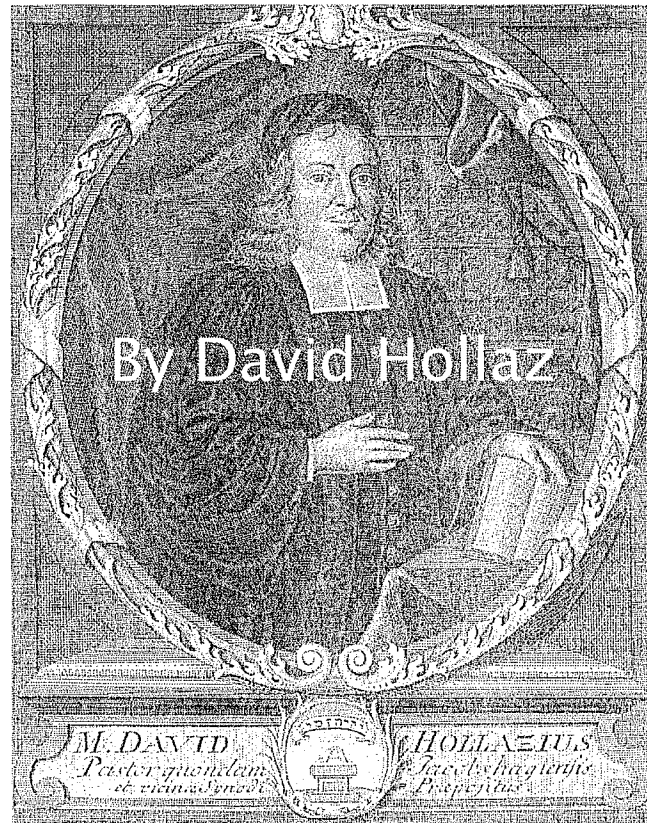


Doctrine of the

Most Holy Trinity

in the Old Testament



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TRANSLATED FROM
EXAMEN THEOLOGICUM ACROAMATICUM UNIVERSAM THEOLOGIAM THETICO-POLEMICAM COMPLECTENS
BY
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The following is translated from pages 288-290, 297-300 of *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum Universam Theologiam Thetico-Polemicam Complectens* (Stockholm and Leipzig: Gottfried Kiewewetter, 1750) by David Hollaz. The numbered footnotes and formatting are the translator's; everything else belongs to the author unless otherwise noted.

Question 14. *In how many ways does Holy Scripture, Old and New Testament, relate the number of divine persons?*

Holy Scripture relates the number of divine persons in two ways.

- 1) It teaches a *plurality* of divine persons in an indefinite or indeterminate way.
- 2) It describes a *trinity*¹ of divine persons in a definite or determinate way.

OBSERVATION 1

For those who are young or new to the faith, who are being instructed in catechetical doctrine, the faithful teacher should not set forth and inculcate an indefinite plurality of divine persons. Instead he should teach a definite trinity of divine persons from the onset because of the divine mandate in Matthew 28:19. In that passage the overseers of the church are commanded to teach and baptize the gentiles in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In disputation, however, as a Christian discusses the matter back and forth with his adversaries who are responding, they might oppose him with the unity of one person in the divine essence. In that case, he can defend an indefinite *plurality* of divine persons against the opposition in the first discussion (the goal of which is to confuse the adversary and demonstrate that his antithesis is false). When he is engaged in debate a second time, or as the first disputation progresses, he should confirm the universal truth, that there are neither more nor less than *three* divine persons, and they are the one true and most high God. Rf. Hülsemann, *Breviarium Theologiae*, p. 128 at *enucleat*.²

OBSERVATION 2

An indefinite *plurality* of divine persons is more frequently related in the *Old Testament*, although a definite *trinity* of persons is not merely insinuated secretly or obscurely there. In the *New Testament*, however, the evidences of an indefinite *plurality* of divine persons occur more rarely, while the evidences of the most holy Trinity occur more frequently and are clearer than those in the Old Testament.

Question 15. *With which arguments will you prove an indefinite plurality of divine persons?*

The arguments, with which an indefinite *plurality* of divine persons is proved, are sought from the clear testimonies of Holy Scripture.

A. Some of these testimonies claim distinct divine actions for distinct persons.

¹ This word is not capitalized when it is indefinite, referring to the concept of a trinity as such. It is capitalized when it is definite, referring to our triune God.

² Johann Hülsemann (1602-1661), Lutheran professor of theology at Wittenberg and Leipzig; *Breviarium Theologiae Exhibens Praecipuas Fidei Controversias* was his most famous dogmatic work.

- B. Some ascribe common conversation and common works to more than one divine persons in the plural number.
- C. Some make plain mention of more than one divine persons.
- D. Some express a plurality of divine persons by using names in the plural.

PROOF FOR A.

The Son of God is begotten of God (Ps 2:7). God is anointed by God (Ps 45:7). The LORD is sent by the LORD (Isa 48:16). The Lord is exalted by the Lord to his right hand (Ps 110:1).

We conclude: **In whatever passage God begets and is begotten, anoints and is anointed, sends and is sent, exalts and is exalted, more than one divine persons are being introduced in that passage. Certainly in the Holy Scriptures God begets and is begotten, etc. Therefore an indefinite plurality of divine persons is proved from those passages.**³

PROOF 1 FOR B.

“And Elohim said [by distribution, each one of God, or the divine persons, spoke to themselves in turn by appealing to and consulting themselves], ‘Let us make man according to our image and according to our likeness’ ” (Gen 1:26).

We declare: **Where more than one are conversing and consulting, there are more than one persons. Certainly in the divinity there are more than one conversing and consulting. Therefore in the divinity there are more than one persons.**

Criticism⁴ 1: God speaks of himself in the plural as rulers do – for the sake of honor.⁵

Response: In the Hebrew of the Holy Scriptures no king or ruler speaks only of himself in the plural. Hebrew is a very straightforward language, devoid of any pretence. It is true that in other languages rulers use the plural when speaking about themselves, but they are indicating that they have decided something with the assistance of their counselors and nobles. One cannot say this about the all-wise God.

Criticism 2: God conversed or consulted with the angels in this passage.

Response: God has never summoned the angels to receive counsel from them (Is 40:13). They were also unable to collaborate for a work of creation, which is of infinite excellence. Moreover, humans were not created according to the image of the angels, but according to the image of God.

PROOF 2 FOR B.

The LORD said, “Come! Let us go down and confuse the speech there” (Gen 11:7). The adversaries object, saying that God had the angels attend him when he confused the languages. But they argue in vain. For the confusion of languages belongs to God, who brings it about with an incomparable power, so that all at once he is able to work his way into the minds of humans,

³ The Latin reads simply: *Ergo*. Rf. David Hollaz, “The Restoration and Resurrection of the Dead (Part I),” *Stodium Excitare*, trans. Kirk Lahmann, 2, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 23, Endnote 4 (http://www.stodiumexcitare.com/vol_2_no_1/the_restoration_and_resurrection_of_the_dead_part_i.html).

⁴ Latin: *Dicis* (You say). Hollaz distinguishes these from objections. They are Hollaz’s attempt to anticipate doubts in the mind of his reader that arise from opposing arguments the reader has gathered elsewhere.

⁵ We would call this the majestic plural or the plural of excellence.

introduce foreign concepts and thoughts to them, and obliterate the memory of the language that was previously so well known to them.*

PROOF 1 FOR C.

“The LORD God said [to himself], ‘Behold! Man was like one of us [divine persons], knowing good and evil [and he sinned nevertheless]’ (Gen 3:22).

Whoever compares one to the plural of himself with regard to the order of knowledge – that one denotes more than one persons. Certainly God, speaking about himself, compares the one man to the plural of himself with regard to the order of knowledge. Therefore God denotes more than one persons.**

PROOF 2 FOR C.

The passage of Isaiah 6:8 is clear. There Adonai says, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

The one who says, “for us,” signals that he is not one (person), but that there are others with him, and so he is more than one persons.

PROOF FOR D.

We pointed out earlier that the divine name **אלהים** is plural not only in ending, but also in meaning. This divine name is constructed...

- 1) with a plural verb in Genesis 20:13, where Abraham says, “But it happened that when Elohim caused [plural] me to depart from the house of my father...” Since God is only one, by the construction of Elohim with a plural verb we must understand more than one divine persons. Cf. Genesis 35:7; 2 Samuel 7:23.
- 2) with a plural adjective. Thus the divine persons are called holy, **אלהים קדשים**, by Joshua (Jos 24:19).

Criticism: Elohim is also constructed with a singular verb, e.g. **ברא אלהים** (Gen 1:1).

Response: Elohim is constructed with a singular verb to show the mystery of more than one persons in the one essence of God.

Question 16. *How will you prove a definite trinity of divine persons?*

A definite *trinity* of divine persons is proved by unquestionable testimonies of Holy Scripture. Some of these show all *three* persons of the Divinity *together*. Other passages teach *separately* that not only the eternal *Father*, but also the *Son* of the eternal Father and the *Holy Spirit* are the *true* and *most high* God. Each class of

* In addition, a singular verb is used in verse 8. Therefore in verse 8, as we compare this singular with the plural in verse 7, we cannot doubt that the plurals, who are the one LORD, are signified in the singular verb.

** Besides the fact that man is said to be created not according to the image of the angels, but according to the image of God, it should also be noted that man, in his state of innocence, would not have been *similar* to, but *equal* to the angels, just as we will be **ισάγγελοι**, not **όμοιάγγελοι**, when we will have reached consummate blessedness (Lk 20:36).

testimonies concerning the most holy Trinity is selected both from the apostolic writings of the New Testament and from the prophetic records of the Old Testament.

OBSERVATION

A distinction needs to be made here between the *order of divine revelation* and the *method of demonstration*. The latter proceeds in this way: We will begin from the clearer testimonies and progress to the less clear. The former follows the sequence of time. Since the *Trinity* of divine persons must be proven to us against the enemies of the truth of heaven, we, keeping in mind the method of demonstration, transmit the testimonies of the New Testament first. They are clearer than the testimonies of the Old Testament, in which the degree of clarity is regarded as less.

Question 18. *Which testimonies of the Old Testament show the Trinity of the divine persons together?*

The testimonies of the Old Testament that teach the Trinity of the divine persons together are taken from the:

- A. creation of the world,
- B. leading of the Israelites out of Egypt,
- C. promised sending and anointing of the Messiah,
- D. solemn priestly blessing, and
- E. *trisagion* of the angels.

PROOF FOR A.

“In the beginning God created heaven and the earth. Truly the earth was made desolate and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. Moreover the Spirit of God was moving over the surfaces of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And light was made” (Gen 1:1-3). Clearly this passage is among the chief passages of the Old Testament that deal with the mystery of the most holy Trinity, because the phrase in Psalm 33:6 was undoubtedly drawn from it: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, and by the Spirit of his mouth all of their host.” Indeed who would also deny that John looked back to this place when he wrote these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him, and apart from him nothing was made that has been made” (Jn 1:1-3).

OBSERVATION

- 1) To describe the first work of God Moses said, “אלהים created...” The noun אלהים is plural not only in ending, but also in meaning. When construed with the singular verb ברא, it signifies a common work or action of more than one, as if Moses were saying, “He who are God created.” Rf. the annotations of Dr. Sebastian Schmid, *On Genesis*, p. 2.⁶

⁶ Dr. Sebastian Schmid (1617-1696), French professor of theology and clergyman. His commentary *On Genesis* was published in Strasburg in 1697.

- 2) To create light God said, "Let there be light." The God speaking here is God the *Father*, in distinction to the *Word*, through whom he spoke, and the *Holy Spirit*, in whom he together with the Word (through whom he was about to speak) moved over the waters.
- 3) God the Father spoke using commands, according to Psalm 33:9: "He spoke and it was made; he commanded and it stood." So then he indicates that *God's speaking connotes or designates* a word of command, and more than that...
- 4) It connotes the ὑποστατικὸν or *substantial Word*. We prove this...
 - (a) from the infallible interpretation of John 1:1-3. From this passage we infer: The word through which all things were made was with God the Father in the beginning of creation. And in fact the Word subsisting through himself, who is true God, was with God the Father in the beginning of creation. Therefore the Word subsisting through himself is that Word through whom all things were made.
 - (b) from the testimony of Solomon, who attributes to the wisdom of God (the hypostatic Wisdom, the eternal Son of God, the Wisdom of every author and source) the same things that Moses attributes to the Word of God here (Pr 8:22ff).
 - (c) from consideration of the matter itself. For just as in a person external word of the mouth substitutes for the internal word of the mind and for internal wisdom, so the word of divine command is not without the hypostatic Word, not without the substantial Wisdom, the eternal Son of God, since the Father does not work without the Son (Jn 5:17).
 - (d) When Moses says: "Moreover the Spirit of God was moving over the surfaces of the waters" (Gen 1:2), with the words "Spirit of God" he is proclaiming the third person of the Divinity, whom King David calls the Spirit of the divine mouth (Ps 33:6). The moving of the Spirit of God we understand to be his most distinguished moving for the purpose of creating light, since the latter half of verse 2 in the Hebrew codex most closely connects with the following verse, so that the sense emerges here: *And in this Spirit of his, as he was moving over the waters, God the Father said through his internal Word, the Son, this προφορικὸν saying: "Let there be light."* Cf. the annotations of Dr. Schmid *On Genesis*, p. 4.

Having presented these things first, we conclude: **Each and every work, which is common to more than one divine persons and is accomplished by God speaking through his internal Word in the Spirit of his mouth, conveys the Trinity of divine persons. Certainly the work of creation is common to more than one divine persons and is accomplished... etc. Therefore the work of creation conveys the Trinity of divine persons.**⁷

OBJECTION

The *Socinians* contend:

- 1) The "word of God" in the work of creation denotes a divine command.
- 2) The "spirit of God," who moves himself over the surfaces of the waters, designates the air or the wind.
- 3) Neither the word nor the spirit of God is a person.

RESPONSE

⁷ Latin: *Ergo*. Rf. footnote 3.

- 1) Here the word of divine command is not to be considered apart from the hypostatic Word, because “without him nothing was made” (Jn 1:3).
- 2) Neither air nor wind existed on the first day of creation. Furthermore, God did not employ wind in the creation of light, or use any creature. Also, why is the wind called the “wind of God,” but heaven is not called the “heaven of God” or earth the “earth of God”?
- 3) Since creation, a most excellent work, is ascribed to the Word and the Spirit of God, personality cannot be denied to them. For they are works of self-subsistent beings⁸.

PROOF FOR B.

The *leading of the Israelites out of Egypt* bears witness to the Trinity of divine persons. God the Father led the Israelites out of Egypt through the angel as ὁδηγὸν or guide (Ex 14:19). The ancient rabbis called him מֵטַטְרֹן – Metatron – the one who marks [Latin: *metatorem*] or leads the way. He is not a created angel, but uncreated. Certainly, he is the Son of God. We assert this because...

- 1) He is clearly called יְהוָה (Ex 14:24), which is the proper name of God and incommunicable to creatures.
- 2) He is called “the angel of the face,” who saves the people (Isa 63:9).
- 3) Concerning this angel God says, “My name is in him” [Ex 23:21 – *trans.*], by which divine glory, majesty, and essence or nature is denoted.
- 4) To this angel is assigned the judiciary power of punishing the disobedient. “You shall guard yourself against his faces, and listen to his voice. Do not provoke him, because he will not bear your transgression” (Ex 23:21).
- 5) Divine works are ascribed to him: He is to provide the Israelites with special protection on the way, go before them, and lead them into the land of Canaan (Ex 23:20,23).
- 6) Religious veneration that is reserved for God alone must be shown to this angel. “Listen to his voice,” says the LORD in Exodus 23:21. Nowhere do we read that this kind of honor was conferred upon any created angel. On account of this fact, we understand the angel as guide of the people of Israel to be the Son of God, who led the Israelites and was tested by them (1Co 10:9).

To these things is added that God the Father led his people out of Egypt through the *Holy Spirit*. For the Israelites are said to have “rebelled and vexed the Spirit of the holiness of the LORD” (Isa 63:10).

From these things arises the argument: **The one who led the Israelites out of Egypt is the true, eternal, and most high God. Certainly God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit led... etc. Therefore the leading of the Israelites out of Egypt conveys the Trinity of divine persons.**⁹

PROOF FOR C.

We deduce the Trinity of divine persons from the *sending and anointing of the Messiah*. Here we should especially note those words in Isaiah 48:16, worthy of perpetual remembrance: “Now the Lord has sent me, and his Spirit.”¹⁰ The one who is speaking here is not the prophet

⁸ Latin: *suppositorum*. *Suppositum* is the Latin translation of the Greek word ὑπόστασις, translated most often as “person.” (But cf. Hebrews 1:3.)

⁹ Latin: *Ergo*. Rf. footnote 3.

¹⁰ Latin: *Nunc Dominus misit me, & Spiritus eius*. Hollaz interprets יְהוָה as a second subject, as does the NKJV, NASB, and ESV. The NIV, NCV, and RSV take it as a second object.

Isaiah, as the Jews and Photinians think, but the Messiah. For indeed Christ himself takes the words that very closely precede – “from the beginning I have spoken not in secret” [Isa 48:16 – *trans.*] – and makes them his own in John 18:20. The one who is speaking here is called “the first and the last” (v. 12), “the founder of the earth” (v. 13), and “the redeemer” (v. 17). Accordingly in this prophetic oracle is portrayed: A) the Lord who is sent, Christ the redeemer, B) the Lord who sends, God the Father, to whom the sending of the Son is attributed in various passages of Scripture, and C) the Spirit of the Lord, who has anointed and sent Christ according to the flesh. “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me. The LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to preach good news to the poor” (Isa 61:1). Cf. Luke 4:18.

On the basis of the truth, therefore, we declare: **Wherever God who is sent, God who sends, and his Spirit are introduced, there the three persons of the Divinity are portrayed. Certainly in the prophetic oracle of Isaiah God who is sent... etc. Therefore the promised sending and anointing of the Messiah conveys the Trinity of divine persons.**¹¹

PROOF FOR D.

The mystery of the Trinity is made clear from the *priestly blessing*. “The LORD will bless you and keep you; the LORD will make his faces shine on you and have compassion on you; the LORD will lift up his faces over you and appoint for you peace” (Nu 6:24). The Trinity of divine persons is deduced from this solemn blessing because...

- 1) The name of the LORD had to be recited in this blessing not twice, not four times or repeatedly, but *three times*. This triple repetition of the name of the LORD is not without mystery. Nor can a substantial reason for it be drawn from Scripture, if you depart from the mystery of the most holy Trinity. Therefore it must not be doubted that the Trinity of divine persons has been described in this passage. For indeed the slightest stroke of a letter¹² in such a succinct and vigorous blessing is not superfluous.
- 2) Twice three benefits are wished for and solemnly promised to the people of God.
 - (a) *God the Father* is invoked as the fount of blessing and the source of the keeping of soul and body. That keeping denotes divine preservation and protection. These benefits belong to the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed.
 - (b) *The Son of God* is invoked as the light of the gentiles (Isa 42:6) and the mercy seat¹³ (Ro 3:25).
 - (c) *The Holy Spirit*¹⁴ is invoked as the one who lifts up his face over us. Through the Word and sacraments he calls, enlightens, converts, regenerates, justifies, and renews us, and grants us internal peace of conscience. For *the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete* (Jn 14:16) who stills the conscience.

To this priestly blessing we connect the royal blessing of David: “May God, our God, bless us. May God bless us, that all the ends of the earth might fear him” (Ps 67:6,7). The word “God” is not repeated three times pointlessly, but to make God known as one in essence and three in persons.

¹¹ Latin: *Ergo*. Rf. footnote 3.

¹² Latin: *apex*

¹³ Latin: *thronus gratiae*. The NIV renders ἱλαστήριον in Romans 3:25 as “sacrifice of atonement.” The LXX employed this word as a translation of the Hebrew כַּפֹּרֶת, traditionally rendered “mercy seat,” but in more recent times “atonement cover” (NIV), “place of atonement” (NLT), or simply “lid” (GNT, but cf. Brown-Driver-Briggs p. 498.2).

¹⁴ Not italicized in the Latin text

We conclude: **Whomever the overseers of the church invoke in solemn blessing as the source of all corporeal and spiritual benefits for which they pray in sacred assembly, he is the one and true God. Certainly the overseers of the church invoke God as three in persons in solemn blessing... etc. Therefore the solemn priestly blessing conveys the Trinity of divine persons.**¹⁵

PROOF FOR E.

The *trisagion of the angels*, or seraphic $\delta\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha$, teaches us the Trinity of divine persons. “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Sabaoth. The fullness of all the earth is his glory” (Isa 6:3). The one whom the seraphim solemnly honor together is not one person, but more than one. For soon after the angels began singing together, the prophet heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” To which the prophet said, “Here am I! Send me” [Isa 6:8 – *trans.*]. God speaks of himself in the *plural*, in order to teach the plurality of divine persons. We deduce that those persons are definitely three from the fact that the seraphic chorus repeats “holy” three times. No suitable reason can be given for this triple repetition, other than a definite Trinity of more than one divine persons.

The unquestionable exposition of the New Testament adds considerable strength to this assertion of ours. For indeed the present prophetic passage is explained in the New Testament with respect to distinct persons of the Divinity. “For Isaiah saw the glory of the Son of God, and he spoke about him” (Jn 12:41), attests St. John. “The Holy Spirit spoke to the fathers through Isaiah the prophet in that place” (Ac 28:25), attests Paul.

Having considered these things first, we conclude: **In whichever passage of Scripture God himself has revealed a plurality of divine persons, and when, in the same passage, God is called holy three times by the angelic choir, the Trinity of divine persons is proclaimed. The more clearly that passage is explained elsewhere in Scripture with respect to distinct persons of the Trinity, the more certainly the Trinity is proclaimed in that passage. Certainly in the present passage or chapter of Isaiah God himself has revealed a plurality of divine persons, and in the same passage God is called holy three times by the angelic choir. Therefore in this passage or chapter of Isaiah the Trinity of divine persons is proclaimed. This passage is explained more clearly elsewhere in Scripture with respect to distinct persons of the Divinity, and so it proclaims the Trinity that much more certainly.**

OBJECTION

The *Jews* and *Socinians* contend:

- 1) God consulted with the angels about the messenger to be sent when he said, “Who will go for us?” (Isa 6:8).
- 2) Often any thing is called by name three times, even though in reality it is only one thing, not three. Thus the hypocrites call out, “The temple of the Lord is here! The temple of the Lord is here! The temple of the Lord is here!” (Jer 7:4; cf. 22:29; Eze 21:27).
- 3) “Holy” was repeated three times either to indicate the perfection of divine holiness or on account of the constancy of the assertion.

RESPONSE

¹⁵ Latin: *Ergo*. Rf. footnote 3.

- 1) The all-wise God never consults with angels. “Who has instructed God by his counsels?” (Isa 40:13).
- 2) We do not make a conclusion on the basis of the triple repetition of “holy” as such. Rather we note that God revealed himself as a plurality of divine persons in Isaiah 6:8. So when the seraphim call out and repeat three times, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Sabaoth,” we assert that a definite Trinity of more than one divine persons is being proclaimed. We appealed to the leaders who pioneered our assertion and gave irrefragable attestation for it – John (Jn 12:41) and Paul (Ac 28:25).
- 3) Triple repetition does indicate perfection because the most perfect being is three. For the most excellent thing in any one class is the measure by which everything else is judged. Besides, there was no reason why the Seraphim would set about to confirm the holiness of God with a constant assertion, since there was no doubt about his holiness. People usually bring forward a constant assertion when they are emotionally wavering in their opinion.