ABSTRACT

Together with the retrieval of the doctrine of the Trinity in the latter half of the twentieth century, a controversy over tritheism took place centering around the notion of divine persons as centers of consciousness. Since Barth, the theological landscape has been divided into opponents and supporters of the notion of divine persons as centers of consciousness. Opponents charge supporters with tritheism; supporters accuse opponents of modalism. The reciprocal criticism demands that we re-examine tritheism and modalism.

The task that this dissertation chooses is that of understanding tritheism. The dissertation intends to accomplish three things: (1) to suggest a definition of tritheism by uncovering historical criteria for tritheism contained in the responses of the church councils to various tritheist positions and evaluating and deepening those historical criteria, (2) to discuss whether the notion of the three personal subjects in the Trinity necessitates tritheism, with reference to the Cappadocians, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Gregory Palamas, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., William Sherlock, and Karl Barth, and (3) to show that not all theologians supporting the three divine personal subjects are tritheist, through applying the tritheist criteria of the dissertation to two so-called social trinitarians, Jürgen Moltmann and William Hill.

For a definition of tritheism, the dissertation concludes that tritheism is any trinitarian theory that fails to confirm the substantial unity of the three divine persons (i.e., the doctrine that the substantial unity of the triune God is not nominal, but ontologically real; the doctrine of *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*; the doctrine of perichoresis), asserting of the three divine persons three distinct, individual, particular natures in divinity or in kind. The dissertation claims that the notion of the three divine persons as centers of consciousness does not necessarily entail tritheism when measured against a definition of tritheism derived from both the historical study of official church pronouncements and the theological analysis of them. Yet the dissertation does not imply that no so-called social trinitarian theories are tritheist. For instance, the dissertation claims that Moltmann is close to tritheism, and that Hill is not.