

Modern Modalism

It is a sad thing that many liberal theologians these days are Modalists. The basic idea is that there are not three distinct persons, but that the same person of “the Father” came to earth as the “Son”, and that, after Jesus ascended to heaven, the same person came again, as “the Holy Spirit”. In other words, the “persons” are just names for different roles that God takes on. What makes such modalism difficult to uncover is that liberals generally keep using the language of orthodox Christianity to cover their real views. Some well-respected recent “scholars” have simply interpreted the Trinity as the result of a human tendency to think in threes! Some have blandly asserted that the doctrine of the Trinity was a mistaken result of the controversies of the first centuries. However, anyone who knows the history of the trinitarian controversy know how it was essentially a serious struggle to come to terms with the Scriptural passages that speak of the nature and the relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Bible is clear and emphatic on the distinctness of the three persons of the Godhead. The Gospels report of the baptism of Jesus would become ludicrous, if the same person were really saying, about himself, *“This is my dear Son, with whom I am well pleased”*, and if, when Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and coming upon Him He was really seeing Himself descending upon Himself! Similarly, such a view makes the Father's sending His Son into the world into a “sending” of Himself! A Modalist accuses Jesus of deception when He speaks about the Holy Spirit as other than He (Joh 14: 16). Even though the word in Greek for “spirit” is neuter, when Jesus refers to Him, He uses a masculine pronoun in John 14:26, not, what might otherwise have been expected, a neuter pronoun in grammatical agreement. Then it was also the same person of the Father who suffered for us on the cross! Much more could be said along these lines.

We need to beware of deceptive language that tries to play down the distinctness of the three persons by talking about a unity of life, truth, and love in God, instead.