# The Relationship of God to His Creation and the Holy Trinity

*Westminster Confession of Faith 2.2–3*

I. WCF 2.2: The Relationship of God to His Creation

A. WCF 2.2 insists that God has no source and is not at all dependent on his creation.

i. This is God's aseity: God is *a se*, from himself, self-existent (Ex 3:14; Jn 5:26).

ii. And God is independent—He does not need his creation for anything.

B. God has no source, but is himself the source of all things.

i. God is the fountain of all; Ps 36:9: "For with you is the fountain of life."

ii. But creation flows from God because he wills it, not as a necessary overflow.

C. And since God is the source of all things, God is sovereign over all things.

i. God is the King and we are the servants—he has the right to rule over us.

ii. God is distinct from creation and reigns over creation with absolute power.

D. In God's sovereignty, nothing is contingent or uncertain to God.

i. God's knowledge and sovereignty are independent of his creation.

ii. Many Christians claim: God wants us to be saved, but he gives us the choice.

1. But that would make God's knowledge & sovereignty depend on us.

2. That would make salvation uncertain & contingent to God.

E. God's sovereignty shouldn't bring fear; God relates to his creatures in a most holy way.

i. You know the saying, power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

ii. That's true with sinful humans, but not with a most holy God.

F. Therefore, God requires whatever worship, service, & obedience he pleases.

i. Everything that came before—God's aseity, independence, sovereignty, and holiness—leads to this conclusion: God can and has a right to command us.

II. WCF 2.3: The Holy Trinity

A. The Unity of the Trinity

i. There is abundant biblical proof of the unity of the Godhead (Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:6)

B. The Persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

i. When we consider God's Trinity, we can't forget God's unity, & vice versa.

ii. The Trinity is not something that God reveals to all people in nature.

iii. But Scripture is clear about the Trinity (Gen 1:26, 3:22, 11:7; Isa 48:16, 61:1; Matt 3:16; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Jn 10:30; 2 Cor 3:17).

C. The Inseparable Operations of the Trinity

i. Everything God does in history is a work of the Father, Son, & Spirit together.

ii. Everything is <u>from</u> the Father, in the Son, and through the Holy Spirit.

D. The Personal Properties of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
   i. This is what makes the persons <u>distinct</u> & how they relate to each other.
   ii. All 3 persons have the same unbegotten essence, but only the person of the Father has the property of being <u>unbegotten.</u>
   iii. Ps 2:8: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."
      1. What is it that makes the Father a father to the Son? He begets the Son.
   iv. Double procession & the *filioque* (see appendix).

E. Trinitarian Heresies
   i. <u>Separating</u> Father, Son, and Spirit: Tri-theism.
   ii. <u>Subordinating</u> Son & Spirit to Father: Monarchians, Arians, Spirit-fighters
   iii. <u>Subsuming</u> Son and Spirit to Father: Modalism & Patripassianism

F. The Testimony of the Early Church to the Trinity
   i. The creeds of the early church were written to correct these heresies (e.g., Nicene).
   ii. Even clearer than the Nicene Creed is the Athanasian Creed.

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 2, Sections 2–3

*Of God and of the Holy Trinity*

2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory, in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone fountain of all beings, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, he is pleased to require of them.

3. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Appendix on the Double Procession of the Spirit and the *Filioque*

I. WCF 2 says the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.
   A. This is a debate between the Western Church—Latin speaking, today Protestants & Roman Catholics—and Eastern Church—Greek speaking, today Eastern/ Greek Orthodox.
      i. The Western church teaches that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, but the Eastern church says Spirit proceeds only from Father.
      ii. In 589, at the council of Toledo, the Nicene Creed was edited to add "and the Son"—in Latin, *filioque*— so the Spirit "proceeds from the Father & the Son."
      iii. This addition was the primary theological reason for the Great Schism in 1054, when the Greek speaking Eastern church split from the Latin Western.
   B. What should we make of this debate and the doctrine of double procession?
      i. Basically, the *filioque* was the right doctrine through the wrong means.
      ii. There was a language barrier between East (Greek) and West (Latin).
      iii. And the main objection from the East is that the Creed shouldn't be edited.
      iv. Many Western theologians at least agree that the way the Creed was edited was unideal—by a relatively small regional council.
      v. The Creed can and has been edited—for example, the original Nicene didn't say anything about the Holy Spirit, that was added at Constantinople (381).
      vi. But Constantinople was received as an ecumenical council, with clear precedence and need for the addition to the Creed.
      vii. And *filioque* seems to change meaning when translated into Greek.
      viii. Further, plenty of Eastern theologians wrote things that would support the *filioque*, and plenty of Western theologians supported the Eastern view.
      ix. So, the division caused by the addition to the Creed was unnecessary, but was exacerbated by poor communication and political tensions.
   C. Scripture supports the view that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
      i. Scripture not only calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of the Father, but also of the Son.
         1. Rom 8:9: "Anyone who does not have <u>the Spirit of Christ</u>…"
         2. Gal 4:6: "God has sent the <u>Spirit of his Son</u> into our hearts."
      ii. But the only passage that explicitly mentions the Spirit proceeding supports the Eastern view: "the Spirit… proceeds from the Father" (Jn 15:26).
         1. At the same time, it's clear from Jn 15:26 that Jesus sends the Spirit.
         2. "The Helper… <u>whom I will send</u> to you from the Father" (15:26).
         3. Compare 14:26: "The Helper… <u>whom the Father will send</u> in my name."
         4. The Spirit is <u>sent</u> by Father and Son, but is that the same as proceeding?
         5. Sometimes it's assumed that they're the same, but that needs to be proved.
      iii. Ultimately, our theological conclusions from Scripture support saying that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.
         1. If the Spirit only proceeds from the Father, how does he relate to the Son?
         2. But our disagreement with the Eastern church on this shouldn't divide us.
         3. We're trying to say the same thing, so we shouldn't be too dogmatic.
         4. Eastern theologians usually want to distinguish, and some say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son (rather than from Father and Son)
         5. We should be able to agree w/ that, it fits the intention of our Nicene Creed.
         6. So, our version of the Nicene Creed is good doctrine with a messy history.