

Chapter Five

The Trinity: Fides Quarens Intellectum

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, in their iconoclastic book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, suggest that it would be a good thing if teachers looked in the mirror each morning and asked themselves three questions: (1) What am I going to teach today? (2) What's it good for? (3) How do I know? The authors feel that this approach to teaching, honestly applied, would revolutionize the educational enterprise.¹

My topic here is the Trinity. My subtitle is actually the title of a book written in the eleventh century by Anselm of Canterbury; it means "faith in search of understanding." The same three questions posed by Postman and Weingartner, in slightly different form, can be posed as we begin our study of this topic. That is, we can ask (1) what we are going to teach about the doctrine of the Trinity, (2) why the doctrine is important, and (3) what evidence can we claim as a basis for our answers? As we proceed we will first mention some brief responses that have been made to these questions, and then develop the topic more fully. And in our fuller development we will attempt to state clearly and accurately the doctrine of the Trinity, with a view toward gaining a better understanding of this foundational yet difficult truth.

Some Brief Responses to Our Three Initial Questions

1. *What are We Going to Teach About the Doctrine of the Trinity?*

John Calvin, in his *Institute of the Christian Religion*, asserts: "Say that in the one essence of God there is a trinity of persons; you will say in one word what Scriptures states, and cut short empty talkativeness."² It should of course be noted that the "empty talkativeness" Calvin wanted to cut short was that of the Arians and the Sabellians, and that Calvin himself went on to discuss at some length the distinctions between substance, essence, subsistence, and persons.

William G. T. Shedd, a nineteenth century theologian, stated that "Theology asserts that God is one in respect to essence, and is three in respect to personal distinctions."³