

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONTRADICTION AND THE TRIUNE GOD

LONG BEFORE SCIENTISTS PONDERED THE IMPLICATIONS OF QUANTUM physics, people wrestled with the determinacy or indeterminacy of the universe. Does God determine everything that happens, or do humans have free will about their behavior? The Bible speaks quite clearly to the issue, but the philosophical interpretation of Scripture in the West has tended to cloud the issue. First of all, terms like *determinate*, *indeterminate*, *sovereignty*, and *free will* are not biblical terms. These terms come from the philosophical consideration of religion, and now science. Rather than pre-determine the argument, it may be more helpful to disregard the levels of philosophical speculation and restate the question: How does God relate to the physical world?

Each religion has its own understanding of the nature of God and how God relates to the physical world and especially to people. Some religions view God as an unconscious and nonpersonal being or force. Others view God as many beings of a capricious and unreliable sort. The three monotheistic religions view God as a personal, self-conscious being who orders the inanimate matter of the universe and guides the course of the personal lives of people. The quantum existence of subatomic particles which have mutually exclusive qualities (discreet and continuous) has implications for one of the most incomprehensible features of the Christian faith. In relating to the physical world, God manifests parallel, mutually exclusive qualities that Christian theology refers to as the *Incarnation* and the *Trinity*. The Incarnation refers to the coming of God into physical time and space through Jesus Christ. The

Trinity refers to the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God and the Physical World

The Bible begins with a description of God's involvement in the beginning of the time-space continuum that we call the physical world. It states that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water" (Gen. 1:2). In Hebrew, the word for "spirit" (*ruach*) also means "wind" or "breath." It has the power to move and cause an effect. The Hebrews were not speculative, metaphysical thinkers. Instead, they expressed ideas in concrete terms which often represented a nonphysical idea. The Greeks were highly speculative and would use as many as four different words to distinguish carefully between different kinds of love. The Hebrews did just the opposite. They would use one word, *ruach*, to describe "breath," and by extension "wind" because it blew like breath. *Ruach* also meant "spirit" because it could not be seen like breath or wind, but its power could be felt. The Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters before the formation of the earth represents a concrete way of describing God's power over nothingness for a people who did not use philosophical language. Instead of the language of rationalism, the prophets used the language of poetry. Nonetheless, they described the work of God graphically.

The Spirit of God caused the elements to exist and continues to act upon them. God engages the elements and they respond. God engaged the elements, and the earth began to appear, as had the waters. God engaged the earth and the waters, and life began to appear. This description of God's involvement in the physical world operates at the micro level. It suggests that God engages the molecular and subatomic strata of the universe. Viewing God's realm of activity as that realm just beyond scientific explanation has been known as "the God of the gaps." This approach regards those realms of reality which have scientific explanations as outside the activity of God, which leaves those unknown areas of the physical world as the only spot for God. At one time, the gaps were much larger before science made such dramatic new discoveries in cosmology and subatomic particles.

Before pushing God out of the picture entirely, however, perhaps a reassessment of fundamental assumptions is in order. The assumption has been that if a phenomenon can be described scientifically, then it is not the result of the activity of God. This

assumption has neither scientific nor biblical basis, but it has a strong philosophical tradition that has influenced theological thinking.

Instead of stopping at the micro level, the Bible goes on to describe God's involvement in the physical world at the macro level. God operated within nature to bring a series of plagues upon Egypt and to open the Red Sea in order for the Hebrew slaves to escape from Pharaoh's army. Besides engaging objects, God also engaged people to bring about a desired end. The effect of engaging Pharaoh was to "harden his heart." The meaning of this phrase has further fueled the discussion about how God relates to the physical world. Beyond this level of engagement, however, the Bible describes the encounter between God and people in which God makes himself clearly known.

Theology speaks of these encounters as *revelation* or *inspiration*. In revelation, God reveals what could not be known any other way. In revelation, knowledge comes to people without their effort. This experience is related to the idea of *grace*. Grace involves a gift that comes unearned, unmerited, and unsolicited. In the Bible God reveals himself first, but never his entirety. He gives glimpses of himself. He reveals his plans for people, but never all of his plans. He reveals his expectations of people, though not all at the same time. He reveals what he intends to do, but not all of what he intends to do. He reveals the coming end of time and space, but not when it will end.

Inspiration describes the way in which revelation takes place. The term comes from the Latin phrase *in spiritus*, which has the sense of the spirit coming inside a person. The Oracle at Delphi in ancient Greece breathed in sulphur fumes which were believed to allow her to see the future. This pagan activity is quite different from the biblical picture of inspiration. Over and over throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord "came upon" or "moved upon" a person who at that moment became a prophet. The same description of God's Spirit moving upon the elements is the picture given of the Spirit moving upon people.

Rather than a God of the gaps, the Bible describes God as involved in the physical world at every level of complexity. Yet, at every level of complexity, God relates in a different way. For many years it was popular to think of this ongoing relationship of God to his creation as an intervention into nature. Such an intervention

represents a “miracle” that would further be described as a violation of the laws of nature. The philosophers of the Enlightenment regarded such an idea as repugnant to their reason, and theologians who followed their lead became *Deists*. Deists believe that God created the universe and established its physical and moral laws, but was not involved in it—like a watchmaker who winds up a clock and leaves it.

Instead of a mechanical, static picture of creation, however, we have seen in previous chapters that the Bible presents a dynamic picture of God’s ongoing involvement in creation over a long period of time and including the present moment.

Revelation

Revelation involves not only the engagement of the natural order at a higher level of complexity; it also involves a qualitatively different kind of engagement. The major world religions have different concepts of God. The great Eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism tend to view God as the totality of all things, though in some forms of each of these religions God may have a specific manifestation. In the great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, however, God is totally separate from all else. In the Eastern religions, a person may experience enlightenment by which they transcend themselves and engage ultimate reality, but God does not take the initiative in reaching out to the person. In the monotheistic religions, a person may seek and experience the spiritual, but this is not revelation. All people may have spiritual experience because all people have a spiritual dimension. Revelation only occurs, however, at the initiative of God.

When both Eastern and monotheistic religions have sacred books, what is the difference? The books of the East do not claim to be revelation from God but accounts of those who experienced the sublime inexpressibility of transcendence. The books of monotheism, on the other hand, claim to be the result of the Spirit of God taking hold of people and giving them a message to share. The essential difference in the two relates to the two major views of God represented by the two religions that emerged on the Indian subcontinent, and the three religions that emerged in the Middle East. The former sees God as impersonal, of which all things are an aspect, including people and the vastness of the universe. The latter sees God as personal and everything else the creative work of God. In the former, the transcendent is real and the physical is an

illusion. In the latter, the transcendent is real, but so is the physical. These ideas are summarized in Figure 11.1.

	Eastern Religions	Monotheistic Religions
God	Impersonal	Personal
Transcendent Realm	Real	Real
Physical Realm	Illusory (physical realm is actually part of God)	Real (physical realm was created by God)
Sacred Texts	Insight or Enlightenment	Revelation from God

Fig. 11.1. Comparison of Eastern and Monotheistic Religions.

Revelation is communication between two persons. Because humans are created in the image of God, they are persons. As persons, humans have a certain capacity for personal relationship, though this capacity is severely damaged, retarded, and inhibited by sin. At the heart of personal relationship lies communication. If God is a personal being, then the kind of personal communication described as revelation would be quite reasonable. The communication depends upon the ability of the superior being to make the communication clear to the inferior being rather than upon the ability of the inferior being to comprehend the superior. Since I can make my dog understand me, then the kind of God who created me would likely know how to communicate with me in a way I would understand. In this divine-human communication, revelation depends upon God's ability to make himself known, while prayer depends upon God's ability to understand. From the human perspective, people do not need ability so much as desire for the communication. God's relating to people in this way is superior to the method he uses in relating to less complex levels of animal life and inanimate matter.

Incarnation

From the picture of God in the Bible expressed in creation and God's continuing engagement of the physical world, we may speak of God as all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing. God is eternal rather than finite. God is immortal rather than mortal. People, on the other hand, are limited in time and space, knowledge,

power, and life span. God and people are not the same. They appear to have mutually exclusive natures, though they share the quality of personhood.

Into this neat differentiation between God and people comes Jesus Christ, who threw a quantum problem into the philosophical understanding of his generation and many generations since. Jesus represented himself as equal with God (John 10:30). Instead of calling himself “son of God,” which would have been the appropriate title for a king of Israel about to reinstitute the royal throne of David, he called himself “Son of Man.” The Son of Man was the foretold divine being who shared the glory, authority, and worship of God who would reign forever over all creation (Dan. 7:13–14). Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrin for claiming to be the Son of Man (Matt. 26:63–66; Mark 14:61–64; Luke 22:67–71).

At the heart of faith in Jesus Christ lies a logical impossibility. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. Perhaps the most beautiful picture of this sublime contradiction appears in Revelation 22:3 when the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy of the Son of Man is complete at the end of time and the beginning of something else: “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:3–5).

Notice how the grammar violates the basic principles of logic. The throne (singular) of God and of the Lamb (plural) will be in the city. A single throne belongs to two. One would then expect to hear that “their servants will serve them.” Instead, we are told that “his servants will serve him.” Who is this individual? God and the Lamb. The servants will see his face. Whose face? God and the Lamb. His name will be on the forehead of his servants. Whose name? God and the Lamb. The two expressions or persons of deity take a single personal pronoun until the end when the ground shifts to focus on the unity of the Lord God. In focusing on the Lord God, however, we are told that *they* will reign forever and ever. Who are they? The Lord God.

The whole scene draws attention to the remarkable nature of the person of God with respect to the Father and the Son, but it also demonstrates the inability of certain traditions of philosophical

logic to deal with the Incarnation. This contradiction of logic also appears earlier in the passage when the river of life flowing from the throne of God appears. The text remarks in passing that "on each side of the river stood the tree of life." This is a remarkable statement in itself. A single tree stands in two places at the same time.

Entering into physical reality and relating to people as a man is what one might expect of a personal God who seeks relationship with people. God must take the initiative to make himself known. From the perspective of eternity, beyond the limits of the time-space continuum of the physical world, the assumptions of the universe may be quite different from what one would expect from daily experience in the physical world of sensory perception. If the universe is being created by a person called God who can exist in physical form and metaphysical form at the same time, then the discoveries of quantum mechanics are not surprising. The substructure of atoms, the building blocks of the universe behave as discrete and continuous entities. These are mutually exclusive behaviors. This capacity reflects the nature of the Creator. It is not surprising that quantum mechanics exists as it has been defined so far. What would be surprising is if it does not prove to be even more complex and inconsistent with traditional ways of conceiving the physical world.

The Trinity

What must happen for God to have full relationship and communication with people? The spiritual experiences of the prophets in the Bible represent an important initiative in relationship by God. The visitations by the Spirit of God resulted in powerful personal experiences and messages shared by entire communities that related to God over centuries. The Incarnation represents a substantially and qualitatively different kind of initiative in relationship and communication by God.

Because of the problem of sin, people have the capacity to distort, misuse, misrepresent, and violate the truth of God as expressed in spiritual experience. The professional prophets of Israel were as guilty as the prophets of Baal in focusing on the ecstatic experience of spiritual bliss rather than the person who caused it. By entering into creation in order to relate to people, God affirmed creation in its goodness as a medium for truth. The physical bodies of people presented a way of knowing Christ, and the physical body of Christ presented a way for people to know God.

The Incarnation, however, represented a discreet human life in a moment of time and space. The Incarnation may have presented a way for people a long time ago to know God in a profound way, but what good does this do people who live in different places and different times? Does the Incarnation need to be repeated in every place and every time? The Incarnation does not represent the final stage of development in the relationship between God and people. It represents more a hinge between two different ways of relating.

Instead of the limitations of time and space that inhibit a relationship with God, Jesus Christ came to extend the capacity of spiritual experience from mere visitation to unity with God. In this regard, Christianity differs from the other major religions of the world. Unity with God is not a prospect of Judaism and Islam. The Eastern religions would tend to view people and all other aspects of what we call physical reality as already a part of God. The focus of Eastern religion would be to lose the illusion of differentiation in merging with God. Christianity, on the other hand, views the physical world as created by God and separate from God. Union with God forms as dramatic a stage in the development of life as the progress from nonliving matter to living matter. When union occurs, however, separate identity and uniqueness continues to be preserved as the gift of personhood and the basis for perfect relationship.

The hinge created by the incarnation represents the transition from the old covenant of law to the new covenant of the Spirit. A *covenant* is an agreement between two or more parties, but it involves much more than a mere contract. It involves promises and commitments that are regarded as too important to break. A covenant forms the basis for a relationship. Christian marriage represents a covenant for life. Civil marriage represents a contract which can be nullified by suing for divorce.

The kind of revelation which resulted in the Law, the Prophets, and the Wisdom of Israel resulted in the development of a cultural identity, a national consciousness, and a religious system. This community of faith went through a series of crises that centered on whether they actually believed that God had revealed his will through the Law, Prophets, and Wisdom. The crises of faith occurred over a period of centuries and involved rival interpretations of spiritual reality. At the heart of the issue lay the question, "Would Israel remain faithful to the covenant relationship with God as it had been offered through Moses?"

In the crisis times of unfaithfulness, God spoke to prophets. They delivered the message to Israel that the people should remember the blessings of God and return to the covenant. With these messages, the prophets also spoke of a golden age at some indeterminate time in the future when God would make a new covenant with Israel. A classic statement of the new covenant was made by Jeremiah:

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD,
 “when I will make a new covenant
 with the house of Israel
 and with the house of Judah.
 It will not be like the covenant
 I made with their forefathers
 when I took them by the hand
 to lead them out of Egypt,
 because they broke my covenant,
 though I was a husband to them,”
 declares the LORD.

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
 after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds
 and write it on their hearts.
 I will be their God,
 and they will be my people.
 No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
 or a man his brother saying, ‘Know the LORD,’
 because they will all know me,
 from the least of them to the greatest.”
 declares the LORD (Jer. 31:31–34a).

The new covenant would involve immediate knowledge of God rather than mediated knowledge of God. This immediate knowledge of God within the human heart and mind (spirit) would occur because of God’s promise, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people . . . before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Joel 2:28a; 31b).

All four Gospels begin their accounts of the public ministry of Jesus with his visit to John the Baptist to be baptized (Matt. 3:13–15; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:19). John the Baptist gave the following testimony of that baptism to his own follower John, who then began to follow Jesus and would eventually write the Gospel of John: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that

the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32-34).

During the public ministry of Jesus, he brought healing to every dimension of life: physical, emotional, social. At the conclusion of his ministry, he celebrated the Feast of Passover with his disciples. The Passover meal memorialized the night that the angel of death had passed over the homes of all the faithful Hebrew slaves who had marked their doorways with the blood of a lamb before eating the lamb as a family meal. From the time of the first Passover in Egypt when Pharaoh finally let the slaves go free until the night Jesus led the Passover meal over a thousand years later, the same story of deliverance had been told. The meal celebrated the beginning of the old covenant with God.

That last night he was with his disciples, however, when Jesus took the cup to share it with his disciples, he said something startling which had never before been heard: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). He then went on to explain briefly what the new covenant would mean.

As the Spirit of God provided the connection between the eternal, transcendent God and the finite, physical creation, the Spirit of God provides the connection between God and people that makes relationship and communication possible. This Holy Spirit provided the continuity between the infinite Father and the finite Son from the moment of conception in Mary's womb through the death and resurrection (Luke 1:35; Eph. 1:18-20). Although the Son shared the glory and unity with the Father before the Incarnation, upon entering the physical world as a human, Jesus accepted all of the limitations of time, space, and mortality that all other people experience. Ultimately this emptying meant sharing death with people (John 1:1-3, 14; 17:5; Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus pointed out that the power he exerted over creation and the things he knew did not happen because of himself, but because his Father living in him did the work (John 14:10; 8:28-29; 7:16; 6:57; 6:38; 5:19, 30).

The new covenant provides a similar union between people and God that God modeled through the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit provides people with a connection to the eternal. The Christian teaching about the Trinity arises most clearly in terms of how people enter into the new covenant and the difference this

new relationship makes. The *Trinity* is not a term found in the Bible, but it is a theological term that describes the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Through the new covenant, God accomplishes *regeneration* of people by filling them with the Holy Spirit, who transforms them by analogy in the same way that he transformed inanimate matter into living matter. The Holy Spirit engulfs people and prepares them for the change from living as a physical creature to living as a spiritual creature. By analogy, the change corresponds to the changes of environment and nature that a frog goes through from life underwater as a polliwog to life above the water as a frog.

After sharing the Passover meal, his Last Supper, with his disciples, Jesus went on to explain the implications of the new covenant. It involved a quality of life that embodied love (John 13:34–35; 15:9–17), joy (15:11; 16:20–24), and peace (14:27; 16:33). Jesus also described how the Father, Son, and Spirit are one although they represent the multidimensional way in which the one God relates to people.

Jesus began by reinforcing the point that he had made so frequently in the past: “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (John 14:11). He then renewed the ancient promise of the coming of the Spirit. Jesus described the Spirit as a *paraklete*, which is translated “Counselor” or “Comforter.” The word literally means “one who stands beside,” and Jesus promised the Spirit would be with his followers forever (John 14:16). Jesus then made clear his own relationship to the Spirit by saying that “you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17b). To erase any doubt of what he meant, he added, “I will come to you” (John 14:18b).

After identifying himself with the Spirit, Jesus then explained how he and the Father relate to the Spirit: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). Jesus moves in his description from *the Spirit* will come, to *I* will come, to the *Father and I* will come. This curious way of expressing the coming of the Spirit results because of the relationship to the Father that Jesus emphasized: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:11). In this sense, Jesus could also say that the Father would send the Spirit in the name of Jesus, and that Jesus would send the Spirit from the Father (John 14:25–26; 15:26). In

describing the transformation that the Spirit brings to a life, the apostle Paul made clear that this transformation “comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Implications for Sovereignty

The Christian understanding of God involves several fundamental contradictions to traditional understandings of logic, so much so that Islam and Judaism have considered Christians polytheistic for their belief in the Incarnation and the Trinity. Part of the problem arises from the confusion of the ontological model with other models of God. *Ontology* has to do with the essential being or nature of something. Christians share with Muslims and Jews the ontological understanding of God as “one,” expressed by the shamai as “Hear O Israel, the LORD thy God, the LORD is one,” or by the Islamic statement of faith, “Allah is one God.” The Trinity is a relational model or way of talking about God. God relates to himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. None of the three exists as a being separate from the other; all three represent expressions of the one. This way of thinking involves a different form of logic than binary or dualistic thinking.

Different varieties of binary thinking occur in the world. Binary thinking forms the logic upon which computers operate. Something is on or off, black or white, up or down, right or left, true or false, hot or cold. The Incarnation and the Trinity suggest that something may operate in a singular way, such as one God. Some things may operate in a binary way, such as the Incarnation or the separation of light from darkness. Other things may operate in pluralistic ways, such as the Trinity.

The theological description of the sovereignty of God has typically occurred within a particular philosophical frame of reference which defined sovereignty. A classic definition of sovereignty from a Reformed perspective would state that God must ordain every event that transpires; to leave anything outside his control would mean he is not sovereign at all. The second part of this statement represents a philosophical value judgment on how God can legitimately exercise sovereignty. In other words, theologians have tended to impose upon Scripture a culturally derived understanding of what God must do in order for God to be considered sovereign in his reign over the universe. This tendency parallels the assumptions of science related to how electrons must behave. The

sovereignty/free will debate also relates to the understanding of Incarnation and the Trinity. Before exploring sovereignty, however, it will be helpful to explore chaos theory as a reminder of what the Bible says about how God relates to his creation.

CHAPTER THREE DIALOGUE ON CERTAINTY

When one considers the extent to which the physical world, apart from the several factors that cause consciousness and awareness, with all its great before we examine the interaction of matter and mind in regard to the quantum world, a world of reason. The quantum world is invisible. Quantum theory is a world of mathematical equations. The calculated results can be checked against experimental results. The predictions of these calculations can be experimentally investigated. In this manner, a world can be constructed that mathematical equations model the quantum world. The world has not really gained "a picture" of the quantum world. The mathematical equations may tell us the energy, but when an electron is in, but the equations are not giving us a mental picture of an electron like we have a mental picture of a ball. When a scientist has to interpret the calculated results, since the only thing we have ever seen are macroscopic objects, then our interpretation of the results are in terms of macroscopic objects or phenomena in the world of macroscopic objects.

As one reads about quantum theory, one is led to believe that it is extremely difficult to separate in the universe what is a cause and what is an interpretation. There are many things that are in between if an interpretation or an observation is being made. For example, when one reads that a quantum jump is a transition in the electron disappears from one energy level and appears at another energy level, is this an interpretation or a cause?

Since the quantum world is invisible and strange, it is difficult to understand. This is why it is so important to know the physical world. It is very important to know the physical world and to know the science which is quantum mechanics. If the