

divine beings. Rather we mean distinct individuals who are united in the single being and life of God. Although with Calvin¹² we can posit a "special quality" that distinguishes each divine Person from the others, this quality does not deny the unity of the three Persons in one essence and being. Thus the three Persons are not three Beings in their own ontological right, but rather one Being, as the Athanasian Creed so aptly asserts.

6. The Essential Equality of the Three Persons

By "essential equality" is simply meant that in the one indivisible essence, the three Persons share fully and completely. And by this is meant that the three Persons are fully God, have all of the attributes of God, have all the rights and prerogatives of deity, and are eternally equal in glory. As the Second Helvetic Confession puts it:

So that there are not three Gods, but three persons, consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal; distinct, as touching their persons; and, in order, one going before another, yet without any inequality. For, as touching their nature or essence, they are so joined together that they are but one God; and the divine essence is common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹³

Equality of essence means that no Person of the Trinity is a lesser god than the other Persons, or lacks some divine attributes or rights, or has lesser essential glory than the others. There is no subordination of one Person to the others in essence or rights or glory. Whatever it means to be God, all of the Persons of the Trinity are that.

However, when we come to consider the inner relationships of the Persons of the godhead, we discover that there is in some sense an order within the essential equality, which is represented to us in the names and expressions of relationship of the Persons, and which is reflected in the order of the outworking of God's purpose. The Father is always the Father; the Son is always the Son; and the Spirit is always the Spirit. The Father is always represented as first in order; the Son is always represented as second in order; and the Spirit is always represented as third in order. This does not mean that the *essence* of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit has in it levels of subordination; the essence of all three Persons is one and the same. But within the unparticularized essence of God, the particularized personal