

# The Structure of Platonism and the Dogma of the Trinity: Some General Considerations

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*For centuries the philosophy of Plato has deeply attracted religious thinkers. William H. Marshner offers here a fine analysis of the structure of Platonic thought. Mr. Marshner probes the difficulties raised by the Platonic doctrine of participation and Oneness when applied to the relations existing between Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian dogma.*

As the Fathers of the Church learned with sorrow, the influence of Plato was one thing, and his system was another. The influence of Plato was largely good. It inspired a love of justice, a vision of order, a concept of the spiritual, a taste for immortality. But the system of Plato was the father of heresies. The purpose of this essay is to give an analysis of why the system had that unhappy fecundity, especially on the topic of the Trinity.

The Scriptures speak of a God who is one—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is one." They speak of a God who is unique - "There is no other god besides Me." They say that His name is Being - "I am He who is." The Scriptures also speak of a Son - "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." A father and a son are two, by a relation of origin. Yet this Son says, "I and the Father are one." The Scriptures do not offer an explanation. They provide instead some illustration: the Son is "the brilliance of the Father's glory, the express image of His substance." A light and its brilliance are relatively two, since the one is *of* the other, the brilliance is *of* the light; and yet they are really one, since the brilliance is light. An expressed image and the image impressed are relatively two, since the impression is *of* the image; and yet they are one, since the thing impressed is the image. So there can be, the Scriptures suggest, a Father and a Son who are relatively two and really one. Similarly, the Scriptures speak of a Holy Spirit, who "proceeds from the Father." A source and what is *from* it are two, by a relation of origin. And yet the Scripture says: "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. No one knows the things of a man but the spirit of man which is in him. Just so, no one knows the things of God but the Spirit of God." Well, what is more the *same* as a man, or more one with him, than his own spirit? So, what is more one with the Father than this Spirit? We seem again to have things relatively two, while really one. Now, can it be that this Spirit is identically the above-mentioned Son? Not easily. The Scripture quotes the Son as saying this: "If I go not away, the Spirit will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." The one who goes and His replacement are relatively two. And yet, if the Son and the Father are really one, while the Father and the Spirit are really one, and if things one with the same thing are one with each other, then the Son and the Spirit are really one. The pattern repeats and closes, yielding three pairs, (Father, Son), (Father, Spirit), and (Son, Spirit), in which distinction fails to exclude some sort of deeper unity.

These texts and the many others which are pertinent do not *pronounce* the dogma of the Trinity. If I say that they *suggest* it, I say too little. If I say that these texts *support* and *justify* the dogma, by excluding any other satisfactory interpretation, and that in this sense they *reveal* the dogma, I state the truth-but this truth is a conclusion which it took 400 years to draw. If I say that these texts made the drawing of that conclusion *inevitable*, I say again what is true but only from God's point of view and knowable only by faith. From man's point of view, it didn't seem inevitable at all. Why not?

The principal obstacle was the fact that the Bible's illustrations of the mystery, like a man and his spirit, or light from light, could be taken either as mere figures or else as clues pointing to a way of philosophical exposition. Which approach was right? Furthermore, once the philosophical option was taken, such texts as the "I and the Father are one" could be taken as revealing a moral unity (one in purpose, one in will) at the weakest, or as revealing a total identity (one person) at the strongest, or as revealing something in-between. Which choice was right?

A stable and clear notion of what *could* lie in-between was exactly what was hard to formulate. No one term or catch-word seemed to suffice. '*Homoousios*', for example, meant different things to Hosius and Athanasius, its two greatest champions in the aftermath of Nicaea. What was needed was a whole body of thought, a system of theses, which would give a clear, theoretical *account* of St. Athanasius's meaning. A meaning remains an "inkling" without such a system wherewith to solidify and expound it. It was hoped by many that Plato's system would provide this service.

How far the hope was vindicated, and how far it turned to ashes, is the theme of these pages.

Now, before plunging into this system, a word of clarification is in order. When I speak of "Plato's system," I do not mean Plato's personal views. These, as reflected in his large corpus of dialogues and letters, changed considerably over the course of his life. Partly for that reason, they show a tentativeness which later Platonists ignored. In particular, the famous theory of the Forms is one which Plato seems to have maintained only during the period of his middle dialogues, with the result that some surprisingly fundamental questions about them were never worked out. Instead, the late Plato seems to have moved very close to the position of Aristotle. Nevertheless, it was the middle Plato, the Plato of the Forms, who proved historically influential. His textual hints and sketches were worked up into a doctrinal metaphysics by later thinkers, who had caught a certain "music" in those texts. They were the Middle- and Neo-Platonists. It was through their speculations that Platonism reached the Church Fathers, as it earlier had reached Philo.

The crucial thing to remember is that the motive for this Middle- and Neo-Platonist system building was mystical. There was a religious fascination to the Forms. They pointed beyond matter, beyond the visible world of complexity and change, to an eternal world of purity and simplicity, of immutable and spiritual Reality. It was this religious potential, especially that of the higher Forms of Goodness, Mind, Being, and Unity, which gave the Forms a centrality in

later Platonism which they had enjoyed only fleetingly in Plato himself. For this reason, I like to group Middle- and Neo-Platonism together under the label of "religious Platonism." In that case, when I speak of "Plato's system," do I mean the system crafted in his name by these later thinkers'?

Not exactly. The problem is that there was no "the system" which they crafted. Only very late in the game, with the work of Proclus (died 485 A.D.), can one speak of a single, standard system. Until that time things were more fluid. Each Platonizing thinker fashioned his own "system," and most of them were rather eclectic. Different bits and pieces of Plato would be fused with Stoic ideas by one fellow, with Neo-Pythagorean ideas by another, with Hermetic symbols by a third. One must understand that during the whole period from Cicero's school-days to the Council of Chalcedon, Platonism was less a "system" than a tendency. It was a living tradition, energetic and infectious, captivating a vast variety of men in different ways and to different degrees, showing itself militant or irenic, precise or unspecific, according to the temperament of each. In that regard, it was like our Western infection of Marxism. Outside of the Soviet Union, where a certain "orthodoxy" is maintained, Marxism is protean, mercurial, by turns humane and scientific, academic and barbaric, totalitarian and anarchic. No wonder the student is confused! If you generalize from the late Marx, you are refuted from the early. If you argue from the *Parmenides*, you lose touch with the *Phaedo*. If you seize upon Lenin, you miss Lukacs and Gramsci; if you settle on Plutarch, you miss Posidonius and Porphyry.

Yet there is a common thread to each tradition, which causes similar arguments, similar inferences, similar developments to recur time and again throughout its history. The "permanent Revolution" of the Gang of Four has antecedents in the early Marx. The exaltation of the "One" to a place beyond Being, for which Plotinus is famous (and Meister Eckhart infamous) is anticipated by Speusippus within a decade of Plato's own death. If one can lay one's hands on this "thread" of the tradition, one can penetrate behind the variations to the theme of which they are variations. That is what I hope to disengage. The *theme* of religious Platonism, often overlaid and compromised, interrupted and partially contradicted, yet ever recurrent and emergent, is what I call the "system."

Let us now look at its fundamentals. We shall find it helpful to split them into two parts, which correspond to two "Levels" of Platonic speculation. Our procedure will be to present the first Level and *its* application to the Trinity, then the second Level and its application. The aim of such separate treatment is to allow us to consider the issues in a logical sequence. But the reader should be aware that the separation never existed in history.

In the entities of our sense experience, a plurality of properties is found. A ball is red, round, rubber. These properties differ from one another and hence are named by different (non-synonymous) predicates. Thus 'red' names redness, which differs from roundness, so that 'red' and 'round' are non-synonymous. Now to have a certain property is to *be* a certain way. Thus the ball contains being (it *is* red). But it also contains not-being: its redness *is not* its roundness, and so the ball *is not* simply its redness. Thus the entities of our sense experience are mixtures of being and not-being, according to Plato's grammar of 'being.'

Because they are mixtures, these entities are both mutable and secondary:-mutable, because the mixture can change, the ball ceasing to be red or perishing altogether;-secondary, because a mixture presupposes the pure-and-simples of which it is a mixture. Where shall we find these pure-and-simples? Obviously not in our sense experience. We must close our eyes and try to think: not of red things but of Redness Itself. This latter we can think but not see; it is an intelligible rather than a sensible

This Redness Itself is an example of a pure-and-simple. Why? Because it is just red, *only* red, nothing but red. It is not also round or rubber. It has no other properties at all besides the one for which it is named. It thus contains being (its being red) but no not-being, since it contains nothing which *is not* red, nothing which is *not* itself. To put the same point differently, we can say that this Redness Itself is utterly the *same* as itself, since it contains no otherness. Throughout the history of Platonism, the grammar of 'is' and 'is not' will tend to be the grammar of 'same' and 'other.' As a result, this Redness Itself is seen to be self-same by virtue of its purity of being, and, vice-versa, is seen to be pure being by virtue of its self-sameness. Such self-sameness is simplicity. The Simple (*haplous*) and the sort of being which is all being, without admixture of not-being (i.e. the really real, the *ontos on*) thus become equivalent notions.

Now the visible redness of this ball is perishable, whereas Redness Itself, being simple, is imperishable. So the visible redness of this ball is not identically Redness Itself; it must be only some sort of share of it. It quickly follows that the things of our sense experience do not arise by sheer collocation of Simples; they are at best collocations of shares of Simples. A theory of this sharing or participation therefore becomes a pressing necessity.

Participation in Redness seems to make the ball more like Redness Itself. Participation reduces otherness; it extends the influence of a Simple and thereby spreads sameness; it spreads being; e.g. it spreads being red. But it doesn't spread pure-being; it doesn't result in another Simple. It spreads sameness without spreading identity. Very strange. Moreover, consider the red ball, the red hen, and the red flower. They are all red. They have redness in common and are "one" in that respect. But they aren't really one. They remain many. So participation reduces otherness without reducing multiplicity! How is this possible?

The Platonic answer is not without its hesitations and variations, but it always contains at least these four elements. (1) The Redness Itself in which the ball, hen, and flower participate is *really* one, simple, self-identical; hence it can't be multiplied. (2) The visible redness of the ball, hen, and flower, which is their participation in Redness Itself, *can* be multiplied, because it is not identically that Redness but only a share in It. (3) The ball, hen, and flower, the three things which share in Redness Itself, are not identically their shares in It, since each of them, besides being the share (i.e. besides being red), is also something *other* than red, e.g. round, feathered, or floral. (4) Hence there remains something in Redness Itself in which the ball, hen, and flower do *not* participate, namely, Its self-identical simplicity; and since these participants do not participate in the Participated's selfidentity, they remain non-identical among themselves and hence many.

So far so good. Beyond these four points, things become very controversial. Participation points to the impact of the Simples upon the things of our world. Is that impact a physical causality? Is the share an *effect* of some action or agency which the Simple itself exercises? I mean, is Its purely-being-red, for example, a kind of eternal reddener of whatever stumbles across Its path? Have there always been things to stumble across Its path? Spots of matter, perhaps-have they always been? Do the spots themselves arise from the impact of some Form, Materiality Itself? What would such a Form impact *on*? Alternatively, perhaps the Simples are not active. Perhaps they are purely passive, like patterns which an artisan uses. Perhaps an Active Cause, a Demiurge, has to conform the things of our world to the pattern of the Simples. Does He also have to create the things of our world? And where does He come from? Is He a Form? Much debated among Platonists, these were questions to which Christians were sure they had some of the answers.

So much for what I call Level I of a typical Platonic metaphysic. It starts with the predicates of our language; it selects those predicates which seem to name real, positive properties. Of these, it prefers the monadic predicates; dyadic or relational predicates, like '-is to the left of-' or '-is greater than-', Platonism is not too sure about. If one wants to include them, fine. At any rate, having selected the predicates, Platonism maps them (and the empirical properties which they name) onto a set of "more real" entities, traditionally called Forms or Ideas, but which I like to call the Simples or, better yet, the Nothing-but. Each such entity, say F-ness, is a being whose whole being is *nothing but* being-F. The mapping is accomplished by a four-part doctrine of participation, whose four parts we have seen - namely, the Participated, the participant, the latter's share, and what it doesn't share).

Now, so long as Christian writers apply this Level I of Platonism to Trinitarian questions, the results are only moderately bad.

God-the-Father can be the Participated; then the Son and Holy Spirit are Participants; full divinity is their share, and Innascibility (or Unoriginateness, or whatever is selected as the Father's distinguishing trait or *proprium*) is what is not shared. But mysterious aspects will break in to spoil the application. Remember that, while shares are multiple, the Nothing-but itself, in which all the participants share, is not only numerically one but unmultipliable. This point *should* help to explain the *homoousion*, *i.e.*, the fact that the Son's divinity is not merely one in nature with the Father's divinity but one in number. But as soon as this application is made, the Nothing-but and the shares which the participants have of it collapse into identity. The Son's share of divinity (which is His *ousia*) is identically the Father's share of divinity, which is identically Divinity Itself. Divine unity and unicity are triumphantly vindicated, but the four-part structure of participation is destroyed. For when the Participated and the Participants' *share* of it become numerically and physically one, the relations of participation collapse into sheer relations of origin. Which is fine! A very orthodox result in its own right! But we cheated to get it. We made the Father the Participated instead of one of the Participants.

Suppose we don't do that. Suppose we make it clear that the Father is one of the three *hypostaseis* which are Participants in the one *Ousia*. We now have that *ousia*, Divinity Itself, as a true Platonic Nothing-but. The three Persons participate in It. But the Father's share of divinity is

mixed with Innascibility, the Son's with Generation, the Spirit's with Procession. So the cost of restoring the full structure of participation seems to be three shares of divinity and hence three Gods. What is worse, the three Gods seem to be ontologically inferior to the really-real Nothing-but which is Divinity Itself. One would think that *It* is the One True God, as opposed to any of the divine Persons worshipped by Christianity.

However, several aspects of the Christian mystery once again break in to blur (and improve) the picture. Notice that as soon as we made the Father one of the Participants, the relations of participation no longer coincided with (indeed, had nothing to do with) the relations of origin. These latter were mentioned only as individuators of the Participants. We can restore their function as origins and use the *homoousion* to overcome tritheism. We can point out that the Son's share of divinity does not arise independently of the Father's share. Quite the contrary, the Son's divinity is from the Father. The Son is the Father's divinity begotten, just as the Holy Spirit is one and the same divinity spirated. So, thanks to the origins and to consubstantiality, it turns out that there are not three shares but *one* share diversely held or communicated. Moreover, the three Participants who have this one-same share are not absolutely distinct, like Tom, Dick, and Harry, but only relatively distinct, like fatherhood and sonship, breathing and breath. Such "relative" distinction will keep the Father and the Son distinct *as* Father and Son, but it will not keep them distinct as God, *as* eternal, *as* omnipotent, etc. So a Trinity of Participants who are "three" only in a certain few respects, and who are "one" in all other respects, and who share one and the same share of Divinity Itself-voila a plausible restoration of monotheism.

But there remains the nagging problem that the three-in-one God whom we worship is God only by participation. Above Him in ontological dignity stands that Divinity Itself in which He participates. And surely, what is God by participation is either not God at all or else a very secondary sort of God. So either we have a True God who is beyond the Trinity altogether, or else we bring Divinity Itself down into the Trinity somehow, at the risk of turning it into a Quaternity, or else we go back to where we were before, identifying Divinity Itself with the Father as Father.

This last possibility a Platonizing Christian will surely find inevitable. The Septuagint had already described God the Father as one, unique, immutable, and (above all) as pure-being. *Ego eimi ho on*. So He already bears the ontological traits which Platonism ascribes to a Nothing-but. Moreover, whatever initial plausibility there may have been to making a distinction between the Son and Divinity Itself, based on His being God *from* God and hence perhaps God by participation-such plausibility never attached to the case of God the Father. He was not from God but simply God. Immutable according to Revelation, He had to be simple according to philosophy; and so there could be no real composition between His hypostasis and His divinity, His fatherhood and His divinity, His innascibility and His divinity. On the contrary, His fatherhood and innascibility could be seen as mere metaphors for that very *independence* which marks the Participated in comparison with Its Participants, which are dependent. So considered, the Father had to be identically Divinity. And so the status of Participants would once again apply only to the Second and Third Persons, and Their participations in the Father would once again coincide with Their processions-a coinciding which we celebrated a moment ago.

Unfortunately, the celebration was premature. Such coinciding carries a profound danger. A participant and that in which it participates cannot be co-equal in a Platonic metaphysic. The participant is ontologically inferior. So, to whatever extent the divine processions are identified with participations, the Son and the Holy Spirit are robbed of equality with God-the-Father. Origen's subordinationism is then the very least error that one can expect, and Arianism gathers like a cloud on the horizon.

Still, there seems to be a way out. Go back to that other idea, whereby God the Father is not identically Divinity Itself but, like the Son and the Holy Spirit, a Participant in It. Recall that the problem with this idea was that it left the three Persons co-possessing an *ousia* which was only a *share* in this higher Divineness. Now let us suggest that this distinction and subordination, between the Participated Itself and the *share* which the participant has in it, makes sense in the realm of material beings, where a ball's redness cannot be Redness Itself; but perhaps it fails to make sense in the higher realm of spiritual, immaterial beings. Where matter and mutability do not intrude, what is to prevent a spiritual being's *share* from being identically the Participated? In other words, what if the *homoousion* is an instance of a general law of spiritual beings, holding wherever they have a property or nature in common?

Such a suggestion is unplatonic. It will seem plausible only where Level I is taken as the whole of Platonism, and where a Level I Form or nature, like Divinity Itself, is therefore made central to the Trinitarian discussion. But in fact Platonism has a second Level which requires a very different approach.

Level I of Platonism is incomplete. It can't stand on its own, because the Simples which it posits turn out, on closer inspection, not to be simple at all. They are not pure Nothing-but, and hence they are not ultimate realities. Redness Itself, for example, is not *just* red; it is also one. It is *one* thing, while Roundness Itself is another *one* thing. Of course, to be nothing but red is to be one thing. But being nothing but red *is not* being nothing but one. Being red must be *other* than being one; otherwise every single thing would be red simply by virtue of being one thing. Hence the two notions are distinct, and Redness Itself, while indeed being red *of itself*, fails to be one *of itself*, and so it must be one by participation. Thus arises a Super-Form, a Super-Nothing-but in which *all* others participate, unimaginably simple, purest of the pure: its name, the One.

Notice that in making this move the system is faithful to its first principles. A ball has properties other than the one for which it is named; this is complexity, and it entails contingency and mutability; the complex is the composed, and the composed must depend upon the simples of which it is composed; Redness will pass for such a simple, until it is discovered that Redness Itself has a property other than the one for which it is named; whereupon the reasoning is triggered again. It makes no difference that Redness Itself is an immaterial being. Material or spiritual, what matters is that it has a property other than the one its name bespeaks, hence other than the one which it has *of itself*; for such a property it must have *of another*. Now the suggestion has been made that the oneness of Redness might be Oneness Itself, *i.e.* that the One might not be a Participated Form *above* Level I but something *on* Level I, so that the Level I Forms would be "composed" by sheer collocation of Simples. Impossible! If the oneness of Redness were Oneness Itself, Redness would have the whole perfection of Oneness; whereupon

it would have the decency to be *one* instead of two. Red and one make two! As long as Redness is going to insist upon being-red, it cannot be *just* one, and so cannot have the whole perfection of oneness, and so cannot have Oneness Itself as its oneness. It must merely have a share.

So the oneness of each Level I Form turns out to be a participated oneness, with the consequence that Level I depends upon a higher Level II.

Now, it would be appropriate if the One could occupy this SuperFirmament in lonely and splendid isolation. Sad to say, it can't. The term 'one' is merely one of a series of terms whose common knack is to be true in some sense of *anything*, no matter what-a knack which long ago earned some of these terms the sonorous name of Transcendentals. They are traditionally listed as *ens*, *unum*, *verum*, *bonum*, *res*, *aliquid*, and maybe *pulchrum*.

The same sort of argument used to establish the Super-Form of *unum* will avail to establish a Super-Form for all the others. Plato's most famous example is the Good (*bonum*). Redness Itself is good. Every Nothing-but is good. But being red is other than being good, since not every good thing is red. So ordinary Level I Nothing-but-like Redness are now seen to participate in the Level II Nothing-but of Goodness. The same goes for Truth (*verum*). Redness is a true form, a true being, but it isn't Truth Itself. The same goes for Being (*ens*). Redness is a "beingly" being, but, since not all beings are red, it is not identically being. It must participate being from what is Nothing-but Being. Redness is also a thing and something, so Thingness (*res*) and Somethingness (*aliquid*) Themselves could join the higher Firmament, if anybody wanted them. And as for Beauty, its status depends on whether the song is right in crooning that *everything* is beautiful "in its own way."

Meanwhile, these transcendentals were only the beginning of the newfound complexity. Besides them, there were two relations, Sameness and Otherness, which seemed to apply to everything. Every Form is the same as Itself and other than all the Others. Moreover, it was not the case that each Level I Form stood *directly* under this umbrella of Super-universals. The Form of Man, for example, had to be covered by the Form of Animality, and Animality by Body, and Body by Rest or Motion, perhaps, and so on. The Form of Redness seemed to partake of the Form of Color, Color of Surface, Surface of Dimension, Dimension of Number, and Number, perhaps, partook of Unity. Further, if all men were two-legged, did Man partake of Two-leggedness and thereby of Number? Where would it all end? It had been hoped that the World of Forms would be simple, like a row of shining, eternal numbers. Instead, it was turning into a complicated lattice of interlocking participations, compositions, complexities. It was turning into a lattice which all-too-suspiciously matched the structure of what was here below! The Forms were turning out to be almost as un-simple (and therefore almost as un-real) as the empirical things they were supposed to lead us away from.

At this point lies one of the great forks in the philosophical road. You can go the broad way of Aristotle, dismantling the World of Forms and carrying some of its treasures back into the world of empirical things. This may have been the choice of the late Plato himself. Or you can go the narrow way, the way less travelled-by in the long-haul of history but greatly favored by the religious thinkers of late Antiquity. You can resolve to re-arrange the Forms into some

kind of hierarchy, in the ascent of which, complexity will gradually fall away, and at the apex of which, that thirst for absolute simplicity, which has led us on this far, will finally be quenched. This is the way of religious Platonism; and, though hard, it can offer for itself this defense. Complexity, remember, is composition, and composition must be *caused* by the Simples which enter into it and bring it about. Therefore, the thirst which has always turned philosophy and religion in the same direction, the thirst to know the ultimate Cause of all things, the First Principle and Origin of the universe, must also be a quest for what is absolutely simplest. For so long as composed-ness is caused-ness, only the utterly uncomposed can be without cause. Only the Simple can be God. And so long as Plato's map from predicates to entities is accepted, only a Nothing-but can be simple. Hence, if the true God is to be found on that map, there can be no turning back: the world of Forms must be ordered into a hierarchy, atop which the Simplest may emerge.

The basic plan of such a hierarchization could be fairly straight-forward. Notice that a specific Form, like Man, can be made to stand at the bottom of a rather short chain of genera and higher genera, terminating at the category Form of Substance. Any other Forms in which Man is found to participate, such as Two-leggedness, perhaps, will also stand in short chains terminating in other category-Forms, such as Quantity or Quality. Let this whole lattice-work of species, genera, and categories now count as Level I. Above this newly thickened Level I, we may arrange the truly transcendental Forms, like Goodness, Truth, Being, and Oneness, into a hierarchy of ascending simplicity. Let this hierarchy count as Level II. Both Levels are now ordered: just as the ordering of Level I Forms resolves the complexity of empirical things up to the relative Simplicities of the Categories, so also the ordering of Level II Forms will resolve the complexities of the Forms themselves up to the absolute Simplicity of the Apex Form, whether that be sheer Being, or sheer Oneness, or whatever.

Only one thing could spoil the chances for finding such an ordering; that would be to allow those two transcendental-ish relations, Sameness and Otherness, or any other such relations, to stay in the upper hierarchy. For, if those two relations remained in Level II, its Apex would never achieve simplicity. For the Apex would have to (1) be Itself, (2) participate in Sameness, since It is the same as itself, and (3) participate in Otherness, since It is other than everything else. Happily, an easy solution appeared to be available. To be the same as oneself is just exactly to be; so Sameness could be de-relationalized and identified with Being. To be other than something is just not-to-be-it; so Otherness became non-being and was ejected from the pantheon of positive Forms. There in outer darkness, this non-being which was other than positive Form (and so other than unified) could pursue a career as matter-or (what seemed the same) as multiplicity.

I have been speaking of these things playfully, but the truth is that each of these Level II concepts has attracted an awe that was at once religious and philosophical. Each seemed worthy of contemplation as the thinking-man's God. But, for that purpose, there were still rather too many of them. It would be preferable to reduce the number of transcendental realities to some pleasingly small total, such as three, two, or one. This goal could only be achieved by cross-identifying some of the transcendentals as two names for the same thing. Exactly which ones

were to be identified, however, was a perplexing question; answers differed from one thinker to another, almost as a matter of taste. An identification which seemed right to very many Platonists was that of the One with the Good. Another easy identification would be Being with Thingness (or Somethingness), so as to yield a transcendental *Ousia*. But whether this *Ousia* could in turn be identified with the One was highly problematic. A Platonizing thinker could be led by the Scriptures to embrace an identification of Being with the One (thanks to Exodus 3:14 and Deuteronomy 6:4), or he could be led by the logic of Platonism to reject it, putting the One beyond Being. By the latter option, the One (who might also be called the Good) would be restored to lonely transcendence, while below Him and participating in Him would stand Being and all the beings.

Be it noted that any such identifications ought to have been suspect, however. Their motivation was religious and aesthetic, not philosophical. The reason I say this is that such identifications fly in the face of the Platonic theory of language. That theory is (or tries to be) a *one-to-one* mapping of conceptually distinct predicates onto ontologically pure Entities. So wherever you have two positive predicates which are conceptually nonsynonymous, and neither of which is included in the definition of the other, you must posit *two* pure entities, not one. The fact that the two predicates have the same empirical extension is not allowed to matter. Perhaps everything good is one, and everything one is to that extent good; but that coincidence should not make the One and the Good the same Entity, any more than the fact that men are co-extensive with featherless bipeds should make humanity and feather-free-bipedality the same property or the same idea. So, when it comes to identifying these transcendental concepts with each other, what piety leads one Platonist to join, rigor can lead another to put asunder.

Still, there was a strong reason from another quarter to make the One and the Good, at least, identical. As ultimate Simplicity, the One was not only the origin *from* which all things somehow came but also the fullness of that unity *in* which all things, just in order to be, must strive to maintain or re-integrate themselves: in a word, their good. And if the degree of unity which each thing thus achieves in this striving could be seen as its degree of goodness, the hierarchy of simplicity would at once coincide with the order of excellence.

Now oneness and Being are at least well-behaved transcendentals, in that they seem to be self-contained. Goodness and Truth are different. The Good refuses to be reduced to Oneness without a remainder: the striving which relates it to a Will. But this is tenuous and indirect; so it could pass unnoticed. Not so with Truth. Its relation to Mind is pretty hard to miss. Truth presupposes a Mind knowing the truth. And so the problem was introduced of finding a niche on Level II for Mind (*Nous*). And since Mind does not stand alone but brings a Soul trailing along with it, this niche for *Nous* had to be broad enough for two. Where, however, should it go?

On the one hand, Mind is one without being Oneness Itself. Mind participates in the One and so is beneath Him. The same goes for Soul. On the other hand, Mind and Soul cannot be demoted to Level I. For all of the ordinary Forms of Level I are *intelligible*. They have Mind as their native habitat, so to speak; they participate in Mind. So Mind (or Reason or Logos) clearly emerges as a Mediating Entity between the two Levels or (perhaps) between some sub-levels of Level II. In other words, *exactly* between what and what Mind intermediated was again a matter

of taste. Was Mind a being, or did It transcend Being, knowing being and non-being'? This option, plus the ad-libetal identifications already noticed, yielded an array of possible hierarchies:

- One = Good  
Mind  
Soul
- One  
Being  
Mind
- One = Being  
Mind etc.  
Soul

Toss in Truth and Beauty, Good and Thing; throw in Will to go along with Good, and allow the hierarchies to branch; then miss the fact that only transcendentals have a right to appear; populate the branches with the names of categories, passions, or anything else which sounds high and "heavy"; there is no end to the Gnostic salads which can then be tossed, as St. Irenaeus observed with scorn.

These variations of hierarchy are not central to our present concern, except for the following points of Christian interest. First, the Biblical descriptions of God the Son as Logos and Wisdom of the Father, as well as Mediator between God and man, made an identification of the Son with the Platonic *Nous* quite irresistible. Secondly, the fact that there is some sort of connexion between Mind and Word, plus the Biblical fact that God created the universe by speaking His Word, gave Christians an attractive way to plant the all-important concept of creation in the otherwise uncongenial soil of Platonic participationism, while, at the same time, making excellent philosophical sense of the Johannine and Pauline texts on creation "through the Son," (*di' hou ta panta*-I Cor. 8:6). Thirdly, this construal of God the Son as Mind, plus the construal of His procession as a case of participation, compelled an identification of God the Father with Something above Mind, whether it were the One, or Being, or both.

Notice a peculiar thing about the logic of `divinity.' On the one hand, `divinity' seems to be the name of a *nature*, like humanity or triangularity. Any such nature is one, without being mere oneness, is being, without being sheer being, is true and good, without being just truth or naked goodness. So, if taken as a nature in its own right, Divinity seems to belong among the Level I Forms, participating in those more "formal" properties of oneness, being, goodness, etc., which lie "above" it in the hierarchy of abstraction but which also seem in some sense inferior, since they do not seem able to constitute *natures* of their own. Hence it seemed plausible to proceed as we did in the first part of this essay, where Divinity Itself was handled as a Level I Form.

On the other hand, the logic of `divinity' compels one to seek God nowhere but in the highest "place." Divinity must be the highest thing conceivable, the most ultimate, the most transcendent, independent, and perfect. God must be an absolute starting-point, an *arche*

presupposing nothing. Hence a Platonizing thinker could not leave Divinity among the Level I Forms. God had to move up the hierarchy to the highest possible place. If *unum* was ultimate, God had to be the One. If *ens* was ultimate, God had to be Being.

Whence, of course, another crisis. Religion required God to have the specific density of a real *nature* (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) and yet required Him to have the highest theoretical "place." Platonism, by making the hierarchy of dignity the hierarchy of abstraction, gave the highest "places" to things which were no natures. For "things" which characterize everything, like oneness and being, are not the nature of anything. Therefore: either Divinity had to lose its specificity, dissolving pantheistically into the oneness or being of everything, or else *mere* Oneness or *sheer* Being-ness had to be found to be natures after all. The latter path alone was open to Christian Platonists, of course; but it was not an easy path. Sheer Oneness made a very weird nature, and sheer Being was not much better.

The reason for the weirdness lies in the fact that the Level 11 Super-Forms are more intense Nothing-but's. Their whole *raison d'être* is to provide the true and utter Purities which Level I Forms failed to provide. Thus Being Itself must be the being whose whole being is *nothing but* being being, if that makes sense. And Oneness Itself must be the being whose whole being is nothing but being one-which was soon perceived not to make sense, not to a Platonist anyway.

For, if Oneness Itself is a being, It is not just one. Being plus one make two. So, if Oneness Itself is a being, It is not what Platonism demands it to be; it is not pure. Hence the inevitable, but not very thinkable, and certainly not sayable, conclusion that the One is beyond being. Not sayable, because if the One is not a being, It cannot be said to *be* anything. One cannot even say that it *is* one or is beyond being. Such are the rules of the Platonic grammar of 'being.' One may only say what the One *is not-a* mode of speech called "apophatic."

Now look at sheer Being-ness. The Common Doctor of the West, Thomas Aquinas, also thought that pure Being could be a nature and that, where it was a nature, it was God. But his whole approach to being was unplatonic. Being, for him, was not the Form by virtue of which anything could be said to *be* such-and-such (i.e. was not the Form corresponding to the copula and only to the copula); rather, being for him was existence; it was the *actuality* of every perfection and hence included every perfection within itself. Thus Aquinas's Pure Being would be infinitely rich, and Its uncomposed simplicity in God would be the very opposite of Platonic simplicity. Indeed, Aquinas's doctrine of Pure Being would be unintelligible, unless one started with a different theory of simplicity, a different theory of abstraction, and a wholly different way of drawing the map from predicates to entities. It is not relevant to our purpose here to examine these alternatives. I mention them only as a counterpoint, serving to highlight, by way of contrast, what a *Platonist* must mean by 'Pure Being.' A Platonist reasons about It as follows: either It is one, or It isn't. If It is one, It gets its unity from the One, hence participates in the One and lies below Him as less pure. If It is not one, then It is many, and so is obviously not pure. In other words, the only way for a Platonist to put Being at the top of his hierarchy is to claim an identity between being and oneness, which in turn requires that the two *terms* be synonymous. Where this move is accepted, to be *is* to be one, and to be more perfectly a being is to be more exclusively one. The Platonic levels of purity thus become grades of being: at the bottom are the loose, contingently "unified" objects of our sense experience; above them are the simpler,

"beinglier" beings of the Level I Forms; above these is Mind (and maybe a few other Things), and above them all is the Being/One. The scheme is edifying, but notice an obvious objection. A centaur is one thing, but centaurs don't exist. Centaur-ness Itself is one, and it presumably doesn't exist. So to be one is not identically to be. The alleged synonymy breaks down. "Nonsense," replies the Christian Platonist, "to *be* one is obviously to *be*; your own words refute you." A triumph of Platonic grammar! But it follows that a centaur, or at least Centaurness Itself, somehow "is." The price of the triumph is a divorce of being from existence.

More generally stated: a Platonically executed identification of the One with Being, or of the One with Anything Else, can only be carried out on the One's terms. The One's utter simplicity tends to devour and evacuate anything identified with It. In yoke with Being, It dis-existentializes being. In yoke with the Good, It disvalues the good into neutrality with evil. In yoke with Mind, It dis-intentionalizes thought, since only a mind devoid of object can have the simplicity of the One.

This is the crucial problem with putting God at the top of a Platonic hierarchy. He takes on the vacuity of the One, no matter what else He is called. The attempts to make oneness a nature, to make Platonic Being a nature, to identify the two with each other and with the Good, and perhaps also with the True—all these attempts to secure some *richness* of content, some *density* of a nature—are finally futile.

Is Christian Platonism thereby defeated? Not necessarily. One can claim that the Biblically mandated identifications (of God with Being and of Being with the One, etc.) only yield paradoxical results because they mark the very point where speech leaves off and ineffability begins. At an apex of Reality beyond speech, perhaps vacuity is its own fullness; perhaps simplicity is its own richness. Perhaps the defeat of discourse at this vertiginous height is just the hush which allows God to be heard: apophatic theology receives the kerygma in a silence which gives consent.

Perhaps.

But Level II of Platonism has a deeper problem for the Christian. We have been looking at the imperialism of the One. We have not yet noticed Its unparticipability.

The fact is all too clear. To participate in the One is to be inferior to the One *because* it is to have a share of what the One has, without having the fullness of what the One has. For to have the fullness of what the One has is, necessarily, to *be* the One identically. So, for anything to participate in the One without being the One requires leaving behind something *in* the One which is not participated. But unity is what is participated. Everything is supposed to get a share of unity, a degree of unity, by participating in the One; and yet nothing else becomes the One. Therefore, there must be something else in the One which nothing else receives—a remainder which is not participated. If that is our thesis, it is easy to prove the antithesis. There *is nothing but* unity in the One, because the One's unity is absolute. An absolute unity is not just physically indivisible; it also excludes all conceptual distinction. For whatever is mentally divisible or distinguishable is less than absolutely one. So, if anything other than unity were even thinkable in the One, it would not be perfectly one, which is impossible. Therefore, if unity is shared, there cannot be anything left in the One which is not shared. Conclusion? A dilemma: either everything becomes the One, or else nothing but the One is one at all.

Consider the two horns closely. If the One is nothing but unity, whatever has unity has all there is to the One. So, if we concede that everything has unity (which is exactly what we did concede, in order to conclude to the One as a Super-Form in the first place), then everything is the One-despite all appearances. Multiplicity turns out to be an illusion. The One is not participated because *It* is all there is. Parmenides (or is it Spinoza?) speaks the last word in Plato's idiom. Now the other horn. If the many objects of our experience, and the many Forms of Level I, and Mind, and perhaps a few Other Things, are not the One, they are other than the One. In fact, they are wholly other than the One, because they cannot even participate in the One. For whatever participates in the One has *some* unity. Now 'some unity' is ambiguous. Sometimes it means a degree of coherence among diverse parts. That sense *cannot* be what is needed here, because the sense of 'some unity' needed here must be continuous with, and similar to, the property possessed by the One; and coherence *among diverse parts* is antithetical to that property. The One neither includes, nor embraces, nor synthesizes diversity; It *contradicts* diversity. Indeed, a "One" so defined that synthesizing multiplicities were Its business, and such that all lesser synthesized unities were Participations in It-such a "One" would have to be the Cosmos or worldsoul itself rather than the Platonic One. No, the sense of 'some unity' relevant here must be sheer undivided-unit-ness. And in *this* sense, whatever has "some unity" has all there is to the One and hence *is* the One. Therefore, if nothing else is to be the One, we must insist that nothing else participates in the One, and hence we must *not* concede that anything has unity other than the One-despite all appearances. Unity turns out to be an illusion. Heraclitus (or is it Bergson?) speaks the last word in Plato's idiom.

So either horn of the dilemma leads us to the same conclusion: the One is unparticipatable.

'A Platonist' can now be defined. He is someone who thinks he can accept the theses of Level I Platonism, go on to Level II Platonism, and still break one or the other horn of this dilemma. He cannot. Platonism is a failed *via media* between Parmenides and Heraclitus. It is an inconsistent system: its doctrine of participation requires every being, in proportion as it is a real being, to participate in a Oneness so defined that nothing can participate in It.

Now back to theology. Just as the imperialism of the One "henad-ifies" any divine entity identified with the One, creating paradoxes which reduce theology to apophatic paralysis, so, too, the unparticipability of the One "isolates" any divine entity identified with It, creating insuperable barriers to the divine processions.

To see this, try a thought experiment. Instead of identifying God the Father with a Level I Form such as Divinity Itself, try identifying Him with a Level II Apex such as the Being/One. It seems to make sense. The Platonic Apex is an absolute *arche*, depending on no *arche* above it. It is "unoriginate origin," which (in another celebrated coincidence) is the *proprium* of God the Father. But now the very absoluteness which makes the One impervious to distinction and hence unparticipatable makes the Unoriginate Father impervious and unparticipatable. You cannot be "somewhat" unoriginate, and so the Son cannot be "somewhat" the Father. Whereupon the all-devouring simplicity of the One-component of a Father/God who is the Being/One brings it about that the Son cannot be "somewhat" God either. The coinciding of *ad intra* procession with participation now annihilates the procession, and anomoean Arianism is the result. Arius, and even the thorough-going Eunomius himself, only half saw it. They saw that the Son/Logos could

not participate in the Being/One *enough to be God*. But they assumed that a created Son/Logos could participate in the Being/One enough to have a share in creative action (*energeia*). Without this assumption, their doctrine could not begin to pass as an exegesis of the New Testament. But *with* this assumption, the Being/One became complex, acquiring a participatable *energeia* alongside His unparticipatable *ousia*. The all-devouring simplicity needed to establish the *anomoios* was sacrificed to keep the *di' hou ta panta*. Thus the Arian reasoning falls apart-but only because it is not radical enough! Hence the damage remains done.

Now try the experiment the other way: identify (not God the Father but) Divinity Itself with the Level II Apex, and let this again be the Being/One. Nothing follows at all but the de-divinization of the whole Christian Trinity. For when Divinity Itself acquires the unparticipatability of the Being/One, none of the alleged divine Persons gets a share of It, and so none of them is God. Paganism is avenged at the hands of Porphyry.

The only solution is to replace participation with identity. Let any one of the divine Persons, say the Father, be *identically* the Being/One. Well, we tried that before, and we got a chemical reaction between the simplicity of the One and the Father's property of Unoriginateness, a reaction which prevented the Son (or the Holy Spirit) from being God. Is there a way to block this chemistry?

Yes, indeed. We could block it by denying that 'unoriginate' is the name of *a positive* property. It looks like a mere negation, and perhaps it is. Now, once a predicate is found to be negative, it is excluded from the Platonic map of predicates onto Entities. There are no negative Forms in Plato. The negative is removed from the Real. And once unoriginateness is taken away from the Real, it cannot interact with the Oneness which *is* in the Real so as to create the problem we have been discussing. Quite so. But it also cannot posit the Father in the Real *as Father*. If His distinguishing property is a mere conception of the mind, an *epinoia*, then He Himself *as Father* is a conception of the mind, although He remains real, of course, *as* the Being/One. Still, it is only *as Father* that He is related to the Son, or the Son to Him. So, if the Being/One as Father is simply the Being/One *conceived* in a certain way, the Being/One *as Son* is equally conceptual. We arrive at modal monarchianism. We have escaped Eunomius only to fall into the hands of Sibellius just as the radical Arians always said we would.

The trap is ineluctable where religious Platonism is theology's partner. For what sets the trap is just that all-devouring simplicity of the imperial One. If the Father's *proprium* is in the Real, the One assimilates it by identity and makes the Father unparticipatable *as God*. If the Father's *proprium* is not in the Real, His identification with the Being/One can originate only a conceptual trinity.

Not so fast, you object. The solution is that the Father's *proprium* *is* indeed in the Real but not as something absolute (like the Oneness and thus apt to interact with it); it is rather in the Real as something relative.

You are right, of course. The Father's *proprium* is the reality of a relation. But your solution explodes Platonism. Real relations are named by dyadic predicates. The ball "is to the left of" the hen and "is bigger than" the flower: two examples of dyadic predicates. Level II of Platonism is a metaphysic of *monadic* predicates; the upper reaches of its ontology must consist of absolutes alone. The Level I ontology doesn't matter so much. On Level I, Platonism *could* posit a Form of To-the-left-of-ness or Bigger-than-ness, *in* which the ball, hen and flower would

participate pair-wise, and *of* which their particular relations would be their shares. The same goes for Fatherhood. But Platonism *must* not posit a relational Form like Fatherhood on the Upper Level. The system couldn't handle relations up there without blowing sky-high. We already saw why Sameness and Otherness had to be eliminated. Now just remember that half-of and third-of are relations. The imperial One is half of two and a third of three. Map these relations onto Forms, and the One will have to participate in them, and in infinitely many more like them. *That* will be the end of Its simplicity! Or, if mathematical relations seem too "unreal," consider the metaphysical relation of Participation Itself. It is a Super-universal relation, in which each thing participated and each thing which is a participant participate two-by-two. If this relation is a real Form, and if (as Platonism tries to maintain) the One is participated after all, then again the One must participate in the Form of Participation and must thereby cease to be one, since being-participated and being-one make two. Thus, for a religious Platonist, Level II relations are strictly taboo. They are off his metaphysical map. And that is the ultimate reason why the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity is off his map.

To that Trinity be glory, honor, and co-equal praise,  
Now and always,  
And unto the ages of ages. Amen.

#### SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE ON 'ONE' AND 'UNITY'

The cause of Plato's dilemma on unity is a deep equivocation. The words 'one' and 'unity' have two very different senses.

In the first sense, these words indicate closeness of relation, tightness, or coherence among a thing's parts. In this sense, oneness is *a matter of degree*, and 'unity' is a misnomer for union or for similarity.

In the second sense, 'one' and 'unity' indicate what we have chosen not to divide, i.e. what we have chosen to take as *a unit* for purposes of counting or measuring. To be "one" in this sense is not a matter of degree. If we are marking off a line and have taken a certain length as our unit, then either an inch *is* the unit or else it *isn't*; it is yes or no, and not a matter of degree.

To be sure, there is a pragmatic connexion between these two senses. When we count items, x, y, and z, so as to ascribe to each item the "property" of being one, or one more, of whatever we are counting (which property is "oneness" in the second sense), we are more likely to choose objects which seem more "unified" in the first sense as the values for x, y, and z. We are more likely to count trees than forests. It seems more *natural* to count "individuals" than to count sets, relations, systems, etc. It is this fact, no doubt, which accounts for the analogical sweep of the word 'one'. Nevertheless, this pragmatic connexion should not fool us into thinking that there is some sort of metaphysical connexion or univocity here. For the fact of the matter is that we *can* count whatever we choose. We can count forests, populations, conjugal ties, environments. If it is the case that, in so doing, we treat these items as individuals, it merely follows that we can assign "individuality" arbitrarily.

The philosopher is inclined to ask, however, whether there are not *natural* individuals and *natural* units. The history of this question is replete with the same equivocation. Each living

being, though highly complex internally, seems sufficiently "unified" within itself and sufficiently "disunified" with its environment, against the background of which it moves and "figures," to count as a natural individual or unit. Biology is thus the home territory of Aristotle's concept of a prime or individual substance; outside of biology, one would have to be led by one's sense of analogy; detached rocks, grains of sand, and drops of water would be the natural individuals, not to mention the planets and fixed stars. Such a notion serves well enough for everyday purposes. Scientists, however, are seeking the *explanatory* individuals, namely, those entities which will figure as individuals in the formalized statements of an explanatory theory. And if the explanations are to be "ultimate," the individuals will have to be "ultimate" also, e.g. quarks or other sub-atomic "particles." So, at least, the reductionists believe. Their scientific rivals, the emergentists, hold that there are theoretically uneliminable properties which cannot be significantly affirmed of individuals below a certain "threshold" of structural complexity. The issue could be put this way: if the reductionists are right, there is a homogeneous class of ultimate, natural individuals; if the emergentists are right, the class of "natural" individuals is heterogeneous. I have no intention of entering into this controversy. I simply wish to point out that it is a *meaningful* controversy over the fruitful applications of *the first sense* of 'one' and 'unity.' The trouble has come when it was confused with the second sense.

Recall that what is "one" in the second sense is simply our chosen unit of counting or measurement. Suppose we have chosen an inch. We could have chosen a smaller unit. We can make the unit *arbitrarily* small. This fact leads to the question of whether there is a "natural" unit, that is, a length so short that, if we choose it as our unit, we could not have chosen a smaller one. The correct answer is no. The classical (and wrong) answer is that famous thing, the Point—the "unit" which has no length at all!

Plato's theory of unity confuses the two senses of 'natural unit' together. Pure Unity is the One and is like the Point. Shares of unity (participated unities) are degrees of coherence or simplicity, as though "more unified" beings were like shorter lengths! This fusion of the two senses leads to a crisis, whether in mathematics or in metaphysics, when it dawns on one that the Point is not a unit but a zero. As the point is a zero of length, the Platonic One is a zero of being. As a line cannot be constructed by addition of points, neither can a real individual be constructed by participation in the One. And if it be objected that the mathematical point and the real individual are at least this much alike, that both are "natural" things to count and hence that both are counting units, I deny even this similarity. Points as such cannot be counted! Draw a line, and try to count how many points there are between your mark for 1.41 and your mark for the square root of 2! You discover that only the units of length, with whose termini certain points have been identified, can be counted, not points themselves. It is a pity that Plato never met Georg Cantor. And if it be objected that points, though uncountable, are nevertheless not zeros of length but infinitesimally short lengths, I reply that a similarity of nature between points and standard, finite lengths, however short, is still not established. For a number system which admits both finite and infinitesimal quantities is non-Archimedean. One cannot add the infinitesimal quantities together to reach a finite length in any finite, or even in any denumerable, number of steps; whereas finite quantities, no matter how small, can be added together to reach any other finite quantity, no matter how large, in finitely many steps. Hence there is a radical difference in "nature" between the two sorts of "length." It is a pity that Plato never met Abraham Robinson.