

## The Error of Denying the Involvement of the Father in the Son's Work

In the special “We Were Wrong” issue of the *Christian Research Journal*, veteran apologist Gretchen Passantino, who participated in the earliest criticisms of the local churches published in the United States over thirty years ago, made an impassioned appeal. She asked her fellow apologists and the signers of an open letter criticizing the teachings of Living Stream Ministry (LSM) and the local churches to reconsider their condemnation, saying that her own further research had changed her opinion.<sup>1</sup> Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes rejected her appeal out of hand, saying:

However, it is clear that truth does not always reside with the persons who have read more or studied longer. Rather, it rests with those who can reason best from the evidence.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Geisler and Rhodes dismissed the need for further research in spite of the lapse of thirty-five years since the original research was performed in which Gretchen Passantino participated. Instead, Geisler and Rhodes assert their own superior ability to reason apart from further evidence. In fact, their reasoning is flawed in many respects. This article examines one such case in which Geisler and Rhodes’ “reasoning” is woefully deficient. Geisler and Rhodes backhandedly accuse the local churches of espousing the ancient heresy of patripassianism, which states that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, was simply the Father in another mode of existence, so that it was the Father who suffered on the cross. Geisler and Rhodes say:

Likewise, the LC’s alleged repudiation of patripassianism (the heresy that the Father suffered on the cross-17) is unconvincing since they also claim (and CRI apparently supports) the view, based on the doctrine of coinherence, that both the Father and the Son are involved in each other’s activities.

There are several defects in Geisler and Rhodes’ analysis:

- All three quotes they use to support this accusation are misattributed (see “A False Accusation of Patripassianism Supported by Specious Scholarship”);
- To speak of the local churches’ “alleged repudiation of patripassianism” gives the false impression that the local churches ever held that belief;
- Their reasoning that the espousal of coinherence and the co-working of the Father and the Son is equivalent to patripassianism is based on both faulty logic and faulty theology;
- Their rejection of the Father’s involvement in the Son’s work betrays a shortage in their apprehension of the biblical record; and
- They ignore the many respected Bible teachers and theologians who have made similar statements concerning the biblical record of the involvement of all three of the Godhead in the operation of each One (see “Scholars Who Affirm the Working Together of the Three of the Divine Trinity”).

## **Geisler and Rhodes' Dismissal of the Local Churches' Rejection of Patripassianism**

Brushing aside the local churches' disavowal of patripassianism by calling it "alleged" is in keeping with Geisler and Rhodes' dismissal of the need for research. In fact, as early as 1976, LSM published *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation of the Triune God according to the Bible*,<sup>3</sup> which clearly rejected the heresy of modalism upon which patripassianism is based. Furthermore, in a book published in 1985, Witness Lee said:

Also, we cannot say that the Father became flesh and that the Father lived on this earth in the flesh. Furthermore, we cannot say that the Father went to the cross and died for our redemption, and we cannot say the blood shed on the cross is the blood of Jesus the Father. We must say that the blood was shed by Jesus the Son of God (1 John 1:7). We can neither say that the Father died on the cross nor can we say that the Father resurrected from the dead.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, in an article entitled "The Divine Trinity in the Divine Economy" in a 1999 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, Kerry Robichaux clearly explained the distinction between patripassianism and the co-working of the Divine Trinity in Christ's crucifixion. This distinction and Kerry Robichaux's explanation will be considered in more depth below.

Geisler and Rhodes ignore not only these three clear declarations but also all such repudiations of modalism and patripassianism published by Living Stream Ministry. Thorough research is indispensable to Christian apologists who desire to understand and represent their subjects in a fair and balanced way. Geisler and Rhodes, however, have simply labeled the local churches as heretical, while rejecting all evidence to the contrary.

## **Geisler and Rhodes' Flawed Reasoning**

The error of modalism (and by extension, patripassianism) is that it does not recognize the distinctions among the three of the Divine Trinity. Modalism developed out of a desire to protect the oneness of God, but it erred in making the Father, the Son, and the Spirit temporary manifestations of God in time. Both modalism and patripassianism are heresies that are firmly and unambiguously rejected in the teaching of Witness Lee and the local churches.<sup>5</sup> Geisler and Rhodes, however, label the local churches as heretical by claiming that espousal of the coinherence of the Divine Trinity and of the involvement of the Father and the Son in one another's activities necessarily leads to patripassianism. Their logic is flawed in three major respects:

- Geisler strongly affirms God's immutability, but he and Rhodes avoid endorsing coinherence, something that is clearly revealed in the Lord's own words in the Gospel of John. Geisler and Rhodes seem to make allowance that coinherence is within the realm of orthodoxy. However, if we accept Christ's own word that He was coinhering with the Father in John 10, 14, and 17, then the Father and the Son must also have been coinhering as Christ was being crucified on the cross or else God's immutability would be compromised.

- By insisting that if the Father was coinhering with the Son on the cross, the Father must have suffered, Geisler and Rhodes contradict Geisler’s own writings on God’s impassibility.
- Equating “involvement” with “patripassianism” is an unwarranted conclusion.

### ***Coinherence and God’s Immutability***

*Coinherence* refers to the mutual indwelling of the three of the Divine Trinity. In the Gospel of John the Lord repeatedly told His disciples that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him (John 10:38; 14:10, 20; 17:21, 23). The coinhering oneness of the Divine Trinity is fundamental to understanding how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit can be one God. The coinherence of the Divine Trinity is beyond illustration, as it has no corollary in the physical universe. Even more, it is beyond the ability of man-made systems of logic to explain. It is the greatest mystery concerning the Triune God and shatters all attempts to neatly explain the Trinity.

Perhaps for this reason, it is not a point that Geisler and Rhodes stress. Coinherence is not mentioned in either Geisler’s *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: God, Creation* or his *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, even though both deal extensively with the Trinity. If the Scripture Indexes in these two books are accurate, Geisler himself makes no reference in either book to any of the verses that clearly show the coinherence of the Father and the Son in the Gospel of John. The only reference to any of these verses is a citation to John 14:10 in a quote from John Calvin which strongly confirms the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son:

The whole Father is in the Son, and the whole Son is in the Father, as the Son himself also declares (John xiv. 10), “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me”; nor do ecclesiastical writers admit that the one is separated from the other by any difference of essence.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, it is not at all clear if Geisler and Rhodes embrace the importance or even the truth of the coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in understanding the Trinity. However, they do appear to make allowance for coinherence within the realm of orthodoxy in their critique of CRI’s reassessment of the local churches. There they say, “*Even if* one holds to the doctrine of coinherence...” [emphasis added]. In other words, they themselves equivocate. They do not commit themselves to coinherence, but neither do they say it is a false teaching. Such equivocation is inexcusable in a work that claims to defend a truth as crucial as the Trinity against purported error. The problem for Geisler and Rhodes is that if they affirm coinherence, then they must admit that the Father and the Son were coinhering essentially even as Christ was being crucified. To claim otherwise would be to deny God’s immutability. It would be to say that God’s essential being changed at some point either during Christ’s incarnation or His crucifixion.

*Immutability* refers to the fact that God does not change in His attributes, in His nature, or in His intrinsic being. Since the coinherence of the three of the Divine Trinity is an aspect of God’s intrinsic being, the coinherence of the three of the Divine Trinity is eternal and immutable. Since that coinherence is immutable, then it was unchanged throughout the entire course of Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Herein lies the basic issue that Geisler and Rhodes seem unwilling to address. If they endorse coinherence but say that the Father was no longer coinhering with His Son as Christ was being crucified, then they are saying that a basic aspect of God’s being—His coinhering oneness—changed. Geisler and Rhodes say:

God was certainly present in His omnipresence, but God the Father is not God the Son, and the Father certainly was not involved in the experience of Christ's suffering on the cross.

This statement sidesteps the basic issue—whether the Father was coinhering with the Son during the crucifixion. God's omnipresence, which we also affirm, refers to His being everywhere simultaneously. However, God's omnipresence is particularly related to the physical universe, not to the relatedness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead. That relationship is one of coinherence. Geisler and Rhodes switch subjects from coinherence to omnipresence. The problem with this argument is that if we accept the Lord's word in the Gospel of John that He was in the Father and the Father in Him, but then claim the Father was at the crucifixion of Christ in His omnipresence only and was no longer coinhering with the Son, as Geisler and Rhodes seem to imply, then God changed in His essential being. This cannot be.

### ***Impassibility***

*Impassibility*, as it related to the crucifixion of Christ, is a term used by theologians to indicate that God cannot be caused to suffer by His creation.<sup>7</sup> As Geisler and Rhodes state, the Patripassian heresy taught that God the Father suffered at the cross. This teaching was rightly rejected by the early church as heresy. Based on the assertion of God's impassibility, the inability to cause God to suffer has come to be applied not just to the Father but to the entire Godhead, including the divine nature in the incarnate Son of God. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Calvinist theologian Charles Hodge wrote:

He was not a mere man, but God and man in one person. His obedience and sufferings were therefore the obedience and sufferings of a divine person. This does not imply, as the Patripassians in the ancient Church assumed, and as some writers in modern times assume, that the divine nature itself suffered. This idea is repudiated alike by the Latin, Lutheran, and Reformed churches.<sup>8</sup>

Geisler himself wrote:

Patripassianism means literally the "Father suffered." It arose in the early third century in the form of monarchianism, holding that God the Father suffered on the cross as well as Christ. However, the divine nature possessed by Christ did not suffer or die: God is impassible and, hence, incapable of undergoing suffering.<sup>9</sup>

The incarnate Christ has two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. What Geisler is saying is that Christ's divine nature was impassible and, as a result, did not suffer on the cross. Yet Geisler maintains that Witness Lee's teaching that the Father and the Son coinhere means that the Father must have suffered on the cross. However, if, as Geisler claims, the divine nature in Christ is impassible and did not suffer during His crucifixion, then the divine Father who coinheres with the Son likewise could not, by definition, have suffered on the cross. It is significant that Geisler and Rhodes cannot produce a single quote that even intimates that Witness Lee and the local churches teach that the Father suffered on the cross, yet they make such an accusation based on their own presumptive and faulty reasoning.

## **“Involvement” Is Not “Patripassianism”**

Furthermore, the leap Geisler and Rhodes make from “involvement” to “patripassianism” is unwarranted. Hebrews 9:14 states that on the cross Christ offered Himself as the unique sin offering to God through the eternal Spirit. To say, based on this verse, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all involved in Christ’s accomplishment of an eternal redemption (9:12) is not patripassianism; it is the divine revelation in the Holy Bible. Kerry Robichaux explained:

What shall we say then concerning the death of Christ? Here most believers blanch. Even the most minimally educated in theology understand the error of patripassianism, against which Tertullian took careful aim (*Against Praxeas* II, XIII, XXIX-XXX). We must be careful to avoid understanding that the Father (or the Spirit) was the subject of the suffering in the death of Christ, but we must be equally careful to avoid understanding that the Son was separate from the Father and the Spirit in the crucifixion. What we must maintain is that in the visible death of Christ the three of the Trinity operated so as to make manifest the distinct activity of the Son on the cross. It was indeed the Son whom we should identify as the subject of the death of the God-man (even though we confess that God Himself does not die!), but we must hold at the same time the realization that the Father and the Spirit were also in operation and that the operation of the three made the distinct action of the Son possible. The Scriptures bear this testimony as well. Paul tells us that in the death of Christ God was:

wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Col. 2:14-15)

There was more to the death of Christ than what met the eye. As the God-man hung on the cross dying for all humankind, God operated to forgive the offenses accumulated against us and to triumph over the fallen angelic host that opposed Him through humankind, and this operation issued in our redemption. We understand that redemption is of the Son, but in operation redemption is the activity of the entire Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit. The writer of Hebrews likewise recognizes the operation of the Trinity in the death of Christ: “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (9:14). To gain a redemption that was eternal in quality and effect (v. 12), the Son offered Himself through the eternal Spirit to the living God.<sup>10</sup>

By claiming no need to do further research, Geisler and Rhodes seek to avoid dealing with such a careful and balanced exposition of the truth concerning the Triune God and the crucifixion of Christ. Instead, Geisler and Rhodes make a sweeping and unwarranted generalization that “involvement” necessarily implies “patripassianism.” As Kerry Robichaux’s article makes clear, this presumption by Geisler and Rhodes is wrong. Thomas F. Torrance, an esteemed Scottish reformed theologian, also attested to the involvement of the entire Triune God in the work of redemption when he wrote:

‘God crucified’! That is the startling truth of the Gospel. Of course only if God is a Trinity, does this make sense, for it was not the Father or the Spirit who was crucified but the incarnate Son of God, crucified certainly in his differentiation from the Father and the Spirit, but nevertheless crucified in his unbroken oneness with the Father and the Spirit in being and activity. The whole Trinity is involved in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.<sup>11</sup>

## **Geisler and Rhodes’ Deficiency in Apprehending the Revelation in the Bible**

If Geisler and Rhodes truly believe that the Father was in no way involved in the Son’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, they are deplorably deficient in apprehending the revelation in the Bible concerning the Trinity and concerning the Person and work of Christ.

The coinherence of the three of the Divine Trinity is eternal and immutable. It did not cease when the Son of God became a man through incarnation, nor was it limited to the brief time when the Son lived on earth in His humanity. Although it was the Son of God who was the subject of the incarnation and who lived as a man, was crucified, and resurrected, the clear testimony of the Bible is that the entire Triune God was involved with every step of the process that God passed through in Christ. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35); thus, His source was the Holy Spirit, and His element was divine. According to John’s Gospel, the Son was never alone; the Father was always with Him (John 8:16, 29; 16:32). The Bible tells us that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily (Col. 2:9) and that He was God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) and was God with us (Matt. 1:23). It does not say that the fullness of one-third of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily, nor does it say that one-third of God was manifested in the flesh or that He was one-third of God with us.

As a man, the eternal Son of God, who is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, passed through human living, was crucified, entered into resurrection, and was exalted to be Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). In each of these stages of His existence in humanity, the Son of God was still coinhering with the Father and the Spirit; at no time was He separate from Them. To claim otherwise would be to claim that the essential nature of God changed. That would be a great heresy.

At His baptism the Spirit anointed Christ economically for the carrying out of His ministry (Matt. 3:16; Luke 4:18). This outward anointing does not mean that prior to this time the Spirit was not already coinhering with Him, just as the pouring out of the Spirit economically in Acts 2 to empower the apostles in their gospel service does not negate the fact that they had already received the Spirit essentially in John 20:22. Following Christ’s baptism, He lived, moved, and worked by the Spirit (Luke 4:1). When He cast out demons, He did so by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28). Furthermore, it was as the God-man that He declared that the Father was always with Him (John 8:29; 16:32) and that He and the Father mutually indwelt one another (14:10-11; 17:21). It was on the basis of His coinherence with the Father that He could say that since the disciples had seen Him, they had seen the Father (14:9) and that in His, the Son’s, speaking, the Father who abode in Him did His works (14:10).

In Christ's crucifixion God forsook Him economically (Matt. 27:45-46), but as the divine only begotten Son of God, He was still coinhering with the Father and the Spirit essentially. In this sense, what happened in the crucifixion of Christ is truly a mystery, the depths of which we cannot fully penetrate; we can only affirm what the Bible affirms. The Bible tells us that at the cross:

- God (not one-third of God) was in Christ reconciling us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19);
- God purchased the church through His own blood (Acts 20:28); and
- Christ offered Himself to God (the Father) as the unique sacrifice for sin through the eternal Spirit, giving His redemption eternal efficacy (Heb. 9:14, 12).

Concerning the Triune God's operation in accomplishing redemption, Witness Lee said:

An eternal redemption was accomplished by the blood of the Son of God through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:12, 14; 1 John 1:7). The blood He shed on the cross was not only the blood of Jesus the Man, but also of the Son of God. First John 1:7 tells us that the blood of Jesus the Son of God cleanses us from all sin. The blood of Jesus the Man qualifies His redemption for us as men. He was a genuine man who died for us and shed genuine blood for us. But the efficacy of His redemption has to be secured by His divinity and it has been secured for eternity by Him as the Son of God. Therefore, His redemption is the eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12) because this redemption was accomplished not only by the blood of Jesus the Man but also by the blood of Jesus the Son of God, which the Apostle Paul even called "God's own blood" (Acts 20:28). This is marvelous!<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, concerning Christ's resurrection, the Bible testifies that the entire Triune God was involved. It says:

- God (the Father) raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32; 10:40; Gal. 1:1);
- The Lord raised Himself up (John 2:19; Acts 10:41; 1 Thes. 4:14);
- The Spirit also was involved (Rom. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:18).

If we receive the Bible's testimony concerning the eternal coinherence of the Divine Trinity,<sup>13</sup> then we must affirm that even as Christ was passing through death and entered into resurrection, He was never separated from the Father and the Spirit essentially. Of this truth, Thomas F. Torrance wrote:

The Son and the Father were one and not divided, each dwelling in the other, even in that 'hour and power of darkness' when Jesus was smitten of God and afflicted and pierced for our transgressions.<sup>14</sup>

Geisler's theology seems to have no room for biblical statements that do not conform to what he presupposes as logical imperatives. However, the coinhering oneness of the Triune God transcends the ability of human logic to systematize. Perhaps it is this dogged reliance on human logic that causes Geisler and Rhodes to equivocate on the coinhering oneness of the Triune God and leads them to espouse a position that is contrary to the biblical record. While they profess to believe in one God, they seem to view the three of the Godhead as operating separately and

independently from one another. Thus, in their understanding it was the Son alone, in isolation from the Father and the Spirit, who came into humanity through incarnation and went to the cross to accomplish redemption. Furthermore, according to this view, it is the Spirit alone who indwells the believers.

It is true that the Son is the central figure and subject of the incarnation (John 1:14; Rom. 8:3) and that it was the Son who went to the cross to accomplish redemption (Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:7). It is also true that the Spirit plays the central role in the believers' indwelling (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16). But that is not the complete revelation of the Bible. Yes, the Father sent the Son, but in what way did He send the Son? He sent the Son through the divine conception by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), and in the Son's coming, the Father came with Him and even in Him (John 8:29; 14:10-11; 16:32). When Christ died on the cross, God was in Him reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19; cf. Rom. 5:10). Furthermore, when the Father sent the Spirit to indwell the believers, this was equivalent to the Son coming to indwell the believers (John 14:16-17, 20; cf. Rom. 8:9-11; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27) and the Father and the Son coming to make Their home in them (John 14:23). Not only so, in the Spirit's coming, we have come to know that the Son is in the Father, that we are in the Son, and that the Son is in us (John 14:20).<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Geisler and Rhodes' rejection of the need for more research to understand the teaching of Witness Lee and the local churches is itself disturbing. It is even more so when their "reasoning" is examined. Their logic is flawed and leads them into contradictions involving two basic attributes of God—His immutability and His coinherence—as well as with Geisler's own writings about God's impassibility. It also leads them to assert a false dilemma, that is, that one must either embrace patipassianism or reject the testimony of the Scriptures that all three of the Godhead participate in the work peculiarly ascribed to one of Them.

The root of the problem is that Geisler and Rhodes have an insufficient grasp of the divine revelation in the Bible concerning the coinhering and co-working of the three of the Divine Trinity in the incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. Further, they seek to impose their deficient understanding on others as a litmus test of orthodoxy. The crucial truth of the coinherence of the Divine Trinity is completely missing from their theological writings because it shatters their tidy, yet deficient, model of the Trinity. Their insistence on narrowly applying their own logical standards to the divine revelation in the Bible causes them to stumble on this point to the extent that they neither affirm nor deny coinherence. Yet, this vital truth concerning the relationship among the Three in the Godhead was so clearly spoken by the Lord Himself in John 14 and 17. Furthermore, Geisler and Rhodes not only refuse to definitively affirm the clear import of the Lord's words, but they also seek to prevent the Lord's people from entering into the precious implications of coinherence for the believers' experiential apprehension of and oneness with the Divine Trinity (John 14:20; 17:21, 23) by associating coinherence with a charge of heresy (cf. Matt. 23:13).

Many students of the Bible err because they have confidence in their own mental capacities to understand the divine revelation. As Watchman Nee wrote in 1927:



In Philippians 3:3 the apostle mentioned “confidence in the flesh.” “Confidence” in the original text is “belief.” He said that he himself did not “believe in the flesh.” The greatest work of the flesh is self-confidence! Since one thinks he is able, he does not need to trust in the Holy Spirit. Christ crucified is the wisdom of God, but a believer trusts in his own wisdom. He can read the Bible, preach the Bible, hear the Word, and believe in the Word; however, all of these are done through the power of his own mind, and he does not think that he absolutely must ask for the Holy Spirit to teach him. Many people believe they have received all the truth, even though what they have is something which they have received from others and from their own searching and what they have is more of man than of God! Furthermore, they do not have a teachable heart that is willing to wait on God and to let Him reveal His truth in His light.<sup>16</sup>

Pride in our education or abilities is a major obstacle to receiving the revelation contained in the Word of God. What is needed is a proper humility, as Witness Lee explains:

Being proud of your education will hinder you from knowing the Scriptures. No matter how educated you are, you must humbly tell the Lord that you are a teachable little child and that in your whole being you are utterly empty. You should be able to say, “Lord, although I have three Ph.D.’s, I know nothing. I am not filled up by my education. I am empty in my spirit, in my mind, and in my whole being.” Many highly educated professional people are filled to the brim. For this reason, even after they are saved, they are unable to receive anything from the Word. Their pride has usurped them.<sup>17</sup>

As the Lord’s children we should all learn to look to the Lord for His grace to be preserved in simplicity and purity toward Christ (2 Cor. 11:3) so that we may receive all that He speaks in His holy Word, unfiltered by preconceived theological or philosophical constructs.

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<sup>1</sup> Gretchen Passantino wrote:

My previous research (developed with and shared by Bob [Passantino], Walter [Martin], Elliot [Miller], and Cal [Beisner]) was inadequate to the extent that my conclusion was wrong. My current research (developed with and shared by Hank [Hanegraaff] and Elliot) is far deeper and wider than the previous, and is adequate to the extent that it has overturned my previous conclusion. No matter how many people sign the Open Letter and how many times the same inadequate sources are cited, the conclusion supported in this issue of the Journal prevails in the arena of truth. The local churches believe the essentials of orthodox Christian theology and should be embraced as brothers and sisters in Christ rather than opposed as believers in heresy. I pray other apologists will rescind their condemnation, if not reengage the issue to the same depth we have. We risk either being guilty of accusing a brother or of falsely embracing a heretic. What spiritual right do we have to refuse to revisit this issue? (Gretchen Passantino, *Christian Research Journal* 32:6, 2006, p. 50)

<sup>2</sup> The complete paragraph says:

One argument used by CRI is that their conclusions in favor of the LC should be believed because they have done better and more research on the topic (50). First of all, as we all know, *more* does not necessarily mean *better*. So, we can concentrate on what really matters. Gretchen Passantino Coburn claims she has done more research on this topic than most others and that she has been doing it for a longer time (50). However, it is clear that truth does not always reside with the persons who have read more or studied longer. Rather, it rests with those who can reason best from the evidence.

<sup>3</sup> Ron Kangas, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation of the Triune God according to the Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Witness Lee, *Elders’ Training, Book 3: The Way to Carry Out the Vision* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1985), pp. 70-71.

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., in Witness Lee, *The Clear Scriptural Revelation Concerning the Triune God* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, n.d.) and Witness Lee, *The Revelation of the Triune God According to the Pure Word of the Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: God, Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), p. 305, quoting from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.2, 19. Unlike Geisler, Calvin strongly affirmed the truth of coinherence in his commentary on John 17:3:

...then we perceive that he is wholly in the Father, and that the Father is wholly in him. In short he who separates Christ from the Divinity of the Father, does not yet acknowledge Him who is *the only true God*, but rather invents for himself a strange god. – John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XVIII: John 12-21; Acts 1-13*, William Pringle, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1848, 1981), p. 167

<sup>7</sup> This article does not attempt to evaluate the merits of the doctrine of God's impassibility. Rather it demonstrates the inconsistency between Geisler's espousal of the impassibility of the divine nature and his accusation that when the local churches teach that the three of the Godhead participate in one another's activities they are teaching patripassianism.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 483.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: God, Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), p. 296.

<sup>10</sup> Kerry S. Robichaux, "The Divine Trinity in the Divine Economy," *Affirmation & Critique IV:2*, April 1999, pp. 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> Witness Lee, *God's New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1986), pp. 49-50.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the basic truths concerning the biblical revelation of the Triune God, see Ed Marks, "A Biblical Overview of the Triune God," *Affirmation & Critique, I:1*, January 1996, pp. 23-31.

<sup>14</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the implications of coinherence for our Christian life, see "The Error of Denying That the 'Son' Is the 'Eternal Father' in Isaiah 9:6."

<sup>16</sup> Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman, vol. 12: The Spiritual Man (1)* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1992), p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> Witness Lee, *Life-study of Genesis* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), p. 1114.