, again in a state of enlightenment. The Nirmanakâya is, perhaps, more symbolic, but reflects the knowledge, again achieved by human beings, that physical reality is not all there is. That which transcends physical reality is clearly the Dharma, again a human concept and not an unattainable abstraction of divine truth. We have said, of course, that the Trikâya does not fit into Panikkar's notion of a trinity; however, it is important to see that even here, the basis of what is taught is potential human knowledge and enlightenment, not a projection of a perfect, unknowable, unattainable, divine being.

"For (Buddhaghosa) the whole universe is divided into three planes, of which the lowest, the world of sensual desire from the deepest hells up to the heavens of sensual pleasures, is inhabited by beings with their six senses. Above these is the world of form, in which the senses of taste, smell, and touch are absent. In the formless world only mind exists. It is inhabited by beings who have practiced the four Attainments of non-form."²⁹ This might be closer to a Buddhist "trinity" than the Trikâya. "Buddhaghosa divides the career of the individual who is transmigrating into three parts. Consciousness is birth-consciousness, the first two links belong to a past existence, and at the third he is reborn, but the actual point of passing to another existence is not birth but conception."³⁰ The three aspects of existence are divided into past, present and future conceptions. Though these are distinct, they are interrelated and must necessarily combine to inform the thoughts of all except the most base or most enlightened

individuals. This juncture of past, present and future knowledge, and of an awareness of human capacity for three conditions of existence and thought, from the mundane to the "formless", fit well into Panikkar's theandrisim. Without ever giving shape to the divine, the Buddhist has the framework to communicate with divine truth by ascending to the summit of human knowledge, and with only human knowledge as a paradigm. What is missing from this in fitting it into Panikkar's model is a conception of how the divine descends to reach us. This is exactly what Christianity does provide; but perhaps the role of religion is, ultimately, the more humble one of learning to receive God rather than that of understanding intellectually who he is and how exactly he goes about making himself known to us.

CONCLUSION

In studies of religion, there is a tendency to break religions into two more or less distinct parts. These can be called the institutional and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible, the cultural and the personal. Because the line between these parts is often unclear, it can be very difficult for the student of comparative religion to know whether or not he is looking at truly comparable elements of the religions he is looking at. If we recognize certain symbol systems that are similar in two or three different religions, for instance, do we conclude that these symbols are universal; further, can we then conclude that such systems are the elements that are essential to religions? If we recognize personal religious rituals, such as meditation, which exist in many different religions, can we then say that these are essential to personal religious experience?

When we talk about "religion" there is a tendency to think in terms of personal experience. When we talk about "a religion", we tend to be referring to a cultural institution. "A religion", though, largely defines, and perhaps modifies, personal "religion." Hence, though we may arrive at an understanding of what is essential to entirely personal religious experience across all religions, we may not yet have an understanding of actual religious experience as it takes place in the frameworks of different religious institutions. Though outlets remain in many institutionalized religions for almost entirely individual religious experience (such as monasticism, mysticism, and meditation) religion for many people is largely conditioned by culturally-defined ritual; even in highly personalized types of religious experience, the individual's orientation is largely determined by the

dictates of the religious institution.

If we have arrived at what we consider to be basic to personal religious experience--that is, if we have first gone so far as to conclude that something common does underlie all religious experience--our task in comparing the doctrines, rituals, and institutions of different religions is to see how conducive these "visible" aspects of religion are to a fulfillment of this personal religious need or quest. Does a particular institutional religion enhance, or does it instead modify, personal religion?

Panikkar has broken religious experience down to a very basic concept of personal religious experience: the trinity. In his basic formulation--that is, of Man, the Absolute, and the Mediator, or means of communication between the two--he has shown what must be the basis of religious experience; indeed, Panikkar's trinity could well be used as a definition of personal religion. What we have tried to show, then, is the way in which the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity modifies rather than enhances the trinitarian religious experience. Part of the reason for this, as we have shown in the first section, is that Nicene Christian orthodoxy was not based on the most sensible trinitarian formulation, but that it achieved eminence for other reasons. However, it is important to realize that the problem with orthodoxy was not simply that it espoused a formulation that was not indisputable and virtually forced many people to accept it in subsequent years. Indeed, any Christian formulation would have had the same problem that the Nicene Trinity had: the problem was in its intellectualization of the incomprehensible, a process which, as we have pointed out, began in Christianity well before the Council of Nicaea. A true trinity is an open trinity, "open in both directions"; that is, a trinity which sees the role of man ex-

clusively as one of attempting to open oneself to God, or Truth, or Dharma. (Openness on the part of God is also presumed, but must be seen, at most, as an object of faith)

It is absurd to condemn a religious doctrine as important as the Christian on the basis of its appearing less conducive to true religious experience than it might be. The attempt of this paper as much as anything is to show the Christian Trinity, in its basic form, as a superb conceptualization of the essential trinity. It cannot be perfect, for it is a conceptualization; it can, however, be incredibly compelling in its symbolization of religious experience. It unfortunately places us more in the role of observers than participators for we are not part of the Christian Trinity.

To this must be added an awareness of religion's cultural importance, though. As we have said, "a religion" is cultural, and is defined by its institutions, which include everything from ritual to doctrine. Though the partly "political" basis for arriving at the Nicene formulation in the early Church might be condemned (as indeed it was in the first section of this paper) for diverting Christians from their true purpose of enhancing the potential for true personal religious experience, it cannot be entirely condemned; for it certainly enhanced the unity of the Church. Further, the tangibility of Christian doctrine, and its compelling nature gave Christianity a great deal of its institutional strength, and made it more possible for Christians to (nearly) understand the trinity, if not actually experience it.

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