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CONTENTS

TMSJ 33/1 (Spring 2022) 1–3

EDITORIAL

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This issue of The Master's Seminary Journal has been published nearly 1,700 years after the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325. The articulations of Nicaea laid the foundation for Trinitarian orthodoxy throughout the Christian Church. Given this long-established Trinitarian confession, the reader may wonder whether and why an academic publication on Trinitarian issues remains necessary. After all, the Church's articulation of Trinitarian theology remained faithful from fourth-century Nicaea to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed Confessionalism, though certainly not without significant attacks. Does contemporary evangelicalism really need to relitigate this foundational, well-defined doctrine of the Trinity?

And at this moment, no less? Would it not be better for the academy to focus its ink on matters less theoretical and more immediately "practical"—especially issues of cultural and social relevance? While there is certainly a place—even a need—for confronting the culture, the past 150 years have demonstrated that when the Church devotes her attention to fighting the wars of the culture, she often strays from the narrow path of doctrinal precision. Sadly, this has been the case with the doctrine of the Trinity. In the most faithful moments of the Church, however, pressing societal issues were never an excuse for doctrinal apathy, certainly not regarding the Trinity—Christianity's most fundamental theological confession. In fact, the Council of Nicaea itself was convened in the eye of tumultuous political happenings. The Roman world had just concluded a twelve-year civil war at the Battle of Adrianople. Yet nine months later, the bishops met at Nicaea to draft the Nicaean Creed. The Church did not postpone deliberation on the Trinity until peacetime; the matter was hotly debated throughout the Roman Civil War. One would think they could have convened to address more practical matters, like helping to heal a nation torn asunder by a vicious civil war. But even amidst famine, war, and widespread mortality, the Church found Trinitarian orthodoxy to be of utmost relevance.

The same perspective continued in Christendom during the Twelve Years' Truce (a brief ceasefire) of the Eighty Years' War between the Netherlands and Spain, from AD 1609 to 1621. During that time, the Reformed churches deemed it necessary to convene the Synod of Dort to combat Arminianism's challenge to orthodoxy (AD

1618–1619). Similarly, during the English Civil War, the Puritans drafted the Westminster Confession of Faith (AD 1643). During years of great economic, political, and social turmoil, John Owen fought ceaselessly against the Socinians (followers of Lelio Sozzini, who denied the doctrine of the Trinity altogether).

Today, the contemporary Church in America operates in relative peace. Yet there seems to be ceaseless pressure—both academically and within individual congregations—to wrestle almost exclusively with social issues: COVID-19 and healthcare, Critical Race Theory and the social justice movement, LGBTQ and gender identity issues, and a host of others. While the Church has the answers to each of those issues (and should provide them), she seems too willing to address those to the neglect of sound doctrine. Thus, for the past century or so, evangelicalism has defined itself more by social issues than doctrinal fidelity, and for that imprudence we are paying far too great a price. The Church is losing what makes it Christian, in the historic sense. In the midst of cultural chaos, the Church's focus should never waver from the core truths of the Trinity. From within or without, she must be resilient.

Such resilience will never be accomplished by doctrinal minimalism. One of the more sound, detailed, recent evangelical doctrinal statements confesses concerning the Trinity, "The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being." While this statement is true so far as it goes, it lacks the precision that the creedal language has passed down to us: the distinction of substance and subsistence, the confession of eternal generation and eternal procession, the distinction between being *begotten* and *made*. One longs for the precision of the Nicene Creed, written to combat the heresy of Arianism, which confesses, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, [God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father."

Contemporary doctrinal statements confess that "Christ is the eternal Son of God." True enough, but more is necessary. To protect against the concept of mixture or confusion of Persons, the Athanasian Creed says, "We worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal."

An even clearer statement is found in the Creed of Chalcedon which states that we worship "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ." In this brief paragraph, Chalcedon condemned Adoptionism (which denied Christ's true deity), Docetic Gnosticism (which denied Christ's true humanity), Arianism (which denied Christ's full deity), Apollinarianism (which denied Christ's full humanity), Nestorianism (which divided Christ's person into two), and monophysitism (which collapsed Christ's two natures into one).

In contrast to such robust clarity, in the name of simplicity and accessibility, contemporary evangelical leaders have favored minimalistic doctrinal statements, intending for such simplicity to edify laymen. Interestingly enough, however, the older creeds and confessions were written to laymen. So, when the modern Church starts removing guardrails that they see as overly scrupulous, speculative, or verbose, they would first do well to consider why those guard rails were there in the first place.

The Belgic Confession (AD 1561) affirms the Ecumenical Creeds in Article 9 when it says, "This doctrine of the holy Trinity has always been maintained in the true church, from the time of the apostles until the present, against Jews, Muslims, and certain false Christians and heretics, such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and others like them, who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers. And so, in this matter we willingly accept the three ecumenical creeds—the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian—as well as what the ancient fathers decided in agreement with them." In these deep, doctrinal convictions, specific errors were exposed rather than concealed.

Today, many errors are tolerated in the name of ecumenical jurisprudence and collegiality. This philosophy functions as a concealed dagger against orthodoxy, an infectious wound that contaminates the entire body and blinds it to the seriousness of the matter. As a result, the Church must endure errant teaching on Trinitarian matters, like defining the Son by His eternal submission to the Father and claiming that there is no Trinity without authority and submission. However, as one of my colleagues recently remarked, historic orthodoxy teaches us that the Persons of the Trinity are not merely different roles God plays. The Persons are who God *is*, not merely what God *does*. So, the Son is not the Son because of what He does (whether submission or anything else); the Son does what He does because He is the Son. Being grounds action, not vice versa. Until recently, the website of an influential Southern Baptist Church confessed the heresy of partialism, that the persons of the Trinity "are co-equal parts of one God." Rejection of classical Christology has led some to confess that Jesus emptied Himself of His divine attributes in the incarnation, or gave up all His power at the cross. All of these errors fly under the banner of "evangelicalism." Doctrines like Eternal Functional Subordination, Kenotic Theology, Incarnational Sonship, and Social Trinitarianism (to name just a few) are pervasive. If evangelicalism turns a blind eye to these contemporary aberrations—even in the name of charity—it engages in an act of self-sabotage.

If contemporary evangelicals are willing to tolerate heterodox Trinitarianism, they must ask themselves whether they have abandoned Jude's charge to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

To that end, this issue of The Master's Seminary Journal is dedicated to errors related to the Trinity as found in modern Evangelicalism.

Soli Deo Gloria,

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TMSJ 33/1 (Spring 2022) 5–19

THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION AND THE ORDO SALUTIS

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In this article Dr. Fesko brings rich historical insight into the necessity for the pactum salutis and its relationship to the ordo salutis. This article retrieves the historical consensus that intra-trinitarian processions, missions, and ordo salutis are all interrelated. Drawing from the WCF and Vos, he proves that to neglect, minimize, or disregard any one of these has crushing ramifications. While establishing the necessity of these doctrines and answering objections, Fesko demonstrates a precision in Trinitarian thought which helps establish long-lost guard rails that need to be regained by evangelicalism.

* * * * *

The *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) was once common and unquestioned within the Reformed tradition but recently it has come under criticism from a wide-range of theologians and scholars.[1] Debate over the legitimacy of the *ordo* typically centers upon the exegesis of one particular text, Romans 8:28–30, the apostle Paul's famous golden chain of salvation. A common Reformed order of salvation is as follows: election, effectual calling, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.[2] Is the application of redemption accomplished in one single act where the various facets do not have any particular order, or is there a logical (not chronological or temporal) and, in some sense, causal sequence present? Historic iterations of the *ordo* maintain that there is a logical sequence between its various elements. This is evident from Paul's use of a cause-and-effect argument in Romans 8:28–30, a *sorites*. But as important as the proper exegesis of Romans 8:28–30 is, the

[1] For a treatment of the history, criticism, and exegetical and theological defense of the *ordo salutis* see J. V. Fesko, "Romans 8:29–30 and the Question of the *Ordo Salutis*," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8 (2014): 35–60.

[2] Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (1932–1936; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 415–22.

ordo does not rest upon this lone text. We must take a large step back from this debate and ask, How does the *pactum salutis* (the covenant of redemption) relate to the question and viability of the *ordo salutis*? The covenant of redemption is the eternal intra-trinitarian agreement among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to appoint the Son as mediator and covenant surety, and to create the plan of salvation.[3]

At first glance, some might think that the two doctrines have no connection. But even though few make the connection, some theologians have recognized the relationship between Christ's appointment as covenant surety within the covenant of redemption and the *ordo salutis*. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) connects the ontology of the trinity and redemption, though he does not discuss it in the specific terms of the *pactum* or *ordo salutis*. Aquinas argues that the trinitarian processions determine the nature and manner by which fallen humanity returns to God.[4] Karl Rahner (1904–84) echoes this idea to a certain extent: "Each one of the three divine persons communicates himself to man in gratuitous grace in his own personal particularity and diversity. This trinitarian communication is the ontological ground of man's life of grace and eventually of the direct vision of the divine persons in eternity."[5] Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) has made similar observations about the connections between the intra-trinitarian processions and the *ordo*. In a nutshell, Vos argues that the intra-trinitarian processions and missions shape the *ordo salutis*. Within the framework of the *pactum*, Vos maintains the priority of the forensic over the transformative aspects of redemption based upon Christ's foundational appointment as covenant surety. The order of the trinitarian processions and missions determine the order of salvation.

If the *pactum-ordo* connection is viable, and even necessary, we must first explore the relationship between the *pactum* and the mission of the Holy Spirit. Hence, this essay first examines the Spirit's connections to and role within the *pactum salutis*. Although the Son alone is covenant surety, he is not alone in his work. Redemption is an act of the triune God—the Father sends the Son, the Son executes his mission as covenant surety, and the Father and the Son send the Spirit to apply the Son's work to the elect.[6] The Son's work as surety, however, is pneumatically charged—Christ executes his mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is integral to the Son's work as covenant surety. Second, the essay examines the Spirit's mission in connection with the *pactum*. The covenant of redemption entails the appointment of the covenant surety as well as the Spirit's mission to apply the Surety's work to the elect. The Spirit, therefore, both applies the work of Christ to the elect in terms of the imputation of his righteousness, and is also the agent of sanctification. The *pactum* has both legal-forensic and transformative blessings in

[3] For explanation of the covenant of redemption, see J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2016). This essay is based upon material presented in this volume but has been abbreviated and updated.

[4] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentum in Lib. I Sententiarum,* 1:14:2:2, in *Doctoris Angelic divi Thomae Aquinatis: Opera Omnia*, vol. 7 (Paris: Ludovicus Vives, 1871), 170–71; cf. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 362–63, 375–76. My thanks to Brian Hecker for reminding me of these passages.

[5] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 2005), 34–35.

[6] On the inseparable operations, see Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

view. The triune God planned both the justification and sanctification of the Son's bride. Third, the essay examines the position of Vos to show how he explains how the trinitarian processions and missions determine the *ordo salutis*. Specifically, this essay defends the idea that the *pactum salutis* provides the original context to recognize the trinitarian character of redemption, the foundation of the *ordo salutis*, and the relationship between the forensic and transformative aspects of redemption. In this particular case, the *pactum salutis* necessitates the logical priority of the forensic to the transformative elements of redemption. The essay then addresses two possible objections to the idea that the forensic takes priority over the transformative. Last, the essay concludes with a few summary observations.

The Pactum Salutis and the Holy Spirit

The role of the Holy Spirit in the *pactum salutis* originates in eternity, but we find hints of his function within the historical unfolding drama of redemption. In particular, it is important to note the pneumatological character of the Son's mission so that we continue to recognize the fully trinitarian character of his appointment as covenant surety. Therefore, we first survey the pneumatic nature of Christ's mission and then turn to explore the Spirit's unique mission.

Pneumatic Christology

The pneumatic character of the Messiah's mission first unfolds in the shadow lands of the Old Testament in a number of passages where various figures have the Spirit descend or "rush" upon them. Joshua was "full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deut. 34:9; cf. Num. 27:18; Isa. 11:2), and the Spirit fell upon a number of the judges and empowered them to carry out their missions (Jdg. 3:10; 11:29). The Spirit of Yahweh rushed upon Samson and empowered him to strike down thirty men from Ashkelon (Jdg. 14:19). The Spirit of God similarly rushed upon Saul and inspired him to prophesy (1 Sam. 10:10). The Spirit rushed upon David when Samuel anointed him king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13). At one level, the Spirit endowed these different Old Testament individuals to carry out various tasks. The Spirit rushed upon Saul as he had rested on other Old Testament savior-judges, such as Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. Saul prophesied in his anointed state, and the Spirit also equipped him for holy war (1 Sam. 10:7; 11:1–11).[7] But there is more to the Spirit's activity with these Old Testament figures. The Spirit endowed individuals with pneumatic gifts to foreshadow the pinnacle of his work, the anointing of the Messiah. Unlike his fallible and flawed typical predecessors, Christ would offer his perfect loving obedience in the power of the Holy Spirit.[8]

The Spirit of Yahweh would rest upon the Messiah, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and especially the "fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:2). Wisdom and understanding are governmental attributes necessary for righteous rule (Deut. 1:13; 1 Kings 3:9). Counsel and might are martial characteristics

[7] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 40–41; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC, vol. 10 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 107.

[8] Wright, *Holy Spirit*, 92–93.

needed to execute wise action. Knowledge and a fear of the Lord are necessary to apply truth to life.[9] These three couplets of traits that come from Yahweh's Spirit are the standard qualities of a righteous king (cf. Isa. 10:13; 2 Sam. 14:17; 1 Kgs 3:5–6).[10] These attributes also ensured that the Servant would be marked by ethical purity.[11] In this vein, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Psa. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10), a fountain of life (Prov. 14:26–27), and the motivating factor behind obedience, *hesed* (Prov. 16:6; Exod. 20:20), the reward for which is "riches and honor and life" (Prov. 22:4; cf. 19:23; 3:16; 15:33; 18:12; 1 Kings 3:12–14).[12] The Spirit-anointed Servant would possess the fear of Yahweh. Isaiah invokes the tetragrammaton, the covenant name of God, which has connections to God's law (Exod. 3:14).[13] The Servant's anointing with the Spirit means that he would, with all certainty, yield his life in loving obedience to the will of his heavenly Father.

The Spirit's presence upon and with the Messiah is by design within the framework of the *pactum salutis*. The prophet reveals that Yahweh's "chosen," the one in whom Yahweh delighted, would have the Spirit rest upon him and through him would "bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa. 42:1). The *pactum* is the context in which Christ's election as covenant surety takes place, but it is also the realm where the Spirit's role in support of the Son's mission finds its genesis. These Isaianic texts reveal that the Father promised to equip the Son with the necessary pneumatic gifts to carry out his mission as covenant surety. The Spirit empowered the Son's mission to herald the gospel, and through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to launch the eschatological exodus out from under the bondage of Satan, sin, and death (Isa. 61:1). In fact, Christ read this very passage from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor," and told the gathered people that this prophecy had been fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:18–21).[14] That Christ read this passage and claimed to fulfill it meant he was conscious of his messianic office, mission, and pneumatic anointing.[15]

Further confirmation of the Spirit's role in the Son's mission appears in numerous places throughout the New Testament. From the very outset, the Spirit brings about the incarnation of Christ (Matt. 1:18–20; Luke 1:35). Christ was anointed with the Spirit from on high. In imagery evocative of the initial creation and Israel's own baptism at the Red Sea, Christ emerged from the waters of his baptism and, in the language of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, the Father declared his approbation: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).[16]

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[9] J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 122.

[10] John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah*, WBC, 2 vols. (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 1:171.

[11] John C. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 1:279–80; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 102–103.

[12] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 1:202–203; cf. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:383.

[13] Tremper Longman, *Proverbs*, BCOTWS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 101.

[14] David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 70–84.

[15] Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1953), 114.

[16] G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 14.

The Spirit descended like a dove and rested upon him (Matt. 3:16). Then, like Israel of old, who was led by the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, the Spirit led Christ into the wilderness (Matt. 4:1; cf. Psa. 143:10; Isa. 63; Hag. 2:5). Where Israel failed her probation wandering in the wilderness, Jesus the true Israel of God succeeded. He offered Spirit-empowered obedience to his heavenly Father in accord with the terms of the *pactum*.[17] Following the opening of Christ's ministry, the Spirit's work in support of his mission appears in several key places. Christ wields the Spirit to cast out demons (Matt. 12:28). According to the author of Hebrews, Jesus offered himself up on the cross "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14).[18] Hebrews connects Christ's sacrificial offering to Isaiah's Spirit-anointed Servant, the suffering Servant who bears the sins and justifies the many (Isa. 53).[19] And Christ was raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 1:4; 8:11), which constituted his justification (1 Tim. 3:16).[20]

The Son, therefore, carries out his mission as covenant surety in the power of the Spirit.[21] In fact, the pneumatic nature of Christ's work is embedded in a number of Reformed confessions and catechisms.[22] For example, question 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) states that the Spirit's work of the incarnation ensured that original sin did not infect Christ. Heidelberg Catechism q. 36 acknowledges that God ordained Christ to be the chief prophet and teacher and, as such, was anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Westminster Confession (1647) teaches that the Spirit-wrought incarnation brought about the hypostatic union of the two distinct yet inseparable natures, the divinity and the humanity.[23]

According to the Westminster Standards, Christ did no work in his earthly ministry apart from the anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit.[24] To this end the Westminster Confession states:

> The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. (WCF VIII.iii)

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[17] On these themes see Brandon D. Crowe, *The Obedient Son: Deuteronomy and Christology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Berlin: De Grutyer, 2012).

[18] William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols., WBC (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 2:240.

[19] F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 205; David Coffey, "The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 193–229, here 209–11.

[20] Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 477.

[21] Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1900; Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1995), 85–120; and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 35–56.

[22] See Yuzo Adhinarta, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Major Reformed Confessions and Catechisms of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2012), 56–66.

[23] WCF VIII.ii; cf. WLC q. 37; WSC q. 22. All quotations of confessions and catechisms come from Jaroslav Pelkian and Valerie Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 4 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[24] O. Palmer Robertson, "The Holy Spirit and the Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, vol. 1, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2003), 57–100, esp. 78–79.

Echoing Hebrews 9:14, the Confession also states: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him" (WCF VIII.v). Through his anointing, the Spirit bathes the entire ministry of Christ.[25]

The Spirit's Mission

Once the Son completed his Spirit-empowered work, his earthly ministry was complete. His resurrection and ascension signaled the next phase of the execution of the *pactum* with the outpouring of the Spirit, the power of the age to come (Heb. 6:5). As with the first creation where the Son and Spirit acted as the hands of God, Christ and the Spirit inaugurated the new creation (cf. Gen. 1:2; John 1:1–3, 9; Col. 1:16).[26] A number of Old Testament texts prophesy of a future outpouring of the Spirit (e.g., Isa 44:3; Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36:36–37; 37:14; 39:39). Within the context of Isaiah's prophecy, the Spirit-anointed servant of Yahweh (Isa. 42:1) brings forth justice to the nations, and does so through his work as covenant surety. The Father would first anoint the Son, who would then in turn anoint the elect with the Spirit. This Christ-Spirit connection appears quite prominently in several key passages in the New Testament.

Paul succinctly spells out the nexus between the relative missions of the Son and the Spirit: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:13–14; cf. Isa. 44:3). Here Paul presents a link between righteousness that comes by faith and the gift of the Spirit.[27] The last Adam offers his righteous obedience to the Father's will, which thereby unleashes the gift of the Spirit.[28] The Spirit both grants believers a justifying faith that looks extraspectively to Christ, and he also sanctifies them. In sanctification, the Spirit transforms and conforms the elect to the image of Christ. A similar link appears in Paul's letter to Rome: "The Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10b). In

[25] See, e.g., Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992–1997), XIII.xii.1–8; Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1677), 173–74, 226–29; Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of Various Passages of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (1861–1866; Eureka: Tanski Publications, 1996), II:399–406; idem, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, I.iii (4:10–13); John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, or, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1853; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 162–83. For a more recent treatment of this idea, see Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 169–208.

[26] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, preface, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (1885; repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 463.

[27] A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2014), 334; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 216.

[28] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 218–19.

other words, because of Christ's work as covenant surety, anyone united to him receives life through the Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:19–21).[29]

Christ's curse-bearing suffering and crucifixion are not the sole triggers for the outpouring of the Spirit. The promise of the eschaton stood before Adam in the garden prior to the entrance of sin and need for salvation.[30] Hence, pneumatically conditioned existence in the eschaton was supposed to be the fruit and effects of the first Adam's Spirit-empowered obedience: "But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46). Adam's state in the garden was preparatory for a heavenly one.[31] And Paul's contrast between the spiritual (πνευματικὸν) and natural (ψυχικόν) bodies extends to the two world-orders connected with the first and last Adams.[32] With the entrance of sin into the world, the last Adam both had to offer his loving obedience to his Father's will in order to usher in the eschaton, and had to deal with making satisfaction for sin given its presence in the world. Hence, Christ had to fulfill the requirements of the law first, by loving his Father with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then suffer the curse of the law in order to unleash the outpouring of the Spirit.[33] In this manner he becomes a life-giving Spirit (πνεῦμα ζῳοποιοῦν) (1 Cor. 15:45).[34]

Important to note at this juncture, then, is that justification and glorification are not exclusively soteriological realities. Rather, they are first and foremost eschatological. If the first Adam in his protological probation had succeeded, he would have been justified, declared righteous, and then glorified. That is, he would have permanently and indefectibly entered the pneumatic eternal Sabbath-rest of Yahweh. Paul's maxim is key: first the natural and then the spiritual. God promised Adam that he would be glorified—the Spirit would transform Adam's natural body into a spiritual body. God gave Adam this promise prior to the entrance of sin and death. In terms of the traditional *ordo salutis*, Adam's justification would have opened the way to a pneumatic eschatological existence—glorification. In a sin-fallen world, however, justification and glorification now operate in the context of the fall and the tension between the two ages, this present evil age and the age to come. Or, in biblical-theological terminology, justification and glorification operate in the midst of the already but not-yet. Sinners receive the already declaration of their eschatological status in their justification, but the Spirit does not immediately glorify

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[29] Douglas Moo, *Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 492; Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 551–52; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 491; cf. NIV; RSV; NAS; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (1835; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 259–60.

[30] E.g., Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 325 n. 1.

[31] Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (1857; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 351.

[32] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the role of the heavenly dimension in Paul's thought with special reference to his eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 44.

[33] Kuyper, *Holy Spirit*, 112–13.

[34] Geerhardus Vos, "Paul's Eschatological Concept of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 107–108; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 43–45; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 477.

sinners, as he would have in a successful adamic probation.[35] Rather, pneumatic eschatological life progresses in terms of our sanctification—the gradual transformation of the justified sinner unto glorification.

In the midst of the sin-fallen world, one goal of Christ's earthly ministry was once again to open the gates to the eschaton, which had been closed due to Adam's sin. Christ baptized the creation in the Spirit, which gave birth to the new heavens and earth. John the Baptist recognized this from the outset: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:11).[36] Throughout Christ's earthly ministry the disciples later reflected upon the fact that their theological ignorance was due, in part, to the Spirit's relative absence: "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). The implication from John's statement is that the Spirit's presence was predicated upon the completion of Christ's work—his obedience and suffering.[37] But the outpouring of the Spirit was not accomplished through an inanimate mechanism, like a vending machine that produces a candy bar when the proper amount of currency is inserted. Rather, the Spirit would be sent, which echoes the *pactum*-originated sending of Christ. At several points Christ instructed his disciples that the Father would send the Spirit: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Here Christ states that the Father would send the Spirit, but he later indicates that he too would send him: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26).

As with the sending of the Son, the intra-trinitarian processions determine the order of their *pactum*-framed missions. The Father eternally generates the Son, hence the Son's mission precedes the Spirit's mission. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, therefore, the Spirit's mission follows the Son's mission. The Spirit's mission could not precede the Son's mission. Moreover, the order of the missions is not simply a function of the divine will. That is, the trinity could not have merely decided that the Father or Spirit would have become incarnate and executed the office of covenant surety. The work of redemption and, consequently, the relative order of the Son's and Spirit's missions rests upon their intra-trinitarian processions. This conclusion is sound given that the Father and Son send the Spirit. As with the Father's sending of the Son, the fact that one is sent means that someone else sends him. A person cannot send himself. The decisions to send and the voluntary agreement to go originate, as I have argued, in the *pactum salutis*. The Spirit was no mere bystander, nor simply a secretary to witness and record the covenantal agreement between the

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[35] *Pace* G. K. Beale, "The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology," in *Eschatology in Bible and Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Mark W. Elliott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 32–34; idem, *Biblical Theology*, 497–526; cf. WCF XI.i; WLC qq. 70–71, 97.

[36] James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970), 38–54.

[37] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 329.

Father and Son.[38] Rather, the Spirit was a full participant in the *pactum salutis*. The Father promised the Son to equip him with the Spirit, and the Spirit agreed to undergird the Son's mission. And the Father and the Son agreed to send the Spirit, and the Spirit agreed to go. But the trinitarian missions were not solely the product of the intra-trinitarian agreement, but rather a covenant made in accordance with the trinitarian processions. The ontology of the trinity determines the shape of the freely willed ensuing covenantal missions and subsequent application of redemption.[39]

As a result of the intra-trinitarian processions, the Son's mission precedes the Spirit's mission, which is evident by the Spirit's relative absence until his outpouring at Pentecost. The Spirit was not totally absent prior to his outpouring at Pentecost, but his presence was geared towards preparing the way for the Son's mission. Once the Son accomplished his mission, the Spirit's mission formally began. In his post-resurrection activity, Christ instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the "promise of the Father," Christ's baptizing them in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). Then at Pentecost, Peter invoked Joel's (2:28–32) end-time prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit as the explanation for the wonders and signs that the people witnessed (Acts 2:17–21). Peter draws attention to the complex of texts surrounding the *pactum salutis*:

> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right had until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:33–36)

These statements warrant several observations. First, Peter explains that the Son has been "exalted at the right hand of God," and he invokes Psalm 110:1, which is a key text for the *pactum salutis*. Psalm 110 reveals the pre-temporal oath, the Father's binding covenantal promise to his Son, to appoint him to the priestly line of Melchizedek (Psa. 110:4; cf. 2 Kgs. 11:4; Ezek. 16:59; 17:3, 16, 18–19; Hos. 10:4; Psa. 132:11; 89:3–4). Second, Peter identifies the Son as "Lord and Christ," which invokes connections to Psalm 2:7, another key *pactum* text. The Christ, the Lord's anointed, was now installed on Zion, God's holy hill, by virtue of his accomplished obedience, suffering, and resurrection (cf. Pss. 1–2; Acts 4:23–28).[40] Third, the Father promised he would anoint his Son with the Spirit and that, upon the accomplishment of his work as surety, the Son would in turn pour out the Spirit and baptize the creation to produce the new heavens and earth.[41] The center piece of the

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[38] *Pace* Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (1861–1866; Eureka: Tanski Publications, 1996), I.vii (5:23); idem, *Work of the Holy Ghost*, IX.iii (6:419).

[39] The covenant of redemption in no way supports or suggests the eternal subordination or the eternal functional subordination of the Son. In defense of the Son's complete and full ontological equality with the Father, see Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 213–60.

[40] Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2013), 140–41. For how these various texts have been employed by advocates of the *pactum salutis*, see J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: V&R, 2015).

[41] Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 102–103.

new creation, would be the eternal dwelling place of the triune God, the living stones, the elect from every tribe, tongue, and nation, those who had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).[42]

The Pactum and the Ordo Salutis

Given the broad contours of what has been outlined above, some theologians have observed the connection between the *pactum salutis* and the *ordo salutis*, or more generally the nexus between the processions, missions, and nature of redemption. As noted above, Vos, has drawn these connections. This section, therefore, surveys Vos's position on the connections between the *pactum* and *ordo*.

In his essay on the history of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant, Vos offers one of the few historical surveys of the *pactum salutis*, however brief, in addition to his own dogmatic observations about the doctrine. Vos contends that if God's work of salvation has a covenantal root, i.e., the *pactum salutis*, then the entire economy of redemption must unfold in a covenantal manner. From the very beginning God determined to give his love and faithfulness as a man to his friend, and thus he covenantally committed himself to the restoration of the violated faithfulness. The covenant of grace, therefore, is the historical execution of the eternal *pactum salutis*: "By virtue of His official appointment, His being anointed as Mediator in the covenant of redemption, the Son rules throughout the ages in the house of grace, gathers unto Himself a church through Word and Spirit, and lays claim on all those who desire to live according to His ordinances."[43] According to Vos, the Son became covenant surety so that the elect could become parties to the covenant of grace and behave in a covenantally faithful manner. There is no imputation of Christ's merit, argues Vos, apart from re-creation in God's image.[44] But for Vos, the *pactum* provides the structure and foundation for two realities: (1) the covenant of grace and (2) the *ordo salutis*.[45]

Vos illustrates his point by comparing Reformed and Lutheran soteriologies, though his analysis is problematic at points on historical-theological grounds given his exclusive reliance upon secondary sources.[46] Vos nevertheless offers a valid observation regarding some principle differences between Lutheran and Reformed conceptions of salvation.[47] Unlike the Lutherans, the Reformed contend that the covenant of grace presupposes the electing grace of God, that is, elements of the *pactum salutis*.[48] Vos draws the strongest connections between the *ordo* and *pactum* in the priority he assigns to forensic elements of redemption. Vos argues that Paul consistently subordinated the mystical aspect of the believer's relationship to Christ to the forensic aspect:

> Paul's mind was to such an extent forensically oriented that he regarded the entire complex of subjective spiritual changes that take place in the believer and

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[42] Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 559–650.

[43] Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History*, 252.

[44] Vos, "Covenant," 253.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Cf. J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517–1700)* (Göttingen: V&R, 2012), 124–26.

[47] Vos, "Covenant," 256–58, also 257 n. 10.

[48] Vos, "Covenant," 258.

> of subjective spiritual blessings enjoyed by the believer as the direct outcome of the forensic work of Christ applied in justification. The mystical is based on the forensic, not the forensic on the mystical.[49]

In his *Compendium of Systematic Theology*, Vos explains the relationship between the forensic and transformative in the following manner: "We must distinguish between the judicial acts of God and the regenerational acts of God."[50] Vos further stipulates: "The justifying acts serve as the foundation upon which the regenerational acts of God rest. Although (for instance) justification follows the new birth in time, nevertheless, the former is the foundation of the latter."[51] Vos came to these conclusions based upon his exegesis of Paul's corpus but also because of his understanding of the *pactum salutis*.

Vos employed the Reformed Orthodox distinction between active and passive justification.[52] Active justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness in the *pactum salutis*, whereas passive justification is the subjective reception of Christ's imputed righteousness. In the context of the pre-temporal *pactum*, active justification of the elect is the ground for the subjective and transformative changes that occur in the *applicatio salutis* (application of salvation) in history within the temporal execution of the covenant of grace. One need not embrace the active-passive justification distinction that Vos maintains. The common distinction between the decree and its execution preserves the same point that the active-passive distinction entails without potentially confusing historical acts (justification) with the decree. The point is that Christ's appointment and mission as covenant surety takes logical priority over the Spirit's mission as the one who applies his legal-forensic work through mystical union with Christ. Or in terms of the *ordo salutis*, justification takes logical priority over sanctification. The Son's procession and mission logically and temporally precedes the procession and mission of the Spirit, hence the *ordo salutis* reflects this order, whether in the intra-trinitarian processions or the *pactum*-framed missions.

Potential Objections

Priority

At this point, some object to the idea that the mystical aspects of salvation are logically subordinated to the forensic. If effectual calling, for example, precedes

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[49] Geerhardus Vos, "The Alleged Legalism in Paul's Doctrine of Justification," in *Redemptive History*, 384.

[50] Geerhardus Vos, *Systematische Theologie: Compendium* (Grand Rapids: 1900), 132: "Welke onderscheiding moeten we op de trappen der heilsorde toepassen? . . . Tusschen de rechterlijke daden Gods en de herscheppende daden Gods." I am grateful to my former colleague, Derk Bergsma, who translated this portion of Vos's *Compendium* for me.

[51] Vos, *Systematische Theologie*, 133: "De rechterlijke daden sijn de grond waarop de herscheppende daden berusten. Al volgt b.v. de Rechtvaardigmaking in tijd op de wadergeboorte, toch is sij de rechtsgrond voor den laatste."

[52] Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5 vols., ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., et al. (2014–2016), 4:150–53. See also Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005–2009), 4:523; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 517.

justification logically and perhaps even temporally, and this work of the Spirit mystically unites the elect sinner to Christ, then is it not preferable to say that union with Christ is the ground of justification and sanctification? And if the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification comes through union with Christ, then how can justification take priority to sanctification if both benefits come simultaneously in union? Should we therefore say that union with Christ, not justification, is the more fundamental soteric category and hence takes priority over both justification and sanctification?[53] As common as these questions are, they do not grasp several important points.

First, these questions approach the subject of priority from the vantage point of the covenant of grace and the application of redemption. Seldom, if ever, have those who raise such questions invoked the category of the *pactum salutis*. Questions about priority must not begin with the application of redemption but with its pre-temporal design. Questions of priority can only be answered from the vantage point of the processions and *pactum*-framed missions. The elect are indeed "in Christ" (Eph. 1:4) before the foundation of the world, and this warrants the conclusion that they are united to him in some sense. But they are not yet mystically united to Christ. This observation led Reformed theologians to distinguish between the *federal* and *mystical* unions—not that there are multiple unions, but that there are different aspects of this one union.

Second, the *duplex gratia* undeniably comes to believers through union with Christ, union is the ground of this twofold grace in some sense. But such a statement lacks specificity and fails to acknowledge that there is something that stands behind the application of redemption through mystical union with Christ, namely, election. Election comes wrapped in the context of the *pactum*, with the undergirding work of the covenant surety. The surety swears a covenantal oath to meet all of the legal obligations on behalf of his confederated bride. In love, he fulfills the law, which opens the gateway to eschatological life. The reason that believers enter into mystical union with Christ in the temporal covenant of grace is because of Christ's antecedent sworn oath in the *pactum* to fulfill the law and impute his righteousness to his bride. Old Testament believers enjoyed the benefits of union with Christ and his imputed righteousness prior to his earthly ministry. The covenantal-legal agreement of the *pactum* was sufficient in and of itself due to the trinity's utter trustworthiness to carry out its covenant oaths. In other words, the stipulations of the *pactum*, an inherently legal arrangement, are the foundation for the application of redemption in covenant of grace.

In this sense justification is foundational for the transformative aspects of redemption because it is the means through which the elect lay hold of the righteousness of the covenant surety. Even faith as a subjective and transformative aspect of redemption, and which is necessary for justification, is not foundational but instrumental to the reception of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Hence,

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[53] E.g., Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 138–39; idem, "Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 280; A. A. Hodge, "The *Ordo Salutis*; or Relation in the Order of Nature of Holy Character and Divine Favor," *Princeton Theological Review* 54 (1878): 305–21; Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 75–77, 95, 164–67.

justification does not rest upon the subjective changes brought about by the Spirit but upon the legal-forensic work of Christ. Moreover, one need not maintain the concept of active justification with Vos in the *pactum* to guard the priority of the forensic over the transformative elements of redemption. The decree to impute the righteousness of the surety is sufficient in and of itself to support the priority of the forensic to the transformative. In simpler words, Christ's promise to the Father to obey the law on behalf of his bride is sufficient unto itself.

Third, recognizing the priority of the forensic over the transformative does not somehow sideline or minimalize the doctrine of sanctification. To prioritize logically the forensic simply means that the work of the covenant surety provides the legal context for the ensuing transformative work of the Spirit.[54] Additionally, the bond that the persons of the triune God share, ensures the inseparability of justification and sanctification. But the inseparability of the processions and missions does not mean they should be conflated or confused. Correlatively, this means that efforts either to conflate justification and sanctification, as in traditional Tridentine Roman Catholic soteriology, or to bypass the work of Christ and argue that the Spirit's work is foundational in salvation, fails to recognize the relationship among the processions, missions, and order of salvation.[55] Such efforts do not recognize the exclusive place of the covenant surety and that the reception of the Spirit and entrance into the eschaton occurs only through him. In other words, the logical relationship between justification and sanctification cannot be reversed.

Legalism

Some might object to the prioritization of the legal to transformative aspects because it supposedly fosters or even creates an atmosphere where love is boxed out from the equation of salvation. This was a fear of Karl Barth (1886–1968). Barth inverted the Reformed category distinction of law and gospel to gospel and law to register his dissatisfaction with the traditional order.[56] But pitting obedience against love is a false dichotomy. The second giving of the law in Deuteronomy is, according to some Old Testament scholars, chiefly a book about filial love between Israel and Yahweh. When Jesus explains the greatest commandment, legal and affective categories are inextricably intertwined: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment" (Matt. 22:37–39). Where God's sons, Adam and Israel, failed, Jesus succeeded and offered his loving obedience to his heavenly Father, which secured redemption for his bride.

But if this essay has demonstrated anything, it is that Christ offered this obedience in the power of the Spirit. At a minimum, Christ's obedient love is a pneumatic expression of love. But a seemingly forgotten concept that theologians should reconsider and employ is that the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father

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[54] Cf. *pace* Johnson, *One with Christ*, 54, 76–77 n. 45, 96–98 n. 20; 112–13; Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 58–59.

[55] E.g., a similar pattern unfolds in Frank D. Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 3–14.

[56] E.g., Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," in *Community, State and Church: Three Essays* (1960; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 71–100.

and Son. This idea goes back to Augustine (354–430) and was promoted by Aquinas in his *Summa*. Based upon 1 John 4:9, "God is love," Augustine argues that this verse characterizes the entire trinity, but especially the Holy Spirit; Aquinas makes similar arguments.[57] God is love and thus love characterizes the intra-trinitarian relationships as well as his decreed and executed redemption. The Father predestines the elect in love (Eph. 1:4–5); he sent his Son in love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). And Christ's outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was equally an outpouring of love: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5; cf. Tit. 3:5–6; Acts 2:17).[58]

It stands to reason, then, that the Father's promise to give his Son the Spirit to carry out his mission as covenant surety was a promise to anoint him with love. The Father poured out the Spirit and anointed him in love that Christ might render his obedience in love, and this loving obedience gave him right to unleash the outpouring of the Spirit, another manifestation of trinitarian love.[59] The Father, then, pours out his love through the Spirit upon the Son, and then the Son in turn pours out the love of the triune God through the Spirit upon his body, the elect.

Christ, therefore, poured out the love of the triune God through the baptism of the Spirit, and because of his perfect obedience the law can never arise to condemn those who are united to him (Rom. 8:33–39). Indeed, the Spirit empowered Christ to render his obedience in fulfillment of the law, to offer himself in sacrifice upon the cross, and raised him from the dead to declare him righteous and herald his eschatological sonship to the world (Matt. 3:13–4:11; Heb. 9:14; Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16). The Spirit performs the same work in those united to Christ with one major difference: Christ offered his obedience to secure the outpouring of the Spirit on behalf of the elect, whereas we offer our obedience because Christ has already irreversibly secured our pneumatic life and laid a foundation for our sanctification in his own obedience (Rom. 5:12–21). We offer our obedience, therefore, not to secure eternal life but in love and thanksgiving to the triune God (Col. 3:16; 1 John 3:10; 4:7–10, 16, 20; 5:1, 3; Rev. 7:12).[60] The blessing of the Spirit comes exclusively through Christ, not through adherence to the law (Gal. 4:4–6; cf. 3:2–5).[61] Far from legalism, the triune God covers redemption in his love, from the *pactum* through to the eschaton, from beginning to end, and it finds a loving response in the power of the Spirit from those who have been redeemed: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We obey because we love our triune Lord (cf. Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 11:1, 13; 30:16, 20; John 13:34; 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 3:23; 4:21; 5:2). The prioritization of the forensic over transformative aspects of our union with Christ is anything but legalistic. Properly understood, to prioritize justification to sanctification recognizes that God first loved us before we loved him, whether in the *pactum salutis* or in its execution in the covenant of grace through the *ordo salutis*.

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[57] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VI.v, in *Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, 14 vols. (repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 3:100; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1948), Ia q. 37 art. 2. On the Spirit as gift and love, see Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 51–70.

[58] Moo, *Romans*, 305.

[59] John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 24 vols., ed. William H. Goold (1851–1862; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966), 2:27.

[60] Cf. Heidelberg Cat. q. 86; Belgic Conf. §XXIV; WCF XVI.ii–iii, v.

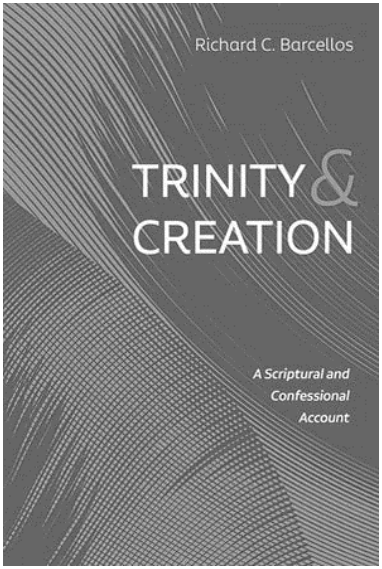
[61] Das, *Galatians*, 315.

Conclusion

This essay set out to prove the thesis that the intra-trinitarian processions, missions, and *ordo salutis* are interconnected. While few theologians explicitly draw the connection between these three realities, some, such as Vos, make the connection explicit. In simple terms, redemption reflects the nature of the triune God. To deny a logical inter-related sequence between the different aspects of redemption in the *ordo salutis* fails to recognize that *ordo* derives its structure from the trinitarian processions and missions. This clearly emerges in Vos's formulation. The Son's mission comes first in Vos's construction and the Spirit, which naturally grants priority to legal forensic categories in the former and transformative in the latter. Though many theologians do not advocate the *ordo salutis*, all theologians implicitly embrace the category. There is an order to the application of redemption.

This essay has also challenged those who maintain that union with Christ is the all-determinative category in soteriology, which then eliminates questions about the priority of legal to transformative categories, or justification to sanctification in the *ordo salutis*. Those who question the idea of priority almost invariably approach the question from the perspective of the application of redemption and the covenant of grace. Few ask what stands behind mystical union with Christ. Election undoubtedly comes first in the *ordo salutis*, but it is not an abstract point apart from a context.

The *pactum salutis* is where we find the connections between election, christology, pneumatology, soteriology, and the eternal covenantal roots of the historical covenant of grace. Questions of priority must rest, therefore, not upon the application of redemption but upon its design and trinitarian ontology in the *pactum salutis*. In this respect, the *pactum salutis* offers a thick account of how the intra-trinitarian processions and missions frame redemption. The *ordo salutis* reflects the *pactum*-framed missions and shows the riches of the triune God's love for fallen sinners. The *ordo salutis* is not, therefore, the foreign and alien imposition of logic upon an ineffable redemption but is rather a reflection of the biblical idea that God first loved us so that we might love him in return. Justification must logically precede sanctification in the *ordo salutis* because Christ's obedience as covenant surety is the sure foundation upon which the Spirit progressively conforms us to the image of Christ. To reverse the *duplex gratia* sidelines Christ's role as covenant surety and places redeemed humanity back in the protological garden rather than indefectibly in the eschaton, the age to come.



Trinity and Creation

by: Richard C. Barcellos

Any faithful account of divine creation must ground its argument first in the God who creates. This method of treating the doctrine of creation is displayed in this book. It will become clear to readers that understanding the nature of God is essential in order to account for what God does. It will also become clear that this is not a novel method of accounting for creation. This book argues that not prioritizing theology proper in our accounting for creation is a recipe for theological novelty and, if unchecked, heresy.

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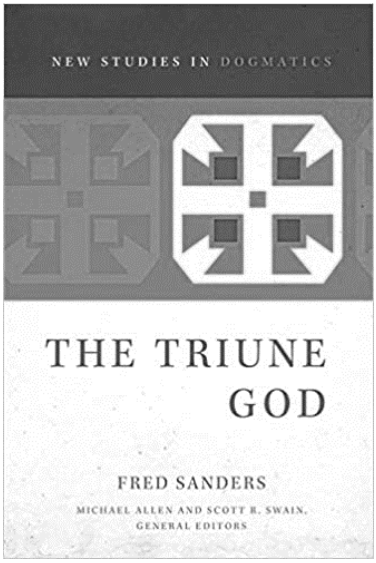
The Triune God

by: Fred Sanders



The Triune God aims to secure our knowledge of the triune God by rightly ordering the theological language with which we praise him. Leading scholar, Fred Sanders, offers dogmatic principles for Trinitarian exegesis and shows that Trinitarianism is a gift of revelation before it is an achievement of the church.

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CHANGE IN GOD GIVEN CREATION?

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In this article Dr. Barcellos takes on the important question often asked, "Was there any change in God when He created the world?" Or, how can a Triune being act in creation and remain immutable? Barcellos answers these often-raised questions by relying on a rich history of the Church. If the Church has univocally answered this question and yet modern "Christians" are starting to answer it another way, what does that mean for modern Evangelicalism? Is there anything historically Christian about the modern answers? What are the ramifications of equivocating on this important issue? All that and more are aptly addressed in this article by Barcellos as he tackles the Theistic Mutualists new take on the Trinity and Creation.

* * * * *

Is it consistent with God's being to claim some sort of change in God due to creation? Does creation bring with it a manner of difference in God's existence? Does God add anything to himself in order to create and/or manifest himself to creatures? A statement made by William Ames is of interest in our day due to the fact that some have attempted to assert and distinguish between modes of divine existence given creation. Note what Ames says: "Nothing exists from eternity but God, and God is not matter or a part of any creature, but only the maker."[1] God is "only the maker" and in no sense part of that which is made. If he were part of that which is made, God would change from being eternal to being (at least partly) temporal, from being infinite to being (at least partly) finite, from being simple to being (at least partly) composed, from being immutable to being (at least partly) mutable. Focusing more on denying change in God due to creation, Francis Turretin says:

[1] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 1.8.9.101.

> There is no change made in God by [creation]. Nor is any new perfection added to him. ... Hence whatever change was made by the creation was made in the creatures passing from nonexistence to being and not in God himself creating.[2]

Similarly, Wilhemus à Brakel says, "[The] creative act does not bring about a change in God but in the creature."[3] The statements by Ames, Turretin, and à Brakel are reflective of the way older theologians spoke about the distinction between God and creatures. In God there is no change, given creation or not. In terms of his being and essence, his existence and attributes, and the three divine persons, God does not go *from* and *to* in any sense. Given creation or not, God just is God the Trinity. He does not become more or less divine or relatable. He does not add divine features to himself. Instead, we ought to affirm with Thomas Weinandy that "God as God and God as Creator are one and the same."[4]

The views of two contemporary writers who have articulated themselves in a different manner from Ames, Turretin, and à Brakel will now be considered. In fact, it will be contended that their proposals steer away from the classical Christian and confessional Reformed position. The views of these two writers were chosen due to their connection to the Westminster Confession of Faith and their influence upon others by the publication of their many books. Before stating and critiquing their views, however, it may be helpful to remind ourselves that *ideas* are being critiqued not *individuals*, *proposals* not *people*. While doing so, attacking the character of those with whom disagreement is lodged is not in view whatsoever. The particular views critiqued below, which have been advocated in print in more than one place, it will be argued, are wrong. The views to be examined are not in-step with the theological tradition of their authors. The catholic and Reformed traditions get it right, it will be argued, and anyone who currently holds these views needs to seriously reconsider them.

John Frame: "Two Modes of Existence in God"

The first contemporary theologian that will be considered is John Frame. Frame says, "My approach ... recognizes *two modes of existence* in God ... ."[5] Previous to

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[2] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997), 5.1.12 (1:433). Though I understand what Turretin is seeking to communicate, technically speaking, creatures do not pass from nonexistence to being. The initial act of creation does not change creatures; it brings into being that which was not. Non-existent patients (i.e., creatures) cannot be the objects upon which God operates, causing them to pass "from nonexistence to being." It is impossible for God to be the agent acting upon nonexistent "things."

[3] Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 99. To be precise, creation does not bring about a change in creatures. Creatures do not exist prior to being created. They do not and cannot undergo change via the creative act of God because that which does not exist cannot change. "Before" creation came into being, there was no change nor time, the measure of creaturely change, nor "at the point of" creation was there change in terms of some thing or things going from and to.

[4] Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1985), 183.

[5] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 572; emphasis added.

this statement he says, "The *difference* between God's atemporal and historical *existences begins*, not with the creation of man, but with creation itself."[6] Let us consider these words: "*two modes of existence* in God" and "The *difference* between God's atemporal and historical *existences begins* ... with creation itself." Does this proposal work? It certainly does not comport with the claims of Ames, Turretin, and à Brakel above, as will be demonstrated.

Frame posits two modes of divine existence. He claims explicitly "*difference* between God's atemporal and historical *existences*" and that this difference "*begins* ... with creation." This seems to entail a difference between God's essence and existence. While discussing divine essence and existence, seventeenth-century theologian Francis Cheynell says the following:

> We must not conceive that God was first in a *naked Power* of Being, and afterwards reduced [i.e., changed] unto *actual Being* by his own *effectual Power* as if his existence were really different from his essence, as its proper cause.[7]

More will be said about this issue below. For now, remember that Frame claims at least one of God's modes of existence *began* and it is *different from* his other mode of existence: one is "atemporal" and the other is "historical." This entails that in some sense God's existence is "really different from his essence," as Cheynell says above. Frame claims a "*difference* between God's atemporal and historical *existences begins* ... with creation itself." The historical mode of existence must be a derived existence, since it is not eternal, which entails something as derivatively divine in God due to creation. A feature in God came-to-be in God given creation. Is this not a contradiction? This must be the case since God's historical existence began and must be, therefore, part of creation prior to man's existence. If God's so-called historical existence began with creation, it cannot be God's atemporal existence. God's historical existence, therefore, came-to-be, but to come-to-be is a necessary and exclusive feature of creatures. According to Geerhardus Vos, "That cannot be."[8] Frame's view is that God came to possess a second mode of divine existence which began-to-be with creation. According to this view, God was, in fact, "reduced unto *actual Being* by his own *effectual Power* ... ," in the words of Cheynell above. Assuming this to be the case, Vos's "That cannot be" applies to Frame's proposal as will become evident below when the Vos statement is considered in context. Frame's proposal is not reflective of the confessional Reformed position.

Frame makes other assertions which are not reflective of the Reformed theological tradition. For example: " … relenting belongs to God's very nature. ... Relenting is a divine attribute. ... Relenting is part of God's unchangeable divine

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[6] Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 571; emphasis added.

[7] Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London: printed by T. R. and E. M. for Samuel Gellibrand at the Ball in Pauls Churchyard, 1650), 8; emphasis original, spelling modernized.

[8] Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One: Theology Proper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2014), 5. Someone might attempt to refute this, claiming Vos is not speaking of God's historical existence but his atemporal existence. Vos, as far as I can tell, however, never speaks of God's historical existence as Frame does.

nature."[9] Just how relenting can be "part of God's unchangeable nature" is not explained with any degree of cogency. Relenting implies changeableness not unchangeableness.[10]

K. Scott Oliphint: God "Decides to Be Something Else as Well"

Another example of a contemporary author who argues for a change in God's existence due to creation is K. Scott Oliphint.[11] In his *God with Us: Divine*

[9] John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 370. For a review article of Frame's *Systematic Theology* see Ryan M. McGraw, "Toward a Biblical, Catholic, and Reformed Theology: An Assessment of John Frame's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*," in *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 197–211. McGraw points out several departures from more traditional discussions of various Christian doctrines. For example, McGraw says: "Much more could be said about Frame's *Systematic Theology* that illustrates where he suffers from a paucity of historical theology, such as shifting from discussing God's intent in the free offer of the gospel to something approximating English hypothetical universalism; misunderstanding the historical context of the lapsarian controversy; importing the two natures of Christ into pre-incarnate theophanies; careless language on the Trinity, such as referring to "three divine beings"; inadequate understanding of the relationship between eternal generation and aseity in Reformed theology; imputing to the Son "eternal obedience" and even "eternal subordination of role" in relation to the Father; importing Christ's threefold office into the definition of the image of God, rather than describing man's function in the world in terms of these offices; opening the door for those who say that Adam was the head of a pre-existing group of early hominids, rather than existing by the special creation of God; redefining the Reformed doctrine of total depravity and accusing the traditional doctrine as teaching that man is as bad as he can be; questioning the legitimacy of a logical order in the traditional *ordo salutis*; and urging the church to adopt elements of Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and Episcopalianism simultaneously and at its own discretion." McGraw, "Toward a Biblical, Catholic, and Reformed Theology," 211; for each claim, McGraw cites page numbers for Frame's book.

[10] For helpful discussions on divine relenting from both exegetical and theological bases, see *Confessing the Impassible God: The Biblical, Classical, & Confessional Doctrine of Divine Impassibility*, ed. Ronald S. Baines, Richard C. Barcellos, James P. Butler, Stefan T. Lindblad, and James M. Renihan (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015), 75, 90–91, 96–97, 125, 130, 157–60, and 166. In Frame's *Salvation belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 29, he says: "The Bible teaches that God has all the emotions we have, though in a more perfect way. . . . Some say that because of God's self-sufficiency he cannot suffer. That is called *impassibility*. Certainly, God cannot suffer any loss of his attributes or divine nature, but the grief we spoke about earlier is certainly a kind of suffering" (emphasis original). Later Frame says: "God can't suffer, man can suffer. . . . God, who cannot suffer, has taken to himself a human nature, in which he can suffer, in Christ" (130). Can God suffer or not? Is God impassible or not? The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), Savoy Declaration (SD), and the Second London Confession of Faith (2LCF) assert that God is "without passions" (2.1). Granted, in the latter statement Frame locates suffering "in Christ" but the way he states himself is not precise enough to distinguish between the acts of the Mediator who works according to both natures "by each nature doing that which is proper to itself" (WCF, SD, 2LCF 8.7). Frame says: "[God] can suffer, in Christ." It is much better to say the Son of God incarnate suffered according to his human nature. God, as God, cannot suffer. Putting it this way preserves divine impassibility and upholds the revealed mystery of the distinct acts of our two-natured Mediator. Maybe this is what Frame intends by his words. If so, there are better ways to state oneself.

[11] It may interest some readers to know that in May of 2019 I corresponded with K. Scott Oliphint concerning some of his views addressed in this article. Dr. Oliphint was kind enough to respond to my request that he preview my material where I critique some of his published statements. Though I remain unpersuaded by all of his explanations of those published statements and their entailments, I have revised some of my material in light of our correspondence and have sought to represent his views fairly. Interested readers are encouraged to read *all* the footnotes which address aspects of Dr. Oliphint's views in this article. Also, I am

Condescension and the Attributes of God Oliphint contends "that God freely determined to take on attributes, characteristics, and properties that he did not have, and would not have, *without creation*."[12] Earlier in Oliphint's discussion he tells us that "attributes," "properties," and even "perfections" are used synonymously.[13] It seems that he uses "characteristics" in the same sense (see the discussion below). God does this *taking on* in order to relate to man both prior to the incarnation of the Son and even "for eternity." Oliphint asserts:

> He remains who he is, but *decides to be* [emphasis added] something else as well; he decides to be the God of the covenant. It was, to be sure, a monumental decision. It changed the *mode* of God's existence for eternity; *he began to exist* [emphasis added] according to relationships *ad extra*, which had not been the case before.[14]

Note what Oliphint claims: "the *mode* of God's existence" changed "for eternity." How so? An act of God, based on a decision of God, changed God forever; that is, God changed God. God willed a change of mode in divine existence.[15] Oliphint says, "... he *began to exist* [emphasis added] according to relationships *ad extra* ... ." How can God remain who he is but become "something else as well" without some sort of addition in or to God? He cannot. If God becomes "something else as well," would this not entail some sort of composition in God? It seems it would, thus compromising divine simplicity (i.e., God is not composed of parts).[16]

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aware that a joint statement by Westminster Theological Seminary and Dr. Oliphint was posted at the Westminster Theological Seminary website on June 22, 2020. The statement includes these words: "Given the controversy surrounding *God With Us*, Dr. Oliphint determined, for the good and peace of the church (Rom. 12:18), to repudiate his proposals concerning the essential/covenantal classification of God's characteristics, as well as their implications for the incarnation. Dr. Oliphint no longer believes these proposals to be helpful or worth pursuing, and will no longer write, speak or teach them." The final sentence of the joint statement reads as follows: "Dr. Oliphint's proposals concerning the essential/covenantal classification of God's attributes, as well as their implications for the incarnation, wherever they exist in any of his writings or lectures heretofore, should be interpreted in view of this statement." Available at https://www.wts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Statement-June-22-2020.pdf?mc_cid=68b47306ca&mc_eid=eac21fa36a&fbclid=IwAR1SqVmBUtjeKLER0P-R9EU8Ug0434Ng1AIUI1aG9XiWiyG9Xc1mMgooPlk. Accessed 1 July 2020. After consideration and seeking the advice of others, I have decided to leave the critique of Dr. Oliphint's former views intact. The reasons for doing so are at least two: first, because I critique proposals not persons, issues not individuals and second, because repudiating one's views does not undo the ill effects those views have had on others. In other words, it is my opinion that the proposals Dr. Oliphint has repudiated are alive and well in others which ought to be challenged.

[12] K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 110; emphasis added.

[13] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 13.

[14] Oliphint, 254–55, emphasis original, unless otherwise noted.

[15] It could be that what Oliphint intended is that God willed and effected a change in modes of divine *revelation*. If that is what is meant, it is not clear and could have been stated better. A willed change in modes of divine revelation is one thing; a willed change in modes of divine existence is quite another.

[16] See Jeffrey C. Waddington, "Something So Simple I Shouldn't Have to Say It." Available at https://reformedforum.org/something-so-simple-i-shouldnt-have-to-say-it/. Accessed 15 February 2020. Waddington argues that there are "two senses in which divine simplicity is denied" by Oliphint. He says, "Dr. Oliphint seems to believe he maintains biblical and Reformed orthodoxy by maintaining the *mere*

Listen to à Brakel as he speaks to this very issue: "Since we must recognize, however, that all composition implies imperfection, dependency, and divisibility, we may not think of God as being composite even in the remotest sense of the word."[17] God cannot come-to-be in any sense. He cannot become "something else as well." To become "something else as well" would entail some sort of divine composition. But Oliphint tells us that "he began to exist ..."? Creatures begin to exist; God is. Creatures are related to God by God; God is. Oliphint posits that God took to himself new perfections. Would this not compromise divine simplicity, infinity, eternity, and immutability? Instead, it must be affirmed that the change brought about by creation does not entail change in God's existence.[18]

A Response to the Proposals of Frame and Oliphint

How should one respond to these proposals? Very carefully, indeed. A response is necessary if for no other reason than these proposals are quite at odds with the long-held view that God's existence (i.e., *that* he is) and God's essence (i.e., *what* he is) are coextensive. The fact that God is (i.e., his existence [*esse*; to be or the act of existing]) and that which God is (i.e., *essentia*; essence, the whatness or quiddity of someone or thing), though they *may be* distinguished conceptually *must never be* separated really. Richard A. Muller defines the essence of God as follows:

> essentia Dei: *the essence or "whatness" of God;* God is the only necessary, self-existent being or, in other words, the only being in whom *esse* (q.v.), or existence, and *essentia* (q.v.), or essence, are inseparable; it is of the essence or "whatness" of God that God exist.[19]

Note these words well: "God is the only ... being in whom ... existence ... and ... essence ... are inseparable ... ." This, according to Muller, is reflective of the position of Protestant Scholastic theology, and certainly reflected in the WCF, SD, and 2LCF. God does not take on new divine being; in fact, he does not "have" being, as if being were something without God added to him to make him to be who and what he is. God just is his being. Cheynell says, "We must not conceive ... as if his existence were really different from his essence, or did virtually flow from, and consequently depend upon

existence of God's essential nature. But in this schema, there are two senses in which divine simplicity is denied in fact even if not in intention. First, the *very distinction* between God's essential nature and his covenantal nature, brought about by the assumption of covenantal properties or attributes is itself a contravention of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Second, the covenantal nature is itself changeable or mutable, not to say malleable. To sum up my concerns, Dr. Oliphint has *ontologized* in his theological formulation what has been understood by the vast majority of the Christian tradition as a *relation* between the absolutely immutable Creator and his changeable creatures."

[17] Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 1:96.

[18] It could be that what Oliphint intended by the words "he began to exist" is that creation is related to God given its existence. If that is so, it is not clear and could have been stated better.

[19] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985, 2017), 110.

his essence, as its proper cause."[20] There cannot be a consequent aspect of God's existence dependent upon his essence, or upon anything else (e.g., decree, creation).

In the late nineteenth century, Geerhardus Vos said:

> There is no distinction in God between essence and existing, between essence and being, between essence and substance, between substance and its attributes. God is *most pure* and *most simple* act.[21]

Vos then poses this question: "*May we make a distinction in God between His being and His attributes*?"[22] Here is his answer:

> No. ... If His attributes were something other than His revealed being, it would follow that also essential deity must be ascribed to His being, and thus a distinction would be established in God between what is essentially divine and what is derivatively divine. That cannot be.[23]

Some context will be provided for this statement then an explanation will be offered. Earlier in his discussion, Vos says, "Now there is nothing higher than God, and God is simple, without composition."[24] It is important to keep this in mind while trying to understand what Vos means in the quote above. God is without composition. He is simple. He cannot be added to or subtracted from because he just is. All additions or subtractions imply composition (or decomposition). Now, when Vos says, "If His attributes were something other than His revealed being," he is distinguishing between, for argument's sake, God in himself without revelation (i.e., "His attributes") and God revealed to us (i.e., "His revealed being"). Then when he says, "It would follow that also essential deity must be ascribed to His being," he is referring to, for sake of argument again, God's *revealed* being. It could be paraphrased this way: "If God's eternal attributes without creation were something different from his revealed being with creation, it would follow that also essential deity must be ascribed to his *revealed* being."

If this is the case, and it seems to be the only way to make sense of Vos's assertion, then it makes sense of his next words: "and thus a distinction would be established in God between what is essentially divine and what is derivatively divine. That cannot be." Vos's point is that given divine simplicity, an ontological distinction cannot be established between what is essentially God and what God reveals himself to be. There is no such thing as derivative deity. God comes-to-be in no sense whatsoever. There are not varying existences in God, one of which is not co-extensive with the very essence of God. In other words, Vos would disagree with Frame's proposal (as well as Oliphint's), utilizing the doctrine of divine simplicity

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[20] Cheynell, *The Divine Trinunity*, 8.
[21] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:5.
[22] Ibid; emphasis original.
[23] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:5.
[24] Ibid.

and the co-extensive concepts of divine existence and essence.[25] Vos's statements cannot be harmonized with Frame's or Oliphint's views; they are incompatible.

These proposals entail that all that is in God is not God eternally; or it could be put this way, some feature in God is not God eternally. Frame and Oliphint, though perhaps inadvertently, end up both distinguishing and separating divine essence from divine existence. Contrary to this, God does not begin-to-be in any sense whatsoever. Divine existence and essence are co-extensive; and God's existence does not "flow from, and consequently depend upon his essence, as its proper cause," as Cheynell says. God does not cause any feature of his existence to come-to-be, but if his so-called historical existence or Oliphint's condescended mode of existence (see below) are real and if either came-to-be with creation, then they were caused-to-be with creation, and that cannot be. In fact, as Steven J. Duby asserts, "... God by his own nature already contains all that might be required for his action in creation."[26]

Stephen Charnock's words may help sort through the issues at this point. He says:

> He is from himself;[27] not that he once was not, but because he hath not his existence from another, and therefore of necessity he did exist from all eternity. ... [God is] what he is from eternity, and cannot be otherwise; and is not what he is by will, but by nature, necessarily existing, and always existing without any capacity or possibility ever not to be.[28]
>
> ... God being infinitely simple, hath nothing in himself which is not himself, and therefore cannot will any change in himself, he being his own essence and existence.[29]
>
> Though God alway remains in regard of existence, he would be immortal and live alway; yet if he should suffer any change, he could not properly be eternal, because he would not alway be the same, and would not in every part be eternal; for all change is finished in time, one moment preceding, another moment following; but that which is before time cannot be changed by time. God cannot be eternally what he was; that is, he cannot have a true eternity, if he had a new knowledge, a new purpose, a new essence; if he were sometimes this and sometimes that, sometimes know this and sometimes know that, sometimes purpose this and afterwards hath a new purpose; he would be partly temporary and partly eternal, not truly and universally eternal. He that hath anything of newness, hath not properly and truly an entire eternity.[30]

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[25] Someone might claim that Frame and Oliphint are not using the word "exist" in a technical sense and that I am requiring a degree of precision in terms and concepts beyond their intent. When theologians speak of God, however, they owe the Christian world precision and they ought to use terms with their common, established meanings.

[26] Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: T&T Clark, 2016), 146.

[27] I prefer "of" instead of "from."

[28] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2 vols. (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1988), 1:51.

[29] Charnock, 1:333.

[30] Ibid.

Both *that* God is and *what* God is he is eternally and by nature. God does not will himself to come-to-be. God is not his own cause, though he is the alone sufficient ground of his existence. Divine existence is not caused-to-be. God is not his own efficient cause. He exists, and in no sense comes-to-be. As à Brakel says, "The essence of God is His eternal self-existence."[31] Louis Berkhof is correct when he says:

> God is self-existent, that is, He has the ground of His existence in Himself. This idea is sometimes expressed by saying that He is *causa sui* (His own cause), but this expression is hardly accurate, since God is the uncaused, who exists by the necessity of His own Being, and therefore necessarily [and, I would add, "and eternally"].[32]

God's existence (i.e., that he is) and essence (i.e., what he is) are co-extensive. Though these concepts may be distinguished logically for pedagogical purposes, they must never be viewed as separate—as if one followed upon the other. Duby's comments are worthy of our affirmation when he says:

> ... if God's existence were objectively distinct from his essence, it would be caused either by God's essence or by an external principle or agent. But it cannot be caused by God's essence, for this would entail that God would cause himself to be. Nor can it be caused by another, for, according to God's aseity in Holy Scripture, God receives nothing from another, least of all his very existence.[33]

God does not effect or affect God. If God possesses a second mode of existence (i.e., his historical mode) or a singular mode which he changed in order to create and/or relate to that which he creates (i.e., his condescended mode), then the second mode was caused-to-be or the singular though willed to-be-changed mode was caused-to-be. This entails some sort of chronology within God's being. Listen to à Brakel again: "There can be no chronology within the Being of God since His Being is simple and immutable."[34] Divine simplicity and divine immutability (and eternity and infinity) defy chronology in God. Bavinck's words are to the point:

> Indeed, the idea of becoming predicated of the divine being is of no help in theology. Not only does Scripture testify that in God there is no variation nor shadow due to change [James 1:17], but reflection on this matter also leads to the same conclusion. Becoming presupposes a cause, for there is no becoming without a cause. But being in an absolute sense no longer permits the inquiry concerning a cause. Absolute being is because it is. The idea of God itself implies immutability. Neither increase nor diminution is conceivable with respect to God. He cannot change for better or worse, for

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[31] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:88.

[32] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1939, 1941; repr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 58.

[33] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 125.

[34] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:92.

> he is the absolute, the complete, the true being. Becoming is an attribute of creatures, a form of change in space and time.[35]

The claim is made by Oliphint, however, that God changed his mode of existence "for eternity." This is something God decided to become. Oliphint pushes his view of divine condescension back of creation to the decree. He says: "The condescension begins before 'the beginning.' Covenantal condescension did not have its genesis in Genesis. It did not begin in history. It began in eternity-past. ...That decree was itself condescension."[36]

God's covenantal condescension occurred, his changed mode of existence came about due to the divine decree and given creation, as with Frame. Because of creation (and God's desire to relate to it covenantally), God *takes on* that which he had not prior to creation. This means that these attributes, these characteristics, properties, and perfections are themselves created, something Oliphint affirms. He says:

> So, there can be little question, as one reads of the varying appearances[37] of Yahweh throughout covenant history that, in order to appear at all, Yahweh takes on created properties and characteristics. He condescends to present himself, and in doing so he takes characteristics and attributes that belong to creation.[38]

A fundamental problem with these proposals (i.e., Frame's and Oliphint's) involves the Creator/creature distinction. In an effort to account for divine immanence, Oliphint's proposal entails that God, revealing himself to creatures, cannot be *both* transcendent *and* immanent so must become something (prior to the incarnation of the Son) he was not (prior to the creation of all things). God acts in this new manner of existence in order to reveal himself to and interact with us "for eternity." This assumes a problem with divine transcendence (and infinity; see below), if God is going to reveal himself to creatures. In fact, according to Cameron G. Porter, Oliphint as much admits this. Here is what Porter says:

> Repeating a particular formula of "in order to" and "so that he could" when articulating his conception of divine condescension, Oliphint suggests there

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[35] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:158, hereafter *RD*.

[36] K. Scott Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery: Celebrating the Glory of an Incomprehensible God* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 117.

[37] Yahweh is not appearing, as if he was not present then became present. He is omnipresent and infinite. Appearances, or theophanies, are revelational; they reveal what is. They do not entail new reality, features, or being in God. They entail new revelation for creatures to ponder (i.e., ectypal knowledge). Attempting to read Oliphint charitably, it seems to me that it would be much better if he said "Yahweh utilizes created things to reveal himself, to communicate knowledge to the creature, but in no sense does this entail any ontological or accidental addition in God." The addition is not God, though revelatory of God (see the discussion below). Oliphint's proposal seems to view theophanies as entailing the acquisition of mediatorial actuality, or intermediary divine being.

[38] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 209; see also 13, n. 8, 198, and 208. If Oliphint simply means that God condescends to reveal himself by using revelational modalities belonging to creation, there are better ways of stating such.

> is a "problem ... of the distance of God" which God needs to voluntarily overcome because it "constitutes a boundary between the being of God and the being of creation" (97). Whether necessitated or assumed freely (Oliphint affirms the latter), this amounts to God having another manner in which he exists—an acquired mode of being that affords him the ontological conditions by which he can interact with his creation. Contrary to Oliphint's assertions, the "answer" to the question of how this transcendent God can be in true and relational immanence is not found in the taking on of ontological newness "in order to relate," but in the fact that God is able to relate *because of who he is ontologically* (without the need of intermediary actuality).[39]

Is Porter correct in his analysis? It surely seems so, and here is why. In the book Porter is referring to by Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery: Celebrating the Glory of an Incomprehensible God*, we find statements like this:

> There is, then, a distance of being between God and man. How can the Infinite One relate to finite creatures?[40]

> [There is a] problem (for us, not for God) of the distance of God, which distance constitutes a boundary between the being of God and the being of creation.[41]

> The problem of distance and the dilemma of God's relationship to creation is no problem or dilemma for Him.[42]

The reason why "the problem of distance" is not a problem for God is found in God. For, in the words of Oliphint, "The absolute and the relative exist, first and foremost, in the Triune God Himself!"[43] By "absolute" Oliphint intends what God is essentially or "God's characteristics *as God* (and, thus, quite apart from creation)."[44] He lists among these characteristics God's infinity, eternity, immutability, and impassibility.[45] What he intends by "relative" is "[t]he characteristics that God has because of His voluntary condescension ... ."[46] He also labels these as God's covenantal characteristics.[47] He says, "Some of those [relative/covenantal] characteristics are now permanent (e.g., grace, wrath), some only temporary (e.g., theophanies, human forms, appearances as fire, in the Old Testament)."[48] So the "distance of being between God and man" is bridged by God himself. God remains

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[39] Cameron G. Porter, "*The Majesty of Mystery: Celebrating the Glory of an Incomprehensible God*, A Review Article," *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies* (2017): 89–90.

[40] Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery*, 95.

[41] Oliphint, 97.

[42] Oliphint, 101.

[43] Oliphint, 103.

[44] Oliphint, 102.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Oliphint, 105.

infinite, eternal, immutable, and impassible in his essential characteristics, but he also must be viewed as "expressing Himself in 'new' characteristics in order to relate to us."[49] And both God's absolute and relative character exist in God. Recall these words of Oliphint: "The absolute and the relative exist, first and foremost, in the Triune God Himself!"[50]

It appears that Oliphint is using a somewhat traditional distinction when he uses the terms "absolute" and "relative." For example, John Owen says:

> The properties of God are either *absolute* or *relative*. The absolute properties of God are such as may be considered without the supposition of any thing whatever, towards which their energy and efficacy should be exerted. His relative are such as, in their egress and exercise, respect some things in the creatures, *though they naturally and eternally reside in God* [emphases added].[51]

Note well, however, Owen's final words: "Though they naturally and eternally reside in God." What Owen identifies as relative properties "naturally and eternally reside in God." Oliphint suggests to readers that God's relative characteristics are either permanent or "only temporary (e.g., theophanies, human forms, appearances as fire, in the Old Testament)." Just how God's relative characteristics such as these mentioned by Oliphint can be both temporary and "naturally and eternally reside in God" is not clear.

A case can be made that Owen and Oliphint use the terms absolute and relative differently. If relative perfections "naturally and eternally reside in God," as Owen contends, how can some of them be temporary, finite, here one day and gone tomorrow, as Oliphint's proposal entails? This needs to be explored in more detail.

Owen explains the distinction between absolute and relative properties in God. He says:

> Of the first sort [i.e., absolute] is God's immensity ; it is an absolute property of his nature and being. For God to be immense, infinite, unbounded, unlimited, is as necessary to him as to be God ; that is, it is of his essential perfection so to be. The ubiquity of God, or his presence to all things and persons, is a relative property of God ; for to say that God is present in and to all things supposes those things to be. Indeed, the ubiquity of God is the habitude of his immensity to the creation.[52]

Ubiquity is a creaturely predication of God given creation. It "naturally and eternally" resides in God, however, indicating his immensity. Owen continues:

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[49] Oliphint, 101. It seems that Oliphint has changed the way he states his covenantal properties / characteristics proposal in this book. In *God with Us* he uses the language of God taking "on attributes, characteristics, and properties" (110). In *The Majesty of Mystery* he uses "expressing Himself" (101) and "the covenantal characteristics . . . are expressed by God" (103), for example.

[50] Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery*, 103.

[51] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 23 vols., ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 12:93.

[52] Owen, *Works*, 12:93; emphasis added.

> Supposing the creatures, the world that is, God is by reason of his immensity indistant to them all; or if more worlds be supposed (as all things possible to the power of God without any absurdity may be supposed), on the same account as he is omnipresent in reference to the present world, he would be so to them and all that is in them.[53]

Owen views relative properties as those attributed to him by creatures given creation. When creatures affirm God's omnipresence, for example, it is an attempt to recognize and account for divine immensity given that creatures exist. Omnipresence is not something added to God given the world of creatures; it is how we affirm divine immensity as we relate to God. Relative properties do not entail some new feature in God or new features added (or subtracted) by God in order to create and/or relate to creatures. As Duby puts it, "[God] does not — indeed need not — undergo processes of development for the sake of his providential oversight."[54] Relative divine attributes "are simply modulations of the already actual perfections of power and love without the entailment of divine development."[55]

The relative attributes do not accrue to God, for to accrue involves a happening to and an addition. Accruing relative attributes would entail accidents in God. Oliphint's proposal seems to entail both.[56] Whether that is the case or not, it is important to deny any accrual or accidents in God whatsoever. Duby's comments help with these very issues.

> The absolute attributes 'belong to God from eternity and without respect of creatures' [quoting Polanus], while the relative 'belong to God in time with some relation toward creatures' [quoting Aquinas]. The former are identical to God's essence considered absolutely (though still under diverse aspects), while the latter are identical to God's essence considered in relation to the creature under some aspect or creaturely circumstance. God does not undergo change so as to accrue the relative attributes as accidents; rather, the creature undergoes change, taking up a new relation to God and thus meeting the same divine essence in new ways. For example, the absolute attribute of love is not enlarged to include mercy; rather, the creature enters a pitiable state and then begins to encounter the love of God as mercy.[57]

If Oliphint's relative divine characteristics are not infinite, eternal, immutable, and impassible as the absolute, this entails they are finite, temporal, mutable, and passible, unless there is some third option which is impossible to conceive. In his book *God with Us*, Oliphint actually says, "There must be some real and fundamental

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[53] Owen, *Works*, 12:93.

[54] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 147.

[55] Ibid.

[56] See James E. Dolezal, "Objections to K. Scott Oliphint's Covenantal Properties Thesis." Available at http://www.reformation21.org/articles/objections-to-k-scott-oliphints-covenantal-properties-thesis.php. Accessed 5 January 2018. Doelzal suggests that "Oliphint understands the covenantal properties to be real existing attributes that accrue to God . . ." (n. 5).

[57] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 205.

sense in which God *can* have or experience passions."[58] But if the relative really exists "in the Triune God Himself," then, in the words of Porter, God must have assumed "an acquired mode of being that affords him the ontological conditions by which he can interact with his creation," and thus, the boundary or "distance of being" has been bridged. The answer to Oliphint's question "How can the Infinite One relate to finite creatures?" seems to be that he assumes finitude in himself. "He remains who he is, but decides to be something else as well," in the words of Oliphint.

If Oliphint can assert "there must be some real and fundamental sense in which God *can* have or experience passions" based on his covenantal properties proposal, could not this be extended further to other "'new' characteristics"? For example, given the covenantal properties proposal, one might posit the following: "There must be some real and fundamental sense in which God *can*" be finite, temporal, mutable, and/or composed. Oliphint argues the following in *God with Us*: "... one of the covenantal properties that he takes to himself is the development of knowledge"[59] and "... the lack of knowledge that God has, as given to us in Genesis 22:12, is a covenantal lack ... ."[60] He argues similarly from Genesis 3:9, "Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where *are* you?'" He says, "In condescending to relate to Adam and Eve, he is, like them (not essentially, but covenantally) restricted in his knowledge of where they might be hiding in that garden."[61] So, according to this theory, "there must be some real and fundamental sense in which God *can*" be ignorant and, therefore, not omniscient. Oliphint further claims that "God takes on covenant characteristics that are consistent with his essential character."[62] Though he attempts to balance this statement with the acknowledgement that some "covenant characteristics ... seem to us to be inconsistent with that character"[63] (i.e., God's essential character), it is hard to fathom how a covenantal lack of knowledge can be consistent with divine omniscience, for example.[64]

This thesis assumes an ontological problem that must be overcome. Oliphint says, there is "a boundary between the *being* of God and the being of creation" (emphasis added). But is there such a problem or boundary? Obviously, there is an ontological difference, but does this entail a relational boundary? Ian A. McFarland asserts there is no "sort of ontological barrier that might limit God's intimacy with creation."[65] Duby says, "God ... has no gap to bridge in order to draw near to us, and in fact we can only exist where he is: 'in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28)."[66] Weinandy says, "The

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[58] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 87, emphasis original. See my interaction with Oliphint on the issue of divine impassibility in Richard C. Barcellos, "The New Testament on the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility (II)," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 208ff.

[59] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 194.

[60] Oliphint, 195. For interaction with Oliphint's proposal on Gen. 22, see Steve Garrick, James P. Butler, and Charles J. Rennie, "The Old Testament on Divine Impassibility," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 147–50.

[61] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 111.

[62] Oliphint, 228.

[63] Ibid.

[64] The two final sentences of this paragraph come from Richard C. Barcellos, "The New Testament on the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility (II)," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 205.

[65] Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 55.

[66] Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Gorve, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 227.

Persons of the Trinity being fully actualized relations contain no potency which needs to be actualized or overcome through new actions in order to establish new relations."[67] And Bavinck says, "Implied in creation is both God's transcendence and God's immanence ... ."[68] Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Psalm 75:1 says, "We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare *that* Your name is near." The works of God are revelatory of the fact that he *is* near. God need not overcome God in himself to become God with us.

Both Frame and Oliphint assume a working tenet of aspects of what some call theistic personalism or mutualism; namely, given classical Christian theism, there are ontological features in the eternal God which must be overcome if divine immanence is to be. Frame even admits the following: "My approach bears a superficial resemblance to process theology, which also recognizes two modes of existence in God, transcendent and immanent ... ."[69] Frame assumes something to be true as asserted by process (and open) theists without questioning it. Charles J. Rennie addresses this issue with reference to Oliphint.

> In *God with Us*, K. Scott Oliphint proposes a novel solution to a theological problem that has been posed by modern liberals and open theists. As is too often the case, the older tradition is dismissed and the presuppositions of the liberals are granted without argument. Early in the book, in an argument against an opposing view, Oliphint states, "One of the questions that should be asked in this regard is why the orthodox tradition did not see the need to posit such things" (77). This is precisely the question Oliphint should have asked the open theists, and we must now ironically ask of Oliphint. Why should it be taken for granted that there is a problem that needs to be solved? Why didn't the orthodox tradition see the need to posit created covenantal properties of God apart from the actual incarnation? Wouldn't a closer examination of the Reformed tradition suggest that much of the contemporary debate assumes a false dilemma between God's transcendence and immanence? Can we even assume that they were asking the same questions? And if not, why not?[70]

The same applies to Frame.

Transcendence and immanence, however, are not "two modes of existence in God." Transcendence is a creaturely affirmation of the otherness of divine being given creation. Immanence is a creaturely affirmation of divine presence given creation. Process theism sees "a fundamental metaphysical continuity between God and all that is not God."[71] Frame and Oliphint deny this, and rightly so. Both, however, posit a need for God to overcome something in him in order to create and/or relate to creatures. Instead, as Duby says, "... God's freedom from spatial confinement is also his positive capacity for unrestricted nearness to all creatures in

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[67] Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 185.
[68] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:110.
[69] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 378.
[70] Rennie, "Appendix I," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 408.
[71] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 18.

all places."[72] Daniel J. Treier's words echo Duby's where he says, "Transcendence and immanence are not pure opposites, despite what humans might suppose. God is so transcendent as to be immanent to anyone and everyone simultaneously."[73]

Process theism further asserts that "[o]nly if God and the world operate on the same metaphysical plane is it possible for God to engage the world both directly and without compulsion."[74] Is God, in fact, an ontological boundary or barrier which must be overcome if he is to reveal himself to creatures? Is it the case that there is "a boundary between the *being* of God and the being of creation" (emphasis added), which functions like an ontological chasm that must be crossed via some sort of change in or addition to God if he is to reveal himself to creatures? The answer is no. In fact, asserting that there is such a boundary and that God has overcome it by his will infuses a dialectic into one's theology proper which wreaks havoc upon it. McFarland is surely correct when he asserts, "God's engagement with the world is neither impeded by nor subject to the metaphysics of becoming."[75] God does not become in order to create or manifest himself to creatures. Creation manifests the eternal God to creatures. McFarland continues:

> For while God's acting outside of God's self to bring into being that which is other than God does not involve any blurring of the distinction between God and the creature, neither does it presuppose any sort of ontological barrier that might limit God's intimacy with creation.[76]

If God pleases to manifest himself to creatures, then God does so; and he is so pleased. God, manifesting himself via creation, is the same God existing eternally without creation.

There is another problem with Oliphint's proposal. His view of God condescended and God as infinite and eternal seem to be two orders of being—one temporal and contingent (i.e., created or derived, even though willed-to-be) and the other eternal and non-contingent (i.e., uncreated). The condescended mode of existence comes about due to a boundary between God and creatures. The boundary is God himself. Recall what Oliphint says, "There is a boundary between the being of God and the being of creation." How does God overcome the "problem of the distance of God"? He condescends. "He remains who he is, but decides to be something else as well."[77] What gets revealed to us in order to overcome this boundary is the condescended, covenantal mode of being, a mode of being not co-extensive with who God is eternally, a mode of being that is not simple, not infinite, not eternal, not immutable, not impassible, and not omniscient. The older Reformed writers did not speak in this manner at all, nor does the WCF allow such talk of God. God has no newly-produced attributes; indeed, God has no produced attributes

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[72] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 152.

[73] Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 95. See Treier's discussion on omnipresence, transcendence, and immanence on p. 111.

[74] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 18.

[75] McFarland, *From Nothing*, 19.

[76] McFarland, 55.

[77] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 254.

whatsoever. Instead, "there is no change made in God by [creation]. Nor is any new perfection added to him ... ."[78] As Duby assures us:

> ... when God acts in the life of his creatures, he is not acting by something added to his own being or by changing from who he is *in se* [i.e., in himself] to who he is *pro nobis* [i.e., for us]. He does not have to develop himself in any way in order to meet us in the economy. He simply exercises outwardly what he himself is as God in accomplishing his good works in our midst. We therefore never encounter a secondary iteration of God but rather only the one true God himself freely turned toward us in his holiness and love. Perhaps unexpectedly, then, the old inflection of God's aseity as pure actuality serves to corroborate and emphasize that God is fully himself in all his activity *ad extra*.[79]

In *The Majesty of Mystery* Oliphint uses the terms "character" or "characteristics" instead of the more conventional "attribute" or "attributes" on numerous occasions. He identifies what he calls God's essential characteristics and his relative or covenantal characteristics.[80] That character and characteristics function like attribute and attributes normally function seems to be the case from these words of Oliphint: "In the history of theology, there have been various ways to attempt to categorize God's characteristics. Some have said that God has some characteristics that are *incommunicable* and some that are *communicable*. ... Other categories that have been proposed to distinguish God's characteristics are "metaphysical and moral" characteristics, or "absolute and relative."[81] Oliphint's condescended/relative characteristics are derived and contingent. This entails that they are created, which would mean that God has become, in some sense, part creature. In response to Oliphint's covenantal properties proposal, James E. Dolezal says:

> They appear to be contingent, caused, and dependent on God's free will for their existence. In sum, the covenantal properties seem to be creaturely rather than divine. If they were divine attributes then we would now have to speak about features of divinity that are temporal, finite, contingent, caused and dependent. This is exactly the opposite of what divinity is. The covenantal properties seem plainly not to be eternal, infinite, necessary, or any of the other things we normally ascribe to God's attributes. It is perhaps, then, not an exaggeration to conclude that for Oliphint God *as covenantal* is a creature and not divine. [82]

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[78] Turretin, *Institutes*, 5:1:12 (1:433).

[79] Duby, *God in Himself*, 223.

[80] See Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery*, 102–103.

[81] Oliphint, 101. At the end of the paragraph quoted above, he adds these words: "All of these categories can be helpful in explaining the differences in God's perfections." Here "perfections" is used instead of attributes or characteristics.

[82] Dolezal, "Objections to K. Scott Oliphint's Covenantal Properties Thesis." In a book review of Oliphint's *God with Us*, Charles J. Rennie provides similar critique to the covenantal properties thesis. See Rennie, "Appendix I," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 399–408.

It is much better to say, as Ames did, "God is not matter or a part of any creature, but only the maker"; and, it could be added, he is not made in any sense whatsoever.

God not only does not, but cannot, change his mode of existence or add a second one (i.e., a different mode of divine being). The various modalities of revelation (i.e., creation, conservation, re-creation, consummation), we must affirm, constitute no change in God either. His works do not make him to-be. The change is in creatures, such as effects derived from divine operation, which include words written or spoken by prophets, apostles, and our Lord. The God who reveals himself to creatures remains God as he is without creatures. The varying modalities of divine revelation constitute no change in God, but they do constitute change in the creature. Divine revelatory acts (e.g., creation) do not in any sense constitute, compose, or establish the being of God; they reveal, or manifest, who he is. It is certain that the acts of God reveal God to us (though not exhaustively or comprehensively) and though the revelatory modalities are not God, they are means through which it is just God who is revealed to us as he who is immanent. Divine immanence does not come about due to change in the divine. It is revealed with the stuff of creation and throughout the economy. Duby's words are to the point:

> ... if God is complete in himself and is not determined at all by reference to a counterpart, he transcends the world in a manner that robustly facilitates his immanence. ... He is free to live and act among his creatures in the economy without in any way altering himself to "fit in" or qualifying his presence in order to avoid being assimilated to the world.[83]

Again, Scripture is clear—divine transcendence is not a boundary to be overcome in order for God to be immanent. "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy *place*, With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isa. 57:15).

Modes of divine revelation and modes of divine existence (or orders of divine being) are not the same thing. Modes of revelation do not constitute a second-level divine existence which becomes determinative of divine action. Oliphint argues this when he says, "He takes on characteristics that *determine* just how he will interact with us ... ."[84] The transcendent is immanent to creation, however, and he tells us so via revelational modalities; and though the modalities are themselves revelational of the divine nature and persons, they are not constitutive of either, nor are these determinative of divine action. God's transcendence is not a problem to be overcome by the taking on of new characteristics which subsequently determine his actions. Concerning divine transcendence and immanence, it can be put in this manner: God is transcendent because he is God, or divine. We could say the same thing about divine immanence: God is immanent because he is God, or infinite. He does not, however, become immanent via self-induced ontological, accidental, creaturely, new additions of any sort. He does not tinker with himself in order to reveal himself. Both God's transcendence and immanence are perfections relative to creatures which are

[83] Duby, *God in Himself*, 225.
[84] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 12; emphasis added.

revealed to us, but neither entails divine mingling with creatures. As Vos says, "Even where God's immanence comes to the fore, God and the world still remain unmixed."[85] According to the Bible and the confessions of faith mentioned above, God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—manifests himself via creation, conservation, re-creation, and consummation. Note well *that* he manifests (i.e., reveals) and note well *what* he manifests (i.e., himself; his "eternal power, wisdom, and goodness"). Revelation is God's telling creatures that he *is* with us; it is not the divine *becoming* with or for us. God does not change God in order to become present with us; he causes us to come into being and changes us. Again, modes of divine revelation and modes of divine existence are not the same thing.

What Drives These Proposals?

It appears that both Frame and Oliphint attempt the same thing. They try to account for divine immanence with creatures, given divine transcendence. To do this, they both posit some sort of divine change, that God relates himself to creatures by adding to or acting upon himself. In some sense, God is the effect of his own will and action, a partly self-decreed and actuated being, both a first and a second cause.[86] But as John Webster assures us, "God's simplicity excludes any relation to creatures in which God receives an augmentation of his being ... ."[87] God is not augmented, nor does he augment himself, to be God with us. He brings creatures into being and augments them to reveal that he is near. The proposals by Frame and Oliphint (though unintentionally) end up compromising *both* divine simplicity *and* divine immutability, as well as divine infinity and divine eternity.

Another motivation for these proposals is to account for what has traditionally been termed metaphorical language, and specifically the anthropomorphic and, especially, anthropopathic scriptural assertions predicated of God. This is certainly commendable. Both Frame and Oliphint, however, view the traditional manner of explaining these metaphorical predications as wrong and in need of reform. For example, Frame says:

> Theologians have sometimes described God's relenting as "anthropomorphic." There is some truth in that description ... .
>
> But the historical process does change, and as an agent in history, God himself changes. On Monday, he wants something to happen, and on Tuesday, something else. He is grieved one day, pleased the next. In my view, *anthropomorphic* is too weak a description of these narratives. In these accounts, God is not merely *like* an agent in time. He really *is* in time, changing as others change. And we should not say that his atemporal,

[85] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:165. Vos's comment is in the context of discussing Gen. 1:2, "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Immediately prior to the statement referenced above, he says, "But the Spirit of God hovers on and above the waters. He does not mingle with them" (165).

[86] I owe the essence of this sentence to Cameron G. Porter.

[87] John Webster, *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, *Volume I, God and the Works of God* (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016), 1:126.

> changeless existence is more real than his changing existence in time, as the term *anthropomorphic* suggests. Both are real.[88]

God's "changeless existence" and "his changing existence in time ... are real"? Both exist? This claim sounds very similar to the view of Karl Rahner as asserted by Joseph Donceel, quoted by Weinandy. "Accordingly, 'Rahner seems to distinguish two aspects in God: God as he is in himself and God as he is in the otherness of world history. He is immutable in the first aspect, he really changes in the other one.'"[89] Frame's position does not account properly for the metaphorical language of Holy Scripture and sounds dangerously like some form of process theism.

Contrast the words of Frame quoted above with those of Vos, who echoes a more traditional Reformed and catholic view on these issues. Vos asks this question: "*Does not the creation of the universe detract from the immutability of God?*"[90] He answers:

> No, when Scripture appears to speak as if there is a succession and change in God Himself, it is expressing itself in a human way. For example, in Psalm 90, where the absolute eternity of God is taught so clearly, it is however also said, "Before the mountains were born and You had brought forth the earth and the world, yes, from everlasting to everlasting You are God." (v. 2). The word "before" appears to introduce time into eternity, but that is because of the weakness of human language.[91]

> ... time and differences of time are products of creation, not the forms in which the creating God Himself moves.[92]

E. L. Mascall's words echo Vos's.

> It is, of course, true that, as we view him, God appears to be subject to change; because the universe that he has created is a changing universe, God's action upon it when viewed from within it appears to be a changing action. Nevertheless, the change that is observed is not a change in God but in his creation ... .[93]

In 2012, Oliphint said, "I happen to believe as well that the other *principium* of the Reformation—the doctrine of God—was itself not sufficiently re-tooled in light

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[88] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 376–77; emphasis original. Technically speaking, divine relenting (or repenting) is termed anthropopathic not anthropomorphic.

[89] Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 169. The citation for the Donceel reference is Joseph Donceel, "Second Thoughts on the Nature of God," *Thought* 46 (1971): 351. In the footnote to this reference, Weinandy says, "[Donceel] seems to opt for a mitigated form of Process Theology. 'According to this modified form of theism God is Pure Act, yet he contains potency. He is Being itself, yet he becomes; he is immutable, although he changes. He is eternal, but in time; he is omniscient, but he finds out from man what man freely decides,' (p. 365)." This sounds dangerously similar to Frame's claim.

[90] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:177.

[91] Vos, 1:177–78.

[92] Vos, 1:178.

[93] E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943), 100.

of Reformed theology ... ."[94] In *God with Us*, published in 2012, Oliphint says, "In chapter 2, I will begin to outline a way of thinking about God's voluntary condescension. This chapter will begin to introduce a relatively new approach to a discussion of God's character."[95] This assumes previous approaches were either wrong or, at least, need some sort of modification. In 2014, Oliphint said, "[M]uch of systematic theology that is done, especially in theology proper, needs a complete revision and rewrite."[96] This statement was made in the context of Oliphint advocating that we be "fearlessly anthropomorphic" in our formulations of the doctrine of God.[97] "Oliphint has expressed that several 'brilliant' theologians, viz., Augustine, Aquinas, Stephen Charnock, Paul Helm, and Herman Bavinck failed to be 'fearlessly anthropomorphic' ... ."[98] In *The Majesty of Mystery* (2016), after identifying various Old Testament theophanies, Oliphint says:

> There is an abundance of literature that deals with these issues, much of which can be pursued with great profit. However, even some of the best theologians in the history of the church misstep when pressed with questions like the ones above [e.g., How can God walk in the garden and appear to Abraham if he is spirit with no body?]. Unfortunately, examples are almost too numerous to list.[99]

Let the reader ponder the implications of Oliphint's claim. Theologians of the Christian tradition who misstep by not being fearlessly anthropomorphic are "almost too numerous to list." In other words, the Christian tradition is substantially wrong on this issue.

After offering Augustine, Charnock, and Bavinck as examples, Oliphint says:

> As admirable as these motives are, however, it is not in keeping with biblical language and emphases to think, speak, or write in such ways as these great

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[94] K. Scott Oliphint, "Aquinas: A Shaky Foundation." Available at https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/ article/aquinas-a-shaky-foundation/. Accessed 4 November 2017.

[95] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 43.

[96] K. Scott Oliphint, "Theological Principles from Van Til's Common Grace and the Gospel," lecture delivered at the 2014 Reformed Forum Theology Conference (Gray's Lake, IL, October 2014), http://reformedforum.org/rf14_08/. Accessed 30 March 2015.

[97] Ironically, Oliphint's proposals are less than "fearlessly anthropomorphic"; they appear, rather, to be fearlessly non-anthropomorphic. I owe this statement to Glen Clary.

[98] Brandon F. Smith and James M. Renihan, "Historical Theology Survey of the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility: The Modern Era," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 273. Smith and Renihan are quoting from Oliphint's 2014 lecture, "Theological Principles." For a published version of that section of the lecture see Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 2nd ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), x–xxv. What might be of interest to some readers is the fact that in this Foreword by Oliphint, he recommends his *God with Us* "[f]or an extended, book-length answer to this question" (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, xvii, n. 14). "This question" refers to "how one can affirm, as Van Til does, *both* that 'God's attitude has changed with respect to mankind' *and* that 'God in himself is changeless'" (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, xvii). Oliphint also recommends *God with Us* in his *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 58, n. 2, 62, n. 7, 82, n. 26, 183, n. 17, and 234, n. 7. The basic thesis of *God with Us* is repeated on page 190 of Oliphint's *Covenantal Apologetics*.

[99] Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery*, 91.

> theologians have done. We have to find a better way to interpret biblical passages dealing with God and His relations to the world.[100]

Again, let the reader ponder these words. Admirable motives aside, these great theologians are in error on a crucial element of the doctrine of God.

It should be obvious by now that Oliphint does not agree with the traditional, classical Christian, and Reformed account of many of the metaphorical assertions of Scripture pertaining to God.[101] Indeed, it appears that he views his book *The Majesty of Mystery* as articulating "a better way to interpret biblical passages dealing with God and His relations to the world." What does Oliphint view as going wrong in the Christian theological tradition in terms of accounting for the metaphorical assertions of Scripture pertaining to God's actions toward creation? He tells us, at least in part, in the following words. He says, "Thomas Aquinas, whose doctrine of God can, in places, be consistent with that which was emphasized at the time of the Reformation, nevertheless stumbled as his mentor, Augustine, had done."[102] The following words occur as a footnote to this statement.

> My own conviction is that, since Aquinas, too many have adopted his ideas and language, especially with respect to his doctrine of God, and thus have had no clear and cogent way to affirm much, if not most, of what Scripture says about God and his dealings with, and activity in, creation.[103]

So, in Oliphint's view, the problem with the traditional way to account for God's *ad extra* works goes all the way back to Augustine but seems to fall more at the feet of Aquinas and the "too many [who] have adopted his ideas and language, especially with respect to his doctrine of God ... ."

We must admit that there are many difficult issues presented to us by the language of Scripture when it comes to assertions about God. Our interest in the language of Scripture, however, is not the mere words used, but the divine intent. The older way of accounting for the metaphorical assertions of Scripture pertaining to God is both better and keeps one in the bounds of Christian orthodoxy.[104]

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[100] Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery*, 93–94.

[101] A further example of this can be found in *God with Us*, 220, where Oliphint says, "In condescending to interact with his people, the Lord did relent from what he would otherwise have done. This is in no way an improper or metaphorical way of speaking" and in *God with Us*, 227–28, where he says, "The point of the passage [i.e., Gen. 22:12], however, is not that God knows the end from the beginning in any and every situation or in Abraham's life, *true as that is*. The point of the passage is that God's covenant with his people, and with Abraham as the father of his people, is one that really and truly, *not simply metaphorically* [emphasis added], involves God in the process. It is a commitment in which he has come down, covenantally 'hiding' those essential properties that remain his, in order to bind himself to us and to our lives in such a way that his interaction with us involves a real, ongoing, empathetic relationship. He really does identify with us, and he moves with us in history, 'learning' and listening, in order to maintain and manage the covenant relationship that he has sovereignly and unilaterally established, the details of which he has eternally and immutably decreed." Again, ironically, Oliphint's proposals are less than "fearlessly anthropomorphic."

[102] Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, xiv.

[103] Van Til, xiv, n. 8.

[104] Accounting for the older way is beyond the scope of this article.

Questions to Ponder

An important question comes to mind in light of the discussion above. Assuming that God does, in fact, have two existences, what gets revealed to creatures? If God's atemporal mode of existence is not his temporal or historical mode of existence, if his temporal or historical mode of existence is not eternal, then would it not follow that, since his temporal mode is his revelational mode, the eternal mode of existence, or the eternal God as such, is not revealed to us? If both modes are revealed, why the need for a second, historical mode? If the answer is because the atemporal mode cannot be revealed to creatures for ontological reasons, does not this point surrender an aspect of the doctrine of God to something dangerously close to process theism? If it does (and it seems inescapable that it does), has any reputable theologian of the Reformed theological tradition ever surrendered such ground and remained within the bounds of Reformed confessional orthodoxy? It is difficult to know the answer to the last question, though one may surmise. It is time for those who claim either the WCF, SD, or 2LCF and posit two modes of existence in God to sit down, think long and hard about the entailments of such a proposal, and ask and answer the kinds of questions mentioned above.

In *God with Us*, Oliphint says this, explaining what he means when he asserts that God has condescended:

> We mean that God freely determined to take on attributes, characteristics, and properties that he did not have, and would not have, without creation. In his taking these characteristics, we understand as well that whatever characteristics or attributes he takes on, they cannot be of the essence of who he is, nor can they be necessary to his essential identity as God. In other words, given that whatever properties he takes on as a result of his free knowledge and will, he did not *have* to take them on; he could have chosen not to create or decree anything. Thus, his condescension means that he is *adding* properties and characteristics, not to his essential being, as the triune God (since that would mean that God was essentially mutable), but surely to himself (more on this later).[105]

[105] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 110. For objections to this aspect of Oliphint's argument see Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, where he says, "An assessment of Oliphint's location of the freedom of the decree in God's 'covenantal condescnesion' is beyond this study. It may be said, however, that it is based on a problematic supposition that God can assume (in an anticipatory relation to the incarnation) properties of a creaturely nature without having yet assumed such a nature in the incarnation . . ." (198, n. 66). Dolezal in "Objections to K. Scott Oliphint's Covenantal Properties Thesis" mentions and discusses three concerns: "First, if the human properties of the incarnate Son are not divine attributes, then neither are the 'covenantal properties' that Oliphint proposes for God. After all, what is assumed in the Son's incarnation is wholly creature and is in no way to be regarded as divine. . . . Second, it is difficult to see how Oliphint's incarnational model does not entail that the Father and Spirit each subsist as one person in two ontologically distinct ways, just as the Son does by his subsistence in two natures. . . . Third, and perhaps even more perplexing, is the implication Oliphint's incarnational model has for the Son. If he, with the Father and Spirit, experiences the union of divine and covenantal, then he already subsists in this divine/creature union prior to his incarnation. . . ." Rennie, "Appendix I," in *Confessing the Impassible God*, 404–405, also provides critique. For example, he says: "Oliphint maintains that this notion of covenantal properties 'affirmed in

By the words "more on this later," it is assumed that Oliphint is referring to his importing of Christological/incarnational categories back into the Old Testament. Whether that is the case or not, it is no secret that Oliphint proposes that Christology is to guide theology proper.[106] Christology, for Oliphint, is the lens through which God's *ad extra* works are to be understood. He says, "... christology organizes our understanding of God's relationality."[107] It is beyond the scope of the present critique to interact with this aspect of Oliphint's thesis. It may well be the driving, methodological force behind all that he says regarding covenantal properties.[108] This critique is limited to the aspects of his thesis and its entailments, and does not critique its methodological basis. Suffice it to say, Oliphint's method is not a safe guide. It seems to be a category error. It puts a redemptive category before a more basic revelational category and, if not checked, runs the risk of reading the *oikonomia* back into the *theologia*. It makes the incarnation of our Lord the climax of lesser "incarnations"[109] which precede it. God, however, is not ever-incarnating himself in redemptive history. Frame seems to attempt the same thing as Oliphint in terms of using the incarnation as an interpretive paradigm for Old Testament theophanies. Recall the words of McGraw cited above: "Much more could be said about Frame's *Systematic Theology* that illustrates where he suffers from a paucity of historical theology, such as ... importing the two natures of Christ into pre-incarnate theophanies."

The condescension of God advocated by Oliphint comes about due to his "free knowledge and will." It is a willed mode of assumed "attributes, characteristics, and properties that he did not have, and would not have, without creation." The new features of the condescended God, though decreed, are not "of the essence of who he is, nor can they be necessary to his essential identity as God." These assumed features of God are added "to himself" but "not to his essential being." They appear to be accidental divine properties. If these features are not added "to his essential being," if they are not infinite, eternal, immutable, and impassible, if they were willed by God, are they God or not God? There are only two options; either they are God or part of the world. And if it is via these assumed covenantal properties that the condescended God reveals himself to creatures, what do creatures come into contact

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christology.' . . . In short, God has taken on created properties from the foundation of the world in the same way that the Son of God took on created human properties in the incarnation. 'What is true of the incarnation is true also of other 'incarnations' of God in Scripture' (192). . . . Such a proposal raises several unhappy consequences. For instance, are we to apply the concept to each person of the Trinity, or just the Son? . . . On the one hand, if it is consistently applied to each, we must conclude one of two things. Either we are to conceive of these properties accidentally, and therefore reject divine simplicity, or they are to be conceived of substantially. Oliphint appears to prefer the latter, arguing that in the incarnation, the Son of God did not merely take on accidental properties, but rather assumed a substantial union of two natures in one person (*God with Us*, 152–54). If this is so, then we are led to the unfortunate conclusion that all three persons have had two substantial natures, one created, and one divine, from the foundation of the world. It would seem difficult, therefore, to escape the conclusion that all three persons, to a greater or lesser extent, have been incarnate at one point or another. . . ." See also Porter's review article of *The Majesty of Mystery*.

[106] See Oliphint, *God with Us*, 136, 183.

[107] Oliphint, 116.

[108] See Camden Bucey, "Addressing the Essential-Covenantal Model of Theology Proper." Available at https://reformedforum.org/addressing-the-essential-covenantal-model-of-theology-proper/. Accessed 5 June 2019. Bucey addresses this aspect of Oliphint's proposal under the heading "The Addition of Christology."

[109] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 76.

with through this kind of revelation or mode of condescension? Is it the eternal God, or some sort of finite, temporal, mutable, passible, willed version of God?

Oliphint is in print saying he has introduced us to "a relatively new approach to a discussion of God's character."[110] How relatively new is it? Are there others in the Reformed theological tradition who have posited covenantal condescension, the type that advocates God willing himself to take on new attributes that "he did not have, and would not have, without creation"?[111] Is Oliphint's proposal his attempt to re-tool the doctrine of God "in light of Reformed theology ..."?[112] Recall these words of Oliphint: "[M]uch of systematic theology that is done, especially in theology proper, needs a complete revision and rewrite."[113] If this is the beginning of such a rewrite, it is fair to ask what the end will look like.

It is time for those who claim the confessions noted above and posit covenantal properties as something new in or added to God to sit down, think long and hard about the entailments of such a proposal, and ask and answer the kinds of questions mentioned above.

It is very important to distinguish between modes of existence and modes of revelation. God, as God, "has" only one mode of existence; his simple, infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, trinitarian mode, or, we might simply say, the divine mode of existence. But the infinite God has mysteriously revealed himself through a multitude of finite revelatory modalities. These modalities tell us something true about the divine, the infinite One, the eternal One, the immutable One, the impassible One. And the author of this kind of revelation just is God, eternal, immortal, the only wise One, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Recall the words of the 2LCF:

> In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible of invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good. (2LCF 4.1)

There is no hint in the confession of some sort of change in God, necessary or willed, in order for God to create and/or manifest himself to creatures. There is no change in God given creation or not. God is not simple, infinite, eternal, immutable, and impassible in himself then, in addition, becomes composed, finite, temporal, mutable, and passible in order to create and/or manifest himself to us. The revealed mystery of it all is that the simple, infinite, eternal, immutable, and impassible God has manifested himself to creatures without any change in him. This surely is grounds for humility toward and praise of him.

Conclusion

This article has investigated a small sliver of contemporary theology. Such interaction is necessary when important issues are at stake. The critique offered above

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[110] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 43.
[111] Oliphint, 110.
[112] Oliphint, "Aquinas: A Shaky Foundation."
[113] Oliphint, "Theological Principles from Van Til's Common Grace and the Gospel."

was given to challenge views which stray from important Reformed-confessional and historical, or classical Christian, boundaries. Predicating change in God by virtue of creation and relation to creatures (or in any sense) is a move in a dangerous, even toxic, direction. It has consequences which end up compromising many long-held and clearly-argued elements of the doctrine of God. For those subscribing the WCF or its related confessions, it wreaks havoc upon the system of doctrine contained therein. The views critiqued above are idiosyncratic and contradict the confession. When novelties arise they must be questioned and scrutinized. Surely this ought to be the case with reference to the doctrine of God, the *principium essendi* of Reformed Orthodoxy. We must not cater to the age in which we live. If that were done by all who went before us, we would be in trouble. Though we may have to stand contrary to some who have been our teachers on various matters, stand we must. If what some are advocating in our day as in step with confessional Reformed thought is not, in fact, in step with what is clearly and emphatically stated in and meant by the confessional documents, what else can confessional people do but stand against such teaching? It is the only honest thing to do. It is fully realized that some will balk at such a statement when it comes to the issues discussed above. Some think the finer, more technical elements of the doctrine of God are tertiary issues. Those subscribing the confession ought to beg to differ. Theology, as Webster says, involves God and all things in relation to God. Get God wrong, and one will get wrong various aspects of all things in relation to God. The stakes are very high, indeed.[114]

May this discussion cause those who posit some sort of change in God in order for God to be God with us to reconsider their views. What is lost by such a formulation is a price too high to pay. One loses divine simplicity, pure actuality, infinity, eternity, immutability, and impassibility. And in losing these doctrines, one forfeits the biblical teaching, the classical Christian doctrine of God, and the Reformed confession.

[114] Having said that, we ought to remember that our better intuitions are often more orthodox than our idiosyncratic arguments and the Lord is way more merciful than we realize. The last clause is basically a re-word of what I once heard a trusted friend say. He is right.

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INDICATIONS OF THE TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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The Trinity is not explicitly revealed in the Old Testament, but after the revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament and after that revelation was given greater clarity in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 325/381), it became possible to recognize the indications of the Trinity revealed in the Old Testament. This article examines key Old Testament texts that contain these indications. This examination includes: Texts that Reveal Aspects of the OT Doctrine of God (that are pertinent to the doctrine of the Trinity); Texts that Reveal Indications of the Trinity including: Texts that Reveal Plurality / Triads—Conversation Texts and in a Blessing and Vision; and finally, Texts that Reveal the Indications of "Others" in Relation to Yahweh—the Angel of the LORD, the Spirit of the LORD, the Servant of the LORD, and Wisdom. This study demonstrates that the revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament, while not explicit, does disclose truth about the Trinity that is pertinent to a full appreciation and understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

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> "In point of fact, the doctrine of the Trinity is purely a revealed doctrine. That is to say, it embodies a truth which has never been discovered, and is indiscoverable, by natural reason."[1]

> "The doctrine of the Trinity is very decidedly a doctrine of revelation." "The Bible never deals with the doctrine of the Trinity as an abstract truth, but reveals the trinitarian life in its various relations as a living reality, to a certain extent in connection with the works of creation and providence, but particularly in relation to the work of redemption. Its most fundamental revelation is a revelation given in facts rather than in words. And this

[1] B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Biblical Doctrines* (Oxford University Press, 1932; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003) 133.

> revelation increases in clarity in the measure in which the redemptive work of God is more clearly revealed, as in the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And the more the glorious reality of the Trinity stands out in the facts of history, the clearer the statements of the doctrine become. The fuller revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament is due to the fact that the Word became flesh, and that the Holy Spirit took up His abode in the Church."[2]

> "The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus, the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged."[3]

Introduction

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 325/381) is the definitive expression of Trinitarianism. It is certainly not inspired in the way Scripture is inspired (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). It is the product of decades of theological debates and rival councils in the fourth century between Arius,[4] Arians, semi-Arians, Homoian Arianism,[5] neo-Arians, Macedonians[6] and many others on the one hand and Athanasius, pro-Nicenes (Hilary, Marius Victorinus), the Cappadocians (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa) and many others on the other hand. Those debates were conducted in a milieu that was deeply influenced by Platonism (especially so-called Neo-Platonism) and "in fact all Greek-speaking writers in the fourth century were to a greater or lesser degree indebted to Greek philosophy."[7] That influence is mostly clearly seen in the use (by both sides) of Greek terms (e.g. λόγος, οὐσία (-ας), ὁμοούσιος, ὑπόστασις, et. al.) that were fraught with a variety of philosophically loaded nuances. However, it is also the case that the debate was intentionally grounded in Scripture and informed by robust scriptural exegesis (again, by both sides).[8] In summing up the "the influences which were most powerful in shaping

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[2] Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (1939–1941), 85.

[3] Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," 141.

[4] See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, 2001).

[5] Uta Heil, "The Homoians," in *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, ed. Guido M. Berndt and Roland Steinacher (New York: Routledge, 2014), 85–115; and R. C. P. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 557–97.

[6] "The Macedonians also believed in the full divinity of the Son . . . but withheld worship and confession of divinity of the Spirit." Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 25.

[7] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God*, 858–59.

[8] "Recent scholarship has argued that characterizing the fourth century as the culmination of Christianity's 'Hellenization' is misleading. This is especially so if Hellenization is understood as resulting in a philosophically articulated doctrinal system only distantly related to the words of Scripture." Lewis

[the] thought and actions" of the actors engaged in this "sixty-year-long drama," Hanson places the influence of the Bible before all other influences.[9] And those involved in that debate and those councils did not simply draw on the New Testament but appealed to a number of Old Testament texts, often appealing to key Old Testament texts (e.g. Prov 8:22[10]) in order to articulate their views (orthodox or otherwise[11]).

However, the theologians in these fourth century debates who appealed to the Old Testament were primarily interested in texts that contributed to their understanding of Christology. That is, their interest was in articulating the nature and Person of the Son, and they appealed to texts that (as they interpreted them) substantiated their doctrine of the Son. Furthermore, many modern interpreters (both critical and evangelical) would find the exegesis of the Old Testament Scriptures, and hermeneutical methods employed by the theologians of the fourth century, to be somewhat problematic.[12]

Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31.

[9] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God*, 825. "All parties to the controversy shared very much the same exegetical assumptions' and "regarded the Bible as inerrant as far as it was possible to do so."

[10] "The key text, Prov. 8:22, for instance was allowed by everybody to refer to Christ." Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God*, 825.

[11] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God*, 831–34, 842–46, lists a number of Old Testament texts that were used by the Arians to argue their position such as Proverbs 8:22, Amos 4:12–13, Isaiah 53:8, Psalm 45:7 (44:7–8), Psalm 110: 1, 3 (109:1); and a number that were used by pro-Nicene authors such as Athanasius (who produced "a list of testimonies to Christ's Godhead culled from the Old Testament" e.g. Genesis 19:24, Psalms 2:7, 110:1 [109:1], 45:6 [44:6], 96:7 [97:7], and 145:13 [144:13]), Hilary ("To prove the distinct existence of the Son is known in the Old Testament he musters" Psalm 45:7 [45:8], Isaiah 43:10, Hosea 1:6,7, Psalm 2:8, Isaiah 45:11ff—"to which much exposition is devoted." See Hilary, *De Trinitate* 4:45–31: "He reproduces also all the traditional epiphanies of Christ under the old dispensation: the figure with whom Jacob wrestled, the figure who stood at the top of Jacob's ladder, he whom Moses saw at the Burning bush, he who gave the law on Mount Sinai and he ranges through the prophets on the same principle."), Basil the Great (who produced "a shower of proof-texts designed to display at once the function and divinity of the Holy Spirit" such as Psalm 33:6, Job 33:4, Isaiah 48:16; Psalm 139:7) and Gregory of Nazianzus ("who gives a succinct list of passages from the Bible calculated to supply a pro-Nicene controversialist with a handy arsenal of prefabricated arguments," many of which are from the Old Testament, e.g. "*That the Son is God*" from Psalm 110:2 [109:3], Isaiah 41:4 ["he who calls him Beginning from the generations" is his version."], "*That He is Lord, King*" from Genesis 19:24 and Psalm 45:7 [44:7]. See Gregory, *Orations*, 39:17.

[12] For example there is this from Hanson: "The last word on the appeal to the Bible during this crucial period in the history of Christian doctrine, however, must be of the impression made on the student of the period that the expounders of the text of the Bible are incompetent and ill-prepared to expound it." Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God*, 848. Even if one finds this estimate of patristic exegesis by Hanson a bit harsh, it seems others recognize the "hermeneutical dissonance" a modern exegete has when reading a fourth century exegete handle a biblical text. For instance, Khaled Anatolios does a good job of explaining Athanasius's employment of the "principle of intertextuality" that stopped short of "standard allegorical exegesis" but allowed him to "construct a biblical meaning by connecting together related language from different parts of Scripture, seemingly overstepping the contextual difference between the different usages." However, he admits, "It could be objected that whatever intelligibility Athanasius's approach might have had in its context, it no longer makes sense for us today." Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 111–12. To such an objection—and to Hanson's comment above directly—Ayres responds, "These negative judgments have usually resulted from comparisons between early Christian and modern academic exegetical practice, comparisons that assume the former is a deficient form of the latter." Ayres, *Nicaea*

In sum, it would appear to be the case that while the Trinitarianism of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was firmly and rightly grounded in the exegesis of the Christological texts of both testaments, there was little interest in finding corroboration for trinitarianism as such in the Old Testament. Indeed, as Warfield conceded centuries later, "It is a plain matter of fact that none who have depended on the revelation embodied in the Old Testament alone have ever attained to the doctrine of the Trinity."[13] However, once the Trinitarianism of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed had been established, the Old Testament could then be examined in the light of that creed for implications, indications and intimations of the Trinitarianism affirmed in it.[14]

That is the intention of this article. The question herein addressed is: How does the Old Testament contribute to the fullest understanding of a biblical and orthodox (Nicene) doctrine of the Trinity?

Texts That Reveal Aspects of the OT Doctrine of God

The doctrine of the Trinity is usually considered under the category of Theology Proper and is informed by a number of basic aspects of that doctrine; and many, if not most, of those aspects are clearly revealed in the Old Testament. These include that God is; God is One; and God is the Living God.

Existence: God Is and He *Is* "in-relation-to"

Genesis 1:1 The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth

[1]In the beginning God (אֱלֹהִים) created the heavens and the earth.[15]

This verse indicates the aseity of God and the "pre-existence" [16] of God since it assumes God's existence "was" before his immediate creation of the physical

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and its Legacy, 31. Ayres goes on to offer an explanation patristic exegesis of the fourth century (see Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 32–40) which is interesting (analysis of which would go well beyond the purview of this article) but falls short of resolving the matter for many twenty-first century evangelical trinitarian exegetes and theologians. To put the matter plainly, the exegesis of the pro-Nicene authors—especially exegesis of the Old Testament—does not, for many who hold to modernist hermeneutics inspire theological confidence in their trinitarian conclusions. It appears to some hold to modernist hermeneutics that while they may have arrived at the right theological conclusion (namely, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed), the hermeneutical and exegetical path to that conclusion was tenuous at best, and even illegitimate. But that leaves the obvious question virtually unasked, "How can a wrong hermeneutical reach a right hermeneutical conclusion?" Perhaps this prejudice against the exegesis of the pro-Nicene authors needs to be challenged; but that is a matter beyond the focus of this article. For more on how modernist hermeneutical opinions view Christian exegesis of the Old Testament see note 41 below.

[13] Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," 141.

[14] After the quote above, Warfield continues: "It is another question, however, whether there may not exist in the pages of the Old Testament turns of expression or records of occurrences in which *one already acquainted with the doctrine of the Trinity* may fairly see indications of an underlying implication of it." Warfield, 141 (emphasis added).

[15] All texts of Scripture are from the *New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

[16] Compare John 1:1–3 which reveals the "pre-existence of the Word." See Douglas McCready, *He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 140–48.

universe. This verse, in context with the rest of Genesis, establishes the basic and vital distinction between God and his creation—that is the Creator-creation (creature) distinction. As such it establishes that the "Being" (ontology) of God is distinct from the "being" (ontology) of the creation, and especially all sentient creatures. God is ontologically *sui generis*.

This verse also indicates God's "transcendence"—a real, but not utter distinction between God and creation.[17] By transcendence is meant a certain relation (standing) of God—real and vital—with respect to His creation/creatures. God is over-against or above (the locational terminology is metaphorical) all that is not God. However, this transcendence, rightly understood, is not an absolute separation.[18] He is distinct (Creator), yet His "is-ness" is an "is-in-relation,"[19] that is He stands-in-relation, to all creation.

At the point indicated in Gen 1:1, that standing "in-relation" to creation might seem to be something new. He obviously had never been "in-relation-to" this creation for it did not exist before "in the beginning." Does that then indicate a change in God? At the moment of creation, does God find Himself "in-relation-to" for the first time when He created the universe? That might seem to be a problem for His immutability. But if He is "in-relation" to Himself, then being "in-relation-to" is not something new, rather being/existing "in-relation-to" is proper to His Being.[20] Robert Letham

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[17] See note 20 below.

[18] See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 13. "The transcendence of God (His exaltation, His mysteriousness) has been understood as God's being infinitely removed from the creation, being so far from us, so 'wholly other' and 'wholly hidden' that we can have no knowledge of Him and make no statements about Him. Such a god, therefore, has not revealed and perhaps cannot reveal—himself to us. He is locked out of human life . . ." Frame contrasts this false notion of transcendence with what he calls "covenant lordship" in which all of creation stands in "covenant relation" to God. Frame's basic insight may be granted, i.e. that God's transcendence should not be understood as His infinite removal from His creation but indicates a certain and vital relation to that creation, without accepting his specific definition of transcendence as "covenant" headship, or lordship (especially if that "covenantalism" is made parallel to the special covenantal relationship the Lord GOD with the nation of Israel. It is enough for the point being made here to acknowledge that the transcendence of God is descriptive not of the absolute separation of the Creator and creation/creature but is descriptive of a certain real relation-to and at the same time a distinction-of Creator and creation/creature.

[19] This is in contrast to the Platonism of Plotinus who posited that the One (absolute simplicity/unity, beyond "being") is above and beyond all that which has emanated from the One. The first emanation is the Nous, which was above and beyond the next emanation, the Soul, and then (in descending chain of being) comes all physical reality. In this complex theory of emanations what is clear is that Plotinus' One does not stand "in-relation-to" that which emanates from the One in any way like the God of Gen 1:2 stands "in-relation-to" His creation. "Plotinus expressly rejects the notion that God becomes in any way less through the process of emanation: He remains untouched, undiminished, unmoved." Frederick Copleston, S. J., *A History of Philosophy: Volume I: Greece and Rome* (New York, NY: An Image Book Doubleday, 1962–1965), 466.

[20] If this "in-relation-to" is understood as trinitarian then the problem of "the one and the many" (which Plotinus, with his One of absolute simplicity/unity) was attempting (but failed) to explain in his philosophy (see note 19 above and Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980], 173–74) is resolved in the Christian doctrine of the "ontological Trinity" (as distinguished from the "economical Trinity"), see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 240n190. "For the Christian, the ultimate unifying principle is the self-sufficient, eternal, sovereign, personal, and triune Creator of heaven and earth. And within this Creator here is equal ultimacy of unity and plurality (three persons in one essence)." Ibid., 326n131. In other words, only in the Creator who

notes, "He is a relational being. This is implicit from the very start."[21] Letham explains further that in the first verses of Genesis, there is "the God who creates the heavens and the earth (v. 1)," then there is "the Spirit of God who hovers over the face of the waters (v. 2)," and then there is "the speech or word of God who issues the" creative order "Let there be ..." (vv. 3, 6, 14).[22] Would this hypostasizing of "Spirit of God," and "the word" have been something the original readers would have understood? Perhaps not, but the later developments of the use of *ruach* (cf. the Spirit, Psa 33:6 [וּבְרוּחַ /*ruach*]; 104:30; Job 32:8 [*ruach*]; 33:4) and the Word/Wisdom (cf. Psa. 33:6; Prov 8:22–23; and see John 1:1) are congruent with such an understanding.

The Plural אֱלֹהִים

The plural אֱלֹהִים may itself indicate plurality in the Godhead.[23] Even though the plural ending (*–im*) is likely a "plural of majesty,"[24] it nevertheless allows for a notion of plurality in God. Herman Bavinck asserts, this name "is no proof for the Trinity. Yet it is remarkable that among the proponents of monotheism (i.e., the Jews) this name never encountered objection on account of its form. This can only be explained on the assumption that it does not contain any reminiscence of polytheism but refers to deity in the fulness and richness of its life. The God of revelation is not an abstract 'monad' but the true and living God, who in the fulness of his life contains the highest diversity."[25]

Exodus 3:13–14 The Calling of Moses

> [13]Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" [14]God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Exodus 3 records the calling of Moses by God to be the human instrument of redeeming the descendants of Jacob from bondage in Egypt. In Exo 3:13–14 God "identified Himself as I AM WHO I AM and informed Moses that he should simply say to the people I AM has sent me to you (3:14). The name I AM is a literal translation of first person singular of the Hebrew verb *'ehyeh* ('I am'); the third

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because He is "in-relation-to" Himself, as is proper to His Being (not in His essence but in Himself) is the problem of the "one and the many" resolved."

[21] Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 19.

[22] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 19.

[23] See Thomas A. Keiser, "The Divine Plural: A Literary-Contextual Argument for Plurality in the Godhead," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 2 (December 2009): 131–46. After his excellent and thorough examination Keiser concludes, "the foregoing discussion suggests that there is considerable basis for understanding the divine plural, within its own literary context, as an intended but unspecified reference to plurality in the Godhead. If this perspective is valid, then what remains is inquiry as to the specific nature of this plurality." (Keiser, 146.)

[24] See the further discussion matter on this below under :1. Plurality indicated in Conversation Texts; What persons are involved in this conversation / deliberation?

[25] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation, Vol. Two*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 261.

person singular of this verb is transliterated *yehweh* ('he is'). This latter term is taken as the name of God ('Yahweh') and is rendered in most English translations as "LORD"; the combination of these four letters (in Hebrew: YHWH) is called the 'tetragrammaton' (the 'four-letter' name of God)."[26]

The Name "Yahweh": Aseity

This name asserts the aseity of God in an even more direct manner than Genesis 1:1 (above). John Frame notes, there are other terms that can be used to express and explain the notion of aseity such as "independence, self-existence, self-sufficiency, and self-containment."[27] Frame notes that while some use "the term self-caused (*causa sui*) ... as another synonym," this can be misconstrued because "efficient causation requires some priority of the cause to the effect," and so "it is impossible to bring about one's own existence in a literal sense."[28] Still, Frame explains that if the term aseity is not pressed too literally, it can be said that the notion means God is "uncaused" in the sense that he "has within himself sufficient reasons or grounds for his existence."[29]

Frame extends the notion of aseity beyond the metaphysical (God's existence) to "the epistemological and ethical areas." "That is to say, God is not only self-existent, but also self-attesting and self-justifying. He not only exists without receiving existence from something else, but also gains his knowledge edge only from himself (his nature and his plan) and serves as his own criterion of truth. And his righteousness is self-justifying, based on the righteousness of his own nature and on his status as the ultimate criterion of rightness."[30]

The Name "Yahweh": Identity

"The name YHWH signifies God's self-identity or simplicity (Ex. 3:14)."[31] "The Bible reserves the proper name YHWH for God alone. It is the one God's 'holy name' (Ps. 145:21), the glory he will not share with another (Isa. 48:11)."[32] Only God Himself can reveal the full significance of this name. "Because of its uniqueness, YHWH is a name that only God can interpret to us. Thankfully, God has done just that. The book of Exodus is, in many respects, YHWH's self-interpretation writ large."[33] Yahweh is his name "in-relation-to" the fathers and his "memorial-name" "in-relation-to" "all generations" (Exo 3:15). In sum, his "self-existence" is expressed in a name that indicates his "being" is inherently a being "in-relation-to"—it's simply a part of who he is.

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[26] Quoted from my commentary on Exodus: Kevin D. Zuber, "Exodus," in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 120. Again, this indicates He is a God who "relates" to his creation—He is above, distinct in his being (essence), "other-than" his creation—and yet he relates to his creation and especially his sentient creation (mankind).

[27] John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 601.

[28] Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 601.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Frame, 602.

[31] Scott Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 29.

[32] Swain, 30.

[33] Ibid.

God Is "One"

Deuteronomy 6:4 The Shema
4"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one."

Zechariah 14:9 Zechariah's Shema
9And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one (אֶחָד), and His name (וּשְׁמוֹ) the only one (אֶחָד).

"The Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4 states, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."[34] This is often understood as a Jewish declaration of monotheism although there are several views on "the question of what it means to say that YHWH is 'one.'"[35] The Hebrew syntax of this verse is somewhat problematic,[36] but "the meaning of the verse is quite clear."[37] The term translated "one" is the Hebrew adjective *ehad* or *ekhad* which, "occurs 960 times in many contexts throughout the OT," and in "its predominant use is to designate something that is numerically one."[38] However, as Erickson explains, while [*ehad*] may be used to convey "the meaning of the only one, [it] can be used to speak of a unity that is actually a union or composite of several factors."[39] For instance, it is "used in Genesis 2:24 of the 'one flesh' of the husband and the wife in marriage."[40] Thus while this term and this verse confirm God's unity, it also allows for plurality in that unity[41] and so does not preclude but allows for One yet Three. "It is true that in other uses of *ekhad*, a compound unity is not meant. But if Deuteronomy 6:4 had been intended to assert that God is only one person, another Hebrew word would certainly have been used, namely, *yakhid*, which has the sense of 'only, solitary' (see Ps. 68:6)."[42]

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[34] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 195.

[35] See Daniel M. Zucker, "שמע ישראל: *Shema Yisrael: In What Way Is 'YHWH One?'"* https://www.thetorah.com/article/shema-yisrael-in-what-way-is-yhwh-one. Accessed September 20, 2021. Rabbi Zucker's article lists several of these views, the most pertinent for this study are: "YHWH Is the Only God: Monotheism," "YHWH Is Indivisible: The Nature of God," and "YHWH Alone Is Our God: A Declaration of Loyalty." The key to each of these views is the meaning or significance of the term *ehad* (*ekhad*), "one."

[36] See Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 76; and John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 446; and Bruce E. Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4–19," *Restoration Quarterly* 20 (1977): 73–87. "Although the rabbinic tradition consistently proposes that the passage affirms the universal oneness of God, there are grammatical and theological complications."

[37] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 446.

[38] Ibid. The term *ehad* can have the meaning of "unique," hence, "the only one," (cf. P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976], 169). However, "There is a Hebrew word for one, *yahid*, which means simply uniqueness. It is the word used of Isaac in Jehovah's command to Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16)." Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 33. Since Moses uses *ehad* not *yahid* it seems the sense of the term *ehad* in context in Deut. 6:4 leans to "oneness of unity" over simply "uniqueness."

[39] Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, 33.

[40] Ibid. "It is used, for example, in Genesis 2:24: 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.'" Erickson, 34.

[41] See MacArthur and Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, 195.

[42] Ibid.

One but Not a Monad

To affirm that God is "one" is not to affirm that he is a singularity, a "monad." A "monad" may be understood as "an elementary individual substance"[43] or a basic, singular, element with no parts or divisions. Bavinck states plainly, "The God of revelation is not an abstract 'monad' but the true and living God, who in the infinite fullness of his life contains the highest diversity."[44] The Old Testament revelation of the "one God" does not endorse a "monadist monotheism"[45] (see under "Plurality/Triads" below).

God Is the Living God

Jeremiah 10:10a

[10]But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.

Daniel 6:26a

[26]"I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever.

That Yahweh is "the Living God" emphasizes at least two aspects of God's being. One, he is not a "non-living idol." Two, he has the capacity to relate to "the living" (i.e. self-consciously aware) entities in his creation (i.e. angels, men, nations).

Texts that Reveal Indications of the Trinity

Texts that Reveal Plurality/Triads

This section examines several texts that reveal indications of a plurality in the One God.[46]

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[43] Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Monad," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 25, 2007. Accessed October 15, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/topic/monad.

[44] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 261; cf. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," 141, ". . . in the Old Testament development of the idea of God there is a suggestion that the Deity is not a simple monad."

[45] Cf. James A. Fowler, "Towards a Christian Understanding Of God," 2002. Accessed October 15, 2021. http://christinyou.net/pages/understandgod.html. Fowler defines "monad monotheism" as the view of God "as a singular, unitary monad, i.e. as a single, unextended unit of one." Examples would be Islam's view of Allah (see Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?: A Former Muslim Investigates the Evidence for Islam and Christianity* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016], 69. "Christians worship Yahweh, the Trinity, whereas Muslims worship Allah, a monad."), and some fourth century Arians, such as Marcellus of Ancyra (see Hanson, *The Search for the Christian God*, 226; here Hanson cites Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* [III.4.1:57] as Eusebius cites Marcellus who uses the term Monad "as no different from the unity of God").

[46] See Arnold Huijgen, "Traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament: From Individual Texts to the Nature of Revelation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19, no. 3 (July 2017): 251–70. He examines several texts that seem to suggest plurality and concludes "from a theological point of view, mere plurality is a feeble basis for trinitarian theology" (Huijgen, 258). However, it should be pointed out that this present article is not attempting to find a "basis for trinitarian theology" in these texts but only indications that demonstrate that the Old Testament offers a positive revelation of intimations concerning God that are commensurate with the Trinitarianism of the New Testament and the Nicene-

Plurality Indicated in Conversation Texts

Genesis 1:26a

[26a] Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."

Genesis 3:22a (cf. Gen 11:7; Isa 6:8)

[22]Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil ... ."

In these OT texts (and others) the indication of "plurality" comes through or is conveyed by divine speech, a divinely spoken word, or in a "conversation." In such "declarations" and/or "conversations," one person is speaking to or about another person. Swain explains, "Biblical texts where we overhear inner-Trinitarian conversations—conversations where the persons of the Trinity speak to or about each other—are among the Bible's primary modes of Trinitarian self-revelation."[47] In identifying these conversations, and the persons involved, the reader (interpreter) is engaging in "prosopological exegesis."[48] Matthew Bates demonstrates that this was a method of reading texts that had ancient roots. "The use of this technique

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Constantinopolitan Creed. In his article Huijgen is conscientiously engaged in a biblical studies approach that disallows a prior theological perspective in examining Old Testament biblical texts. Thus his effort is "to investigate whether traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament can be found that are acceptable in the light of contemporary biblical studies" (Huijgen, 254). Huijgen objects, for instance, to Matthew Bates's use of prosopological exegesis of Old Testament texts (cf. Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 36; see footnote 43 below) "because it comes at the expense of the Old Testament on its own terms." (Huijgen, "Traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament," 254n17). It seems that for Huijgen for the Old Testament to be interpreted on its own terms an exegete must limit himself to an "openness for biblical studies, including historical criticism, without claiming to know the divine intention in Old Testament texts and contexts beforehand"; only this will do for interpreting "the Old Testament on its own terms" (Huijgen, 254).

However, for the Christian theologian to exegete the Old Testament with no reference to "the divine intention in Old Testament texts" is both short sighted and frankly impossible (as well as pedantic and actually pointless!) This article proceeds on the theological-hermeneutical assumption that the One God has revealed Himself in the Old Testament and that the One God has revealed Himself to be Triune and while there is a certain (and revealed!) development in His self-revelation it would be a mistake *not to expect to find* (and to actually find!) that what He revealed about Himself in the Old Testament is consistent with Who He actually is. Thus, the objective here is not to prove the Trinity (as such) is revealed in the Old Testament but to show that what is revealed is consistent with, and (indeed even intentionally!) indicative of, what the New Testament reveals about the Trinity. For more on this point see Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018). Carter writes: "The doctrine of God generates a theological understanding of who we are as readers and the nature of the situation in which we read. But it is the *Christian* doctrine of God to which we must appeal. We are talking about appealing to the specific understanding of God that is derived from the prophets and apostles of Holy Scripture by means of exegesis. It is an appeal to the Holy Trinity" (Carter, 33). See also John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2012). Webster writes: "Countering the hegemony of pure nature in bibliology and hermeneutics requires appeal to the Christian doctrine of God." (Webster, 6) That Christian doctrine of God is Trinitarian (see Webster, 6ff).

[47] Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 39.

[48] Swain, *The Trinity*, 41; see Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 36; "prosopological exegesis demanded that the interpreter identify a speaking character or person (Greek: *prosōpon*; Latin: *persona*) and/or a personal addressee."

[prosopological exegesis] to interpret ancient texts is attested beginning in the second century BCE."[49] To be clear "prosopological exegesis" is a modern term for an ancient technique.[50] Of course, to the Old Testament reader it would not have been obvious that the persons involved in the conversation were "the persons of the Trinity." Nevertheless, these conversations or speeches do make it obvious that there are "persons" (Greek: *prosōpon*; Latin: *persona*) in the Trinity.[51] A reader of the Old Testament would be engaging in "prosopological exegesis" simply by acknowledging the "dialogical nature" of these texts. Even before the fuller revelation of the New Testament, it is evident that "'God' had already been read dialogically [i.e. in spoken dialogues] and prosopologically in the ancient Jewish Scripture, and hence the foundational conceptual decision to privilege the 'person' metaphor in considering internal distinctions within the one God had already been made via scriptural interpretation."[52] Furthermore these texts also provide indications of unity of the Godhead while indicating the distinctions of person. To be sure, this does not yet reveal the Trinity with the clarity of the New Testament but, as Bates avers, from such texts "the Trinity emerged conceptually to a large degree through interpretative reading of the Old Testament, especially through a specific technique, prosopological exegesis."[53]

What Persons Are Involved in This Conversation/Deliberation?

But who are the persons involved in these conversations? Theologians and exegetes of Genesis have offered a variety of suggestions to explain the dialogical features of these texts. Some have suggested that the deliberation of Genesis 1:26–27 involved God and the angels.[54] Murphy dismisses this suggestion for a number of reasons,[55] not the least of which (despite Von Rad's overly confident assertion[56]) this is simply not indicated by the texts.[57] Furthermore, "The agents addressed are invited to share in the creation of man, and this power is never attributed to angels elsewhere in the Bible."[58] Letham further notes that Gordon Wenham "puts forward a variant on the theme of the heavenly court" but he also "argues that God invites the angels to witness the creation of man, rather than

[49] Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 31.

[50] Bates, 33n59.

[51] The term comes from the *prosopon*, a mask worn in Greek theater by an actor that let the audience know who this character was; see Bates, 31.

[52] Bates, 40.

[53] Ibid.

[54] "Some suggest that God is addressing the angels and placing himself in the heavenly court, so that man is made like the angels." Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 19; cf. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 57–59; see C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: Volume I: The Pentatuech*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 62.

[55] See Bryan Murphy, "The Trinity in Creation," *MSJ* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 175–76.

[56] Von Rad affirms, "God includes himself among the heavenly beings and thereby conceals himself in this multiplicity. That, in our opinion, is the only possible explanation for this striking stylistic form." Von Rad then cites Gen. 3:22 as a parallel text. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

[57] "There are no direct references to angels or the angelic host in the creation narrative (i.e., Gen 1:1–2:3; or even in 2:4–25). The nearest reference is in Gen 3:24 and it is too remote to be readily associated with the plurality and the context of 1:26 with any level of certainty." Murphy, "The Trinity in Creation," 175.

[58] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 19.

to participate in it."[59] Also, man is not made in some angelic-divine image but in the "image and likeness" (*tselem* (or *selem*) and *demuth*) of God.

Letham observes that Westermann and many recent interpreters favor a plural of self-deliberation or self-encouragement. Yet few parallels support this view."[60] Others have posited that what appears to be a plurality of persons in this text is merely expressive of the so-called "Plural of Majesty."[61] Letham cites S. R. Driver as one of those who suggest this is an example of the plural of majesty, "a figure of speech underlining God's dignity and greatness."[62] While this view has some merit, especially in the light of the use of *Elohim* in Genesis 1, it is less adequate to explain what is depicted in Genesis 1:26. In his careful analysis of the use of the plural *Elohim* in the creation accounts (and an overview of the Hebrew grammar of "plurality") Bryan Murphy concludes, "The plural form of *Elohim* is not, in itself, a clear indication of plurality within the Godhead." He further concludes, "The best and most consistent way to understand the plural form in these cases [e.g. Gen. 1:1] is to take it as a majestic plural" or "plural of majesty."[63] However, Murphy argues that other grammatical considerations, namely the plurals of Gen 1:26 coupled with the return to the consistent use of *Elohim* in conjunction with singular verbs in Gen 1:26, indicate that this verse "does attest to a plurality of persons within the singular Godhead."[64]

Both Letham and Wainwright observe that rabbinical commentators were not unaware that this verse, among others, seemed to indicate "a plurality within God (Gen 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8). Philo thought they referred to subordinate powers assisting God in the creation of man. Puzzling over these passages, Jewish interpreters tried to see them expressing the unity of God."[65] But satisfying explanations for this do not seem to have been of much interest for these scholars.

Mediating Agent(s)?

It may be pertinent to observe here that there are a number of OT texts that indicate that creation involved Elohim and a mediating agent or agents. Indeed, this can be seen when the earlier parts of Genesis 1 (e.g. Gen 1:2, the Spirit; Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29, "and God said" = the Word) are read in light of later texts (e.g. the Spirit, Psa 33:6 [וּבְרוּחַ /*ruach*]; 104:30; Job 32:8 [*ruach*]; 33:4; the Word, Psa 33:6; Prov 8:22–23). "Elohim creates by speaking his word and sending out his spirit." "God calls all things into being by his word as mediating agent, [but also] it is through his Spirit that he is immanent in the creation and vivifies and beautifies it all."[66]

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[59] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 20; cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15: Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 28. Letham points out that Wenham cites Job 38:4–7 as indicating that at creation the angels rejoiced. This is an indication that while present at creation, the angels were not direct partners the deliberation or dialogue of Genesis 1:26–27.

[60] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 19–20.

[61] "No other explanation is left, therefore, than to regard it as *pluralis majestatis* . . ." Keil and Delitzsch, *Volume 1*, 62.

[62] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 19; cf. S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1926) 14.

[63] Murphy, "The Trinity in Creation," 172.

[64] Murphy, 177.

[65] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 20; cf. Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (1962; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 23–25.

[66] Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 261–62.

So the deliberations involved in Gen 1:26–27 may be understood, as Keil and Delitzsch suggest, as "God speaking of Himself and with Himself in the plural number, not *reverentiae causa*, but with reference to the fulness of the divine powers and essences He possesses."[67] However, these scholars add that these deliberations (in keeping with "the trinitarian view") indicate "something more than powers and attributes of God," indeed, these deliberations may be taken to indicate the *hypostases* in the "absolute Divine Being." In other words, if not directly, but given "the further revelation of God," these deliberations (may merely indicate that, but certainly allow that,) there are "persons" in Genesis 1:26–27 (at least two—one speaking and one addressed, but possibly [likely] more).[68]

It seems that a fuller revelation concerning the mediating agent(s) is required to understand the persons indicated but not explicitly identified in this conversation in Genesis 1:26–27 (cf. Gen 3:22a). This delay in fully revealing the nature of God's plurality—within the OT canon—not only allows for, but would seem to prepare for, the fuller revelation of the nature of God's plurality in the NT.

In sum, in these "conversational texts," both plurality and relationality is evident in the Godhead. "This God who made the universe—establishing an order with a vast range of variety, with human beings as the crown of his creation, representing him as his image bearers—is relational."[69]

Texts That Reveal Plurality in a Blessing and Vision

In a Blessing
Numbers 6:22–27 The Aaronic Blessing / Benediction

[22]Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [23]"Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

[24]The LORD bless you, and keep you;
[25]The LORD make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
[26]The LORD lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.'

[27]So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them."

These verses are generally known as the Priestly or Aaronic Blessing,[70] or the Aaronic Benediction.[71] These verses were used for both Jewish and early Christian liturgy.[72] The Christian use of this blessing was given a "Trinitarian slant" in the

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[67] Keil and Delitzsch, *Volume I*, 62.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 19

[70] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: Volume III: The Pentatuech*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 41.

[71] See Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in *EBC* Vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 754.

[72] "In these three blessings most of the fathers and early theologians saw an allusion to the Trinity." Keil and Delitzsch, *Volume III: The Pentatuech*, 41; see David L. Stubbs, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2009), 78 and 78n61.

church fathers,[73] which has been emulated by many ever since.[74] Modern authors are more measured in their comments, and yet they can recognize how easily the threefold repetition of the name of the LORD lends itself to a plurality, if not clearly as a Trinity, in the relation of God to His people.[75]

In a Vision
Isaiah 6:2–3

> [2]Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.
> [3]And one called out to another and said,
> "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,
> The whole earth is full of His glory."

These verses are part of Isaiah's vision[76] of Yahweh and the prophet's call to ministry (Isa 6:1–10). This vision of the Seraphim is unique[77] and the account is highly dramatic. The cry of these angelic beings is a sublime, "probably

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[73] Stubbs notes that both Chrysostom (*Patrologia graeca* 58.514–16) and Theodoret of Cyprus (*Patrologia graeca* 80.363–64) refer to this blessing. Stubbs further notes that for Chrysostom "Christ is the source and content blessing" and this "is extended to Christians through union with him by the work of the Holy Spirit"; and Theodoret "makes similar connections between the Aaronic blessing and the life of Christians in their relationship to Christ." Ibid.

[74] For instance, the nineteenth century commentator George Bush forthrightly asserts, We may "regard the benediction pronounced by Aaron and his sons upon the children of Israel as a dim, but real foreshadowing and revelation of that great truth which lies at the very foundation of the Christian system—(the love of the Everlasting Father, the grace of the Incarnate Son, the comfort, the teaching, and the communion of the Holy and Blessed Spirit— not as three Gods, but as one God viewed under a threefold aspect. According to this suggestion, God the Father is referred to in the 24th verse—'The Lord bless thee and keep thee,' the Son, the Redeemer, is referred to in the 25th verse—'Make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;' and the Holy Spirit is alluded to in the 26th verse—'Lift up the light of his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.' This view appears to us a reasonable one." George Bush, *Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Numbers* (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1858), 101–102.

[75] Keil and Delitzsch explain that the early theologians who perceived a trinitarian allusion in these verses "rested their conclusion, (a) upon the triple repetition of the name *Jehovah*; (b) upon the *ratio praedicati*, that Jehovah by whom the blessing is desired and imparted, is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and (c) upon the *distinctorum benedictionis membrorum consideratio,* according to which [the] *bis trina beneficia* are mentioned." The authors' comment on this is "There is truth in this, though the grounds assigned seem faulty." Still, they conclude, "the substance of this blessing . . . unfolded the grace of God in the threefold way in which it is communicated to us through the Father, Son, and Spirit." Keil and Delitzsch, *Volume III: The Pentateuch*, 41–42. In other words, the blessings of grace and peace, and the blessing of presence (communion, fellowship) of the LORD ("His face . . . His countenance") which are offered by Him in this benediction are many times, in later revelation, the blessings promised and realized by the Persons of the Father (communion—John 14:23; grace and peace—1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 13:14; 2 John 1:3), the Son (communion—Matt 18:20;1 John 4:13); grace and peace—John 1:16; 14:27) and the Spirit (communion—John 14:17; grace and peace—Eph 2:5; Gal 5:22).

[76] "The claim that Isaiah saw the Lord (6:1) does not contradict statements that it is impossible to see God (Gen 32:30; Exod 19:21; 33:20; Judg 13:22)." "This was a limited manifestation that was adapted to finite mental comprehension and human observation, probably a vision." Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39: NAC* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 187.

[77] "The heavenly beings, *seraphs* / 'burning ones' . . . are found only here." J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 76.

antiphonal,"[78] acknowledgment of the holinesss of God, which Motyer states, "is supremely the truth about God, and his holiness is itself so far beyond human thought that a 'super-superlative' has to be invented to express it."[79] The function of the "trisagion"[80] is to express the utter uniqueness and moral purity of Yahweh.[81] Isaiah stood before the One awesome in His transcendent essence and in His terrifying in His moral purity (as evidence by Isaiah's reaction and acknowledgment of his sinfulness, cf. Isa 6:5).

The question that is often asked at this point is: "Does the three-fold repetition of קָדוֹשׁ / *qāḏōwōš* imply anything tripartite in Yahweh? Is this an indication of the Trinity?" Oswalt does not think there is and notes, "There is nothing in the context to cause us to take this reference to the Trinity as the church fathers did."[82] Smith, less firmly, but astutely notes, "Although the seraphs certainly knew about the Trinity, there is no way to prove that this threefold declaration of holiness is evidence to support this doctrine."[83] However, in answer to the question "Why is the word holy uttered three times?," Young observes, "An ancient answer is that this is a refence to the Trinity and in the New Testament different parts of this chapter are indeed referred to the three Persons of the Trinity."[84] And he cautiously cites Delitzsch " ... the trilogy (*trisagion*) of the seraphs (like that of the cherubim in Rev. iv.8), whether Isaiah was aware of it or no, truly pointed to in the distinct consciousness of the spirits themselves to the triune God."[85]

In sum, it would appear that this text may not be as clear an indication of the plurality or triunity of the Godhead as others, but it is fair to conclude it is certainly not incommensurate with the notion of plurality and may (with appropriate caution) be considered an indistinct indication.

Texts That Reveal the Indications of "Others" in Relation to Yahweh

A number of texts indicate that there were other persons (hypostasis) who were distinct from Yahweh but who had divine qualities on par with Him in terms of deity and divinity.

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[78] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 180.

[79] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 77.

[80] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 181.

[81] See E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol. I: Chapters 1–18* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 242–43n19.

[82] Young, 281n34.

[83] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 189n206.

[84] Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 243.

[85] Young, 244. There is no source by Delitzsch cited by Young. Young goes on to cite Calvin who held that "the passage is not as clear" on the point regarding the Trinity as it might be.

Texts That Refer to the Angel of the LORD

The entity identified as the (not "an"[86]) Angel of the LORD (*mal'āk* [מַלְאַךְ] *Yahweh* [יְהוָה]) appears in a number of OT texts[87] and in a number of roles. Eichrodt notes that he often serves "as the guide and protector of those who fear God" (cf. Gen 24:7; 1 Kings 19:5ff; 2 Kings 1:3, 15), or he may appear as an avenger who brings "plague and destruction as a punishment" from God (cf. 2 Sam 24:26ff; 2 Kings 19:35ff), or he "himself may be conceived of as a heavenly judge" (cf. 2 Sam 14:7, 20; 19:28; Zech. 3:1). He plays a prominent role as "Yahweh's emissary" and "special helper of Israel during the Wilderness wanderings" (cf. Exo 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2).[88] He is, as the name "angel" indicates, a "messenger" sent by the LORD.

Yet in several of these appearances the Angel of the LORD is identified as the LORD (Yahweh) (Gen 16:13; cf. 21:11–12) or God (Elohim) (Gen 31:11, 13) and is thus revealed to be, in some sense, more than (but never less than) an angel in the sense of a messenger (מַלְאָךְ *mal'āk*). Indeed, in Eichrodt's words, "in his appearing and speaking clothes [he] himself with Yahweh's own appearance and speech." However, Eichrodt's characterization that this "describes an emissary that is no longer distinguishable from his master" is not quite right.[89] Payne agrees that this Angel "transcends the angelic category," but he better characterizes this by suggesting that this Angel is "described in terms that are suitable only to a distinct Person of the Godhead."[90]

Genesis 16:7–11, 13 (cf. 21:17–18) The Angel of the LORD Appears to Hagar

> [7]Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. [8]He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid where have you come from, and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." [9]Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." [10]Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count." [11]The angel of the LORD said to her further "Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall name him Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction ... . [13]Then she called the name of the LORD

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[86] "Grammatically, *mal'āk Yahweh* is a construct (also called bound form, genitive construction) and according to the rule of constructs, both elements must be either definite or indefinite. Since the proper noun "Yahweh" is intrinsically definite, the noun that precedes it musts (sic) also be definite; so the phrase cannot therefore mean 'an angel of the LORD' but must connote greater definiteness, in other words, 'the Angel of the LORD." Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: NAC* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 110. "But the expression is often quite definite by position; hence it is always definite in use; and the explanation is that the expression מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה is sufficiently definite in itself." C. Goodspeed, "The Angel of Jehovah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 36, no. 144 (October 1879): 601.

[87] "The term *mal'āk Yahweh*, usually translated 'the Angel of the LORD,' appears sixty-seven times in the Old Testament." Goodspeed, "The Angel of Jehovah," 601.

[88] Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament: Volume Two*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1967), 23–24.

[89] Eichrodt, 24.

[90] J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 167.

> who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees me"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive after seeing Him?"

In this exchange with Hagar, the angel of the LORD makes a promise to Hagar that he will "greatly multiply your descendants" and in a subsequent exchange (in Gen 21:17–18 where this entity is called by the equivalent title "angel of God," *mal'āk Elohim*) Hagar is promised that her child will be made "a great nation." These promises are very like those the LORD made to Abram (cf. Gen 15:5, cf. Exo 32:15; and Gen 12:2). These are promises only the LORD Himself can keep; and so it appears that in so speaking this angel is declaring that He is the LORD (Yahweh). Hagar herself addresses this angel "by the names Yahweh and God" (16:13 and 21:17).[91] And yet, in Gen 16:11 "the angel speaks about Yahweh as if He were a third party."[92] The angel both is the LORD (Yahweh) and distinct from the LORD. The angel has the authority to make promises that only the LORD can make, and yet He is in some way distinct from, and can speak of the LORD as another.

Genesis 22:11–12, 14, 15–18 The Angel of the LORD Appears to Abraham

> [11]But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [12]He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." ... [14] Abraham called the name of that place, The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided." [15]Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, [16]and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17]indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. [18]In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

In Genesis 22:1–2 God instructed Abraham to offer Isaac as "a burnt offering." In 22:11–12 the angel of the LORD speaks and interrupts Abraham's intention to obey that command and goes on to say, "I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Here again, the angel of the LORD is acknowledged as God. In Genesis 22:15–18 the angel of the LORD calls to Abraham "a second time" and once again, this One who speaks is identified as "the LORD," Who reiterates the promise He made to Abraham (Abram) in 15:5 and 12:3.

Exodus 3:2–6 The Angel of the LORD Appears to Moses

> [2]The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the

[91] Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 167.
[92] Ibid.

> bush was not consumed. [3]So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." [4]When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." [5]Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." [6]He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

This encounter between "the angel of the LORD" and Moses begins with a clear assertion that it was the "angel of the LORD" who appeared to Moses "in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush," (v. 2) but he just as clearly identifies Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face because he recognized that the One speaking to him from the bush was God. It was God (Elohim) who "called to him from the midst of the bush" (v. 4). However, even though in this text it is clear that "the Angel of the LORD" is identified (in some sense) as "God," it may still be the case that there is a distinction between the "the Angel of the LORD" and "the LORD."

Douglas Stuart asserts, "Indeed, Exod 3 is perhaps the strongest of all the passages for identifying he 'Angel of the LORD' as the Lord himself for it continually refers to the individual first identified as the 'Angel of the LORD' as both Lord (Yahweh) and (vv. 2,4,7, 5 (sic), 16, 18) and God (vv. 4–6, 11–16, 18)."[93] But is Stuart accurate in saying that the 'Angel of the LORD' is identified as Lord (Yahweh) as clearly as the 'Angel of the LORD' is identified as God (Elohim)? Is there no significance to the change from "the LORD saw" to "God called him" in verse 4? Payne may be right when he claims, "The Elohim-Angel is, in the text, differentiated from Yahweh."[94] In any case, this text must be read in the light of others where the angel of the LORD is identified with the LORD—in some sense—and distinct from the LORD and God—in some sense. The next set of texts picks up this point.

Exodus 14:19 + 23:20, 23 (cf. Exo 33:2) + Judges 2:1 (cf. 2:4–5)
The Angel of the LORD as the Guide of the Nation

> [19]The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.

> [20]"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ... [23]For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites ... .

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[93] Stuart, *Exodus*, 112.
[94] Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 168.

> [1]Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you.'"

These texts, taken together, indicate that it was the angel of the LORD who led the nation from the time of the deliverance of the nation from Pharaoh's revenge (cf. Exo 14), through the wilderness wanderings, and to the time of the conquest. For this study the key text is Exodus 20:20 where it is the LORD God who is speaking,[95] and He refers to this angel as an entity sent by the LORD and so distinct from Him.

Judges 6:11–14, 17–24 The Angel of the LORD Appears to Gideon

> [11]Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. [12]The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." [13]Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." [14]The Lord looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" ... [17]So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me. [18]Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And He said, "I will remain until you return." [19]Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them. [20]The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. [21]Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. [22]When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." [23]The LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die." [24]Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace.

In this exchange, the angel of the LORD appears to Gideon and speaks to him (6:12). Although Gideon does not recognize the angel as the LORD, he does address Him as one who speaks for the LORD. In the exchange it becomes obvious that it is the LORD Who is addressing Gideon (e.g. 6:14), and Gideon seems to have realized this because he asks for a sign from the angel (6:17) and offers to prepare an

[95] All of chapters 20 through 23 are understood as the words of the LORD God: "Then God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God . . ." (Exo 20:1–2a).

offering[96] (6:18), an offer that the angel accepts. "It was when the meal was consumed with fire at the touch of the angel's rod, followed immediately by the disappearance of the angel himself (21), that Gideon realized with terror the nature of his heavenly visitor (22)."[97] Gideon's reaction is explained by the belief (based on texts like Exo 20:19 and 33:20) "that no man could see God face to face and live,"[98] and for Gideon this applied to seeing "the angel of the LORD face to face" (Judg 6:22). In 6:23, "it was Yahweh who finished the conversation"[99] (6:23), thus confirming that this angel is to be identified with the LORD Himself.

Judges 13:2–3, 6, 15–21 The Angel of the LORD Appears to the Wife of Manoah and Manoah

> [2]There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. [3]Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. ... [6]Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name ... . [8]Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born." ... [15]Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a young goat for you." [16]The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. [17]Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?" [18]But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" [19]So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. [20]For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. [21]Now the angel of the LORD did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD.

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[96] The term for offering is *minḥā* (מִנְחָה) and is "often used of the freewill offering in Israel's sacrificial system." Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges*: *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968) 105.

[97] Cundall, *Judges*, 106.

[98] Ibid. "It nowhere appears that such fear as Gideon manifested was shown in view of meeting any common angel, or any being not divine. Gideon feared, probably, because of what Jehovah had said to Moses, 'Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live." Goodspeed, "The Angel of Jehovah," 599.

[99] Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 169.

Here the angel of the LORD appears to the wife of Manoah and Manoah himself in such a form and manner that both take Him as a man; she calls Him a "man of God" (Judg 13:6), and Manoah prays to the LORD for "the man of God whom You have sent," to return. When the angel of the LORD does appear to Manoah, he offers him a meal as would be appropriate for a human guest. The exchange between Manoah and the angel of the LORD over this meal indicates that He is not a mere man as Manoah supposed but One whose name is "wonderful"[100] and One who will not eat a dinner with this couple but would accept "a burnt offering" offered "to the LORD" (13:16). And after the miraculous demonstration ("performed wonders" 13:19) of the flame on the alter, in which "the angel of the Lord ascended" (13:20) the couple realized, much to their fright, that this was no man, and then "Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD" (13:21).

Zechariah 1:12–13; 12:8 (3:1) The Angel of the LORD Appears to The Prophet Zechariah

> [2]Then the angel of the Lord said, "O Lord of hosts, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?" [13]The Lord answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words.
>
> [8]In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord before them.

After his first vision of the horses[101] in Zech 1:7–11; These horses are best understood as "symbols of divine activity in the government of the earth." The riders of the horses bring their report to the angel of the LORD (1:11). Then the prophet records a remarkable exchange between the angel of the LORD and the LORD. The angel of the LORD actually addressed the LORD (1:12), and the LORD responds to the angel (1:13). The distinction of the two could hardly be more evident. And yet Payne notes, in 12:8, "God and the Angel of the LORD are equivalent expressions."[102] And in 3:1 the angel is depicted as "sitting in God's place."[103]

The Angel of the LORD Appears: Summary

As has been seen, these texts that refer to the Angel of the LORD' are unambiguous in revealing that this entity is God, the LORD, Himself. However, they also indicate that this Angel is, in some sense, distinct from God, the LORD. Kidner crisply summarizes the point that while the title "angel of the LORD" "denotes God Himself as seen in human [or perhaps better, merely visible] form," the very term

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[100] This Hebrew masculine adjective, "comes from a root meaning, 'separate,' 'surpassing,' or 'ineffable'." Cundall, *Judges*, 159. The only other occurrence (in feminine) is in Psalm 139:6.

[101] Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990, 1952), 275.

[102] Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 169.

[103] Ibid.

"'Angel', by its meaning 'messenger', implies that God, made visible, is at the same time God *sent*."[104]

To attempt to further discover the identity of the angel of the LORD would go beyond the purposes of this article.[105] What has been demonstrated is that there are indications of plurality in the Godhead.

Texts That Refer to the Spirit of God: A Person Distinct from the LORD

Genesis 1:2

[2] The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Isaiah 48:16

[16]"Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit."

Isaiah 63:11 (cf. 63:10)

[11]Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them.

Psalm 104:30

[30]You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the ground.

These texts that refer to the "Spirit of God," "the Spirit of the LORD," "His Spirit," and "His Holy Spirit." It is well known that the Hebrew term רוּחַ/*rûaḥ* has several nuances. The basic sense is "wind," or "breath." The latter, "breath," "naturally gave rise to 'breath' as a sign of life," and from that came the sense of "living spirit," or simply "spirit."[106] In Job 27:3 the term נְשָׁמַת/*nišmaṯ* (breath) is used in poetic parallel with רוּחַ/*rûaḥ*.[107] Often רוּחַ/*rûaḥ* is used "to describe the general character of a person or group," (e.g. "a spirit of bitterness") or "a state of mind or

[104] Derek Kidner, *Genesis*: *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 33–34.

[105] Not a few Bible scholars and Trinitarian theologians make the case that the angel of the LORD is a theophany of Christ, however, that is a study more proper for Christology and is related to, but just outside of, the purpose of this study. "Many of the former and contemporary theologians have argued that the OT angel of the LORD was either a theophany or a Cbristophany." René A. López, "Identifying the 'Angel of the Lord' in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Loci," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20, no. 1 (2010): 3; cf. Günther Juncker, "Christ as Angel: The Reclamation of a Primitive Title," Trinity Journal 15, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 221–50; cf. James A. Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978), 5–10.

[106] See William D. Mounce, ed., "Spirit," in *Mounce's Expository Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 675.

[107] Oddly the NASB95 translates "life" for נְשָׁמַת / *nišmaṯ* and "breath" for רוּחַ / *rûaḥ*; in any case the close association with "life, breath" and רוּחַ / *rûaḥ* is evident.

personal attribute" (e.g. "he is a bitter spirit").[108] At times רוּחַ/*rûaḥ* can refer to a person—an angel, or to God. "In a few Biblical passages ... God's *rûaḥ* may refer simply to His active life or intention" (e.g., Isa 40:13).[109] The context is often most determinative of which nuance is most appropriate for the meaning of the term. Thus, Payne notes, at most points in the Old Testament, the immediate context approves or favors, and the New Testament analogy strongly suggests, that "the *Rûaḥ* of God is to be understood as a distinct Person, the Holy Spirit."[110]

Two questions arise from the title "Spirit of God" in Gen 1:2. First, is this a personal reference or "an impersonal force working at God's direction,"[111] and if the former, second, does this title indicate a person distinct from God (Gen 1:1)? To the first question Mathews argues that the title is a personal reference and cites Psalm 104:30, which, he writes, "does not refer to [Gen 1:2] specifically, rather to the six days of creation inclusively, it suggests that the psalmist affirmed the personal participation of God's spirit in then transformation of the earth."[112] Stigers answers the second question by observing that multiple persons are "implied in the creative process in the use of the titles 'God' (1:1) and 'Spirit of God' (1:2)."[113] In other words, the fact that in two verses, two titles are used implies (or again, indicates) a distinction of persons—God and Spirit of God.[114] Thus, in Gen 1:2 the "Spirit appears as very independent, just like a hypostasis or person."[115]

In several other texts that make reference to the Spirit of God, it is clear that the Spirit is commissioned, or sent for a purpose. The parties in view in this text are: The speaker, the Lord GOD who has sent the speaker, and "His Spirit" who is sent along with the speaker (or with the Lord God sends the speaker). E. J. Young addresses these alternatives: "Are the words *and his Spirit* part of the subject, or are they to be construed to be a part of the object."[116] In other words, is the speaker sent by the Lord GOD and the Spirit or are both the speaker and the Spirit sent by the Lord GOD? Either way, commenting on Isa 48:16, Payne argues, "The Spirit is thus seen to be distinct from Yahweh and to be personal[117], in whichever way the verse be understood."[118]

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[108] See Mounce, "Spirit," 675.

[109] Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, 173.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:11–26: NAC Vol 1A* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), 143.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 47.

[114] Once again, it is important to observe that the claim here is not that the use of these titles is definitive for seeing a distinction of persons but that these titles, understood in the light of later revelation are indicative of a plurality of persons in the Godhead.

[115] Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, 173.

[116] E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah Vol. III: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 259.

[117] In Isa 63:10 the prophet mentions that the rebellious nation had "grieved His Holy Spirit." Since the experience of grief is "a characteristic peculiar to a person" this "leads to the conclusion that the prophet is speaking of the Holy Spirit as a person." Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah: With Emphasis on the Messianic Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 504.

[118] Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 504. Payne cites A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms: The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 2:293. "Passages like these which imply the spirit of Jehovah acts, prepare the way for the New Testament revelation concerning Him, and can be used in the fullest Christian sense." (Kirkpatrick, 173–74.)

Finally, the Spirit is "the effectuating agent in creation (Gen. 1:2),"[119] an act that reveals His deity. This Spirit's work of "sustaining providence"[120] (Psa 104:30; cf. Isa 40:13–14) and His regenerating power (cf. Ezek 11:19) also reveal His deity. This is not "a spirit," this is the "Holy Spirit" (Isa 63:10, 11)—He is deity.

It should be observed that if the speaker of this prophecy is taken to be the Servant (cf. Isa 42:1–13; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12)[121] then a third person is in view—and if that Person is understood as the Messiah (see below) then three distinct Persons with divine qualities are seen in this one text.

Texts That Refer to the Servant of the LORD

Isaiah 42:1

[1]"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations.

Isaiah 61:1ff

[1]The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners.

In these two texts, instead of a "conversation" (see above II, A, 1. Plurality indicated in Conversation Texts), there is in each a monologue or declaration by one person, which is about another person. In Isaiah 42:1 the one speaking is the LORD (Yahweh) (cf. 42:6)[122] who is speaking about His "servant." Isaiah 61:1 records the testimony of the one "anointed" by another, namely the LORD (Yahweh). In both texts a third person is identified, namely the Spirit—identified in 42:1 as "My Spirit," and in 61:1 as the Spirit of the Lord GOD.

The identity of the servant must be determined in concurrence with the "servant songs" in Isaiah (42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).[123] Kaiser simply summarizes, "When all these passages are put together, that individual turns out to

[119] Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, 133, 174.

[120] Payne, 174

[121] Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 401.

[122] "The speaker now identifies Himself, and places the pronoun *I* in the position of emphasis. He who speaks is the God of Israel's covenant, who, when presenting His covenant to Israel at Sinai, made known to His people the significance of His glorious Name." Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol. III*, 118.

[123] A detailed study of the identity of the Servant is quite beyond the focus of this article. For a good summary of the issues see these three articles—Robert B. Chisholm, "Isaiah 42:1–9: The Commission of the Servant of the Lord," 931–41; Robert B. Chisholm, "Isaiah 49:1–13: The Ministry of the Servant of the Lord," 943–951; and Michael L. Brown, "Isaiah 52:13–53:12: The Substitution of the Servant of the Lord," 964–74—in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019).

be the Messiah."[124] He is distinct from the LORD, and yet He is the agent of establishing of justice to the nations (42:1, 3, 4). "Since God is the absolute Sovereign, and the foundation of his throne is justice and righteousness (Pss 89:14; 97:2) it follows that the rule initiated by the Servant will be just and right, based on Jehovah's own character."[125] In other words, the justice the Servant brings is the righteousness of the LORD (cf. 42:6).

The speaker in Isaiah 61:1 is one who is "anointed" (מָשַׁח / *māšaḥ*)—clearly the Messiah.[126] This one is also best understood as one and the same with the Servant in Isaiah 42:1 and the other "servant songs."[127] The remarkable feature of this text is the juxtaposition of the Speaker (the one anointed), the Spirit (Who in this case replaces the oil normally used for anointing[128]), and the LORD (Who performs the act of anointing). The three distinct persons of this text give it, in the words of Young, "a Trinitarian shade."[129]

Texts That Refer to Wisdom

Proverbs 8:22–23 Wisdom Speaks

22"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
23"From everlasting I was established,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.

This text was a key Old Testament text cited by the early church fathers and used by all sides in the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century.[130] As Postell observes,

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[124] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 173. Kaiser acknowledges that "God's servant is often the nation of Israel (twelve instances in eight verses: Isa 41:8–10; 44:1–3, 21; 45:4). "But," he adds, "it is just as certain that the servant is an individual who has a mission to Israel and the nations (42:1–4; 49:1–7)."

[125] Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 352.

[126] "Here the anointing is made the central act of his installation as the Anointed One." Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 183.

[127] "Although the word Servant does not occur in these verses, one feels constrained by the context and likeness to the four Servant Songs previously considered to identify the speaker as the Servant-Messiah." Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 492. See also, John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 562–63; and Edward E. Hindson, "Isaiah 61:1–6: The Spirit Anointed Messiah and His Promise of Restoration," in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 983; and Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol. III*, 458–59). Of course, all debate about the identity of this speaker is ended by Jesus' reading a portion of this passage (Isa 61:1–2a) in the synagogue in Nazareth and then affirming its (partial fulfillment) in Himself (cf. Luke 4:16–21).

[128] "Rather than being anointed with oil as many of the priests and kings in the OT, this Servant is anointed by the Holy Spirit Himself." Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 183. "What was imparted to the speaker in the anointing was the Spirit of God." Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol. III*, 459.

[129] Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 183. Cf. Kaiser notes this is "one of the earliest constructs of the doctrine of the Trinity."

[130] See footnote 10 above. The literature here is vast. For a brief summary see Richard M. Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 33–54 who notes, "In patristic Christology, Prov 8:22–31 constituted one of the most popular OT passages used with reference to Christ" (Davidson, 34). And David Waltz, "Proverbs 8 and

"For many throughout Church history, this passage referred to the preincarnate Son of God, Divine wisdom."[131] Even up to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "The Christological interpretation was still popular."[132] However, more modern commentators have denied this understanding of this portion of Proverbs.[133]

For the purpose of this study these questions will be addressed: 1) is Wisdom, as depicted as the one speaking (cf. 8:1, 12 חָכְמָה / *ḥokmāh*) to be understood as personification (i.e., the description of an object or abstraction in personal terms) or taken as an instance of hypostatization (i.e., the depiction of, or identifying an actual person by means of an abstraction)?[134] In other words, considering Prov 8:22 specifically, is Wisdom to be understood either as an attribute of God, or an abstraction available to God, or is Wisdom to be seen as a person, distinct from God, present with God, and one working alongside God (as Prov 8:30 suggests)? And then, if Wisdom is to be understood as a person (hypostasis), 2) what is the nature of this person?

There are several indications from Proverbs 8 that argue for the view that Wisdom is "more than an attribute of God" and is "actually objective to God,"[135] that is, that Wisdom is distinct from God and is a person (hypostasis). There are activities attributed to Wisdom that "exceed the function of a specific divine attribute or of an impersonal mental effort on the part of either man or God."[136] The most obvious such activity is speaking (1:20; 8:1) and the accompanying display of certain intellectual capacities (i.e., words made known, 1:23; counsel offered, 1:25; 8:14). Wisdom displays emotion (i.e., amusement, 1:26; love, 8:17). And Wisdom exhibits volition,

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the Early Church Fathers," Accessed October 10, 2021; and Maurice Dowling, "Proverbs 8:22–31 in the Christology of the Early Fathers," *Irish Biblical Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 2002): 99–117. For more detailed studies see Susannah Ticciati, "Wisdom in Patristic Interpretation: Scriptural and Cosmic Unity in Athanasius's Exegesis of Proverbs 8:22," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 187–203; and Matthieu Cassin, *L'Ecriture de la Controverse Chez Grégoire de Nysse: Polémique littéraire exégèse dans le Contre Eunome* (Paris, France: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2012) chapter "PR 8,22 Dans La Controverse Théologique Des Cappadociens Avec Eunome," 223–74.

[131] Seth D. Postell, "Proverbs 8: The Messiah: Personification of Divine Wisdom," in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 739.

[132] Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," 36. Davidson cites the ever popular 1710 commentary of Matthew Henry and the 1846 *Exposition of Proverbs* by Charles Bridges. (Davidson, 36–37).

[133] Postel cites Bruce Waltke as an example (see Postell, "Proverbs 8: The Messiah: Personification of Divine Wisdom," 739: "Bruce Waltke, in his recent commentary on Proverbs, states emphatically, "The notion that Wisdom is eternally being begotten is based on Christian dogma, not exegesis…. Augustine, Calvin, et al. erred in that they wrongly interpreted Wisdom as a hypostasis of God that they equated with Jesus Christ and not as a personification of the sage's wisdom." See Bruce Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15," *NICOT* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), n104, n409."

It should be noted, however, that the New Testament seems to support the notion that Prov 8:22–31 in some way refers to Jesus Christ. Davidson writes "Various NT descriptions of Jesus Christ as Wisdom allude to Prov 8:22–31," and he cites John 1:1–3, 1 Cor 1:24, 30 and Heb. 1:1–4 and he further cites a number of NT scholars who support that assertion. However, investigation of this aspect of the use of Prov 8:22–31 is beyond the objectives of this article.

[134] The more extensive analysis of R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1965), especially "IV The Development of the Concept of Wisdom," is pertinent here.

[135] Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, 170.

[136] Ibid.

(i.e., "I will also laugh ... I will mock," 1:27; reproves, 1:23). Payne's conclusion is correct: "*Hokhmā* is an objectively existing person."[137]

Furthermore, that Person is divine.[138] "Especially impressive is the evidence that Wisdom in Proverbs assumes the very prerogatives elsewhere reserved for Yahweh alone in the Hebrew Bible."[139]

These prerogatives include being the one who gives life (8:30; cf. Job 33:4), the one who is the source of sound counsel and wisdom (8:14; cf. 1:7; 2:6; Job 11:6), the one who is the sovereign over earthly kings and rulers (8:15; Dan 2:21; Isa 45:1), the one who is the source of righteousness (8:20; Deut 32:4; Psa 119:137), the source of wealth (8:18–19; Deut 8:18; 1 Sam 2:7), "and perhaps most significantly, a source of revelation (Prov 8:6–10, 19, 32, 34, 30:3–5)."[140] (cf. Deut 29:29). "Wisdom ... existed prior to creation of the world (Prov 8:23–25) ... and lives as one eternally possessed of God."[141] Davidson conclude that in Prov 8:12–36 חָכְמָה/*ḥokmāh* is "a hypostatization for divinity (in the sense of an actual divine person)."[142]

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament, while not explicit, does disclose truth about the Trinity that is pertinent to a full appreciation and understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. While many of the indications and implications can be seen as such predominantly in the light of later revelation, for many of the texts examined above, as Warfield affirms, "the Trinitarian interpretation remains the most natural one of the phenomena which the older writers frankly interpreted as intimations of the Trinity."[143]

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[137] Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, 170. See also Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 99 "In 8:22–31 . . . wisdom is clearly represented as a person in conformity with the context."

[138] The use of the feminine חָכְמָה / *ḥokmāh* has led to a number of views from that "Lady Wisdom" in Proverbs 1–9 "had the qualities of a goddess" (cf. Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," 38–39) and the background of the image was mythological sourced in ANE paganism. Refuting such theories is beyond the scope of this article but it may be observed that these theories are based on source and form critical assumptions that are simply not commensurate with a consistently biblical view of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. (See MacArthur and Mayhue, eds. *Biblical Doctrine*, especially Chapter 2: "God's Word: Bibliology," 69–141.)

Davidson acknowledges that the feminine חָכְמָה / *ḥokmāh* lends itself to the idea that "this hypostasis of 'Wisdom'" may be "conceived of as feminine," but he argues that this is not necessary. He points to the masculine אָמוֹן / *'āmōwn* in Prov 8:30 as one indication that Wisdom is masculine. His detailed study of the views leads him to conclude, "Ultimately, however, I suggest one cannot say that Wisdom in Prov 1–9 is either male of female." Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," 47. And, to anticipate the next part of this article, Davidson further cites an article that concludes "'Wisdom' as a divine being is presented in a neural way, beyond the polarity of sexuality." (See Francoise Mies, "'Dame Sagesse' en Proverbes 9 une personnification feminine?" *Revue Biblique* 108, no. 2 (2001): 161–83.

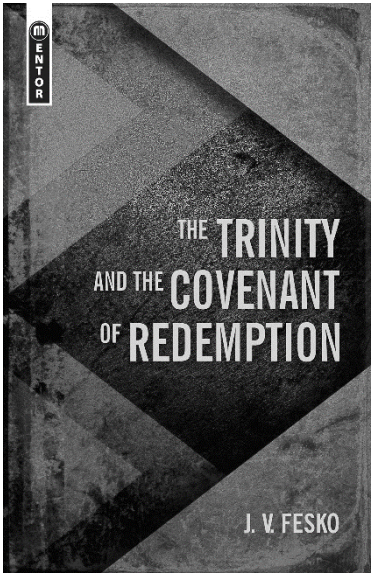
[139] Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," 42.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, 170. "Wisdom was Yahweh's instrument in creation (3:19), His *āmōn*, His 'artificer, architect, master-workman (8:30)."

[142] Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," 42.

[143] Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," 141. "The upshot of it all is that it is very generally felt that, somehow, in the Old Testament development of the idea of God . . . a preparation is made for the revelation of the Trinity yet to come. It would seem clear that we must recognize in the Old Testament doctrine of the relation of God to His revelation by the creative Word and the Spirit, at least the germ of the distinctions in the Godhead afterward fully made known in the Christian revelation."



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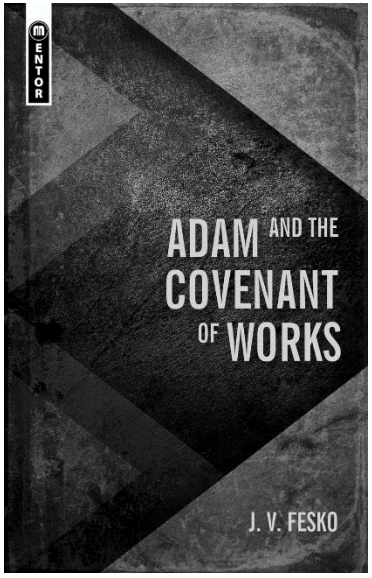

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WHEN DISTINCTION BECOMES SEPARATION: THE DOCTRINE OF INSEPARABLE OPERATIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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The doctrine of the Trinity has made a rich impact on the believer's theological taxonomy. In fact, Christians cannot even explain divine action without utilizing the precise, time-tested language upon which Trinitarianism rests. Sadly, many Bible scholars today are so narrowly focused on their modest field of "expertise" that they intentionally exclude this type of language in the name of academic fidelity. The modern exegetical task, therefore, has been hamstrung by a focus on the myopic. This article seeks to demonstrate that those Bible scholars who refuse to utilize historical-theological categories and terminology in their exegetical method will be left proliferating inadequate exegetical conclusions at best or damning errors at worst. A test case of John 1 will confirm the inadequacy of the ahistorical exegetical method to explain divine action apart from the nomenclature of inseparable operations. In this instance, such a method ends up resorting to either inaccurate language or practical tritheism. Furthermore, this article aims to prove that the taxonomy of inseparable operations is the necessary ramification of classical theism (in accordance with the doctrines of pure actuality and divine simplicity in particular). Therefore, classical theism—and the terminology supplied therein—functions as a proper guardrail for explaining divine action in a way that keeps the exegete from the pitfalls of tritheism or social trinitarianism.

* * * * *

Introduction

Unfortunately, far too many people have a faulty understanding of the Trinity. They know it as a doctrine they ought to affirm, but because it is an intellectually rigorous doctrine, they regard it as a mere affirmation of orthodoxy without studying it in any detail. This has produced a people who affirm a doctrine they know little

about; in turn, their theological grammar betrays their profession. In attempting to describe His acts, they ultimately communicate that they believe God works as three separate and divisible Persons. This categorical error often stems from reading personhood as it is known in the human experience back into Divine ontology.

Indeed, if reading discernable acts back into the ontological nature of God were the case, there would be three sets of divine attributes which were either not fully divine or not equally divine. The debate on this point was waged back in AD 681 at the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople III, in which monothelitism and dyotheloticism were discussed.[1] Though this council was conclusive regarding the matter, the issue needs to be revisited because many theologians in recent days have distorted the settled understanding of Trinitarian action. More specifically, because of a failure in how Theology Proper is communicated, the long-standing principle of Inseparable Operations (ISO) has been neglected.[2] This oversight has resulted in a number of errors, but perhaps none has been more popular than the novel position known as Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS).[3] The modern heterodoxy of EFS has produced a God with three separate consciousnesses and three wills, as well as a division of the Godhead. This error is seen most evidently by the way in which EFS explains Divine Action.[4]

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[1] For the pertinent documents pertaining to the Sixth Ecumenical Council see: Henry R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 14:325–52.

[2] What often constitutes theology in a number of schools is an MA for two years followed by a PhD in three to four years. This has resulted in far less formal instruction, producing students with "accomplished" degrees who haven't put in the hours to genuinely know much about the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, most M.Div. students have perhaps one or two lectures in their entire curriculum on the doctrine of the Trinity. This shortcoming has resulted in a premature student preforming uninformed contemplative theology.

[3] Others would refer to this position as ERAS (Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission).

[4] This should not be taken to mean that everyone who ignores ISO when defining divine action affirms EFS. Furthermore, while this article is not intended to be a treatment of EFS, nevertheless its errors are merely a byproduct of the lack of Trinitarian focus in scholarship. For relevant literature, see, e.g., Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 249–52; Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Glenn Butner, "Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will," *JETS* 58, no. 1 (2015): 131–49; Glenn Butner, *The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case Against the Eternal Submission of the Son* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018); James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 133–34; Bruce Ware and John Starke, *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012); Michael J. Ovey, *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility* (London: Latimer Trust, 2016).

EFS improperly attempts to further define "person" in the Godhead from mere external observation. As a result, the Son's obedience to the Father is not in the economy *ad extra*, but in the immanent Trinity *ad intra*. Older theologians, however, have considered any form of submission within the Godhead as repulsive and damnable error, being contrary to the very notion of deity. Duby's translation of Witsius' comments in *The Economy of the Covenants*, II.iii.vi, 1:179., to the effect that, "The Son, precisely as God, neither was nor

To begin with, far too many modern scholars attempt to define "person" by actions rather than modes of origin or missions in the language of appropriations. This results in a divided deity. The historic definition of the Trinity, on the other hand, teaches the opposite: God's one essence is all His attributes (will included). The three persons subsist undivided because there is only one essence, not three essences. This indivisibility of God, the monotheism in Christian Trinitarianism, dictates the grammar appropriate for articulating divine action.

Since there is one God, there can only be one actor. God's action is one and cannot be divided.[5] The internal nature of the Triune God is indivisible, so the work of the Triune God externally is also indivisible. Augustine said, "The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are inseparably united in themselves. The Trinity is one God, all the works of the one God are the works of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[6] This is where we see the reality of God's unity, according to simplicity and pure actuality. This is God's *ad intra* nature expressed *ad extra*.

This being the case, how does the faithful Bible teacher communicate it? They need to use the appropriate and accurate theological grammar. The Father, Son, and Spirit are not merely cooperating Persons. If that were the case, then you'd have three separate wills (none of which belong to essence), which happen to independently decide to cooperate. This also is why mere instrumentality, cooperation, submission, or similar language is inadequate, if not damningly dangerous.

Another common approach is to explain divine action as a division of labor. The Father does certain things, the Son does certain things, and the Spirit does a completely different set of things. This distribution often raises the question, who decides who does what? If one member assigns the others their appropriate tasks, then that person is more authoritative, more Lord, more *something* than the other persons.

This logically represents not only inherent subordinationism, but some form of tritheism. For example, if an employee is working at McDonald's and the boss who is working alongside the employees on the assembly line assigns the other employees their specific tasks, while they are all working together, no one is confused who is in charge. The manager is not on the same level as the employee to whom he assigns work. This may be harmonious work and cooperative work, but God's work is not mere harmony or cooperation. So, if the Son is not the efficient cause of creation and merely is an instrumental cause, the result is either a denial of the Trinity or tritheism.[7]

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could be subject to any law, to any superior; that being contrary to the nature of the Godhead" In Steven J. Duby, "Trinity and Economy in Thomas Aquinas," *SBJT* 21, no. 2 (2017): 29–51, esp. 43.

[5] Matthew Barrett simply said, "When we say God acts as one, we assume he is one. Since his very nature or essence is one, he acts as one, not merely cooperating bur performing a single act that accords with the triune God's single will." *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021), 292.

[6] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 20/13* (NPNF1), 7:137. Also see, Joel Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Revelation and God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 1:895, and Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity*, 291.

[7] This is the same argument as that which is found in Calvin's commentary on John, in which he wrote, "Having declared that the Word is God and proclaimed His divine essence, he goes on to prove His divinity from His works." John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1–10*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1961), 9.

This is precisely why Luther says, "If Christ is not true and natural God, born of the Father in eternity and Creator of all creatures, we are doomed."[8] If Scripture attributes deity to the Son and Spirit, yet confesses only one God, we are left to explain these two facts in a number of ways. The Trinity is the traditional Christian explanation. However, other groups have tried to explain these commitments by resorting either to tritheism or sub-divinity of one or more of the persons.

Hence, to properly articulate Trinitarian action one must utilize the proper grammar, or otherwise inadvertently affirm error. Adonis Vidu helpfully adds, "In this case theological progress takes the form of a gradual purification of our speech about God, by stipulating grammatical rules rather than shining the light of comprehension on transcendent realities."[9]

The doctrine of the Trinity has made a rich impact on the believer's theological taxonomy. In fact, Christians cannot even explain divine action within a trinitarian framework without using precise, time-tested language. Sadly, most Biblical scholars today are so narrowly focused that they rarely deviate from their modest field of "expertise." The modern exegetical task has been hamstrung by a focus on the myopic. This article seeks to demonstrate that those Bible scholars who refuse to utilize the historical categories and terminology in their exegetical method will be left spreading inadequate exegetical conclusions at best or damning errors at worst. A test case of John 1 will confirm the inadequacy of most Bible scholars to explain divine action without the nomenclature of inseparable operations. They end up resorting to either inaccurate language or practical tri-theism. Furthermore, this article aims to prove that the taxonomy of inseparable operations is the ramification of classical theism (pure actuality and simplicity in particular). Therefore, classical theism functions as proper guardrail for explaining divine action in a way that keeps the exegete from the pitfalls of tri-theism or social trinitarianism.

John 1:1–3

When we come to John 1:1–3 and survey modern scholarship, we find a number of interesting details. Many commentators get several issues right, such as God's eternal and non-temporal preexistence.[10] The prepositional phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν[11] is

[8] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1976), 22:21.

[9] Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 95.

[10] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 4; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 73; Andreas J. Br, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 26; J. H. Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 1–2; Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of St. John,* The Expositors' Bible (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), 1:3; Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 87; Richard D. Phillips, *John 1–10* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2014), 7; F. B. Meyer*, Gospel of John: The Life and Light of Men* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1952), 13.

[11] Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 35; Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 1996), 104.

rightly identified as demonstrating communication between distinct persons.[12] The Word is understood to be personal.[13] A host of important details for a proper trinitarian theology are drawn from the verbal form of ἦν ("was").[14] From this evidence, commentators have rightly accepted that the Word is co-existent with God in personal communion. From the Greek prepositional phrase τὸν θεόν in John 1:1 we see the preposition with the accusative according to the weakening of the Hellenistic Greek.[15] Most commentators recognize that John is, without equivocation, stating that the Word is God. This is understood by the Greek phrase θεὸς ἦν ("was God") that the Word is not just of divine quality.[16] Because the Word is first, divine; second, co-existent; and third, in personal timeless communication with God; the doctrine of the Trinity is represented by this text.[17]

Now one of the definitive distinctions between Christian Trinitarian theology and Platonic ideology is that the Word is a person, not a mere demiurge. John, having clearly established this, gives creation as definitive proof. This is a critical point demanding careful attention from Bible scholars. If they affirm the Trinity while denying tritheism, an impersonal Word (as some kind of passive instrument), and any form of Arianism,[18] then their theological grammar must reflect those cognate truths.

The Word was involved in creation through pure active power,[19] as John mirrors Genesis 1:1.[20] Yet, how is the Word involved in creation? It's vital to consider, as does D. M. Baillie, that

> when Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement and Origen set themselves to grapple with the question as to whether the Logos was of the very being of God Himself from all eternity, the discussion was not some remote point of ancient metaphysics. The question was: Is the redeeming purpose which we find in Jesus part of the very being and essence of God? Is that what God is? Is it His very nature to create, and to reveal Himself, and to redeem His creation? Is it therefore

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[12] Meyer*, Gospel of John*, 14.

[13] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 75–76; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 50; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1953), 70; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 118.

[14] Köstenberger, *John*, 27.

[15] Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 5.

[16] Ibid. From the very word order. Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* 77; Köstenberger, *John*, 28; Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 35; Klink, *John*, 90; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 47.

[17] Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 5; Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, 1:7; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*,117.

[18] Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 6; Köstenberger, *John*, 28; Phillips, *John 1–10,* 9; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 114; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 31.

[19] Borchert, *John 1–11*, 105; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 153.

[20] Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 6. Brown egregiously suggests that not only is the prologue a different author, but he has a different theology completely he claims, "However, we shall see that the Prologue had a history independent of the Gospel and does not necessarily have the same theology as the Gospel." He also believes the author is not concerned with metaphysics of ontological origins. Shamefully he suggests, "Once again the reader must divest himself of a post-Nicene understanding of the vocabulary involved." (24). Köstenberger, *John*, 25; Klink, *John*, 86 and 94; Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 28.

> not some subordinate or intermediate being, but the Eternal God Himself, that reveals Himself to us and became incarnate in Jesus for our salvation?[21]

The Word is involved in creation. But in what way? Most commentators describe the role of the Word as mere instrumentality or secondary agency.[22] Some give him causal agency, but they are not clear on what that means.[23] Some say the Father and Son jointly created.[24] But what does that mean? The Son's role is discussed as "God's companion."[25] Elsewhere he is described as an "executioner in creation, the agent who accomplishes God's will."[26]

Some commentators refer to Him as the Mediator of creation. George R. Beasley-Murray says, "The Logos is asserted to be the Mediator of creation ... Mediator must be distinguished from that of an intermediary between God and creation, as though the Logos were a species of demiurge ... the creative activity of the Logos is the activity of God through him."[27] Beasley-Murray tries to remove the depersonalizing influence of instrumentality found in Platonism, but still maintains a form of undefined instrumentality.

Philo taught that the word *logos* was a passive instrument used by God.[28] Bernard attempts to communicate this activity of the Word, but resorts to some strange analogies that do not really demonstrate the Son's causality, but instead, paint him in a passive instrumental light: "but God the Son, our Lord, is the organ through which the creative purpose moves."[29] Barrett refers to the Word as a "Precious instrument."[30] D. A. Carson calls him, "God's Agent."[31] Furthermore he says the Word is "God's agent of creation" who played the "role" of originator.[32] F. F. Bruce attempts to answer the question, calling the Son the "Word in action"—but how? As the Father's "agent or messenger?"[33] This sort of miscommunication, by referring to Jesus as an "agent," without clarification, or as a "medium," leaves the reader with an unanswered problem.[34] Others refer to the Word's role as a "mediating presence."[35]

The worst thing a commentator can do is wholesale buy into subordinationism, which many liberal commentaries do without apology. For example, interacting with

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[21] D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 70. The use of "part" here is poor wording. The persons of the Trinity are not "parts" of God as we will see when we look at Simplicity.

[22] Köstenberger, *John*, 29.

[23] Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 25. Brown says there are elements of efficient and exemplary causality which brings up the issue, but He doesn't define divine action in simultaneity in the Godhead nor give a definite definition to what he means.

[24] Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 46.

[25] Michaels, 49.

[26] Phillips, *John 1–10*, 8.

[27] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 36:11. Also, Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 156. In a more egregious way Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1–6*, in *Hermeneia*, trans., Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 112.

[28] Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3.

[29] Meyer, *Gospel of John*, 17.

[30] Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 156.

[31] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 118.

[32] Carson, 114.

[33] Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 30. Later he says, "God's is the Creator; his Word is the agent" (32).

[34] Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, 1:7–8.

[35] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 36.

Bultmann (more than any other source, Biblical or otherwise), Ernst writes, "He becomes the intermediary in the creation, a role played by Wisdom in late Judaism ... 'all things were made through him' (πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο) appears to be especially suited to describe the intermediary role of the Logos."[36] Ernst bases this on a wrong understanding of θεὸς as the quality of divinity rather than God Himself, which leads him to conclude the intro to John, "contains a Christology of the subordination of the son, albeit still covertly. It is precisely for this reason that the believer sees the Father in the son: the son does not speak his own words, he does not do his own works, he does not effect his own will, but subordinates himself entirely to the words, work, and will of the Father."[37] And while not all commentators are as bad, many find themselves on the slow road to Ernst's conclusion.

The problem with most of these commentators is that they communicate the action of the Son without any background, clarity, or further definition in their explanation. In so doing, they approach the perspective of liberals who brazenly say, "For the author of the hymn, as for the Evangelist, only the Father was 'God' (cf. 17:3); 'the Son' was subordinate to Him (cf. 14:28)."[38]

Some commentators who do not want to fully adopt the position of subordinationism recognize that the Word participated in Creation.[39] Yet, this is not the whole picture of divine action either, because divisible Persons can participate, each doing part of the work, but none doing the whole. Two separate actors doing two separate actions is implied in the term "participation." Even terms like "harmony" can be misused: "Jesus is God the Executor doing the will of the Father, God the Ordainer, within the perfect harmony of the Trinity."[40]

One key to properly communicating Trinitarian divine action is to articulate that there is no subordinate agency.[41] One of the briefest and closest articulations of Trinitarian divine action comes from Hendrickson who says, "In the external works all three Persons cooperate."[42] However, using the term "cooperation" without any clarification remains somewhat problematic. Two divisible entities can cooperate.

Leon Morris helpfully says that Jesus's action is not subordinate agency, but he confusingly adds, "There is a careful differentiation of the parts played by the Father and the Son in 1 Cor 8:6. Creation was not the solitary act of either. Both were at work."[43] However, he moves on before developing that concept.

Without using the exact words "inseparable operations," the concept was well communicated by Borchert when he said,

> The preposition *dia* ("through"), used in connection with creation here, should not be taken to mean that the Logos is essentially inferior to God, as the Arians argues. But the early Christians, in attempting to discuss simultaneously the work of both the Father and the Son in creation, sometimes tried to hold both together through

[36] Haenchen, *Commentary on the Gospel*, 112–13.
[37] Haenchen, 111.
[38] Haenchen, 109.
[39] Köstenberger, *John*, 22.
[40] Phillips, *John 1–10*, 10.
[41] Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* 73.
[42] Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel*, 71.
[43] Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* 80.

> the use of two prepositions. The Father's activity was linked with the preposition *ek*, which carries the sense of "origin," and the Son's activity was linked with the preposition *dia*, which carries the sense of "mediation" (e.g., the early Christian creedal statement in 1 Cor 8:6; also see Heb 1:2 for the use of *dia*). But where there was an attempt to affirm the creative activities of the Father and the Son jointly, then both prepositions could readily be applied to Jesus.[44]

Far too often, scholars recognize Trinitarian theology in John 1 but are like children arriving at partially correct conclusions without doing the hard theological work. As a result, they know the Trinity is present and can even make some important textual conclusions about the relations between Father and the Son from the text (eternal, uncreated, eternal generation, same essence), as well as many other helpful insights. They can even articulate what the text is not saying (contra Arianism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.), but they do not explain divine action in an orthodox, informed way when it comes to creation. If modern commentators spent more time in the Early Church Fathers rather than in other modern commentators (who all seem to regurgitate the same mistakes perpetually), the church would be much better served.

The Early Church routinely maintained proper grammar of Trinitarian divine action by developing the concept of Inseparable Operations, even if it was not always properly named. Augustine said, "If they do some things together, some separately, then the Trinity is not indivisible."[45] By this, Augustine is saying if the persons do some without each other, then God is no longer an inseparable Trinity. Gilles Emery said, "The three persons act together not by the juxtaposition of the superimposition of three different actions, but in one same action, because the three persons act by the same power and in virtue of their one divine nature."[46] Again, Gregory of Nyssa says,

> We are not to think of the Father as ever parted from the Son, nor to look for the Son as parted from the Holy Spirit. As it is impossible to mount to the Father, unless our thoughts are exalted thither through the Son, so it is impossible to say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. ... If these Persons, then, are inseparate from each other, how great is the folly of these men who undertake to sunder this indivisibility by certain distinctions of time, and so far to divide the Inseparable as to assert confidently, "the Father alone, through the Son alone, made all things."[47]

What Are the Fathers Saying?

In order to dissect this precise grammar, it is important to establish the principle of Inseparable Operations alongside the doctrine of Divine Appropriations. Once this

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[44] Borchert, *John 1–11*, 107.

[45] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, The Works of St. Augustine, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 21 (1.5.8).

[46] Gilles Emery, *Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011), 162.

[47] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. A. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 5:319.

has been accomplished, it will be more natural to consider the guard rails which helped the Fathers communicate such a precise taxonomy of Trinitarian divine action.

Inseparable Operations Briefly Set Forth

In the example of John 1, since the Trinity is true and it affirms monotheism, there is only one God. And since there is only one God who works in the world, there can only be one creation. Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a solitary nature, they have one external work. With that said, there are places in Scripture that highlight, in a special way, one of the Persons in a specific act. Traditionally, theologians have accounted for these Scriptural occurrences by recognizing that, as there are three subsistances in the Godhead, so there are three modes of working in each of the external or *ad extra* divine works.[48]

When one member of the Trinity acts, all three members necessarily act, even if Scripture does not always communicate the act of each Person in the terminus of the created order. Sometimes Scripture highlights one Person over the others (this is where the principle of appropriations comes in, more on this later). We see this in the doctrine of election, for example. The Bible says the Father elects, Ephesians 1:3–4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." Scripture also says the Son elects, Matthew 24:31: "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt 24:31; also see John 13:18; 15:16).[49] Prophecy is said to come from the work of the Father and Spirit (2 Pet 1:21; Heb 1:1). Miracles are attributed to all three persons repeatedly throughout Scripture.[50] We see the work of sanctification attributed to all three Persons: the Father (cf. 1 Thess 5:23), the Son (cf. 1 Cor 1:2, 30), and the Spirit (cf. 1 Pet 1:2).[51] Yet, there are not three sanctifications. Scripture provides many similar examples. Therefore, the works of the Father, Son, and Spirit are the works of the one true God, not multiple deities. The best example of this is exegetically found in John 5:17–19,

> But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of

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[48] John Owen says, "What we have frequently mentioned occurreth here expressly,—namely, the whole blessed Trinity, and each person therein, acting distinctly in the work of our salvation." *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 3:209. Also, see: Richard A. Muller, *The Triunity of God*, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca, 1520 to ca. 1725 (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003), 4:268.

[49] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), I.v.19:89–90.

[50] Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, "The Puritans on the Trinity," in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 85–100, esp. 92.

[51] Butner, *The Son Who Learned Obedience*, 38.

> Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."[52]

So, we must conclude that the theological precision offered by ISO is a Scriptural necessity, as Vidu rightly recognizes: "The primary reason for the confession of the doctrine of inseparable operations is that it is a datum of revelation."[53]

In considering again the creation account of John 1, Scripture claims that the Father created the world: "God [the Father] created all things" (Eph 3:9; cf. Isa 42:5; Rev 4:11). Furthermore, Scripture attributes creation to the Son: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3; cf. 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). Furthermore, while less frequently, the Holy Spirit is called the creator as well (as most theologians and commentators recognize): "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath [וברוח] of His mouth all their host" (Ps 33:6; cf. Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; Ps 104:30). Therefore, as historic consensus concludes, the Father is the creator, the Son is the creator, and the Spirit is the creator and yet, there are not three creations, but one, as there is one God who creates.[54]

Early Church Consensus

It is not as if there is a separation of work into a number of tasks, with each task performed by a separate person so that each person of the Godhead effects a separate portion in it. Augustine said, "If some things were made through the Father, others through the Son, then it cannot be all things through the Father nor through the Son. But if it is all things through the Father and all through the Son, then it is the same things through the Father as through the Son."[55] Instead, creation must be viewed as a work of the entire Trinity. This is perfectly communicated to us in Genesis 1:26–27. Commentators are right to recognize the plurality in the Godhead due to the various plural pronouns and the phrase, "Let Us make mankind in Our image," (Gen 1:26), but the precision of God's Word does not leave this ambiguous by continuing in explaining creation as, "They created," but the Word says, "God created" (v 27).[56]

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[52] While it is outside the scope of the article to go into detail in John 5 there are plenty of good resources demonstrating ISO from an exegetical standpoint. However, one great resource that expertly unites an exegetical explanation of John 5 with the nature of ISO and appropriations see: Alan Quinones, "In the Council Chamber of the Triune God: An Exegetical, Trinitarian, and Christological Formulation and Defense of the Reformed Doctrine of the Pact of Salvation" (M.Div. Thesis, The Master's Seminary), 2021.

[53] Vidu, *Same God*, 91.

[54] Owen, *Works*, 3:93. Goodwin said, "The Father is said to create, the Son is said to create, and the Holy Ghost is said to create." Thomas Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians 1*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2021), 1:461. Also, Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 89–90.

[55] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 1.6.12:75. And so Richard Barcellos is right to explain, "We must not think of the work of creation as one-third effected by the Father, one-third effected by the Son, and one-third effected by the Spirit." Richard C. Barcellos, *Trinity & Creation: A Scriptural and Confessional Account* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2020), 83.

[56] William G. J. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Classic Reprint Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 3:127; also see: Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Volume 1: God, Man, and Christ*, ed., Joel R. Beeke, trans., Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritige Books, 1995), 1:142.

So there are not three creations, nor three acts of creation that when put together result in creation, but one creation and one creator. This is perhaps best expressed in the Athanasian Creed,

> The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated: nor three incomprehensibles [infinites], but one uncreated: and one incomprehensible [infinite]. So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties: but one Almighty. So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.[57]

In full agreement Gregory of Nyssa said, "The Holy Trinity operates every operation not separately according to the number of the persons, but one movement and arrangement of good will occurs, from the Father through the Son to the Spirit."[58]

Puritan Unanimity

Standing on the shoulders of the ecumenical councils and creeds, the Puritans are likewise careful to maintain the principle of Inseparable Operations. The Puritans saw themselves as building on the shared historical Christian heritage and so did not rework or abandon the Early Church taxonomy. In fact, Inseparable Operations is assumed in the confession of God's inseparable essence. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith says in 2.3, "In the unity of the Godhead there be ... one substance, power, and eternity,"[59] which necessarily implies a unity of operation. One undivided essence implies an undivided will and, therefore, undivided action. For this reason, Van Dixhoorn comments on 2.3, "The three powerfully *act as one* and are equal and unsurpassed in their power."[60] It could be said that every member of the Westminster Assembly affirmed Inseparable Operations when the Confession affirmed the single, undivided essence of the Godhead. We see this by the fact that the assembly notes on Chapter 2 are without debate or deliberation. While there are many sections of the confession where the notes show lengthy and heated dialogue, in Chapter 2, it is an assumed principle taken straight from the Thirty-Nine Articles (and the early church consensus), without debate.[61]

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[57] Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, with Historical and Critical Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1919), 2:67.

[58] Gregory of Nyssa, *Quod Non Sint Tres Dii, ad Ablabium*, in *PG*, vol. 45 (Paris, 1863), 125–28; as translated in Steven J. Duby, "Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account" (PhD Dissertation, University of Saint Andrews, 2014), 278.

[59] Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, 22.

[60] Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 37–38. Furthermore, Hodge in his commentary on the WCF recognizes, "it follows that if Father, Son, and Holy Ghost consist of the same numerical essence, they must have the same identical attributes in common; that is, there is common to them the one intelligence and one will, etc." A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004), 84.

[61] Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, *Vol. 4*: *Minutes, Sessions 604–1163 (1646–1652)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 400 & 892.

Thomas Goodwin skillfully said, "First, you must know that all the works of the Three Persons, what one doth the other two are said to do. It is a certain rule, that *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, all their works to us-ward, of creation and redemption, and whatsoever else, are all works of each Person concurring to them."[62]

Since Goodwin, this concept has been preserved in the maxim *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, or "the external works of the Trinity are not divided." Furthermore, Goodwin explains, "Hence that, as all three persons have in common but one essence, so one equal hand in works. For all operations flowing from essence, therefore when the essence is but one, the operation must needs be one and the same."[63] For Goodwin, one God equals one action.[64] Under this principle, even if Scripture highlights one person, or theologians speak of three distinct agents performing divine works, we must nevertheless maintain the principle of inseparability—every action is attributed to the one true God.

Inseparable operations states that "the ad extra (or external) works of the Trinity are undivided."[65] Matthew Barrett recently articulated this in *Simply Trinity* when he said, "The three persons are undivided in their *external* works because they are undivided in their *internal* nature."[66] To plainly state the significance of this: failing to attribute an external act to a person means that person is necessarily excluded from the essence of the other persons, and therefore less than or not God. Sadly, this essential unity of the Trinity is denied by some modern theologians when it comes to, for example, the incarnation.[67]

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[62] Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 1:461. Goodwin spoke more at the Westminster Assembly than any other attendee, according to Lewis Allen and Tim Chester, *The Glory of Grace* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 18.

[63] Thomas Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2021), 7:530.

[64] Goodwin is not alone in Puritan consensus. Thomas Manton says, "they are one in essence, therefore, one in will, and one in operation; and what the Father doth, the Son doth, because of the unity of essence." Thomas Manton, "Ser mons Upon Titus 2:11–14," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), 16:243. And Owen, "There is no division in the external operations of God such that any one of them should be the act of one person, without the concurrence of the others. The reason for this is because the nature of God, which is the principle of all divine operations, is one and the same—undivided in them all." Owen, *Works*, 3:162.

[65] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 246.

[66] Barrett, *Simply Trinity*, 291. Emphasis original. Also, "Divine essential unity ("God is one"—Deut 6:4) and, consequently, perichoretic co-inherence ("I am in the Father, and the Father is in me"—John 14:11) necessitate the axiom *opera trinitatis indivisa sunt* (the works of the Trinity are undivided)." Kyle David Claunch "The Son and the Spirit: The Promise of Spirit Christology in Traditional Trinitarian and Christological Perspective" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 137–38. Unfortunately and surprisingly, this is denied by some modern theologians overtly when it comes to the incarnation For a list of theologians who hold to this error, see Claunch, 51–81. See also Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 373–93 and 409–11. It is also this same denial that is done unwittingly by most of the commentators that were surveyed in divine action in John 1.

[67] Bruce Ware states, "After all, Jesus could not really have experienced life as we know it, or lived life as authentically human, if, for example, he was omniscient in his own consciousness as the person, Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*, 92. Bruce Ware again, "Certainly *some* of Jesus's miracles *may have* been done out of his divine nature. Indeed, it seems in John's Gospel, in particular, this *may* well be the case. But here Christ states specifically that the miracle performed was done in the power of the Spirit…So it seems reasonable to conclude that the norm for accounting for the miracles that Jesus did is

Classical Theism

The next question is, how did the Church Fathers arrive at such a precise grammar? How did the Puritans maintain such consensus? It was provided by the safeguards of the divine attributes as expressed by Classical Theism. While there are many attributes that could be examined, two prominent ones are pure actuality and simplicity.

Pure Actuality

Aquinas famously surmised, "A thing acts in so far as it is in act."[68] This is commonly known as *Actus Purus*.[69] When we speak of God's Pure Actuality we are stressing His nature as lacking in any passivity. Positively put, Pure Actuality teaches that God has no passive potentiality. In other words, God is not *becoming*, but rather God *is*. God is pure actuality, with no potentiality in His being whatsoever. Whatever has potentiality (potency) needs to be actualized or effected by another. Because God is the ultimate Cause, there is nothing in Him to actualize any potential (i.e. ability) He may have, nor can God actualize His own potential to exist, since this would mean He caused His own existence. But a self-caused being is impossible. Something would have to exist before it to act. Even God cannot lift Himself into being by His own ontological bootstraps. Thus, God must be Pure Actuality in His Being. God cannot give cause to Himself otherwise He could not claim to be the I AM (Ex 3:14).

This truth must apply to each person equally if Trinitarian Monotheism is to be maintained. "The activity of a particular thing is determined in its nature by the kind of thing that it is."[70] The work of each Person of the Trinity is determined on their solitary nature. So there cannot be one Person working (in action) while the other two are passive (in a state of passive potential). While God has the power to create other things (active potency), He does not have the power (passive potency) to exist in any other way than He does, namely, as an infinite, eternal, necessary, and simple Being.

The Creator-creature distinction becomes vital at this point: while God is Pure Actuality, all other beings have both actuality and potentiality.[71] Therefore, if a member of the Godhead is a mixture of actuality and potential, then that person is not truly God in the same sense as the others.

Aquinas borrows heavily from Aristotle to articulate the act/potency distinction. This distinction between act and potency is central to our understanding of God. When we talk about act (or divine action) we are talking about how something exists right now (that is, act or actuality), whereas potency is how something could be given its nature.

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not through an appeal to his divine nature, but rather an appeal to the power of the Spirit who indwelt him." Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 37n2. Emphasis added.

[68] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), ½ q. 18, a. 1, ad. 2.

[69] For an excellent article on *Actus Purus* see: Alan Quinones, "Toward the Worship of God as Actus Purus," in *The Master's Seminary Journal* 31, no 2 (Fall 2020): 213–30.

[70] Vidu, *Same God*, 92.

[71] Created beings have potentiality that is not actuality, imperfections as well as perfection. Only God is simultaneously all that He can be, infinitely real and infinitely perfect: 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14).

For example, consider a green object (such as a hat or ball). The object at this present moment is actually green, but it has the potentiality to be blue, yellow, orange, or any other color. The object is green in actuality, while blue merely in potency. However, the object could become blue in actuality if it were painted blue. If someone painted the green object blue, then it would have changed from act to potency to a new actuality. From actually green and potentially blue, to actually blue. In this case the potentiality for the balloon to become blue was actualized. In metaphysics, this is known as the actualization of a potential.

So, when we are discussing divine action, if we use purely instrumental language or the host of language that was used by commentators to explain the Word's action in John 1—if the Son is a mere agent, instrument, mediator, or subordinate, then He is a Creator merely as passive potential that needs the active potential of the Father to actualize Him as a Creator.

Simplicity

One unfortunate occurrence that continues to plague theological discourse and Bible scholarship is the reasoning from the Trinitarian economy in revelation backwards into the concept of personhood, and then redefining person based on these ad extra appropriations.[72] Instead, it is important to recognize that God's external acts can only be understood properly based on the internal processions, and not through the empirical method that men often employ in discerning action in creation.[73] This recognition bears a great deal of importance when it comes to the doctrine of simplicity.

The simplicity of God means God is not made up of His attributes.[74] He is not a composite being consisting of a little bit of goodness, a little bit of mercy, a little bit of power, and a little bit of justice. Simplicity teaches that God is goodness, mercy, justice, and power. Every attribute of God is identical with His essence. Meaning, one cannot be removed, diminished, or augmented, without the very essence of God being impacted.

When you think of simplicity you often think of the fact that God is not composed of parts. This is true, but what often comes to mind for us as creatures is the idea that God is not composed of body *parts*. He does not have eyes, hands, arms, legs, and things like that. However, that is the doctrine of God's spirituality, not necessarily simplicity. Simplicity most assuredly encompasses the truth that God is immaterial, but it also expresses the reality that He is not composed of essence and existence. To that end, the three persons who all subsist equally in the one essence cannot be defined purely by their *ad extra* works, otherwise that which God does in creation becomes definitional to His very being.

Because God is simple, nothing can give definability to Him from the outside.[75] So the Persons cannot be defined purely by their *ad extra* works in the economy of

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[72] This is precisely what is wrong with EFS. It's defining person not by the words used in Scripture (modes of origin) but rather by the economy exclusive of modes of origin. Thereby redefining the persons or attributing to them the mythical "personal attributes."

[73] This is because of the incomprehensibility of God and what is known as archetypal v ectypal theology.

[74] See Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 40–41.

[75] Often, theological grammar operates more successfully in defining these realities via negativia than via emenitia.

redemption. All we can know about Him He has to reveal or else it would be left in the infinite darkness of mystery. So all of our understanding about God must be qualified, since creation cannot give definability to God. If we conceive of God only in *ad extra* categories, then we are making God dependent and defined by the creation He made. If someone can account for God purely from a singular economic act, then the identity of God had been defined by that economy.[76] The inability to understand this is routinely undermined by those who create a version of a temporal deity because they utilize their empirical methods and then just conclude, well, if God acted in time space, then He must be temporal at least in some measure.[77] Yet, just because God causes something that terminates in the temporal realm, does not mean we are to conclude retrospectively that God is a finite cause.

There is an intellectual balance we must maintain, and we must constantly remind ourselves, that even in God's imminence, He is true transcendence. It would be dubious to reason backward from effect to that which caused the effect. God's identity and our concepts of Him (our Theology Proper) cannot be retrofitted to what we perceive in the economy.

Timelessness

Now, God's action should not be conflated with mere finite action. If God is immutable (as Classical Theism maintains), then He cannot become temporal when He creates time itself.[78] So when defining divine action of an eternal Triune God, our grammar must be shaped by that reality as well. There have been many attacks on the doctrine of eternality. Duby effectually proves that we can affirm both divine timelessness and God's ability to act within the confines of time. This reality is what is known as Inchoative vs Terminative Works. Some presuppose that the occurrence of divine effects within time implies that God's "power-to-act" is not timeless; therefore, He cannot be timeless.

Yet, Classical Theism maintains that God's actuality is terminated within time. The Reformed Scholastics solidified this teaching by referring to these actions as "egressions"—God is pure eternal activity, that is His essence. This eternal actuality, however, brings forth diverse effects at different times. God has in His mind His plans from eternity and then effects His work in time. Therefore, God's eternal actuality is not terminated in a solitary act (or moment) when time is concerned. Duby then applies this idea to creation and shows how a timeless God can create a temporal effect without there being any passive potency in God.[79] And so, if the Son is not

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[76] For a detailed explanation, see John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," in *God Without Measure, Vol. 1: God and the Works of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2018). This is exactly what many errant positions do these days: EFS and Social Trinitarianism are prime examples.

[77] Vidu helpfully reminds the student, "it must be remembered that in producing finite effects, God does not himself become a finite cause." *Same God*, 93.

[78] For more on this see Peter Sammons, "The Eternal God of a Vanishing Creation: Recovering the Doctrine of Divine Timelessness," in *The Master's Seminary Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 189–212.

[79] God is not in a deistic fashion abstracted from time since He is both immanently close and transcendent. His intricate involvement is necessary for time's very existence according to His governance. He just doesn't experience it and certainly cannot be defined by or measured by it. See: Steven J. Duby, "Divine Action and the Meaning of Eternity," in *God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Bradford Littlejohn (Moscow, ID: The Davenant Institute, 2018).

equally involved with creation because of His shared essence, then not only is the Son temporal, He is also created. This is especially true if His creative ability is measurable in a temporal way from the Father.

Indivisibility

The final classical attribute that has functioned as a guard rail for explaining divine action is God's indivisibility. There is only one God who cannot be divided. God's indivisibility is essentially a negative way of affirming His simplicity. The external and essential works of God are, by their very nature, undivided. In other words, they are works of the Father as much as they are works of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And it is because of the numerically singular essence of God, the indivisibility of that nature, His pure actuality without passive potential, the simplicity of God's essence and existence, that theologians have maintained ISO.[80] The Pre-Nicene Fathers generally argued from the unity of the work as proof of the unity of essence, rather than from the unity of the essence to the unity of operation.[81] While after Nicea, the common argument changes from essence to operations as we see becomes the common nomenclature. This transition in argument should not be surprising, since there was not a consensus on ουσια, and υποστασις was only reached later.[82] Yet, in Scripture, arguing from the unity of work to the indivisibility of essence is seen in John 5:17–20.

Divine Action

Now with the principle of ISO properly understood and the guard rails which make it necessary, it is must easier to be precise about Divine Action. Yet, when discussing Divine Action there are some qualifications that need to be established up front. God as He is *ad intra,* compared to the economy of how God has revealed Himself, *ad extra*, cannot be conceived apart from each other. So when the Bible reveals God's work *ad extra* we must still maintain the *ad intra* reality in order to maintain precision in our taxonomy.

Persons act by means of nature—natures do not act. *Ad extra*, the persons are the agents of divine action and often this is communicated through a special highlight of one person or another, and this is what we call discernable appropriations. Scripture often spotlights one person in the economy of redemption, which is more easily assessable to us. However we must maintain the ISO when discussing the economic work or we disproportionately highlight the distinctions of the persons over the unity of essence.

And this focus on the appropriations becomes even more emphasized as we look for those distinctions (which Scripture only allows by modes or origin or missions) by considering the economic act and then wrongly redefining the *ad intra* reality. The

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[80] These doctrines were not created by the Midevils Scholasticism but is basic Nicean Trinitarianism. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236. Ayres gives three ways to see measure Nicene orthodoxy: 1) proper person-nature distinction, 2) eternal generation of the Son, and 3) a clear expression of Inseparable Operations.

[81] G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1952), 260

[82] See John Owen, *On the Person of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988 edition), 1:10–11.

substance of God is not divided among the three persons, which means our theological grammar necessitates understanding modes of origin as primarily internal to the substance. This results in the theological rule known as equiprimordiality,[83] which essentially establishes that the persons should not be understood as a substructure or subordinate to the essence because that functionally severs the ties of person from essence.

Too many times people try to think of the persons separated from the essence, but they are one and the same realities. Owen writes, "Now, a divine person is nothing but the divine essence, upon the account of an especial property, subsisting in an especial manner."[84] There are no more fundamental attributes in each person that distinguishes one from another. Many modern theologians look for "personal" attributes to define "person" in the Godhead, but this is mistaken.

For example, consider the will of God. In God there is only one will, therefore, in the Father sending the Son, it is the same will of the Son in being sent. Thus, the processions (modes of origin), not operations, are how we are to communicate the distinction between persons. These are known as subsistent relations. If the persons are identified with relations on the level of substance and not subsistence, then they become contingent finite realities. The persons do not have different substances.

With that in mind, we are able to progress in developing a theological grammar of Divine Action that maintains ISO and proper modes of origin in Divine Action. Gregory of Nazianzus helpfully expressed how these two truths are inseparably wed in theology when he said, "No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illuminated by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One."[85] So appropriations in divine action cannot be discussed without ISO and a study of ISO is incomplete without the doctrine of appropriations.

Appropriations is used to explain how there can be a distinct divine effect in causality *ad extra*, or how Scripture can prominently highlight one person in a particular action. Bavinck helpfully clarified that all of the works of God have a single agent/author (*principium*). However, these works "come into being through the cooperation of the three persons, each of whom plays a special role and fulfills a special task."[86]

Discernable Appropriations Properly Considered

By discernable appropriations,[87] it is maintained that although the persons of the Godhead have a joint hand in all of the *ad extra* divine works, some of those works

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[83] John Macquarrie helpfully explains how these two exist together as equally fundamental. See: John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and His Critics* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 213.

[84] John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen,* ed. William H. Goold (Eddinburugh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 2:407.

[85] Gregoty of Nazianzus, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 7:375.

[86] The use of "cooperation" should not be misunderstood as to violate the principles of ISO even though people utilize "cooperation" in a different manner in modern theology, Bavinck maintained the proper dictum of ISO. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 2:319.

[87] Emery, helpfully provides theological details resulting from the etymology of "appropriations" from the Latin *ad-propium*, see: *Trinity*, 165

are attributed—in the words of Thomas Goodwin—"more especially to one Person than to another; as Sanctification you know is attributed more especially to the Holy Ghost, Redemption to the Son, Creation to God the Father."[88] Bavinck similarly surmised that Divine Action "issues from the Father, is actualized through the Son, and is completed by the Spirit."[89] This is the discernable pattern in which we see Scripture speak. Scripture does this by a unique use of prepositions according to each person, otherwise known as, "differentiating prepositions": εκ (out of), δια (through), and εν (in) (1 Cor 8:6; John 1:3, 14).[90]

Therefore, while the maxim *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* affirms that the persons of the Trinity work *inseparably*, it also grants that they nevertheless work *distinguishably* or *discernably*.[91] Though we may see one person focused upon, we must keep in mind—because of Inseparable Operations—that it does not exclude the other two persons, even if they are not the focus. This balance keeps us from conceptually dividing the Trinity, even if one member is the focus in any given text of Scripture. Emery said that appropriations "attributes an action or an effect to a divine person in a special way, without excluding the two others."[92] Furthermore, Matthew Barrett helpfully adds, "The purpose of appropriation is to mimic Scripture, which can shine its spotlight on one person in a 'special' way, though never to the exclusion of the other two."[93]

A very classical way of referring to Divine Action is "by the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit." This is drawn from the differentiating prepositions in Scripture. This construction communicates an order according to the modes of origin. Order has been traditionally taught by the Cappadocians, the council of Nicea, and Calvin, who taught it during the Reformation. Mainstream Reformed scholarship has followed suit ever since.[94]

What often happens at this point is that people misunderstand order to imply inferiority or inequity. Or, they attempt to define the order with "personal" attributes by means of the *ad extra* operations, resulting in the error of EFS.

It should be noted that the discernable appropriations in Scripture are not random; they are based on modes of origin.[95] Barcellos helpfully clarifies,

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[88] Goodwin, *Ephesians*, 1:439.

[89] Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 229.

[90] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:319.

[91] One alarming concern in modern evangelical circles is when we read respected scholars like Wayne Grudem claim that ISO amounts to modalism. In "Doctrinal Deviations in Evangelical-Feminist Arguments," in *One God in Three Persons*, 25, he recklessly claims,

> He [Millard Erickson] is arguing not that the whole being of God is somehow involved in every action, but that the action of any one person is also in the same way an action of the other two persons, so that any action done by one person is also done by the other two persons. This is something Scripture never teaches and the church has never held. And it is something that means we no longer have the doctrine of the Trinity. We have modalism.

This disgraceful conclusion hasn't gone unnoticed by many Trinitarian scholars see: Stephen R. Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism and Eternal Functional Subordination: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections," *SBET* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 90–105 see especially note 33.

[92] Emery, *Trinity*, 165; Ayres, *Nicea and Its Legacy*, 297–98.

[93] Barrett, *Simply Trinity*, 297.

[94] Owen, *Discourse*, 3:209; Muller, *The Triunity of God*, 4:265 or 4:380.

[95] Webster, *God and the Works of God*, 1:95.

"attributing a work to one person does not negate the activity of the other persons *in the same work*, but it does highlight something of that divine person's relation to the other divine persons."[96] Because each of the persons is identical with the divine nature, the distinction between them, "cannot arise from attributes or accidents that one person has in distinction from another."[97] Rather, it must relate to each person's very nature *as a divine person*.[98] Accordingly, the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit becomes the basis for this distinction.

Drawing from the difference between essence and person in God allows one to recognize that while each person is identical with the true and living God (or, abstractly, the divine essence), yet the essence itself is broader than each person. Turretin explains, "each person has indeed the whole divinity, but not adequately and totally (if it is right so to speak), i.e., not to the exclusion of the others because [given its infinity] it is still communicable to more."[99] To claim that the real identity of one person is the same as the other persons' real identity as God is a heretical belief known as Modalism (Sabellianism).[100] In order to avoid this mistake, Trinitarianism explains that the Father is God subsisting in relation to the Son by an eternal and internal act of begetting of necessity. The Son is God subsisting in relation to the Father by an eternal and internal act of being begotten by necessity. The Holy Spirit is God subsisting by eternal and internal procession of necessity from the Father and the Son. This ordering is important to observe since it is the language Scripture demands. Therefore, this ordering is "not another 'thing' in God but rather a distinct mode in which God exists, which is the reason that the divine persons are suitably called 'modes of subsisting' (τροποι ὑπαρξεως)."[101]

These modes of subsisting give the believer a proper understanding of discernable works in the economy of redemption (otherwise known as "missions"). As a result, the personal works of God can be said to be distinguishable, for they give rise to real (as opposed to merely rational) distinctions between the three persons: the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

One example of this doctrine is found in the incarnation.[102] Scripture does not claim that the Father or Spirit became incarnate but only the Son.[103] So the

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[96] Barcellos, *Trinity & Creation*, 92–93.

[97] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2:286.

[98] Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:146–47. "It is God's eternal nature to exist as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the Father not being able to be the Son, the Holy Spirit not being able to be the Father."

[99] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993), 1:278.

[100] Steven J. Duby, "Atonement, Impassibility, and the *Communicatio Operationum*," *IJST* 17 no. 3 (July 2015): 290.

[101] Duby, "Atonement, Impassibility," 290–91.

[102] Duby gives numerous examples, such as the Father (not the Son or Spirit) spoke at Christ's baptism (Mt 3:16–17). Only the Spirit descended as a dove on that occasion not the Father or Son. From this objectively distinct appropriation we can conclude that the Persons hold different economic offices (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:13–16; Gal 4:4). Duby, "Atonement, Impassibility," 284–95, 290.

[103] Augustine clearly shows this when he says, "the Son indeed and not the Father was born of the Virgin Mary; but this birth of the Son, not the Father, was the work both of the Father and the Son. The Father indeed

incarnation is not the incarnation of the divine essence but the divine person of the Son, one personal mode of subsisting. Thomas Aquinas helpfully explains how the incarnation takes place "according to which something distinct is said of the divine persons."[104] Nevertheless, all three persons are still involved in the solitary act of the incarnation because of the doctrine of ISO. Concerning this, Aquinas says, "the three persons caused the human nature to be united to the one person, the Son [see Luke 1:35; Heb 10:5]."[105] So the Father sent the Son to be incarnate, the Son is the one incarnate by the power of the Spirit. And so we can see the Trinitarian members operate in a manner fitting to the modes of subsisting. Therefore, the unity of the Godhead is preserved, even when His *ad extra* work is more particularly attributed to one particular person.[106]

Anyone who claims that ISO means the persons cannot transact with one another undermines and irreversibly damages any notion of the threeness in the Godhead. Augustine and Edwards both emphasized the trinitarian transactions of mutual giving in love based on the modes or origin.[107] Scripture shows the Father, Son, and Spirit interact and dialogue with one another (Isa 42:1; 49; Matt 3:13–17; John 17).[108]

How then does this Trinitarian interaction take place? This threefold hypostatical consciousness in God is ensured by the appropriation of the divine nature and will. William Shedd explains,

> The will of a trinitarian person is the will that belongs to the one Divine Essence, and the understanding of a trinitarian person is also that of the one Divine Essence. There are not three wills and three understandings in the Trinity, but only one. When the essence is modified by eternal generation, or eternal spiration, both the Divine will and the Divine understanding which belong to the essence are modified along with it, and this modification has its own corresponding hypostatical consciousness. In this way the three modifications of the one essence, with its one will and one understanding, yield three consciousnesses that are so distinct from each other that the Father

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suffered not, but the Son, yet the suffering of the son was the work of the Father and the Son. The Father did not rise again, but the Son, yet the resurrection was the work of the Father and the Son." Augustine, "Sermon II: Of the words of St. Matthew's Gospel, Chap. iii. 13, 'Then Jesus cometh from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.' Concerning the Trinity," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. R. G. MacMullen (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 6:261.

[104] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3a.3.4. He calls this category *theologia discreta* or "discrete" theology.

[105] Aquinas, 3a.3.4resp. Owen explains, "As unto authoritative designation it was the act of the Father . . . As unto the formation of the human nature, it was the peculiar act of the Spirit . . . As unto the term of the assumption, or the taking of our nature unto himself, it was the peculiar act of the person of the Son" Owen, *Discourse*, 3:298.

[106] Muller, *Dictionary*, 213, states, "Sometimes the Protestant scholastics will speak of the *opera ad extra* as *opera certo modo personalia*, personal works after a certain manner, because the undivided works *ad extra* do manifest one or another of the persons as their *terminus operationis*, or limit of operation. The incarnation and work of mediation, e.g., terminate on the Son, even though they are willed and effected by Father, Son, and Spirit."

[107] Jonathan Edwards, "Heaven Is a World of Love," in *Ethical Writings*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[108] J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Geanies House, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2016), 180, writes, "The triune unity does not eliminate dialogue and interaction, indeed communion, among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

> knows that he is not the Son, and the Son that he is not the Father, and the Spirit that he is neither the Father nor the Son. The varieties in these consciousnesses do not spring from three essences or beings each having a will and understanding, but from one numerical being or essence having one will and understanding in three varieties of subsistence.[109]

What Shedd is uncovering here is how there can be a distinction in divine action between the beginning of a given *ad extra* work (*principium*), and its end (*terminus*).[110] This is important to remember when we are seeking to explain how God created the world. The Father can be attributed with creation, just as the Son and Spirit, and yet the *ad extra* work can be expressed without removing causal power from any individual person. The *principium* of the *ad extra* work belongs to the divine nature (expressed by ISO), and the *terminus* belongs to a specific person—or in this case, to all three persons (expressed by appropriations).[111]

The External Works of the Trinity in the Act of Creation

The Dutch theologian Petrus van Mastricht pointed to three different ways in which the persons of the Trinity may be distinguished from one another: first, in modes of origin (Begetting, Begotten, and Proceeding); second, in the order of their subsisting (Father first, Son second, Spirit third); and third, and most importantly for our consideration, in their mode of operating. Following the modes of origin and the order of subsisting, it can be said that in the *ad extra* works, the Father works from Himself but through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Son works from the Father but through the Spirit. And consequently, the Spirit works from the Father and the Son but through Himself.[112] Therefore, the *ad intra* (essential) works of the Godhead do not only distinguish the persons from one another, but they also ground the *ad extra* work of the Godhead.

Conclusion

So where does all this leave us? What have we learned and how should it shape our trinitarian taxonomy of divine action (specifically in creation)? What's seemingly missing from the plethora of commentaries written on John 1 is a disregard for historical Trinitarian grammar. While they seem to understand that the Trinity is true and clearly taught in most cases, they nevertheless fail to drink from the overflowing wellspring of centuries' worth of Trinitarian orthodoxy. The doctrines of Inseparable Operations and discernable appropriations, as well as Classical Theism in general,

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[109] Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3:130. Shedd's theological grammar perfectly demonstrates how the eternal processions should inform our taxonomy.

[110] This is also in other works distinguished between "inchoative" and "terminative" works, for example while the whole Trinity preforms the incarnation "inchoatively," yet only the Son does so "terminatively." Tyler R. Wittman, "The End of the Incarnation: John Owen, Trinitarian Agency and Christology," *IJST* 15, no. 3 (July 2013): 295–97.

[111] Wittman, 284–300, esp. 294–95. Also see: Thomas, *ST* 3a.3.2.resp.

[112] Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 2:504–505.

are not hidden under a rock, they have saturated every generation of the church for thousands of years—to those looking for a historical footing to their beliefs.

How then do we correct this apparent oversight? First, rather than commentators spending their collective energies merely reading other contemporary works, or spending hundreds of pages (literally) discussing matters that have been well covered, such as the background material and controversies by liberal scholarship, genuine scholars would do well to dig deeper into the theological fruit of the text of Scripture.

With regards to John 1 and creation, the Church is not served by being taught that Jesus is ambiguously involved in creation as a passive instrument (or even an instrument undefined), some kind of co-laborer, or harmonic worker (like a companion). It is not enough for Him to be a mere mediator, an agent of the Father who plays a role in creation—or even worse, in a form of subordinationism. Nothing short of the causative agent of Creation does justice to the witness of Scripture. In fact, the same is true of the Holy Spirit, because if all three persons do not have power of causation by pure act, then they are nothing more than passive instruments who have the ability to create but need that ability to be actualized by the higher deity.

So how are all three persons the cause of creation? Basil, the Early Church Father, helpfully explains that the Father is the "original cause," the Son is the "creative cause," and the Spirit is the "perfecting cause." Creation is brought into existence "by the will of the Father, are brought into being by the operation of the Son, and perfected by the presence of the Spirit."[113] Aquinas states, "To create is, properly speaking, to cause or produce the being of things. And as every agent produces its like, the principle of action can be considered from the effect of the action; for it must be fire that generates fire. And therefore to create belongs to God according to His being, that is, His essence, which is common to the three persons. Hence to create is not proper to any one Person, but is common to the whole Trinity."[114]

However, there is also an order to how we should speak of this one act of God since there are not three creations but one creation, and not three creators but one Creator. Nevertheless, the act has respect to the persons but not according to a hierarchy; it is based solely on modes of origin (processions). When someone says the Father acts through the Son, they must remove from their vocabulary any notion of instrumentality or intermediary, lest the deity of the Son be forfeited. Because the Son is not some kind of disconnected instrument, the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, in the same essence and will, which is distinguished purely by processions.

So when we look at divine action, we are looking at trinitarian divine action; there is no monadic action of one person apart from the other two persons. Vidu explains, "it can be said that the divine persons have the divine essence and perfection in a differentiated way, the Father as unbegotten, the Son as begotten, and the Spirit as spirated. Therefore just as each divine person can be said to be a unique and incommunicable mode of being (*tropos hyparxeos*), in the same way each person had its own unique mode of action."[115] With that in mind, modes of action should not be understood as if God is undergoing any change in any action that He performs *ad*

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[113] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Spirit*, Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Bloomfield Jackson (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 8:23.

[114] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, q. 45, a. 6.

[115] Vidu, *Same God*, 103. Also see: Aquinas, *Suma Theologica*, I:40, art. 2, ad. 3.

extra (such as the act of creating). Mode of action refers to the way the same action is performed by a person who is inseparably united to the other persons.

This grammar permits the inseparable principles demanded by monotheism, yet preserving the distinct relations between creatures and the distinct persons in the Godhead. Ultimately, God's causality in effecting in creation is efficient causality, whereas his relation to humans is often referred to as formal causality. The key distinction here between efficient causality and formal causality allows room for distinguishing the mode of action.[116] So, while there is still inseparable eternal action based on the one essence, the diverse modes of action *ad extra* are derived from the distinction of persons. This is mirrored in what is known as missions/procession language. All things are from the Father (because He begets), through the Son (not as a mere instrument, but because He is begotten), and in the Holy Spirit (because he proceeds from the Father and Son). Utilizing this language keeps us from overemphasizing the essence to have a monolithic act, while permitting us to speak of differences of results in such a way as to uphold God's unity in efficient causality.

[116] Aquinas, *Suma Theologica*, I, q. 89, a, 1.

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A MORE EXCELLENT NAME: ETERNAL SONSHIP AND PSALM 2:7 IN HEBREWS 1

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In this article Executive Director of Grace to You, Phil Johnson, masterfully addresses the pitfalls with Incarnational Sonship while retrieving the Biblical necessity for Eternal Generation. Johnson focuses on the New Testament (Hebrews 1) use of the Old Testament (Psalm 2) as a key to properly retrieving the doctrine of Eternal Generation. In this piece Johnson shows how the church of recent generations has neglected and abandoned Eternal Generation on faulty grounds, misunderstanding monogenes, and aims to aid the church in retrieving this precious doctrine taught in Scripture.

* * * * *

Three times in the New Testament, the climactic phrase of Psalm 2:7 is quoted verbatim and identified as a Messianic reference: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5).

Allusions to that phrase also appear in several other key New Testament contexts. For example, the voice of the heavenly Father, speaking at Jesus' baptism, employs an unmistakable echo of Psalm 2:7: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). Later, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father again uses similar words to designate the Son: "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" (Mark 9:7). Peter's famous confession also evokes an idea taken from Psalm 2:7: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). And John 3:16, arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture, cannot be adequately understood or explained without reference to Psalm 2:7 and the begetting of the Son by the Father.

Of course, "Son of God" is one of the most important titles applied to Christ throughout the New Testament, and every reference to his sonship tacitly points back to Psalm 2:7. It is a vital text—the numerous New Testament citations testify to that. Interpreters should therefore approach it with extraordinary attentiveness and care.

Background

The Messianic significance of Psalm 2 is apparent on the face of the text. Verse 2 describes the key figures in the Psalm as "the LORD and ... His Anointed" (v. 2). The Hebrew word for "Anointed" is מָשִׁיחַ (*mashiyach*), the word from which the English name *Messiah* is derived. And in verse 7, when the Son speaks ("I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me"), that is not merely the voice of the psalmist. The logical flow of the psalm itself points to the fact that "the Son" (v. 12) *is* the Anointed One mentioned in verse 2. Multiple commentators in the Talmud categorize Psalm 2 as a psalm about Israel's Messiah.[1] Indeed, the messianic significance of Psalm 2 was so clearly and universally understood in the apostolic era that neither the writer of Hebrews (1:5; 5:5) nor Peter (Acts 13:33) felt compelled to make any argument to establish the fact that what we are hearing in verse 7 is the prophetic voice of the Anointed One.

Given that Israel's Messiah is "One [whose] goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2; cf. John 1:1–2), the phrase quoted from the voice of the Father in Psalm 2:7 poses some significant interpretive challenges. The word "today," for example, has obvious temporal overtones. Being "begotten" would normally speak of a person's conception, and that in turn implies that the person has a beginning. Does this verse therefore speak of an event that happened at a point in time? Is it (as the Arians claim) describing the origin of the begotten One's existence? Alternatively, is this saying that sonship is a role or a title that was conferred on Christ at some definite point in redemptive history?

What is the proper way to understand the New Testament's use of Psalm 2:7? The Arian interpretation can be speedily and emphatically dismissed. The notion that Christ is a created being contradicts several clear statements of Scripture: "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:2–3). "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16–17). He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13). One of the fundamental confessions of historic Christianity is that Christ has no beginning or end. He is the eternal "I am" (John 8:58). Arianism denies all of that and is therefore thoroughly unbiblical and categorically anti-Christian.

But what about the idea that sonship is a role the eternal Second Person of the Trinity stepped into, or a new status conferred on him at his incarnation? Is "Son of God" a supervenient title (like a mantle placed on Christ)? Or is his sonship what defines his eternal relationship to the other Persons of the Trinity?

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[1]. "In the Talmud, this psalm is cited in the context of the future coming of the Messiah, and specifically of the wars against Gog and Magog preceding that event. The nations that rage against Israel and the peoples who mutter in vain are the idol-worshippers who will be against the Lord and His Messiah when the battle of Gog and Magog comes at the end of times. Psalm 2:7–8 is interpreted as the words of God that will be addressed specifically to the Messiah, the son of David." "The interpretation of Psalm 2 in Midrash Tehillim is clearly Messianic." Aranda M. Gomez, "Medieval Jewish Exegesis of Psalm 2," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 18 (January 2018), https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2018.v18.a3.

"Incarnational sonship" is the idea some have set forth as the reason for the temporal expressions in Psalm 2:7. This view is sometimes wrongly conflated with Arianism,[2] but it is not the same thing. Arians (including their modern counterparts, the Jehovah's Witnesses) believe Christ is a created being and therefore not eternal at all. But evangelical advocates of "incarnational sonship" do not deny the full deity and eternality of Christ. They merely suggest that the expression "Son of God" is a title that applies to his humanity rather than an expression of the essential, eternal relationship that defines and distinguishes his place in the Trinity. Ralph Wardlaw (1779–1853) was a Scottish theologian who held that view.[3] Walter Martin (1928–1989), counter-cult apologist, likewise taught incarnational sonship.[4] Adam Clarke (1762–1832) and Albert Barnes (1798–1870), both prolific commentators, took the same position.[5]

John MacArthur once held the incarnational sonship view but now affirms the eternal sonship of Christ.[6] In an early commentary, MacArthur wrote,

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[2] The charge typically follows this line of reasoning:

> "To deny that the Messiah is the Eternal Son of God, is virtually to call in question his Godhead, in doing which we plunge ourselves into danger of the most alarming nature. For the Arians can prove, and no man need deny it, that Jesus Christ existed as the Son of God before the world was (John xvii:1–5). Now, if he existed before the world was, and is not the Eternal Son of God, then he must be a created Son, who was brought into being prior to the world, and by whom, as an instrumental cause, God created the universe. From this conclusion, which is downright Arianism, it will be impossible to extricate ourselves, if we deny the Eternal Sonship of Christ. . . . To deny that Jesus is the Eternal Son of God, is to take a long stride toward Unitarianism." William Beauchamp, *Letters on the Eternal Sonship of Christ* (Louisville: John Early, 1849), 157.

[3] "Jesus is called in the Scriptures, 'the Son of God,' 'His own Son,' 'His beloved Son,' 'His only begotten Son.' But we do not find Him anywhere denominated the eternal Son, or eternally begotten. The eternity of the divine person, the second in the blessed Trinity, is decidedly affirmed; but not the eternity of His sonship." Ralph Wardlaw, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1857), 47.

[4] "Jesus Christ before His incarnation was the eternal Word, Wisdom, or Logos, of God, preexistent from all eternity, coequal, coexistent, coeternal with the Father, whose intrinsic nature of Deity He shared [but] Jesus Christ is not called by Scripture the 'eternal Son,' the error passed on from Origen under the title 'eternal generation,' but rather He is the Living Word of God." Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 102–103.

[5] In his comment on Luke 1:35, Clarke emphatically states, "With all due respect for those who differ from me . . . the doctrine of the *eternal Sonship* of Christ is, in my opinion, anti-scriptural, and highly dangerous. This doctrine I reject." Adam Clarke, *The New Testament . . . with a Commentary and Critical Notes,* 2 vols. (New York: Lane & Scott, 1850), 1:360–61. In his comments on Psalm 2:7, Clarke added, "It is well known that the words, 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee,' have been produced by many as a proof of the *eternal generation of the Son of God.* On the subject itself I have already given my opinion in my note on Luke i, 35, from which I recede not one hair's breadth." Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible . . . with a Commentary and Critical Notes,* 4 vols. (New York: Lane & Scott, 1850), 3:223.

On Psalm 2:7, Barnes writes, "The passage cannot be understood as referring to Christ without admitting his existence previous to the incarnation, for all that follows is manifestly the result of the exalted rank which God purposed to give him as his Son, or as the result of the promise made to him then." But commenting on the phrase "Thou art my Son," Barnes says, "That is, Yahweh had declared him to be his Son; he had conferred on him the *rank and dignity* fairly involved in *the title* THE SON OF GOD" (emphasis added). Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (London: Blackie & Son, 1870), 18–19.

[6] John MacArthur, "Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ" (August 20, 1999). Retrieved July 18, 2020, https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A235/reexamining-the-eternal-sonship-of-christ.

> Jesus ... was not by nature eternally subordinate to God the Father but was equal to Him, yet He willingly submitted Himself to the Father during His incarnation, as an obedient son does to an earthly father. It seems that Jesus had not been eternally subject to the Father but was subject only during the time of His humanity.[7]

But in his 1999 retraction, he wrote, "I no longer regard Christ's sonship as a role He assumed in His incarnation. ... I am now convinced that the title 'Son of God' when applied to Christ in Scripture always speaks of His essential deity and absolute equality with God, not His voluntary subordination."[8]

Psalm 2 in Hebrews 1

Psalm 2:7 considered in isolation might appear to pose significant difficulties for the doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship. But all those difficulties are eliminated when one takes into consideration the full context of how and why that verse is cited in Hebrews 1. That is where its true meaning comes into the brightest biblical light.

It is well known that the book of Hebrews was written to confront an epidemic of apostasy among Jewish converts in the early church. The human author is writing to persuade half-hearted people and hangers-on not to fall short of authentic saving faith. Hebrews is therefore filled with Old Testament quotations showing Jewish readers that Christ is greater than any aspect of their religious traditions. He is greater than their cultural heritage. He is greater than the priesthood. He is greater than the sacrificial system. He is greater than *all* the external rules, ceremonies, and symbols of the Mosaic law. In short, Christ is greater than all the religious protocols of the Old Covenant era. Even the unsophisticated simplicity of Christian worship is actually superior to all the liturgy and pageantry—the pomp and circumcision—of Old Testament Judaism.

All of this is established with several chapters of biblical proofs showing that Christ is the fulfillment of every truth that was ever hinted at or foreshadowed in the various types and figures of the Old Testament. He is therefore the resolution and the full unveiling of every mystery that was ever set forth in the Old Testament. He is the answer to every essential question that was left hanging when the canon of Old Testament revelation was complete.

The starting point of Hebrews summarizes the book's entire message regarding the supremacy of Christ with an emphatic declaration that Christ is the capstone of God's revelation to humanity: "God ... in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2). In other words, Christ is truth incarnate, the consummate, full, and final self-revelation of God to the world. More than that, he is God incarnate. "He is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature" (v. 3). All of chapter 1 is then devoted to a vigorous affirmation of the deity and eternality of Christ, beginning with the assertion that Christ is superior to the angels (v. 4).

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[7] John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 107–108. Note that MacArthur's earlier position stemmed from his belief at the time that sonship necessarily signifies subordination, and he categorically rejected (and still rejects) the idea that Christ is eternally subordinate to the Father. Rather, Christ's voluntary subjection to the will of the Father pertains to his obedience as a man.

[8] MacArthur, "Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ."

The writer's argument is an insurmountable refutation for anyone who would deny the deity of Christ. Any careful student of Scripture (even in the Old Testament era) would understand that angels are the highest of all created beings in the universe, but they are not to be worshiped (Deuteronomy 6:13). Even the Seraphim, high-ranking angels who guard the throne room of God (Isaiah 6:2), are themselves engaged in perpetual worship (v. 3). They would expressly refuse all worship or veneration for themselves (Revelation 19:10; 22:9). But "when [the Father] brings the firstborn [his Son] into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Hebrews 1:6).

That argument is surrounded and buttressed with a series of similar points: Angels are created; Christ is the creator (vv. 2–3). Angels are God's servants; Christ is God's Son (v. 5). The angels offer worship; Christ receives praise (v. 6), *even from the Father*: "Of the Son [God] says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever'" (v. 8). Angels are ministering spirits (v. 14); Christ is a Son begotten by the heavenly Father (v. 5). All of this is still part of the argument that Christ is God incarnate. And notice: the writer proves each point with direct quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures. He quotes Old Testament verses verbatim in each verse from Hebrews 1:5 through verse 13.

So the argument that ties the entire book of Hebrews together is that nothing and no one in all the universe is greater than Christ. Chapter by chapter, he hammers this theme. Christ is higher than the angels. His priestly office is superior to the Old Testament priesthood. His atonement for sins once and for all accomplishes what the blood of millions of bulls and goats could never effectuate. He is far above "every priest [who] stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:11–12). He is better in every way than all the elements of Old Testament religion combined.

And it all starts with the truth that Jesus is God incarnate. He does the works of God—"He made the world ... and upholds all things by the word of His power" (vv. 2–3). He has a permanent position where no lesser being has any right to be, "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (v. 3).

And here is the point that elicits a reference to Psalm 2:7: Jesus "has inherited a more excellent name" than any name ever given to the angels. Bear in mind the context. We are right in the middle of chapter 1, where the theme is the eternality and divinity of Christ. Therefore the "name" spoken of in verse 4 is one that bespeaks deity. What is that name?

It is the same name used for Jesus in John 3:16: He is the "only begotten Son" of God.

"Begotten"?

Psalm 2:7 is of course the principal Old Testament text that identifies the Son of God as "begotten." The Hebrew word is יָלַד, (*yalad*), and it's the same word often translated "begat" some 225 times in the King James Version's Old Testament genealogies—"Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David" (Ruth 4:22), etc.

The Greek word for "begotten" in Hebrews 1:5 is γεννάω (*gennaō*). It is the root used in the word μονογενής, (*monogenes*), translated as "only begotten" in John 3:16.

Monogenes can also mean "one of a kind." Both are legitimate literal English equivalents of the Greek term. That is why the King James Version and New American Standard Bible say "only begotten," but the English Standard Version renders it "only," and the New International Version has "one and only." The Greek term actually carries both meanings simultaneously. *Monogenes* is never used of anything other than sons or daughters, and it always signifies a child who has no siblings from the same parents. Luke uses it three chapters in a row as he relates various narratives about how Jesus healed people. In Luke 7:12, Jesus raises from the dead a young man whom Luke says was "the only son [*monogenes*] of his mother." The boy was both her one and only child and her only-begotten son. A chapter later, Jairus begs Jesus to come to his house, because "he had an only daughter [*monogenes*] ... and she was dying" (Luke 8:42). Again, she was his only child. In the following chapter, "A man from the crowd shouted, saying, 'Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy [*monogenes*]'" (Luke 9:38). That is always the sense of the Greek term: "an only child."

"Begotten" seems a more precise translation of the word in John 3:16, not only because it recognizes the connection with Psalm 2:7, but also because it underscores what makes Jesus unique. All believers are God's children by faith and by adoption, as affirmed by many passages: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12); "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26); and "All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Even the angels are called "sons of God" three times in the book of Job.

But Christ is the "only *begotten*" Son of God, and the writer of Hebrews underscores that point by quoting Psalm 2:7.

Note that in the realm of biology, all creatures were made to bear offspring that shared their exact nature and likeness. "God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures *after their kind*: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth *after their kind*;' and it was so" (Genesis 1:24, emphasis added). The point is that the one begotten is of the same nature as the one who begets. "Adam ... begat [*yalad*] a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Genesis 5:3). To say Christ is "begotten" by the Father is to stress that he "is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3).

No one other than Christ is ever said to be begotten by the Father—not even the Holy Spirit. This is precisely what makes Christ unique—"one of a kind." He alone is God's Son by nature—not by adoption; not by appointment; not by creation; and not by his conception in Mary's womb.

Furthermore, (and this is vital) Christ's position as "Son of God" is not a role he assumed at his incarnation. That would be no proof at all that Jesus is higher than the angels.

But this is a description of Christ's eternal essence as the radiance of divine glory. He is always and forever the full and perfect manifestation of the divine nature. He is from eternity past to eternity future "the only begotten Son of God." His eternal glory rests in that reality, according to John 1:14, "We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father."

As an infant begotten by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary's womb, Christ had no distinctive glory. In fact, his glory as God's Son was veiled under his humanity throughout his life: "He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him,

nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him" (Isaiah 53:2). The glory that shone on the Mount of Transfiguration was one bright shining moment of divine glory, unveiled from the divine nature of Christ. That glory was the proof that he is God incarnate. That is the point the apostle makes in John 1:14 when he declares himself an eyewitness to a glory so inexpressibly bright and pure that it could only signify One who is himself deity—begotten by a heavenly Father.

It is clear therefore from the context that the begetting spoken of in Hebrews 1:5 pertains to the deity of Christ, not his humanity. It sets him apart from every created being; it exalts him above the angels; and it magnifies him as God. That, indeed, is the whole point—the writer of Hebrews is citing Psalm 2:7 as proof that Jesus is God.

Notice—his throne is eternal according to verse 8, and according to verses 10–11, so is he. He was there at the beginning of time: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands" (v. 10).[9] Verses 11–12 go on to declare both his eternality and his immutability: "[The earth and heavens] will perish, but You remain; and they all will become old like a garment, and like a mantle You will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, and your years will not come to an end." Those are incommunicable attributes of deity.

Any reader who studies this chapter in earnest and with care cannot deny that from start to finish it is declaring the deity of Christ. In the process, the text lays a foundation for one of the most important truths of Trinitarian doctrine—namely, the eternal sonship of Christ. It holds up the twin truths of Christ's sonship and his deity—and categorically affirms both. In fact, this passage presents the sonship of Christ as one of the proofs of Christ's deity.

That, by the way, is precisely how virtually everyone in first-century Judaism understood sonship. To say Jesus was the only-begotten Son of God was to say he is absolutely equal to God in his divine nature and authority.

Subordination?

It is vital to note that there is not a hint of subordination in the designation "only begotten Son." It is an expression that denotes absolute equality. Father and son share the same nature and substance. They are equal in status and privilege. Every person in any first-century middle eastern culture understood that. A son was deserving of the very same respect and honor as the father.

That view is evident in the Gospels. At the pool of Bethesda, after Jesus healed a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, a group of Jewish leaders publicly scolded him for breaking their Sabbath rules. He answered, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (John 5:17). The next verse tells us, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He

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[9] Verse 10 purposely echoes Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Every key expression from the opening verse of Scripture is echoed in Hebrews 1:10: "in the beginning"; "heavens"; and "earth." The verse is actually a direct quotation from Psalm 102:25 ("Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands"). That, he says, is the voice of the Father attributing the work of creation to Christ. It is an emphatic declaration of the deity of Christ. Verses 11–12 continue the quotation from Psalm 102.

not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, *making Himself equal with God"* (emphasis added).

Faithful Jews sometimes spoke of God as "our Father" in the collective sense, as in Isaiah 63:16: "You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name" (see also Isaiah 64:8). The prophet asks the whole nation, "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10).[10] Jesus apparently raised no eyebrows among the Pharisees when he taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father ... " (Matthew 6:9).

The Jewish nation saw themselves collectively as belonging to God's family. But no pious Jew would ever refer to God as "*His own* Father." The casual familiarity implied in that expression was offensive. Even more than that, to call God "My Father"—especially while claiming to be God's "only begotten Son"—was to claim prerogatives that simply do not belong to any mere man.

"Son of God," is clearly a title of deity in the unique way Jesus applied it to himself as "the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). It was an unequivocal declaration that the Incarnate Christ is equal in rank and authority to God. Both text and context make it clear that the quotation from Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5 is not about Jesus' conception and birth as a man. The whole point being made in that chapter is that he is eternally God's Son, one in nature with the Father, equal in authority with the Father, far superior even to the angels, and therefore worthy of worship the same as the Father.

Today?

Nevertheless, we must candidly admit that the hard questions Psalm 2:7 raises need to be answered. How can we say Christ was "begotten" if he has eternally existed? If self-existence is an attribute of deity, how can he be both "God" and "begotten of the Father"? And when did this begetting take place? What does the word "today" in Psalm 2:7 refer to?

Remember that this same phrase from Psalm 2:7 is quoted twice more in Scripture. In Acts 13, the apostle Paul is preaching in the synagogue at Antioch, and he gives an abbreviated history of God's saving work. He begins to conclude his sermon in verses 32–33: "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten You.'"

Since Paul links Psalm 2:7 with Christ's resurrection, some commentators believe "today" in that text refers to the day when Christ rose from the dead. But that view would create an even more troublesome interpretive problem. If "today" refers to the first Easter Sunday, that would imply that Jesus was not the "only begotten Son," and God was not (in the fullest sense) Father to Christ until he rose from the

[10] The first question in Malachi 2:10 is somewhat ambiguous. The NASB has the word "father" lowercased, as if it is a reference to Abraham as the nation's "one father" (cf. Luke 1:73). But "Do we not all have one father?" is purposely set parallel to the second phrase in the verse—as if it is the same question recast: "Has not one God created us?" Most translations therefore treat "Father" as a reference to God and capitalize it.

dead. In essence, the verse would mean, "Now that you have arisen from the dead, I have become your Father."[11]

Paul himself explains the connection between Jesus' sonship and the resurrection—but he does it in a different context. In Romans 1:4, he says "Jesus Christ our Lord" "was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness." That is one of many conspicuously Trinitarian verses of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit declared that Christ is eternally a Son to the Father by raising him from the dead. Jesus was irrefutably singled out and "designated" (Legacy Standard Bible) as the one true Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. Paul uses a Greek word ὁρίζω (*horizō*), meaning "marked out," or highlighted—literally "singled out and made conspicuous." What the resurrection did was signify that Jesus Christ—and he alone—is the one true, eternal, "only begotten" Son of God.

The point should be obvious. If the name "Son" is proof of Jesus' deity, as Hebrews 1 suggests, then Christ's unique place as the Father's only begotten Son cannot be a role he assumed at some point in time. In his humanity, Jesus can experience change and growth, like anyone else. But in his divine nature, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

In other words, there was no point in time when Jesus *became* a Son. The language of Scripture repeatedly confirms this and makes this truth a prominent feature of the gospel message. The New Testament says in numerous ways that "God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4); "God has sent His only begotten Son into the world" (1 John 4:9); He "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10); "The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14); "God ... gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16); God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin" (Romans 8:3); God "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all" (Romans 8:32).

Christ was not sent from heaven to step into a new role as God's Son. None of those verses say the Savior was sent to *become* a Son. They say the Son was sent to be a Savior.

Also, by logical necessity, if Christ was not a Son until his incarnation, then the Father wasn't a Father yet when he sent him. The New Testament says repeatedly that he is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It calls him "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Calling God "Father" presupposes that he has a Son. It's reciprocal. Unless we are prepared to argue that paternity is not an eternally-defining property of God the Father, we simply cannot deny the eternal Sonship of Christ.

Colossians 1:15 says Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Isolate that verse from its context, and it might seem to be saying Christ had a beginning. But the very next verse says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions

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[11] Albert Barnes took that view. In his commentary on Acts 13:33, he wrote: "It is evident that Paul uses the expression here as implying that the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God because he raised him up from the dead; and that he means to imply that it was for this reason that he is so called in the psalm. The interpretation of an inspired apostles [sic] fixes the meaning of this passage in the psalm; and proves that it is not there used with reference to the doctrine of eternal generation, or to his incarnation, but that he is here called his Son because he was raised from the dead." Albert Barnes, *Notes Explanatory and Practical, on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Knight & Son, 1856), 278.

or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16–17). In other words, he cannot be a created being. He is the one who through whom everything was created (Hebrews 1:2). John 1 states, "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (vv. 2–3).

It should be clear that like the Greek term *monogenes*, the expression "firstborn of all creation" is not—cannot be—ascribing a beginning to either the existence or the sonship of Christ.

Eternal Generation?

How then do we explain what it means for the Son of God, "having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3), to be "begotten" by the Father? Classic Trinitarianism has answered that question by describing the begetting of God's Son as an act of *eternal generation.* That is the technical term theologians coined to explain the timeless Trinitarian relationship between Father and Son.

The expression itself sounds oxymoronic. *Eternal* means "without beginning or end," and *generation* usually means "Bring into existence, produce; or cause to arise." Indeed, what can the word *begotten* possibly mean for an eternal, self-existent deity who is the same yesterday and today and forever? Or to put it more simply: how can Christ be *both* eternal and begotten? After all, human beings are begotten as zygotes. How can someone who is God, with no beginning and no end, be begotten—not as a man, but as eternal God? How can "generation" (the act of begetting, which usually speaks of bringing one's offspring into existence) have anything to do with Christ, who declares himself to be Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End, who is and was and is to come (Revelation 1:8; 22:13)?

This is not a new question. Believers in the early centuries of Church history grappled with it and came to a fairly solid consensus. Augustine stated simply that "God without time [outside of time] begat the Son by Whom He created all times."[12] Some eighty years before Augustine published that, the Nicene Creed (AD 381) had affirmed,

> We believe ... in one LORD JESUS CHRIST,
> the only-begotten Son of God,
> Begotten of the Father before all worlds;
> God of God,
> Light of Light,
> Very God of very God,
> *Begotten*, *not made,*
> Being of one substance with the Father;
> By whom all things were made." (emphasis added)[13]

[12.] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John and His First Epistle,* 2 vols., trans. H. Browne (London, 1848), 2:222.

[13.] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1877), 1:27–28.

Notice the highlighted expression: "begotten, not made." That is a purposeful use of biblical language. Neither Augustine nor the Nicene creed use the *words* "eternal generation," but both statements affirm the *idea* in principle.

Of course, "eternal generation" is not a biblical term, and there are those who reject the language for that reason.[14] But regardless of what one thinks of the terminology, the truth of eternal generation is thoroughly biblical. Jesus is clearly and repeatedly said to be "begotten from the Father" (John 1:14), and this begetting clearly pertains to his deity, not his human nature. He is even called "the only begotten God" (v. 18). Virtually every place in Scripture where the Son is said to be begotten, the point is that Father and Son are of one substance, eternally equal—making it impossible that he was begotten in time, as opposed to eternity. Hence, "eternal generation."[15] Archibald Alexander Hodge gives this helpful definition:

> The eternal generation of the Son is defined to be an eternal personal act of the Father, wherein, by necessity of nature, not by choice of will, he generates the person (not the essence) of the Son, by communicating to Him the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead, without division, alienation, or change, so that the Son is the express image of His Father's person, and eternally continues, not from the Father, but in the Father, and the Father in the Son.—See particularly Heb. 1., 3; John x., 38; xiv., 11; xvii., 21. The principal Scriptural support of the doctrine of derivation is John v., 26.[16]

Delving further into the many debates and controversies that surround "eternal generation" in the annals of historical theology would be far beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient for our purposes to note that many who affirm that the *fact* of Christ's eternal generation is sufficiently clear in Scripture will freely admit that no fully satisfying explanation of the idea can be given. Spurgeon said, "The mysterious

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[14.] Oliver Buswell, for example, does not like the expression *eternal generation* though he does not deny that Christ's sonship pertains to his eternal nature as God. He seems to equate the idea of "generation" with *subordination,* although (inconsistently, it seems) he has no such concern about the biblical expressions "begotten," or "Son." J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 111–12.

Ryrie indicates that he agrees with Buswell's position, though he gives a slightly different rationale for avoiding the language of "eternal generation." He writes: "I agree with Buswell (A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, pp. 105-12) that generation is not an exegetically based doctrine. The concept it tries to convey, however, is not unscriptural, and certainly the doctrine of sonship is scriptural. The phrase "eternal generation" is simply an attempt to describe the Father-Son relationship in the Trinity and, by using the word "eternal," protect it from any idea of inequality or temporality. But whether or not one chooses to use the idea of eternal generation, the personal and eternal and coequal relation of the Father and Son must be affirmed." Ryrie then goes on to state rather dogmatically that Psalm 2:7 lends no support even to the principle "eternal generation" aims to convey. Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 54.

[15.] I prefer the view of those who stress that the *person* of Christ is generated, not the substance or the essence. We say the substance is "communicated" through generation, but that is not what is *begotten.* Turretin says it this way: "A person is properly said to generate a person. . . . Although the Son may be said to be begotten by the Father, it does not follow that the Son is the Son of himself because the essence does not generate an essence, but a person (the Father, the Son, who is another one, although not another thing)." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:293, 301.

[16.] A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (New York: Robert Carter, 1866), 146.

doctrine of the Trinity, and the equally mysterious and sublime doctrine of eternal generation are best let alone by feeble minds. I do not think there are half-a-dozen men alive who ought to meddle with [the doctrine of eternal generation]."[17] Elsewhere, he wisely said,

> There has been much disputing about how Christ can be equal with the Father, and equally eternal, and yet be the Son of the Father. This is a great deep into which you and I, dear friends, will do well not to pry. We usually speak of Christ being the Son of the Father by what is called "eternal generation." I confess that there is a mystery here which I can neither understand nor explain; but as the Father calls him his Son, I unhesitatingly believe that he is what the Scripture constantly calls him, "the Son of God."[18]

"Much disputing" is an understatement. Debates about how, in what sense, and by what means Christ was begotten underlie most of the Christological controversies throughout church history. To cite just one example, Athanasius wrote this in response to the Arian controversy:

> [It is not] right to seek how the word is from God, or how He is God's radiance, or how God begets, and what is the manner of His begetting. For a man must be beside himself [literally "crazy"] to venture on such points; since a thing ineffable and proper to God's nature, and known to Him alone and to the Son, this he demands to be explained in words. It is all one as if they sought where God is, and how God is, and of what nature the Father is. But as to ask such questions is irreligious, and argues an ignorance of God, *so it is not holy to venture such questions concerning the generation of the Son of God*, nor to measure God and His Wisdom by our own nature and infirmity. Nor is a person at liberty on that account to swerve in his thoughts from the truth, nor, if any one is perplexed in such inquiries, ought he to disbelieve what is written. For it is better in perplexity to be silent and believe, than to disbelieve on account of the perplexity: for he who is perplexed may in some way obtain mercy, because, though he has questioned, he has yet kept quiet; but when a man is led by his perplexity into forming for himself doctrines which beseem not, and utters what is unworthy of God, such daring incurs a sentence without mercy.[19]

John Owen said, "Of the eternal generation of the divine person of the Son, the sober writers of the ancient church did constantly affirm that it was firmly to be believed, but as to the manner of it not to be inquired into."[20] Owen goes on to quote

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[17.] Charles Spurgeon, "Strong Meat," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1863), 9:234.

[18.] Charles Spurgeon, "Lessons from Christ's Baptism," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 58:183-84.

[19.] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series,* 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 4:367. A footnote attached to this passage further says, "Eusebius has some forcible remarks on this subject. As, he says, we do not know how God can create out of nothing, so we are utterly ignorant of the Divine Generation."

[20.] John Owen, *The Person and Glory of Christ* (New York: Robert Carter, 1852), 13.

Ambrose: "I inquire of you when and how the Son was begotten? Impossible it is to me to know the mystery of this generation. My mind faileth, my voice is silent—and not only mine, but of the angels; it is above principalities, above angels, above the cherubim, above the seraphim, above all understanding. Lay thy hand on thy mouth; it is not lawful to search into these heavenly mysteries."[21]

Francis Turretin says this is a doctrine that cannot be totally explained or comprehended by the human mind. He too quotes Ambrose and follows with a quotation from Gregory Nazianzus, who, in Turretin's words, "puts a stop to our curiosity when he wishes [this doctrine] to be reverenced in silence: 'The begetting of God is to be honored by silence; the great thing is for you to learn he was begotten.'"[22]

These men who specialized in biblical doctrine all their lives are not suggesting that the rest of us should abstain from studying these doctrines. They are saying the same thing the apostle says in 2 Peter 3:16—namely, that Scripture includes "some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort ... to their own destruction."

The filiation of Christ is not a suitable place for hobbyists and beginners to experiment with creative theology. Indeed, *none* of the core Trinitarian doctrines is safe playgrounds for theological neophytes. But it sometimes seems as if every dilettante dabbler in doctrine is just itching to tackle the things in Scripture that are the *most* difficult to understand.

That's a bad idea, and it is folly for greenhorn exegetes to think they can improve historic Christianity's long-standing creeds by twisting, tweaking, and tinkering with doctrines that they clearly haven't even begun to grasp. Spurgeon deplored that kind of small-minded theological tampering. He said, "We might like to see two Titanic Puritans enter the field of controversy—two such men, for instance, as Dr. John Owen and Charnock—one might travel a thousand miles to see them grapple one of these lofty subjects; but when the little men of these days meddle with them, it saddens the humble-minded, and affords enlightenment to none."[23]

We can't wrap our feeble minds around the idea of eternity—even though it's such a familiar concept. Yet we obviously cannot simply discard every thought of infinity as an irrational, unreasonable, or absurd concept. Try to conceive of a universe where everything is finite—that's impossible. So we *must* acknowledge infinity, even while we are forced to confess that we can't comprehend the idea. The eternal generation of Christ Father is just like that.

Turretin's approach is the sound one. He writes, "The words of Is. 53:8, although having another bearing, may be rightly used here—'Who shall declare his generation?' But only that it may be distinguished from human generation and explained negatively rather than positively." In other words, although we cannot precisely describe the mode of eternal generation, we can certainly say with biblical authority what it does *not* mean. It does not mean there was a time when Christ did not exist (John 1:1–2). It is not a denial of the Son's aseity, or self-existence (John 5:26). It does not mean that Christ is eternally subordinate to the Father (John 5:18; Philippians 2:6). It does not mean that the Son derives the divine essence, his glory,

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[21.] Owen, 14.
[22.] Turretin, *Institutes*, 292.
[23.] Spurgeon, "Strong Meat," 234.

or the attributes of deity from the Father (John 17:5). What is generated is his sonship—the distinctive property of his Person (more on that in a moment).

Psalm 2:7 and Hebrews 1:5 *must* be consistent with the rest of Scripture, so we are driven by the text of Scripture to conclude that here, at least, the word "today" does not speak of a point in time at all. It is the eternal "now" of our timeless God—an inscrutable reality, described in finite and totally inadequate language.

The immediate context of Psalm 2:7 is actually consistent with that interpretation: "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" Many commentators take that as a reference to the eternal decree of God. It belongs to the time before time, when there was actually no such thing as "today." Turretin agrees, and adds this:

> And so with regard to the word "today" (*hodie*), which is added not to point out a certain time in which that generation began; but that we may understand that all things are present with God, and that that generation is not successive, but permanent in eternity (viz., in it there is nothing past or future, nor any succession of time, but an indivisible "now" [*to nyn*] embracing however all the circumstances of time). As, therefore, with God there is no yesterday or tomorrow, but always today, so this filiation being eternal can properly be designated by the today of eternity.[24]

Personal Properties?

How vital is the eternal sonship of Christ to our understanding of the Trinity? To eliminate the eternal generation of Christ would destroy the familial relationship that defines the Trinity. It would turn the Father-Son relationship into nothing more than a temporary metaphor—and thus destroy the singular distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How are the Persons of the Trinity distinguished in Scripture? The answer is given in countless historic creeds and confessions of faith:

> The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.[25]

The words used to frame that article of faith are taken verbatim from the Athanasian Creed (*Quicunque Vult*, c. 500), purposely emphasizing both the absolute equality of the three Persons, while also identifying their distinctive personal properties.

This is basic Trinitarianism. The Father begets the Son; the Son is begotten of the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son. Thus, the distinctive personal properties are known as *paternity* (the Father); *filiation* (the Son);

[24.] Turretin, *Institutes*, 295.

[25.] Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), 2.3.

and *procession* (the Holy Spirit). Those properties are what give definition to the personhood of each. In fact, those are their only distinguishing characteristics. Aside from those properties, all three Persons share the same attributes and prerogatives.

As noted near the beginning of this paper, no one besides the Son (including the Holy Spirit) is ever said to be "begotten" of the Father. The Holy Spirit is sent from Christ and proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). The expression evokes the idea of breathing, and that is fitting, because the Greek word for "Spirit" is *pneuma*, a word that means "breath." When Jesus spoke of sending the Spirit to his disciples, "he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:22).

R. L. Dabney is candid with regard to the mystery surrounding these personal intertrinitarian distinctions. He wrote, "That there are such properties and relations, we know; what they are, we do not know."[26] But like so many aspects of the Bible's Trinitarian teachings, it would be sheer foolishness to dismiss or explain away important biblical truths just because they pose a challenge to our understanding. The generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit may mystify us, but these are clear and necessary biblical doctrines.

No doctrine is *more* essential to our confession of faith as Bible-believing Christians than the doctrine of the Trinity and the numerous biblical truths that weave our understanding of our Triune God. The writer of Hebrews starts here precisely because no doctrine has more far-reaching significance, and nothing has more serious practical implications than the issue of whom we worship. Remember: he was writing an extended appeal to half-hearted almost-converts who were tempted to revert to Judaism because they had not yet grasped that to walk away from Christ was to turn away from God himself. The full truth of Trinitarian doctrine had been revealed to them. "God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9). As Jesus himself said, it is the duty of all believers to "honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23); "He who hates Me hates My Father also" (John 15:23). The apostle John agreed: "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (1 John 2:23); "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2 John 9).

In other words, to turn away from Christ, deny his deity, or neglect to honor him as we honor the Father is to turn away from the true God. Christ's sonship is not an abstract, arcane, impractical, or insignificant doctrine. This doctrine has practical ramifications in the ultimate and eternal sense, and the eternal relationship between Father and Son is a vitally important doctrine with major implications for the gospel. That is why the Scriptures take great pains to inform us time and again that God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins—and the one whom God sent is "his *only* begotten Son."

I hope you see the beauty and majesty of that truth—and more than that, I hope you *believe* it.

[26.] R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Co., 1878), 203.

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INCORRUPTIBLE TRINITY: SKETCH OF A DOCTRINE

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The doctrine of divine incorruptibility deserves more focused attention than it has generally received, especially in the modern period. This article draws the doctrine from its Scriptural sources (especially making use of the phthora *word-group) and sketches its basic shape for systematic theology. First, it establishes the doctrine as a statement about God's nature (that it is not subject to decay), and then traces its implications through Christology and soteriology. Finally, with the overall doctrine sketched out, the article suggests what is especially trinitarian in the doctrine of God's incorruptibility.*

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Incorruptibility is a divine perfection—that is, an attribute of the triune God. Only twice in the New Testament is God directly called incorruptible, both times in the writings of Paul (1 Tim 1:17 and Rom 1:23). But the broader set of words and concepts associated with incorruption[1] in general are spread much more widely throughout Scripture, so that when Paul at last affirms that God is incorruptible, something very important comes to the surface. Incorruptibility is, in fact, a massive doctrinal complex presupposed in the rest of Scripture and energetically developed in early Christian theology. The focus of this short essay is to draw attention to the doctrine of divine incorruptibility and to display some of its theological and spiritual ramifications, with a special goal of exhibiting its connections to the doctrine of the Trinity.

That God is incorruptible means that he is not subject to decomposition. He cannot disintegrate or be dismembered. God does not rot. "Incorruptible" is a double-

[1] I will use "incorruptibility" and "incorruption" interchangeably for reasons of style, though these terms could also be distinguished from each other (the former as the property of not being able to be corrupt, the latter merely the state of not being corrupt). The distinction is not relevant to the current sketch. As we will see, considerable verbal flexibility is necessary for dealing with this doctrine at all, since no adequate word has consistently imposed itself on the English-language theological tradition.

negative construction, confessing a positive thing by denying its negation. It belongs among that whole class of divine attributes whose power and usefulness derive from their ability to teach us what concepts we must reject if we are to affirm the truth about God's being. In rehearsing such attributes, we deny that God is limited by any power, surrounded by any presence, derived from any other; he is not changeable, visible, mortal, compound, or composed of parts. There is something almost arbitrary or reactive about which negative doctrines we stipulate of God, since we would never bother to make the movement of negation unless the possibility of affirmation was proposed to us. God is not blue, for example, but unless and until someone proposes a doctrine of divine blueness, there is no need to insist on this particular denial. The history of theology has made a select group of these negations strategically important. All of these doctrines sound somewhat more positive to us when we state them in English words that partly conceal their built-in negations. We characterize God as having divine infinity, aseity, immutability, invisibility, immortality, and simplicity. But each of these words are in fact double negations which gesture toward the transcendent reality of God, a reality about which we can also, based on revelation, make a few positive statements as well.

What is that positive truth guarded by the doctrine of incorruptibility? It is the simple and vital reality that God is one, and alive: he has strong unity and perfect life. It is the one, living God who Christian theology confesses as incorruptible. As the incorruptible one, God is radically distinguished from all creatures, and by grace he offers himself to his creation as the rock of its salvation, the stable source of a creature's finite, dependent integrity. It is this soteriological note that sounds out so affirmatively from the Biblical witness to divine incorruptibility: "The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation" (Psalm 18:46). [2] God lives, and is an indestructible rock. On this basis he saves.

Biblical Exposition: Creator and Creation

To exposit the Bible's own way of teaching divine incorruptibility, we can choose between following along after the chronological sequence of the canon's unfolding storyline, or examining the conceptual structure of the fully realized doctrine. The former approach (chronological) would be especially conducive for a leisurely exploration of the full range of Scripture's varied ways of speaking of God, and would enable us to watch how the doctrine grows from lesser to greater focus and definiteness. The latter approach (conceptual) would be especially valuable for providing a rapid overview, and generating conceptual paraphrases that can easily enter into dialogue with other systematic theological topics.[3] A middle approach mingles the two, arranging topical clusters in patterns that follow the broad outline of Scripture's development of the theme. This mixed approach is the one followed in this sketch.

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[2] Scripture passages are from the ESV throughout, except where noted.

[3] Both approaches count as "biblical reasoning," which, as John Webster points out, can take the two forms of "exegetical reasoning" or "dogmatic reasoning." Webster rightly recognizes exegetical reasoning as the "theologically primary act," but commends dogmatic reasoning for making possible "swift, non-laborious and non-repetitive access to the text's matter." John Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 130–31.

We begin with praise: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." This doxology from 1 Timothy 1:17 features the single word that is central for the doctrine of incorruptibility: *aphthartō*.[4] For our purposes, it would be more helpful if this key word were translated here by incorruptible. But since it is rendered as immortal in the vast majority of English versions of this passage, we should take the opportunity to point out the importance of the distinction. To follow the tradition of translating *aphthartō* here with "immortal" may be justifiable, but is definitely a simplification. "Immortal" rightly indicates that God is not subject to death (mortality), but it smooths over the detail of the particular kind of death he is immune to: death by decomposition, that is, by corruption. In rendering *aphthartō* in this verse with immortal rather than incorruptible, translators may be interpretively harmonizing it with 1 Timothy 6:16, which says that God "alone has immortality (*athanasian*)." The longer doxology at the end of 1 Timothy does seem to be Paul's own expanded recapitulation of the first chapter's brief doxology, following the same sequence of concepts: exalted kingship, immortality, invisibility, and honor forever. Nevertheless, simplifying incorruption to immortality in 1:17 omits the concept of corruption (*phtharsis*), substituting for it the concept of death. There is much to be gained from recognizing that the word used here is not *athanatos*, but *aphthartos*.[5] We should bear in mind the several differences between the concepts of death and corruption: first, death lacks the idea of losing composition. Second, while corruption suggests a process or a continuum along which things can be more or less corrupted, death suggests a condition more punctiliar, all or nothing. Richard Chenevix Trench, famously attentive to the shades of meaning between synonyms, notes that there is "a clear distinction" between the two ideas, admitting that the translation "incorruptible" is "to be preferred: the word predicating of God that He is exempt from that wear and waste and final perishing; that *phthora*, which time, and sin working in time, bring about in all which is outside of Him, and to which He has not communicated his own *aphtharsia*."[6] Finally, as we move on from this examination of the key word, it is worth noting that there is no well-established English word that accomplishes all we require in service of this divine perfection we are calling incorruptibility. Other translational possibilities

[4] The most helpful lexicon entries on this word group are Günther Harder, "phtheiro," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 9:93–106; T. Holtz, "Phthora," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* , ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993) 3:422–23; and "phtheiro," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014) 4:597–602. For the patristic development, see G. W. H. Lampe, "aphthartos," in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 276–77.

[5] *aphthartō* is the well-attested reading in I Tim 1:17 and is not controversial either in eclectic texts or in older versions. The manuscript known as Codex Claromontanus, a sixth-century uncial diglot rife with scribal corrections, has *aphthartō* in the main text with *athanatō* in the margin. For detailed consideration of text-critical issues in this verse, see J. K. Elliott, *The Greek Text of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, Studies and Documents XXXVI (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1968). Elliott judges *aphthartō* to be "probably original," which aligns with the major critical editions available.

[6] Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London, 1880; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 254.

include imperishability, invincibility, and indestructibility.[7] But the closest we have come to a standardized term set apart for this task is incorruptible.

The language of this passage is exalted. While it is more doxological than argumentative, it makes an important point in the way it draws together a small but potent cluster of theological terms. We can see that incorruptibility belongs in a series of divine attributes that characterize God as eternal, invisible, and, as Paul concludes perhaps by way of summary, as "the only God." As Gerald Bray notes, "this is one of the few places in the New Testament where divine attributes are specifically listed."[8] The doxology includes key terms for speaking monotheistically about God in Greek. Even if the crucial concepts clustered here are all powerfully present in the Old Testament, they are expressed in terms that had also come to be current in Hellenistic philosophical discourse.[9] Trench notes that *aphthartos* in particular, "a word of the later Greek, is not once found in the Septuagint, and only twice in the Apocrypha (Wisdom 12:1; 18:4)." He goes on to point out that "properly speaking, God only is *aphthartōs*, the heathen theology recognizing this not less clearly than the Biblical."[10] In his commentary on Titus, Philip Towner asserts that the word *aphthartōs* as used here is "borrowed from Greek categories by late Jewish writers."[11] Its usage here in a Christian doxology, surrounded by key terms of monotheistic reflection, establishes the term's significance as part of a very high doctrine of God.[12] Even though Paul does not bring to bear any arguments about the word, or linger over any analysis that might draw out the implications of calling God *aphthartō* here, we can learn a lot about the word by the company it keeps in this doxology.

The situation is different in the one other New Testament passage that calls God incorruptible. Rather than just employing the term itself, the first chapter of Romans makes use of it in a discursive framework that establishes its meaning and its implications. As he traces the trajectory of human away from God, he moves through the categories of ungodliness and unrighteousness, reaching the conceptual climax in the notion of corruption:

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[7] Luther has *dem Unvergänglichen* both here and in Romans 1:25. The word remains unsettled even in English translation of Greek patristic sources. In the works of Gregory of Nyssa, "'indestructible' and 'indestructibility' are used to render *aphthartos, aphtharsia*," because "there is no satisfactory term in English: alternatives might be 'incorruptible, -ility', 'imperishable, -ility', 'immortal, -ity'." Stuart George Hall, notes to his translation, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II, An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Lenka Karfíková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 87; see the same lament repeated at 141. On the breadth of the whole *phthora* word group, see the remarks below by Thiselton.

[8] Gerald Bray, *The Pastoral Epistles: An International Theological Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2019), 123.

[9] While we often tend to think of ancient paganism as uniformly polytheistic, there was also a powerful philosophical current of monotheistic thought at work in Greek thought, stretching from Plato to the various Hellenistic schools. This pagan monotheism was a valuable dialogue partner for early Christian thinkers. See the range of options presented in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

[10] Trench, *Synonyms,* 253–54.

[11] Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 152. For a good rehearsal of aphtharsia's path through Wisdom and Maccabees to the New Testament, see Dănuț-Vasile Jemna, "The Aphtharsia in the Pauline Thought, A Biblical Anthropological Perspective," *Sacra Scripta* 9, no. 1 (2012): 69–97.

[12] Jerome H. Neyrey, S. J., "'Without Beginning of Days or End of Life' (Hebrews 7:3): Topos for a True Deity," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991): 439–55. Especially helpful is the careful review of terminology in the sub-section "The Shape of Hellenistic God-Talk," 440–48.

> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures. (Rom 1:20–23, NASB)

Here the contrast between incorruption and corruption serves to mark the boundary between the creator and the creature. The incorruptible God (*aphthartou Theou*) is characterized as having eternal power and a divine nature (*theiotēs*) which, though invisible in themselves, are the objects of human mental perception insofar as they are "understood by what has been made." Humans, by contrast, are identified as corruptible mankind (*phthartou anthrōpou*), and stand at the head of a descending series of creatures that get closer and closer to the ground: "birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures." The essence of idolatry is an exchange (Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11) of that which is creaturely for that which is divine, and here we are told specifically that what is exchanged is "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind." The special value of focusing on divine incorruptibility here is for its contrast to the idolatrous substitution of creatures, precisely in their corruptibility. Idols are assembled from parts and shaped by human craftsmanship, then set in place and carefully preserved from harm. Idols are compositions made of selected segments of wood no different from the other segments from which they sawed (Isa 44:9–20), covered with silver gathered in from Tarshish and gold imported from Uphaz, all painted with many colors (Jer 10:8-9), "But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King" (Jer 10:10). As a result, the prophetic message is that "The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under these heavens" (Jer 10:11). In Romans 1, Paul sets the prophetic critique of idolatry against the background of the corruptible/incorruptible distinction, thereby drawing out its implications in a more explicitly metaphysical register. Assemblages can, by nature, become disassembled or disintegrated. The mark of the true God is, by contrast, to be truly and inherently incorruptible.[13]

The two New Testament passages that directly call God incorruptible establish a solid foundation for elaborating a broader theology of divine incorruptibility, with implications for Christology and soteriology. It is worth noting how decisively these two passages function to elevate the Christian doctrine of God to the greatest heights of divine glory and to distinguish the creator from the creature: the eternal and incorruptible God is always to receive honor and glory, a glory which should never be transferred to corruptible creatures.

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[13] For a programmatic outworking of this insight in terms of ontology and the history of salvation, see Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, in *"Contra gentes" and "De incarnatione,"* ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).

Christology and Soteriology

There are several possible paths by which to trace the notion of incorruptibility from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of Christ, and then to the doctrine of salvation. First, it is worth noting that Jesus' own teaching presupposes divine incorruptibility in several ways. For example, his exhortation to store up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19–20) is based on his absolute trust in his heavenly Father. He states this in terms of a contrast between heaven's security and earth's insecurity—in this world, valuables can be consumed by moth and rust, or stolen by thieves. But things of real value are secure against everything when they are kept by the imperishable and invincible heavenly Father of Jesus.[14] Jesus' close identification with the Father already associates him with the heavenly security about which he teaches his followers. In that sense there is a kind of assimilation to divine incorruptibility already latent in Jesus' own teaching.

But secondly, the New Testament teaching about Christ also goes on to include him within the divine incorruptibility. It does this by invoking the Old Testament's vision of God as exalted above the created order:

> Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
> and the heavens are the work of your hands.
> They will perish, but you will remain;
> they will all wear out like a garment.
> You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
> but you are the same, and your years have no end. (Ps 102:25–27)

Once again we see the art of contrast at work here—God's eternally stable identity ("you are the same") is brought into high relief by comparison with the perishing, transient nature of the created heavens and earth. The incorruptible God can doff these ancient works "like a garment" as they wear out and pass away. But God's years have no end, and he is "the same." This high praise is quoted in Hebrews 1:10–12 as part of the rehearsal of Christ's divine identity in contrast to even the highest, angelic creatures. Specifically, these words from the Psalm are recognized as the Father's speech to his one and only Son, ascribing to him the essential divine reality of being "the same."[15] The words "the same" return in Hebrews 13:8, functioning again almost like a divine title: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." All things must pass, but the Son is not among those things—he stands on the other side of the frontier between creator and creation.

In soteriology, the broadest statement about incorruption is 2 Timothy 1:10's announcement that "our Savior Christ Jesus … abolished death (*thanaton*) and brought life and immortality (*aphtharsian*) to light through the gospel." This language of manifestation is typical of the Pastoral Epistles' unique vocabulary and expansive way of stating theological claims. The details of how incorruptibility was manifested and made effective for human salvation are spelled out in Paul's other

[14] See Rudolf Stier, *The Words of the Lord Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1861), 1:255.

[15] For an account of how the words function in Hebrews as the Father's address to the Son, see Madison N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 56–59.

writings, especially 1 Corinthians. Notice the key role played by incorruptibility in his argument about the resurrection:

> I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable (*phthora*) inherit the imperishable (*aphtharsian*). Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:50–53)

Phthora, Paul tells us, cannot inherit *aphtharsian*: there must be a mysterious change ("Behold, I tell you a mystery"). That change he explicates in terms of the corruptible "putting on" the incorruptible, donning it as if it were a protective or transformative garment. Anthony Thiselton argues that within the argument of 1 Corinthians, there is a contrast between corrupt and incorrupt that requires us to think of incorruption as something much thicker than simply extended duration. *Phthora*, he says, "is a term within the semantic opposition that carries the decisive content, in relation to which the contrast is signalled by the alpha privative." Since *phthora* "denotes decreasing capacities and increasing weaknesses, issuing in exhaustion and stagnation," he takes it to signal "a state of decay."[16] And if *phthora* is decay, then "the semantic contrast to such decay would not be permanence or everlasting duration, but ethical, aesthetic, and psychological flourishing and abundance, even perhaps perfection, and certainly fullness of life."[17] Salvation comes to us as a rescue from decay on all levels of our human creaturely reality, by way of protective inclusion within the wholeness and flourishing that are best conceived as the positive opposite of rotting. In Thisleton's argument we see again the great value of distinguishing between death and corruption, and therefore between divine immortality and divine incorruption.

Our participation in that incorruption is described more cosmically in Romans 8, where Paul expands the scope of his teaching on the resurrection body for a moment. It is not just the human body but creation itself that "was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption (*phthoras*) and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:20–21). All creation is somehow bound by the decay-inducing power of corruption, and eagerly awaits the deliverance from it which will be manifested in the resurrection of believers. All of this depends on the resurrection of Christ himself, which is the decisive manifestation of God's essential incorruption brought down and opened up for our participation, or put into action for the purposes of salvation.

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[16] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1272. I have omitted Thiselton's typographical complexities here. His pattern of italics, bolds, self-quotations, and even shifts from serif to sans serif fonts may work well in his large commentary, but are distracting to reproduce in quotation.

[17] Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1272.

How did this divine perfection of incorruption break through into the reality of fallen human creatures subjected to corruption? It did so in the Father's refusal to let the incarnate and crucified Son undergo decay. Psalm 16 contains an oracle about a righteous one who the Lord will not surrender to corruption; Peter quotes that Psalm in Acts 2 as fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, who says prophetically to his Father, "You will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption (*diaphthoran*)." Here is the doctrinal benefit of approaching this passage from the perspective of divine incorruptibility. It primes us to recognize that God was in Christ restoring the fallen creature to participation in incorruptibility. Just as the resurrection of Christ is the triumphant securing of the incarnate Son's invincibility at the right hand of God, so the resurrection of believers is the activation and application of that divine power for the conquering of our natural downward drive into disintegrated and decaying fragments of ourselves.

There are some important Christological complexities involved here. Because our goal in this sketch is to establish the broad, systematic outlines of the doctrine of divine incorruptibility, we can only indicate a few of the Christological details here. By the hypostatic union in which the eternal Son took to himself human nature, God the Son came within the range, so to speak, of corruptibility. That is, his divine nature was, and remains, incorruptible in itself—this has been the burden of arguing that divine incorruptibility is an attribute of God. But the human nature which the Son assumed into personal union with himself as his own human nature, was such a nature as could be subject to corruption. Human nature as such can come apart; it can decay.[18] In fact, when the Son of God experienced human death in his assumed human nature, that human nature did come apart in one crucial way—the created human body of Christ and the created human soul of Christ were separated from each other. This is human death, and Jesus died humanly. The next downward step in human dissolution is for the body, after the soul's departure, to undergo biological decay as its organic parts lose the functions of life and self-preservation. But this physical corruption is what God intervened to stop. He did not permit his holy one to see it, but raised him instead. And in the interim, during which body and soul were sundered in death, both continued to be the exclusive property of the incorruptible Son of God. We might say it this way: Body and soul lost each other in death, but the incorruptible Son lost neither his own human soul nor even his own human body. The implications for believers are immense. The seventeenth-century poet Henry Vaughan imagined a dialogue between the human soul and the body on the subject of resurrection, in which the body admits that it is exposed to the danger of decay in a way the soul is not, and yet it trusts in God's promise:

> Shall I then thinke such providence will be
> Lesse friend to me;
> Or that he can endure to be unjust
> Who keeps his covenant even with our dust?[19]

[18] For an excellent exposition of the soteriological and theological issues involved, worked out on intentionally traditional lines and in direct opposition to modern revisionism, see David J. Luy, *Dominus Mortis: Martin Luther on the Incorruptibility of God in Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[19] "Resurrection and Immortality," in *The Poetical Works of Henry Vaughan* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co, 1871), 59.

In less evocative but more careful doctrinal language, classical theologians have affirmed this profound truth about the way the incorruptible God encountered human death in Christ:

> Even though as man He did die and His sacred soul was separated from His immaculate body, the divinity remained unseparated from both—the soul ... and the body. Thus, the one Person was not divided into two persons. For from the beginning both had existence in the same way in the Person of the Word, and when they were separated from each other in death, each one of them remained in the possession of the one Person of the Word.[20]

The holy one experienced death, but in fulfillment of God's faithful promise, he did not see corruption.[21] The Son of God died our death for us, but did not rot for us. Instead, he made a way for our corruption to become invested with his incorruption.

Incorruptibility and the Trinity

Much more could be said about the doctrine of incorruptibility. Its implications for ethics and eschatology are especially rich and far-reaching: the *phthora* word group takes on moral connotations even in the New Testament, and we have already glimpsed how incorruptibility characterizes the risen life of the saints. But having surveyed the basic outlines of the doctrinal complex and shown how it all descends from a confession of incorruptibility as a divine perfection, we are in a position to conclude with some indications of how incorruptibility characterizes the Christian confession of the Trinity.

The Trinity, of course, does not come apart and cannot rot. But with attention to the nature of corruption, we can say a bit more. In pre-Christian Greek theology, corruption was the second term in a two-term complex. As birth corresponds to death, coming-to-be corresponds with ceasing-to-be. In the argument of Plato's *Phaedo*, there is a continuum of creation (*genesis*) and destruction (*phthora*). This continuum presupposes some kind of system or medium in which the twinned terms can function:

> What does not feature explicitly in Socrates' theory, but which may have been lying at the back of Plato's notion of unchanging eternal entities such as the Forms, is the Presocratic idea that matter cannot cease to exist, but that generation and destruction were in reality modifications of a basic, eternal

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[20] John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr., FC 37 (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1958), 3:27:332. For the same claim in Thomas Aquinas, *see Summa Theologiae* III, Q. 50, A. 2. A contemporary evangelical restatement that pays special attention to the defense of body-soul dualism can be found in Matthew Y. Emerson, *"He Descended to the Dead": An Evangelical Theology of Holy Saturday* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

[21] The further question of whether Christ's body could have decayed requires a conceptual distinction between the "potential disposition for an actual property" of decay and "the actual state" of decay. It is easy to see how this could matter in disputes about monophysitism, and it did in fact emerge as significant in a dispute between Julian of Halicarnassus and Severus of Antioch. See Aloys Grillmeier in collaboration with Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition,* Vol. 2, Part 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 79–121, esp. 100. On the history of what was called aphthartodocetism, see Grillmeier, 212-229; for its systematic status, see Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics* 5:2 (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2021), 154–55.

> substance, whether one of the elements, such as Anaximenes' air, Heraclitus' fire or, perhaps more suggestively, Anaximander's *to apeiron* (the boundless), a kind of reservoir from which opposites were generated and to which they returned.[22]

In Christian appropriation, however, this continuum had to be shattered, since the biblical God could not be situated within it. Or rather, some such metaphysical continuum might be seen as appropriately characterizing created being, but could not encompass God's own manner of being. God is above the cycle of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be, and is also (however difficult this may be to conceive of in formal categories) above whatever ineffable and mysterious continuum of existence plays host to that contrast.

This understanding of God's transcendence was at work even as the early church confessed that the eternal Son of God was *monogenes* in the sense of being eternally generated by the Father. Trinitarian theology affirmed that the Son had his origin in the Father, but utterly denied that this origin was to be understood as the first part of the dyad that concluded with *phthora*. The denial of corruptibility, in other words, helped to sharpen and focus the confession of eternal generation—it was not the kind of generation that presupposed completion in decline and decay. The Son's eternal origin from the Father had nothing to do with a mythological theogony that located the divine within a wider world process, because the eternal Son was from the eternal Father in a way that transcends world process. Chrysostom somewhere describes the Son as being "generated incorruptibly." The confession of eternal generation takes on its full metaphysical implications, and can be recognized as utterly unique, when it is understood as radically breaking free from the conceptual cycle of generation and decay.

God's life is perfect in itself, and God lives by the power of his own life. The Son and the Holy Spirit are included within that perfect divine life, which we confess negatively by saying that their common life is not subject to decay or decomposition—it is incorruptibly complete and fully realized in itself. It is simple and uncompounded, having no segment or parts into which it can be divided. The positive reality guarded by this negative formulation is that the triune God is the living God, having simplicity and aseity in the fullness of the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Putting Incorruptibility Back into Circulation

In conclusion we can ask, Is the doctrine of the incorruptible Trinity a neglected one? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that there are no academic articles or monographs devoted directly to the subject, even though it is a topic inherently worthy of study. Yes again, in the sense that although it is a subject directly taught in the words of Scripture and richly embedded in the classic theological tradition, it does not draw much attention from Christian theologians or preachers. It is certainly a profound theme that repays contemplation. In that sense, it is a doctrine worthy of study and ripe for retrieval.

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[22] Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, *Plato I: Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo*, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 287–88.

But no, it is not a neglected doctrine in the weightier sense, as if it has been substantively absent from Christian theology. When we confess God's attributes, one of the things we confess is that we cannot confess them all. They are, in the words of Charles Wesley, "glorious all, and numberless."[23] Since God's perfections cannot be exhaustively or definitively catalogued, it would be unseemly to accuse anybody of leaving one or two of them out. It is entirely possible to bring out the reality of divine incorruptibility indirectly, by attending to adjacent doctrines like simplicity, aseity, impassibility, and blessedness. Those doctrines easily overlap with each other in such a way that they effectively cover nearly all the territory which could be surveyed in a thematic focus on incorruptibility. For example, in Stephen Charnock's classic volumes *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, while there is no chapter or section devoted to incorruptibility, his discussion of divine immutability not only covers much of the same ground, but employs much of the same terminology.[24] Charnock takes as his guiding text Psalm 102:26–27, which we have seen is a key Old Testament passage on incorruptibility. Following this Psalm's lead, he explains creaturely mutability largely in terms of corruptibility, even contrasting it with divine incorruptibility. The most stable of creatures (the earth and heavens) "have it not from themselves that they do not perish, but from thee, who didst endue them with an incorruptible nature."[25] In all the ways that matter most, Charnock does not lack a doctrine of divine incorruptibility, though he lacks the locus.

Most systematic theologies, in fact, lack this locus. It is in hard to find historic examples of theological writers drawing out divine incorruptibility for special attention. The traditional arrangement shows a preference for folding this doctrine into the nearby doctrines in which its elements are implicated. The particular vocabulary (the *phtarsis* word group and its correlates) and concerns (the denial of constitution) of divine incorruptibility are usually scattered around in various other doctrines, lending to them a pervasive background, an occasional tone, or a subtle flavoring that we can recognize as the doctrine of divine incorruptibility. We do well to remember what a strength it is that the divine attributes mutually implicate each other.

But there are also strategic reasons to focus attention on particular attributes, or to approach the character of God from various angles. This essay is an investment in approaching the central Christian doctrines from the point of view of the doctrine of incorruptibility. It has been not so much a work of retrieval as an a work of recirculation, bringing a set of terms and concepts back into currency, to draw attention to the particular exegetical trajectories and systematic associations that carry the doctrine. Placing divine incorruptibility in the midst of the full doctrine of God, we can benefit from confessing God as incorruptible in all ways—incorruptibly holy, incorruptibly just, incorruptibly merciful, incorruptibly good, incorruptibly patient, and incorruptibly Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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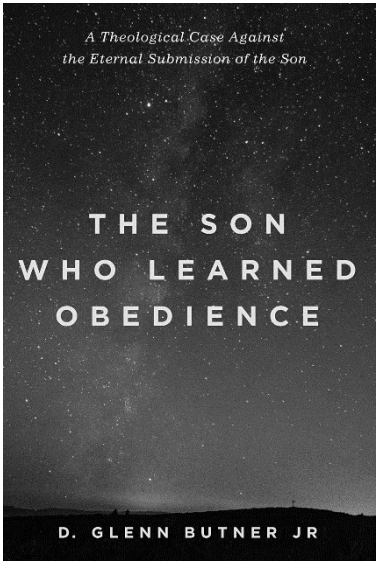
[23] Charles Wesley, "Glory Be to God on High," verse two.

[24] Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 1:310–62. See also Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

[25] Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 311.



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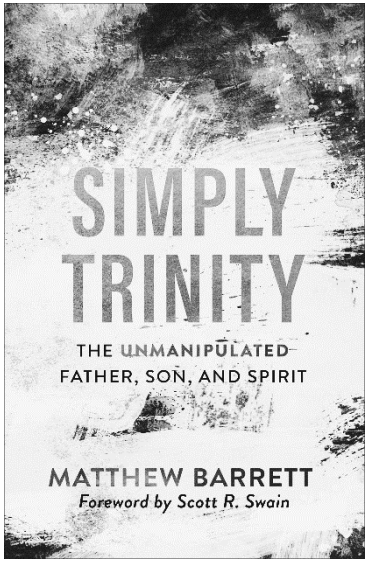

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THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE MAN

An Excerpt from *The Son Who Learned Obedience*[1]

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* * * * *

This excerpt from The Son Who Learned Obedience, is excellent evidence why proper Trinitarian orthodoxy informs the taxonomy of incarnational theology. Modern evangelicalism has been too swift to violate the principle of Communication of Properties (from Theistic Mutualists, to social trinitarians, to EFS and ERAS, to name a few), where they read back into the Metaphysics of Trinitarian dogma (the ontological trinity) by ignoring the taxonomy of ecumenical councils. This trend has created a new Christology that is not Trinitarian in the historic sense of the term. Butner aptly shows why this error must be avoided if the church is to maintain its creedal confessions for future generations. In this article Butner invites us to sit at the feet of Maximus the confessor and see what's really at stake in the Son's Obedience.

* * * * *

The Apostle Paul writes, "By the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). The author of Hebrews adds, "Although he was son, he learned obedience" (Heb 5:8). What does it mean that Jesus offers the obedience of a man? How is it possible that the omniscient Son learned obedience? Here, the New Testament authors prompt theologians to connect their treatment of God's single will perfectly shared among Father, Son, and Spirit with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son incarnate. This is an important task but a task where no single passage of Scripture can fully answer all the theological questions. Instead, theologians find themselves once more with the need to develop a theological understanding of one doctrine—in this case Christology—by drawing on the broad pattern of Scripture and offering non-scriptural terminology under the guidance of philosophy.

[1] D. Glenn Butner, Jr., *The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case Against the Eternal Submission of the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018). Used with permission from Wipf and Stock Publishers: www.wipfandstock.com and edited for this journal.

Connecting the one will of God to Christology is one facet of a larger theological challenge. Christology must treat the question of the incarnation, exploring what it means that God the Son "became flesh" (John1:14), how he "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7), and how the Son was made like human beings "in every respect" (Heb 2:17). Broadly speaking, systematic theology must be able to make sense of two things: we must explain what Christ is as human and as God, and we must explain what Christ does as human and as God. The Bible affirms that he is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3), but it also teaches that he is "the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:15), the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45). Jesus is at once Lord[2] (a title used elsewhere in the Bible as a pious substitute for the divine name), our great high priest who serves as a human representative before God (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 8:1–6), and the Son of David, the descendent in the flesh of king David himself (Matt 1:1–16; Luke 3:23–38). Centrally important to the question of EFS is whether Jesus Christ has a human will and a divine will, just as he is said to be both human and God. As we will see, this question was answered in an ecumenical council following what is known as the monothelite controversy.

A theology exploring how the Son "became flesh" and human "in every respect" must make sense of the things Jesus said and did. Jesus did things that are only appropriate for God to do, such as forgiving sins (Luke 7:48), for example. Christ also did things that are appropriate for human beings to do but uncharacteristic of God, mundane things like sleeping (Mark 4:38 and pars.), crying (John 11:35), being hungry (Mark 11:12), and learning (Luke 2:52), as well as salvific things like dying. Particularly pertinent for any study of God's will is the issue of Christ's temptation. "God cannot be tempted with evil" (Jas 1:13), yet we read that Satan tempted Jesusin the desert (Matt 4:1–11 and pars.) and that Christ is a great high priest who "in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb 4:15). Theologians must explain how it is possible to affirm both that Jesus is God and also tempted like any other human being. In other words, they must address how he does things appropriate for God and for human beings. This is a question historically treated under the doctrine known as the communication of idioms, or by the Latin name *communicatio idiomatum.* The more we attend to the classical explanation of who Christ was and how Christ acted as the God-man, the more clearly it is apparent that EFS does not easily fit with traditional accounts of Christology.

Historical Context: The Council of Chalcedon

The most important historical development in Christology occurred at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Christians had long wrestled with the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ. Some early Christians denied the Son's divinity altogether, or claimed that he was a human being who had been adopted by God through the work of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his ministry.[3] Other Christians emphasized the divinity of Jesus, claiming that he was

[2] Paul alone uses this title for Christ 230 times! Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 142.

[3] These are the approaches of the Ebionites and the Adoptionists, respectively.

merely human in appearance, and actually was only fully divine.[4] Early theological debates quickly revealed that no imbalanced presentation of Christ's humanity and divinity would suffice. Only when Christians affirm the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus can they make sense of the scriptural narrative. Moreover, our salvation is only possible if Jesus is both fully human and fully God.

The biblical witness to Jesus's life and ministry compels Christians to affirm that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus's messianic role is rooted in the fact that he is descended from David, something highlighted in the genealogies found at the beginning of both Matthew and Luke (Matt 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). This Davidic lineage is only comprehensible if Jesus is human (Rom 1:3). Similarly, the title "Son of God," so commonly applied to Jesus, is a title that not only points to Jesus's messianic role and his universal lordship but also implies, to quote N. T. Wright, "that he is the one in whom the living God, Israel's God, has become personally present in the world." Wright notes that throughout Paul's writing we see a clear relational dynamic between Father and Son that occurs within the context of monotheistic claims in Old Testament passages Paul is interpreting (i.e., Phil 2:1ff, citing Isa 45:23; 1 Cor 8:6, drawing on Deut 6:4; and 1 Cor 15:25–28, using Ps 110:1).[5] This relationship centers on the resurrection: God is precisely the God who has raised Jesus from the dead, while Jesus is most clearly revealed as the Son of God through the same event.[6] In Christ's resurrection, he is vindicated as the Son of God, yet such a resurrection is only possible in the flesh of human nature, for the Son's resurrection is a resurrection of the body.[7] At the very core of the gospel, then, is a claim that Jesus is both God and human (and this claim can be supplemented with dozens of additional key texts and arguments to make the point). As Paul writes, Jesus is "descended from David according to the flesh" but also "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:3–4). Once Christians understood this claim, the task of determining how to speak of Jesus being both human and divine remained.

A second pivotal argument played a role in early christological debates. Following the Council of Nicaea, Christians began to acknowledge that Jesus was *homoousios* with the Father, and therefore fully divine. Christians had by this time also long recognized that Jesus was also human, but it was not yet clear whether Jesus was fully human, one might say, *homoousios* with us. Enter Gregory of Nazianzus, a theologian who would leave his mark on Christology through his

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[4] This is roughly the approach of Docetism.

[5] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 731–32.

[6] Ibid. cf. Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 74. Harris writes, "The Resurrection was the vindication and confirmation of the sonship of Jesus. During his ministry Jesus laid claim to an intimate and unique relation to God (e.g., Matt 11:27) that was epitomized in the term 'Abba' ('Father'; 'my Father') by which he addressed or referred to God, and in the title 'Son (of God)' by which he sometimes referred to himself (e.g., Mark 12:6; 13:32) or others sometimes referred to him (e.g., Matt 16:16; 27:54). What Jesus had always been, although in hidden form, the Resurrection openly declared him to be, viz. the Son of *God*."

[7] Wright, *Resurrection*, 201–204. Wright demonstrates that resurrection in ancient Jewish writings referred either to a metaphorical event happening to the nation of Israel, or to a literal and bodily event expected to occur to all human beings at the future judgment. Christians retained the bodily nature of individual resurrection, but claimed that Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection.

claim that "that" which [the Son] has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved."[8] Gregory of Nazianzus would have originally explained this in terms of deification, which depended upon the full humanity of Christ. To avoid the lengthy digression needed to introduce patristic accounts of salvation, I will instead explain Nazianzus' within a robust theology of union with Christ unto sanctification. The rule functions in a similar fashion in either patristic or Protestant soteriological systems. Paul tells us that Christ became our sanctification (1 Cor 1:30; cf. John 11:25). Paul's claim makes sense when we recognize that both the process of sanctification and the eventual Christian state of resurrection and glorification do not happen apart from Christ. Sanctification is not a matter of developing certain moral qualities disconnected from Christ. Rather, as Paul likes to tell us, sanctification and glorification are fully "in Christ."[9] After all, when Christians are resurrected into perfected spiritual bodies, they are raised into the same kind of humanity that Christ shared after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20–49). Marcus Peter Johnson helpfully clarifies how Paul can call Christ our sanctification: "Although it may at first be difficult to imagine how or why Jesus 'became' sanctification to us when he was already perfectly holy, we should remember that he took on our human nature in order to present us holy before the Father." Here, Johnson cites John 17:19, which teaches that Jesus sanctifies himself that we may be sanctified. He continues, "Christ is uniquely our sanctification because in him alone the sanctification of our human nature has taken place by union with his divine life. What unholy humanity so desperately needs is union with the Sanctified One."[10] Christian sanctification is nothing short of our sharing in the perfected humanity of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Accepting this biblical conclusion, Gregory of Nazianzus insists that Christ must have been fully human in order to fully sanctify Christians who are in union with him. This follows from the fact that sin has infected the entirety of human nature, a doctrine Protestants often refer to as total depravity. Across the Bible, sin is depicted as a darkening of the understanding (Eph 4:18), a lack of self-control of the will and the possession of wrongly ordered desires (2 Tim 3:3–4), a lack of love (John 5:42), and captivity within sinful bodies (Rom 6:6). It is no surprise, then, that the Bible depicts sanctification as a transformation of all aspects of human nature. Sanctification calls for the renewal of our minds (Col 3:10; Rom 12:2), our

[8] Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy," in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 218.

[9] This phrase is used seventy-three times throughout Paul's epistles and is accompanied by a number of other terms and metaphors for union. After surveying each instance of key union terms and metaphors, Constantine Campbell concludes that union indicates for the Christian life that Christian activities such as obedience or worship and characteristics like love or godliness are both "conditioned by their union with Christ." Campbell concludes, "The status and identity that believers enjoy, which is so programmatic for Paul's ethical framework and instruction, are inextricably bound up with union with Christ. From there flow the activities and characteristics of believers, which again are entwined with union with Christ. The Christian life is so weaved of the fabric of union with Christ that the most appropriate moniker for believers is 'in Christ.'" Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 374–75.

[10] Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 119–20.

emotions or desires (1 Pet 2:11), our wills (Phil 2:13), and our bodies (1 Cor 6:19–20) But if sanctification is only in Christ, a participation in the perfected humanity assumed by the Son in the incarnation, and if sanctification affects the heart, mind, body, and will, then Jesus must have assumed a full human nature, heart, mind, body, and will for us to have the hope of sanctification. As debates concerning Christ's humanity and divinity grew, Christians influenced by the biblical need to affirm Jesus's full humanity and full divinity sought a second-order theological explanation that could make sense of the broad scriptural testimony concerning the Son while moving beyond this testimony to offer philosophical clarity. A solution must affirm the full divinity and full humanity of Christ without dividing Jesus into two separate subjects, one divine and the other human. Amid intense debate, the Councilof Chalcedon (AD 451) offered a solution that has become the standard of orthodoxy among Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Christians. The definition of Chalcedon reads as follows:

> We then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in deity and also perfect in humanity; truly God and truly man, or a rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the deity, and consubstantial with us according to the humanity; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the deity, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.[11]

The definition establishes two important theological truths.[12] First, the one who is Jesus of Nazareth is the same one who eternally is the Son of God. Second, this one who is both Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Son of God is *two natures* united in *one person*, one full and perfect divine nature united with one full and perfect human nature in the person of the Son. When we speak of Christ's humanity, we speak of his sharing a human nature with human beings. This nature is not mixed with the divine nature to create some third thing. Christ subsists in

[11] "The Symbol of Chalcedon," in *The Creeds of Christendom—Vol. II: The Greek and Latin Creeds*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 62–63.

[12] Here I appreciate the insights of Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 144–45.

two natures; he is not one nature from two natures.[13] When we seek the unity of these two natures, we look to the category of person, for the person who is eternally Son of God has assumed a full human nature inseparably.

The Chalcedonian definition provides a helpful hermeneutic for reading the Bible, but one that requires further philosophical clarification. Consider, for example, the mind of Christ. At times, Jesus seems omniscient, as for example when he knows the thoughts of others (i.e., Matt 9:4). At other times, he admits that "no one knows that day nor hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son" (Matt 24:36). If Jesus possesses a full human nature and a full divine nature, as Chalcedon affirms, and if actions arise out of natures, then Jesus's omniscient acts here arise from the divine nature and mind, but his limited knowledge arises from his human nature and mind. Both finite human knowledge and infinite divine knowledge are found in the person of the Son, and both passages are upheld. However, several major theological questions remain: in this case, how do we relate the divine and human minds of Christ? Furthermore, how do we adequately explain the unity of the Son as a single person? Exploring Christ's human and divine minds is a task beyond the scope of this work,[14] but it illustrates well the philosophical challenges that arise from Chalcedon. Insofar as the believer's sanctified human nature is a participation in Christ's humanity, and insofar as sanctification requires a transformation of the mind, we must affirm that Christ had a human mind. This also follows from the claim that Jesus is fully human. Yet it is also important to unify Christ in such a manner that these two minds are still coherently a single person. Christological developments after Chalcedon often wrestled with these sorts of questions, seeking to develop theology that is rationally consistent with the Bible and with the Chalcedonian definition (itself derived from scriptural patterns). For our present purposes, one such debate warrants particular attention: the monothelite controversy.

The Monothelite Controversy: Who Jesus Is and the Question of Christ's Will(s)

Although the Council of Chalcedon provided Christians with answers to fundamental questions concerning the relationship between Christ's humanity and his divinity, it also opened the door to a new set of questions regarding how Christians ought to think of the God-man who was two natures united into a single person. The main debate relating to our discussion of eternal functional subordination is the question of Christ's will(s). If Chalcedon is correct that Jesus is two natures in one person, then two options lie before us. Either a will is proper to nature, in which case Jesus logically must have two wills (one human and one divine) if he indeed possesses a complete human nature and a complete

[13] This claim was meant to ensure that Christ's humanity and divinity could not be mixed into a third thing that was neither God nor human. Nor could the divinity assume a human nature in such a way that it was annihilated. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 330–34, 340–41.

[14] For a helpful contemporary treatment of the two minds of Christ, I refer the reader to Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001). It should be noted that Morris's treatment of the unity of Christ as a whole is not clearly compatible with the theology described here.

divine nature, or else a will is proper to a person, in which case Jesus would only have one divine will because he is only a single divine person. In the seventh century, theologians in the Byzantine Empire considered each of these options in a debate that eventually led up to the seventh ecumenical council, the Third Council of Constantinople.

By the seventh century, the Byzantine state (heir to the Roman Empire) had lost much of its territory to several hostile neighboring empires, but the emperor Heraclitus had begun to reclaim land once belonging to Byzantium. As he did so, he found a number of Christian groups in newly reconquered border territories that questioned the theology of the Council of Chalcedon.[15] These Christians preferred to emphasize the unity of Christ's divinity and humanity, and they worried that Chalcedon created an artificial division within Christ. Heraclitus needed these populations to stand in union with Byzantine Orthodoxy to ensure a united military front at the borders of the newly expanded Empire, so he sought a theological solution that might reconcile all parts of the church within the empire.[16] Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople provided Heraclitus with his potential source of union. Sergius developed a theological formula that affirmed two natures in Christ united in one person but that, in several different forms over the course of the debate, claimed there was either single energy/operation in Christ or a single will in Christ. The former theology is known as monoenergism and the latter was known as monothelitism. In their basic contours, each put forward a similar theological proposal: though there are two natures in Christ, there is only the single divine person of the Son who is the source of all Christ's actions and/or willing. For a time, it seemed that Sergius' proposal was a viable theological solution to division within the church and empire, but as time went on, resistance to this proposal grew, particularly with the writings of Maximus the Confessor. This resistance culminated with monothelitism's condemnation at the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 in favor of a view known as dyothelitism, which claimed that will and energy/operation were both properties of nature. Because Christ had a complete human and a complete divine nature, he must have two wills.

Maximus skillfully raised a number of objections against monothelitism, the claim that Christ only had a single will. At its most rudimentary level, monothelitism was wrong simply because it did not continue within the theological tradition that saw any operation, willing included, as originating in nature or substance. This was the assumed meaning of such terms as nature in earlier trinitarian debates, and Maximus intentionally placed himself within this tradition.[17] More important to Maximus's argument were three closely related

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[15] For a helpful analysis of the theological questions lingering after Chalcedon that led to the monothelite controversy, see J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10–13.

[16] For a thorough analysis of the historical events surrounding the monothelite controversy, see Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 13–24.

[17] John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 37. Operation as proper to nature was assumed by dyothelites

theological claims. First, Maximus argued that if Jesus Christ was fully human, then he must have had a human will and a nature that made human operations possible. Second, if we are sanctified[18] by union to Christ's humanity, then Christ must have a human will. Corrupted and fallen humanity has a polluted will that must be redeemed through union with Christ's perfect humanity, so Christ must have a human will. Third, Maximus recognized that any christological claims about the nature and person of the Son in the incarnation would have ramifications in trinitarian theology. After all, as the Chalcedonian definition emphasized, the one who is Son of God is also the one who is incarnate in Christ. Maximus argued that monothelitism undermined the core of trinitarian theology by undermining the inseparable operations so essential to pro-Nicene thought.

Maximus inherited the argument that Christ's full humanity required him to possess a human will from previous theologians who had argued against monoenergism and monothelitism. Sophronius of Jerusalem argued that natures are distinguished by operations, so we must affirm distinct operations to affirm Chalcedon's claim that Christ's human and divine natureswere combined without confusion.[19] Stephen of Dora also argued that Jesus must have had both a human will and a divine will in order to be fully human.[20] Leo Donald Davis Summarizes the argument well:

> If the natures in Christ are really two, then the operations of those natures must also be two. For activity, operation is essential to an existent being. Only through operations can natures be discerned and distinguished. Natures and operations are thus necessarily and ineluctably connected. If there are two natures really existent in Christ, there must be as well two really existentoperations.[21]

This conclusion followed clearly from the common definition of nature used by early theologians in conjunction with the Chalcedonian definition.

Jesus Christ's full humanity, clear from the Scriptures and affirmed in the Chalcedonian definition, also led Maximus to insist that Jesus had a human will. As Christopher Beeley remarks, "Various patristic figures are credited with defending Christ's full humanity; the one who did so most thoroughly was Maximus."[22] Maximus followed the traditional understand ing of nature when he argued that if something has no will or operation, it does not exist.[23] Therefore, to claim that Jesus subsisted in a human nature and not just from a human nature (in

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throughout the debate. Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action, and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 154–55.

[18] Here Maximus would use the terminology of deification. For present purposes I will treat deification as roughly a functional equivalent to Protestant views of sanctification as expressed above.

[19] Davis, *Ecumenical Councils*, 265.

[20] I. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, Vol. 3, trans. D. W. Simon (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889), 182.

[21] Davis, *Ecumenical Councils*, 272.

[22] Christopher A. Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in the Patristic Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 296.

[23] "Dispute at Bizya," in *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, ed. and trans. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), §3.

other words, to claim that nature exists throughout Jesus's life and was not simply a factor in Jesus's origin), it must have a natural operation and will. Here Maximus adds a degree of precision to his forbearers, granting that the divine and human nature may have the same objective willed. Christ's human and divine wills must have shared a common object to preserve the personal unity of Christ. However, claiming that God and man have the same will would be, in Demetrios Bathrellos's words, "tantamount to confusing divinity and humanity."[24] If Jesus did not assume a human will, he did not assume a human nature, so he must have a human will.[25] Here, Maximus appealed to Psalm 39, which he viewed as a prophetic foreshadowing of the temptations and suffering of Christ to affirm Jesus's human nature. We might make the same point with stronger exegetical footing by pointing to the temptation in the desert (Matt 4:1–11 and pars.). Jesus was tempted, but God cannot be tempted (Jas 1:13), so Jesus must have a human will. However, Jesus also has a "divine will, which is both his and the Father's"[26] because it is "*by nature* the same as the Father's."[27] Maximus saw Jesus's divine will clearly revealed in Luke 13:34's claim that Jesus had often willed to gather Israel to him when they were persecuting the prophets.[28] Since his human nature did not yet exist at the time prior to the incarnation when prophets were being killed, the Son must have willed this in the divine nature shared with the Father. Maximus clearly connected his dyothelitism (the claim that Jesus had two wills) to his understanding of salvation. He saw clearly that human will was corrupted in the fall because Adam ate willingly, so he saw that the Son must have assumed a human will to heal it.[29] As John Meyendorff comments, the restoration "of human nature in Christ implies that the incarnate Word assumed human energy [i.e., operations] and restored it in conformity with the primitive divine plan."[30] Maximus argued that Christ submitted to human temptations and responded with obedience not for his own sake, but for ours. Adam deliberately succumbed to "hedonistic passions" to the end that human will "inclines toward wicked pleasure against his own self-interest."[31] Christ overcame temptation, learning an obedience (Heb 5:8–9) in his humanity that was not needed in his divinity so that in overcoming temptation he was "thereby healing the whole of human nature of the passion connected with pleasure."[32] Maximus recognized that sin en tered the world through human will at the fall, and that, in accordance with Gregory of Nazianzus' formula, the Son must have assumed a human will in order to sanctify it.[33]

Maximus most clearly connected Jesus's human will in his human nature to the redemptive significance of overcoming temptation when he examines Jesus's prayer, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt 26:39). Previous

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[24] Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 119.

[25] *Opuscule 3*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, 195.

[26] *Opusculum 6*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, 174.

[27] *Opuscule 3*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, 194. Emphasis added.

[28] Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ*, 139.

[29] Bathrellos, 131.

[30] John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1969), 111.

[31] *Ad Thalassium 21*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, 112.32.

[32] *Ad Thalassium 21*, 113.

[33] Hovorun, *Will, Action, and Freedom*, 129–30.

commentators who treated Christ's agony in the garden considered his request to let the cup pass to be hypothetical—the Son could not will something contrary to the divine plan. Perhaps this was merely an expression of human experience, but not genuine deliberation. Maximus, however, suggested that this was a deliberation of the human will that submitted to the divine will.[34] Maximus argued that this cannot be a request arising from Jesus's divine nature, for we know that God wills our salvation"by his very nature," and the Father and the Son share a "common will" according to their common nature.[35] Simply put, Jesus could never say "not what I will, but what you will" in his divinity because there is no distinction between what the Father and Son will, due to their shared nature and therefore shared will. Maximus therefore concluded:

> It follows, then, that having become like us for our sake, he was calling on his God and Father in a human manner when he said, *Let not what I will, but what you will prevail,* inasmuch as, being God by nature, he also in his humanity has, as his human volition, the fulfillment of the will of the Father. This is why, considering both of the nature from which, in which, and of which his person was, he is acknowledged as able both to will and to effect our salvation. As God, he approved that salvation along with the Father and the Holy Spirit; as man, he *became* for the sake of that salvation *obedient* to his Father *unto death, even death on a cross* (Phil 2:8). He accomplished this great feat of the economy of salvation for our sake through the mystery ofhis incarnation.[36]

Notice how clear Maximus is here: the Son learned obedience in his human nature through the incarnation that he might become obedient in his humanity to heal fallen human nature. He could not possibly have been obedient in his divinity because there could not be any negation, any yielding of his will to the Father's will, since all three divine persons share a single common will.[37] Moreover, if Christ had offered a divine obedience, he would not have healed the human will, and Christians' wills would not be healed when they participate in Christ's humanity through the work of the Spirit in sanctification. This is the opposite position of EFS, which sees the Son's obedience as a divine obedience manifest in the history of redemption as a reflection of what is necessarily and eternally true in God, not as a contingent result of the incarnation.

Maximus's first two arguments are rooted in the Chalcedonian definition. Jesus is a human and a divine nature united in the person of the eternal Son, so if Jesus must have a human will to be fully human, and if he must have a human will to ensure the transformation and sanctification of all aspects of the Christian, then will must be a property of nature, for there was no human person in Christ. Maximus reached a similar conclusion through the doctrine of the Trinity. The

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[34] See the discussion in Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 126–31.

[35] *Opusculum 6*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, 175.

[36] *Opusculum* 6, 176.

[37] Compare with Maximus' argument in *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, §73.

standard patristic understanding of the Trinity from the fourth century and onward recognized the indivisible work of the Father, Son, and Spirit as a necessary consequence of the claim that the three persons were of the same essence and nature. Persons with an identical essence and nature do identical operations because an operation arises from a nature. This theological position does not require that the three persons work indistinguishably, but it does prohibit any claim that the three persons perform distinct acts, except in the specific cases of the divine missions. (I discussed this exception briefly in excursus 1, but we will return to the question of the unique acts of the incarnate Son below.) Maximus was well aware of this tradition, so he connected his Christology to his trinitarian theology. The problem, Maximus declared, is that monothelites posit a single will in Christ, which contradicts this traditional understanding of the Trinity.

Let us consider Maximus' argument in detail. Monothelites claim that there is only one will in Christ, which would follow only if will is a personal property. After all, if will is a property of nature, the dyothelite position would be correct, for the incarnate Son has two complete natures. Maximus noted that in attributing a will to the person of the Son, "We will be forced to attribute hypostatic activities both to the Father and the Spirit in the same way as to the *Son.*" Given that trinitarian orthodoxy affirmed at the Constantinople in AD 381 also admits a single will and operation in the shared divine nature, this would force us to admit four wills in the Godhead, which would muddle the threefold nature of the deity— "we will be suffering from the sickness of a fourfold God." Maximus also recognized that patristic theologians "declare every activity to be natural, not hypostatic," and he knew that distinct operations or activities are the means by which natures are distinguished.[38] If we say that the Son has a will proper to his person, we must therefore admit the same of the Father and Spirit, which leads to the conclusion that the "blessed monad will also be a triad of natures." This follows from the claim that distinctive wills and operations allow us to identify distinctive natures. Or else we can preserve the unity of being by positing one will, but if will is a personal property, and "if there is one will of the triad beyond being, there will be a Godhead with three names and a single person."[39] The first option is tritheism and the second is modalism, and Maximus will accept neither option. Thus it is no surprise when Maximus asked his debate partner Pyrrhus, "Wilt thou say that ... because there are three hypostases there are also three wills, and because of this, three natures as well, since the canons and definitions of the Fathers say that the distinction of wills implieth a distinction of natures? So said Arius!"[40]

Maximus connected any effort to attribute will to the divine persons to the arch-heretic Arius, a claim with dubious historical accuracy (the question of wills did not play a significant role in the Arian debate), but a claim that nevertheless illustrates how strongly he rejects associating will with person. Maximus was not alone in

[38] "Dispute at Bizya," in *Maximus the Confessor*, §4.
[39] *Opuscule 3*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, 195–96.
[40] *Disputation*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, §15.

making such an argument for dyothelitism.[41] However, this is precisely the move that defenders of EFS are making. Bruce Ware writes clearly that the Son's eternal submission "is nothing other than a 'personal property.'"[42] Even if we read Ware charitably, and take him to mean that will is a property of nature, but submission is a personal property, we still have considerable problems when we keep Maximus' dyothelitism in mind. First, Maximus understood fallen humans to possess what he called a gnomic or deliberative will, which referred to a human being's ability to choose whether or not to act according to the intended purpose of human nature reflected in the natural will. However, Maximus explicitly denied this to the Godhead and to the incarnate Christ, because Christ is not imperfect and therefore does not need to deliberate as to what must be done in a given situation.[43] Thus, even this charitable reading of Ware is inconsistent with Maximus' theology.[44] Second, as noted above, Maximus insists that the Son assume a human will so that he can transform what Adam damaged through his life of sinless obedience. Assuming Ware means that will is a property of nature but submission is a personal property, it is unclear how the Son might offer a human submission, thereby healing human nature, for there was no human person. At least Ware offers no adequate explanation, and, as we will see, no explanation could fit with traditional understandings of how the incarnate Son undertakes any operation, including submission. So EFS, at least as Ware explains it, seems quite incompatible with dyothelite Christology. If Ware actually does mean that both the will and the act of submitting are proper to the person only, Maximus' entire theological argument collapses. As I. A. Dorner summarizes,

> Part of [Christ's] work, [Maximus] says, was to exercise obedience, and to fulfill the will and law of His Father. ... Now if the rational soul of Christ had no will at all, in accordance with, or by means of, what will, did He keep the Father's commands? According to the will of the Divine Logos? But the will of the Logos is a will that commands and rules; and the will of the

[41] Consider the argument made by Pope Agatho, which was read to the delegates at the third Council of Constantinople: "For if anybody should mean a personal will, when in the holy Trinity there are said to be three Persons, it would be necessary that there should be asserted three personal wills, and three personal operations (which is absurd and truly profane). Since, as the truth of the Christian faith holds, the will is natural, where the one nature of the holy and inseparable Trinity is spoken of, it must be consistently understood that there is one natural will, and one natural operation. But when in truth we confess that in the one person of our Lord Jesus Christ the mediator between God and men, there are two natures (that is to say the divine and the human), even after his admirable union, just as we canonically confess the two natures of one and the same person, so we confess his two natural wills and two natural operations." Agatho of Rome, "The Letter of Pope Agatho," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. XIV—The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 332–23. Agatho also put forward similar arguments to Maximus concerning the full humanity of Christ and the need for a human will in Christ for sanctification.

[42] Bruce A. Ware, "Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of Homoousios?" in *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 244.

[43] Hovorun, *Will, Action, and Freedom*, 134.

[44] "Maximus made repeated reference to the long-held connection between nature and will that had been established in trinitarian theology. If a will introduced a person, and vice versa, there would be either one person in the Trinity, because of the one will, or three wills because of the three persons. If these wills were natural, we would have three Gods, whereas if they were 'gnomic,' there would be an internal opposition in the Trinity, which, for Maximus, was unacceptable." Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 130.

> Father is one and the same with the will of the Son. By means of what will, then? For the will that commands is one thing, and the will that obeys, another. We are thus reduced to an alternative, either of saying that the will of obedience was the will of the Logos, or ofgranting that there was a true human will in Christ. The former alternative makes the divine nature of the Logos a subject and servant, after the manner of Arius—an error which needs no refutation.[45]

No refutation was needed, at least, until the time of modern evangelical debates on the eternal submission of the Son.[46]

Dyothelite Christology and the Eternal Submission of the Son

Most theologians who accept the eternal submission of the Son appear to also affirm dyothelite Christology, but the compatibility of these views is unclear. For example, Wayne Grudem is quite explicit on the matter: "It seems necessary to say that Jesus had two distinct wills … and that the wills belong to the two distinct natures of Christ."[47] Yet, though Grudem treats will as a property of nature in his Christology, when he speaks of the Trinity, he treats will as a personal property, for example claiming, "The Son is the one who carries out the will of the Father."[48] Bruce Ware insists that Jesus possesses "a full human nature,"[49] and he recognizes that this tradition originates with the Third Council of Constantinople.[50] Ware also follows the precedent of Maximus the Confessor to argue that Christ overcome temptation by virtue of a "perfect obedience"[51] accomplished through "all the resources given to him in his humanity."[52] However, though dyothelite Christology treats will as a property of nature, Ware is prone to cite P. T. Forsyth's claim that the Son has a "yielding will" and the Father an "exigent will,"[53] implying that will is a personal property and not a natural one. As we have seen, Ware explicitly treats will and/or submission as something pertaining to persons, not natures, when responding to the charge of Arianism.

Other theologians who affirm EFS also affirm dyothelite Christology, teaching that Christ possesses a human and divine will. Some recognize the historical claim

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[45] Dorner, *The Person of Christ,* 192.

[46] For brevity's sake, this reprint omits the section "The *Communicatio Idiomatum:* What Christ Does as Perfect Human and Perfect God," which occurs at this point of the book.

[47] See Agatho of Rome, "The Letter of Pope Agatho," 333; Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1971), 236; "The Symbol of Chalcedon," 62–63.

[48] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 560.

[49] Wayne Grudem, "Doctrinal Deviations in Evangelical-Feminist Arguments," in *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 41.

[50] Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 20:72, 75–76.

[51] Ware, 88.

[52] Ware, 84.

[53] Ware, *Father, Son, and Spirit,* 81; cf. Ware, "Equal in Essence," 36.

that will is a property of nature. So Norman Geisler,[54] Robert Letham,[55] and J. Scott Horrell[56] present contradictory christological and trinitarian theologies or ambiguous understandings of the divine will. Kyle Claunch is aware of the problem reconciling EFS with dyothelitism[57] to the extent that he will only minimally affirm that "the submission of Christ to the Father, per his human will, is the analogical expression of the immanent trinitarian *taxis* of the one eternal divine will."[58] He rejects language of eternal submission and authority as "too strong."[59] Instead, Claunch argues that "gender complementarity" is grounded in the immanent Trinity only "indirectly."[60]

Widespread affirmation of dyothelite Christology is a good thing, a trend to be expected from evangelical theologians trained in the tradition. However, it should be clear this affirmation does not fit easily with the common affirmation of EFS. As I have just demonstrated, many who speak of the Son's eternal submission use language that implies that the Father and Son have distinct wills, suggesting that will is a personal property, not a natural property. Since there is only a divine person who is the Son, this would mean there is no human will, and Christ would not be fully human. Second, the doctrine of the communication of idioms and the confession of the Third Council of Constantinople treat the natures as sources of actions that subsist in a person. However, the claim that the Son submits to the Father that all operations or actions are in, with, and through each nature. This incompatibility between dyothelitism and EFS risks the full humanity of Jesus, the possibility of our sanctification in Christ, and the coherence of the christological doctrine developed at Chalcedon. In the face of

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[54] Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Two—God, Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 290–91; Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 73, 76.

[55] Robert Letham, "Reply to Kevin Giles," *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2008): 343–44. Letham attempts to use Constantinople III in an argument against Giles, and he at times treats the property of will as a property of natures. Nevertheless, Letham defines submission as a "free action chosen willingly by the one who submits;' though it is a choice still made in 'the unity of his indivisible will.'" It is never explained how a will shared by all three persons is only used by the Son to willingly submit to the Father.

[56] "We may say that there are both one mind and three minds, one will and three wills, as each [person] indwells the other." Horrell here succumbs to the very sort of metaphysical confusion that Maximus castigated. J. Scott Horrell, "Complementarian Trinitarianism: Divine Revelation Is Finally True to the Eternal Personal Relations," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son*, ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 355.

[57] "In order for the Son to submit *willingly* to the *will* of the Father, the two must possess distinct wills. This way of understanding the immanent Trinity does run counter to the pro-Nicene tradition, as well as the medieval, Reformation, and post Reformation Reformed traditions that grow from it. According to traditional trinitarian theology, the will is predicated of the one undivided divine essence so that there is only one divine will in the immanent Trinity." Claunch then notes that this is connectedto dyothelite Christology, and for this reason he will not fully affirm eternal submission. Kyle Claunch, "God Is the Head of Christ: 1 Corinthians 11:3," in *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 88–89.

[58] Claunch, "God Is the Head of Christ," 93.

[59] Claunch, 91.

[60] Claunch, 93.

these problems, few have explained how EFS is compatible with dyothelitism, and existing efforts do not clearly succeed.

Mike Ovey is the theologian who has most extensively addressed the compatibility of dyothelite Christology and the eternal submission of the Son. He summarizes his argument as follows:

> The objection to the Son's eternal subordination might be made that subordination is simply a category error because the Father, Son and Spirit share the same divine natural will, that is will at the level of their common nature (using "nature" in its technical trinitarian sense). In fact, this objection does not refute the point that at the level of personal relationship rather than nature, the Son is subordinate to the Father. This is attested in the prayer in Gethsemane, and is entailed by the Son's unity at the level of person, whereby, although he has two natural wills, they are not opposed to each other. Alternative arguments to the effect that the Son does not obey, or only obeys in the Incarnation both fail to deal with the Gethsemane prayer at the exegetical level and risk dividing the personal unity of the Son.[61]

Because Ovey's argument is the most extensive treatment of dyothelitism by an advocate of EFS, we must treat it in detail. Ovey begins by asserting that Maximus the Confessor argued that the "natural will," (a technical term for Maximus) was proper to Christ's human and divine natures, but that Maximus ensured the unity of these wills through the unity of the person of the Son. Ovey claims that Maximus distinguishes between natural will as the faculty allowing one to act, and the personal actualization of that will. Given this distinction, Ovey claims that EFS is compatible with Maximus's theology, for EFS does not posit a distinction of natural wills, but a distinc tion in the way that these wills are actualized.[62]

After distinguishing between a natural will and the personal actualization of a will, Ovey argues that he finds biblical support for his position in Matthew 26:36–46. When Jesus prays for the cup to pass from him, Ovey argues that three elements are present: a "reference to the Father wants/ desires/plans/is able to do; a petition on that basis that the Cup pass by; a concluding, over-riding petition that the Father's will be done in preference to Jesus."[63] Ovey considers three possible interpretations of this prayer. First, when Jesus refers to his own will, he might be referring only to his natural human will. Ovey rightly notes that this claim would need to be supplemented by a second or third interpretation to make sense of the Father's will, so he sidesteps significant analysis of this option. Second, when Maximus refers to the Father's will, Jesus may refer to the shared divine natural will. Ovey objects to this on the grounds that the Gospel authors likely did not have something so precise in mind. Moreover, Matthew 26:39 (NRSV) depicts Jesus praying "not what I want but what you (singular) want." Oveyfinds it difficult to reconcile the singular "you" with a reference to the natural

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[61] Michael J. Ovey, *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy, and Divine Humility* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2016), 101.

[62] Ovey, 104–105.

[63] Ovey, 107.

will shared by three persons, claiming that this may reveal that the Gospel authors had something else in mind. Even more problematic, in Ovey's mind, is the idea of Christ's human nature submitting to his divine nature: "Submission and obedience seems necessarily to involve the will or desire of another which one prefers to one's own."[64] Such otherness is only available at the level of persons, not natures, so Matthew must be referring to something relating to the person of the Father and the personof the Son. Ovey grants that it may be possible for "Jesus the Son to obey in his human nature" according to the natural will, but he dismisses this as "well on the way to Nestorianism." He asks, "In what sense, if Jesus the Son wills one thing in his natural human will and another in his divine natural will, is there a genuine, unified, integrated person?"[65] In fact, if the human nature was obeying the divine nature all within the single person of Christ, Ovey claims that this would be a conflict of wills undermining personal unity.

After rejecting an interpretation of Jesus's prayer for the cup to pass in the context of a human natural will submitting to a shared divine natural will, Ovey settles on a third option for interpreting the passage: Jesus's references may "be taken as a reference not to natural wills but to actualizations of will at the level of person."[66] To put it simply, "The reference to what each Person wills is to be taken within the context of personal relation rather than of the common nature/substance."[67] He insists that his "construal leaves intact the dyothelite theology advocated by Maximus and adopted at Constantinople III (680)."[68] Here, Ovey's defense is in line with the arguments of Bruce Ware and others: the submission of the Son to the Father is at the level of personhood, relation, and hypostasis,not at the level of nature, being, or essence. If Ovey's argument holds, then dyothelitism is quite compatible with EFS.

On closer examination, Ovey's argument is in fact riddled with problems, beginning with his claim that what he has presented is compatible with the dyothelitism of both Maximus and the Third Council of Constantinople. Recall how Maximus in fact disagrees with the Third Council of Constantinople in terms of how he treats the unity of the natural wills, as discussed above. The council teaches that unity is found as "each nature wills and works what is proper to it, in communion with the other."[69] This tradition was in continuity with the *Tome* of Leo canonized at the Council of Chalcedon, and it led to the development of the doctrine of communication of idioms, which is explored above with reference to Martin Chemnitz. Ovey is not in fact reconciling EFS to the Third Council of Constantinople, but is at most siding with Maximus the Confessor against the Third Council of Constantinople. Of course, it may be the case that an ecumenical council is wrong, but it is important to be clear that EFS is not siding with the ecumenical councils here against a modern corruption

[64] Ovey, *Your Will Be Done* 110.
[65] Ovey, 111.
[66] Ovey, 108.
[67] Ovey, 112.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "The Statement of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople," in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 384.

of orthodoxy. The dyothelitism of Maximus is not quite the same as the dyothelitism of the council.

As it turns out, it is not even clear that Ovey is correctly using Maximus here. Rather strangely, Ovey does not cite a single primary source written by Maximus in his analysis of the Confessor, instead relying on a secondary treatment by Demetrios Bathrellos, who, as we noted above, admits a large debate surrounding how, precisely, Maximus treats the unity of the two divine wills.[70] Ovey fails to mention this debate, and instead, treats Bathrellos' treatment of Maximus as definitive. What is even more puzzling, though, is that Ovey's summary of Maximus relies almost entirely on pages74–75 of Bathrellos' *Byzantine Christ*, which is actually a discussion of Sergius' of Constantinople's thought (under the heading "Sergius of Constantinople") with occasional reference to Maximus.[71] So Ovey's demonstration of dyothelitism's compatibility with EFS neglects an important distinction and disagreement between Maximus and Constantinople III, disregards scholarly debate concerning how to interpret the unity of Christ in Maximus's thought, ignores all primary sources, and merely relies on parts of secondary literature that do not even focus on Maximus. This is hardly a clear proof of Ovey's point.

The problems grow even larger, however, for when Maximus actually addressed the prayer at Gethsemane in *Opusculum 6,* for example, where Maximus first treated the Gethsemane passage, he did not agree with Ovey's interpretation of the passage.[72] In *Opusculum 6*, Maximus treated Christ's prayer at Gethsemane at great length, claiming that the prayer illustrates the "perfect harmony" (*sumphuia*) and "concurrence" (*sunneusis*) of the divine and human wills of Christ.[73] When Jesus prays, "Let not what I will, but what you will prevail" (Matt 26:39), Maximus took this to be "the ultimate concurrence of his human will with his divine will," arising from the wills and operations proper to each nature.[74] Maximus was clear that the "not what I will" portion of verse 39 cannot refer to the divinity, for the shared divine nature "excludes his willing something for himself separately from the Father." Maximus went on, "Since the Father and the Son always share a common will," the negation "not what I will" cannot refer to the divine natural will, for that would ascribe "that declining to [the Father and Son's] common and eternal divinity."[75] Instead, Maximus took the phrase "not what I will" to reveal "harmony between the human will of the Savior and the divine will shared by him and his Father." Simply put, Jesus "was calling on his God and Father in a human manner (*anthrōpoprepōs*)."[76] Though Maximus did not explain the personal unity of the Son here, and one wonders how he might combine his interpretation with his theory of the unity of the divine person, Maximus did offer an interpretation that is precisely what Ovey has rejected. Ovey finds no ally in Maximus the Confessor, especially given

[70] Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ,* 164.
[71] Bathrellos, 74–75; cf. Ovey, *Your Will be Done*, 103–104.
[72] Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 126–31.
[73] *Opusculum 6*, in*Maximus the Confessor*, 173.
[74] *Opusculum 6*, 174.
[75] *Opusculum 6*, 175.
[76] *Opusculum 6*, 176.

that, over time, Maximus' interpretations even more clearly highlighted that the Gethsemane prayer was an issue of *the human natural will submitting to the divine.*[77]

Very well, then. Neither Maximus nor the Third Council of Constantinople appears to agree with Ovey. This does not, of course, mean that Ovey is wrong with his interpretation of Matthew 26, so we must attend to his exegesis. Though Ovey makes much of the singular use of "you" in Matthew 26:39, he also admits that it would be an "anachronistic construction" to interpret Matthew to refer to the "faculty of will arising in the nature."[78] This is certainly the case. The doctrines we are considering are not immediately expressed in Scripture but arise from an effort to synthesize the broad scriptural narrative usinga second-order of language that seeks terminological clarity by which the various teachings of Scripture can be upheld. For centuries, Christian theologians have claimed that dyothelite Christology provides exactly this sort of second-order language when it interprets Matthew 26 to refer to Christ's human nature submitting to the divine will shared by the Father and the Son, even granting that the apostle Matthew himself likely did not have this in mind. This same tradition would agree with Ovey that submission requires an "other," though drawing on the doctrine of the communication of idioms, we would say that the Son submits to the Father *according to hishuman nature.* The person of the Son is the one in whom the operation is concrete, but lest we imply a division of wills in the Godhead, which Maximus treated as tantamount to Arianism (somewhat inaccurately using that title), we add the qualifying "according to his human nature." This theological rule was likely not envisioned by the apostle Matthew, but it allows us to uphold what Matthew says while also making sense of the broad pattern of Scripture that depicts a fully human and fully divine Messiah.

Michael Ovey's proposal that "Not what I will but what you will" refers to the personal actualization of the divine natural will in distinctive ways according to the personal relations is also an anachronistic construction that surely goes well beyond what the apostle Matthew would have understood. However, in this case, the proposed interpretation does not result in a second-order of language that provides terminological clarity by which the various teachings of Scripture can be upheld. His proposal lacks terminological clarity because it is unclear how nature and person are distinguished if the classical connection between natures and operations is muddled by also attributing these operations to the persons.[79] This muddled nature is revealed when Ovey affirms dyothelitism and the single natural will of God, and yet claims that "in some sense there is a plurality of wills" in the Godhead,[80] and insists that submission requires conforming "one's will to the will

[77] See the discussion in Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor,* 162–64.

[78] Ovey, *Your Will be Done*, 109.

[79] It should be noted that Maximus allowed for a distinction of this sort for human beings, contrasting a natural will proper to each nature with a gnomic or deliberative will proper to the hypostasis or person. However, Maximus denied that the divine persons possess a gnomic will, for there is no need for God to deliberate on how to best use his faculties. Maximus thought that this follows from God's omniscience and omnibenevolence. At any rate, even if we disagree with Maximus here, Ovey does not provide a terminological distinction to help make his case. Instead, his interpretation adds confusion. Hovorun, *Will, Action, and Freedom,* 134.

[80] Hovorun, 107.

of another."[81] This is exactly the sort of terminological confusion that Maximus charged the monothelites of fostering when he accused them of crafting a quaternity, of reducing the Trinity to a monad, or of splitting the Trinity into three natures.[82] For Ovey, will (and if we follow this principle to its logical conclusion, all operations) appears to be a property both of nature and person, but this simply blurs the person/nature distinction and risks sacrificing trinitarian metaphysics.

Ovey's solution also does not allow us to affirm the broad patterns of Scripture. He claims that the Son submits to the Father in Gethsemane by "actualizing the same thing as a Person using two different faculties in two different natures." Ovey claims that such unity in actualizing natural wills is "so important if dyothelitism is not to degenerate into Nestorianism."[83] Similar claims are made by others who support EFS, who claim that if the two wills do not coincide or act identically the result is Nestorianism.[84] Consider his proposal in the context of another divine/human act: temptation. Applying Ovey's claims concerning Matthew 26 to Luke 4:1–13 (and pars.), where the Synoptic Gospels teach that Jesus was tempted in the desert, if we want to avoid Nestorianism, we cannot say that the human nature was tempted but the divine nature was not tempted. Rather, the person of the Son must actualize both the divine and human faculties in his single person. But this is impossible, for we know concerning the divine nature that God cannot be tempted (Jas 1:13). Ovey's explanation is not able to uphold both Luke 4 and James 1. Conversely, dyothelite theology—and here I refer to what I summarized in this chapter above, not to Ovey's inaccurate representation—is able to explain both Matthew 26 and the Luke 4/James 1 combination when coupled with the doctrine of the communication of idioms. Similar problems occur when we think of scriptural accounts of Jesus eating or drinking, for example. Did the divine nature digest the meals that Jesus ate? Of course not, but this need not entail Nestorianism.

As shown above, to avoid Nestorianism, the two natures in Christ do not have to will and do the exact same thing; they merely need work in harmony, so that each act of the person of the Son is by, in, and through both the divine and human nature, with each nature working what is proper to it. When Jesus prays for the cup to pass from him, he submits in his human nature, but not in his divine nature—the single divine will prevents this. However, the divine nature contributes the strength proper to it so that the human nature is able to embody

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[81] Hovorun, *Will, Action, and Freedom,* 110.

[82] "Dispute at Bizya," in *Maximus the Confessor*, §4; *Opuscule 3,* in *Maximus the Confessor*, 195–96; *Disputation,* in *Maximus the Confessor*, §15.

[83] Ovey, *Your Will be Done,* 112. Ovey is clear in his treatment that if one nature obeys, the other cannot not obey.

[84] So Robert Letham writes that there must be something about the Son makingit appropriate that he submit in human form, lest we fall into Nestorianism. The pointis granted. Letham then makes the unwarranted jump to the conclusion that Constantinople entails that "the two wills, divine and human, nonetheless coincide. There is no discrepancy, as if one will worked against the other, or as if the human will obeyed and the divine will did not. Jesus would then be some kind of schizoid." Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 394–96. Letham assumes the hypostatic union requires identical actions by both wills instead of merely cooperative actions that nevertheless remain distinct according to the appropriate differences in natures; cf. J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2016), 179.

so perfect a submission. Similarly, when Jesus is tempted in the desert, it is only the human nature that is tempted, not the divine, for God cannot be tempted. Yet, the act of the Son is in, with, and through both natures, so the divine nature contributes again a grace that empowers the human nature to overcome such temptation. The Gospel authors allude to this in a less philosophically developed form when they note that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1). Here we have the unity of person preserved against Nestorianism, but we also avoid a confusion of natures found in miaphysitism, which Ovey's Christology tends toward.

To my knowledge, Michael Ovey's work represents the most extensive treatment of dyothelite Christology and the eternal submission of the Son published at of the time of my writing. However, Ovey's work actually does nothing to show that dyothelitism is in fact compatible with EFS. He argues against the Third Council of Constantinople and inadequately engages Maximus the Confessor such that it is not clear that he fully understands dyothelite Christology or the doctrine of the communication of idioms. Making submission a personal property referring to the personal actualization of a natural will, results in muddled metaphysics that appear to have problematic consequences for Christology. Claiming that the Father and Son have distinct wills, as other EFS advocates do, and as Ovey himself (mis?)states on occasion, implies that wills are a personal property, which undermines not only trinitarian metaphysics, but also the full humanity of Christ, and therefore the potential for the full sanctification of Christians. As it stands, it simply is not clear that EFS is compatible with dyothelitism, despite the continued affirmation of both dyothelite Christology and eternal submission by many evangelical theologians. There is a great rift between evangelical Christology and much evangelical trinitarian theology. A purportedly eternally submissive Son does not easily fit with "the one man's obedience" (Rom 5:19).

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DENYING DIVINE ETERNITY: CAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY RESIST THE TEMPTATION?

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In this article Craig Carter addresses the new wave of assaults on divine timelessness. This assault has ranged from quarters of liberal Protestantism from Moltmann, to Kant, to Open Theism, but most importantly has found a home in Evangelicalism. Modern evangelicals have fallen in love with the seeming simplicity with which these quarters of liberalism have answered the difficulty of explaining the Eternal Trinity and the Economic Trinity. In this article Carter masterfully demonstrates why giving up on the metaphysical attributes under the anti-metaphysical pressure of late modernity is a bad idea.

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The doctrine of the timeless eternity of God is under assault today from various quarters. The broader cultural setting in which these challenges occur is dominated by post-Hegelian ideas that locate God within history either (1) as a symbol of the cosmos itself and its self-realization through the unfolding of history or (2) as a being within the historical cosmos itself. A large swath of liberal Protestantism adopted the former option and followed the philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne in developing process theology.[1] In this philosophical system, God is strongly identified with the cosmos in its development through time. Although God is not identified so strongly with nature in the systems of Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, God nonetheless realizes himself through time and is only

[1] See Alfred North Whitehead's Gifford Lectures of 1928–1929, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978). For an introduction to process theology see, John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).

fully God at the end of history.[2] Most Evangelical theologians, however, have recognized that the impersonal god of process theism and dynamic panentheism is not the God of the Bible, so this option has not been taken seriously in most Evangelical and confessional Protestant circles.[3]

As the twentieth century unfolded, however, many Evangelical and confessional Protestant theologians flirted with the second option by adopting some form of theistic mutualism[4] or theistic personalism.[5] These terms signify attempts to modify or deny at least some of the metaphysical attributes of God as taught by classical theism, most commonly simplicity, immutability, impassibility, and eternity. Theistic personalism is so named because it views God as the greatest person in the cosmos with the most power and knowledge of any being. God is a being among beings, rather than one whose being is different in kind from created being. The God of theistic personalism is a person modelled on the concept of human personhood.[6] This concept of God redefines eternity as everlastingness rather than timelessness,[7] which results in a conception of God as existing on the same plane of reality as creatures. This in turn frequently leads to the use of univocal language for God and the rejection of analogical language as unnecessary mystification. The God of theistic personalism is not pure act; in order to be able to change by responding to the initiative of creatures, he has to have potentiality like they do. The pressure on the metaphysical attributes seems to arise from the desire to make God *really* be within history and not just *apparently* be in history. The rejection of attributes like eternity is based on the premise that since we know that God is within history from the Bible, we need to revise what is said about God's being to make it rationally comprehensible for God to be historical.

It is possible, then, to see process theology and dynamic panentheism as more radical versions of the liberal project, that it, the attempt to fit theology into the historicism of the post-Hegelian situation. It is also possible to see theistic personalism as a more conservative version of the same project, which attempts to safeguard the personal nature of God, while making God's being historical. However,

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[2] See Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967), and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991–1997).

[3] However, some of the open theists have shown a high degree of openness to various aspects of process thought. The purpose of this paper is not to explore all the various ways in which God has been conceived as being contained within history in the post-Hegelian context. Suffice it to say that many possible versions of this basic idea have been explored, some more radical than others as compared to classical theism.

[4] James E. Dolezal uses this term in his book, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017). He defines "theistic mutualism" as a modification of classical theism in which God is conceived as being in a two-way relationship with creation such that God affects creatures and creatures, in turn, affect God. Classical metaphysical attributes such as immutability, impassibility, and eternity are denied in theistic mutualism. Dolezal says that another term for theistic mutualism is theistic personalism. (1)

[5] We owe this term to Brian Davies. See chapter one of his *An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). I will follow Davies by using the term theistic personalism to include both theistic mutualism and theistic personalism.

[6] Both Dolezal and Davies mention as examples the contemporary analytic philosophers Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. Many other contemporary examples could be cited.

[7] See, for example, R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

the attempt, while noble in intent, inevitably fails because the sheer Divine transcendence confessed in the historic orthodoxy of the ecumenical creeds is missing from theistic personalism. This loss of transcendence entails a diminution of the mystery of God's being and, ironically, makes God like idea of divinity that was widespread in the ancient Greco-Roman world into which the New Testament came. The God of theistic personalism arguably is much closer to the polytheistic deities of pre-Christian paganism than to the God of the historic, ecumenical creeds and Reformation confessions. The theistic personalist God differs from the gods of polytheism mainly by virtue of his moral attributes, the excellence of his various other attributes, and by the fact that there is only one of him. The somewhat clumsy but striking neologism "monopolytheism" was invented by David Bentley Hart to describe this concept of God.[8]

Pre-Christian, pagan polytheism believed in many such gods and saw them as greater than humans in degree, not in kind. Striking evidence of this comes from two disparate sources. On the one hand, it was popularly believed by the superstitious element of the population that a dead man could become a deity (like Julius Caesar, for example). On the other hand, some of the most intellectually sophisticated schools of Neoplatonic philosophy saw all being as emanating from the One and differentiated by degrees of purity. Greco-Roman thought did not have a clear Creator-creature distinction; clarity only emerged as the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* came to shape Christian theology decisively. In patristic theology, a great deal of time and energy was spent on the problem of how to affirm God in Christ—God in history—without reducing God to the level of the gods who are contained within history. The doctrine of the two natures of Christ developed in response to this problem.

It is ironic that some Evangelical theologians today think that they are confessing the historic doctrine of God when they (1) imagine a being like Zeus or Apollo, (2) purge that being of all flaws and imperfections, and (3) exalt that being as high as the human imagination can conceive. This is a modern version of perfect being theology that is very different from the method of the medieval theologian, Anselm. Whereas Anselm began with the concept of God as metaphysically ultimate and inquired into the implications of believing in such a God, modern perfect being theology starts with the concept of person and asks what we must attribute to (or deny of) a person in order for that one to be perfect. Anselm began with the mystery of the transcendent God and tries to understand as much of the faith as possible. As Josef Pieper puts it: "His 'practically unlimited' trust in reason's powers of illumination is based, first and foremost, on faith."[9] It was faith seeking understanding. Modern perfect being theology, however, begins with our experience of what it is to be a person, and ends up demystifying God. It is the reduction of faith to what can be understood. This kind of project is common in contemporary analytic philosophy. John Webster identifies the problem with such projects as their "attachment to a distinctly

[8] David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 127–28.

[9] Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy,* trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 64.

formal conception of deity largely uncorrected by the event of God's free self-enactment as Father, Son and Spirit."[10] Theistic personalism is thus a futile attempt to arrive at the God of creedal orthodoxy via a modern method.

The purpose of this paper is to identify theistic personalism as a temptation to deny the eternity of the Triune God under pressure from modern historicism. In the eighteenth century, the main temptation was to deny the doctrine of the Trinity, but today, the main temptation is to affirm a doctrine of a Triune God who is understood to inhabit the space-time continuum with us and thus to be a being among beings—albeit the greatest being of all. The denial of God's timeless eternity is the essence of this temptation. This temptation is not new; it has been haunting Protestant theology for the entire modern period, beginning with the rise of Arminianism in the early seventeenth century. But in the twentieth century, even non-Arminian, confessional Protestants began to speak of the intratrinitarian relations of God in temporal terms, thus reading time back into the eternal Trinity. In the rest of this paper, we will consider four topics: (1) eternity as a metaphysical attribute, (2) the distinction between the eternal Trinity and the economic Trinity, (3) the complementary roles of philosophy and theology in formulating our doctrine of God, and (4) Christology and eternity. In discussing these points, I will argue that we need to confess the timeless eternity of God if we wish to preserve the transcendence of God. Evangelical theology needs to abandon modern methodology, recover classical metaphysics, and recommit itself to the beauty and mystery of the classical vision of the eternal, Triune God.

The Divine Attribute of Eternity

From Augustine to Boethius to Thomas Aquinas to Francis Turretin, the central tradition of the orthodox doctrine of God has confessed that God is eternal. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* lists eternity as one of the attributes of God and cites Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."[11] The post-Reformation, Reformed orthodoxy of the framers of the Westminster Confession understood "eternity" as meaning timelessness. The paradoxical language of "before time" is used to express the fact that God is the creator of all things visible and invisible, which is to say, the totality of reality. The Hebrew idiom, "the heavens and earth" (Gen 1:1), is used to express the same idea of the whole of reality, whatever sort it may be. God precedes all that is not God and cannot be reduced to a part of creation, no matter how rarified or spiritualized. Thomas Aquinas points out that "as we attain to the knowledge of simple things by way of compound things, so must we

[10] John Webster, "The Immensity and Ubiquity of God," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 88.

[11] "The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. II. Of God and the Holy Trinity, I," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 4: 1600–1693*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 237. All the major Reformation-era confessions including the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, the *Savoy Declaration*, and the *Second London Confession* agree with the affirmation of God's eternity.

reach to the knowledge of eternity (*aeternitatis*) by means of time (*tempus*), which is nothing but the numbering of movement by before and after."[12]

Eternity is closely related to the other metaphysical attributes. God exists necessarily, while the created order is contingent. God's existence is part of his being—to be God is necessarily to exist. This classical understanding of eternity was expressed clearly by Boethius when he wrote that to predicate time of God is different from predicating time of a creature because the "present" of a creature differs from the past and future of the creature and thus signifies change, whereas "God's 'now,' abiding, unmoved, and immoveable, connotes eternity."[13] Francis Turretin asserts that eternity means three things in God: that he is without beginning, that he is without end, and that he is without succession.[14] Thomas argues that eternity must have all three of these characteristics. He proposes "aeviternity" as a term for that which has a beginning but no end and points out that it still has duration.[15] Eternity is not compatible with before and after because it measures that which is immutable and simple. For Thomas, God's eternity, immutability, impassibility and simplicity all mutually imply one another. That which is immutable must be simple; that which is simple must not change; that which is unchanging must be eternal.

The view of God as the one, simple, perfect, immutable, impassible, eternal, self-existent First Cause of the universe—the teaching of the ecumenical creeds of the first five centuries and the confessions of the Protestant churches of the Reformation—has recently come to be called "classical theism." There is no reason to object to this term, but it should be noted that it has come into common usage as a way of specifying the kind of theism that is the alternative to the neo-classical, or process theism, of the modern period. The trinitarian and biblical meaning of theism can no longer be taken for granted in modernity. How has this situation come about?

The late eighteenth century witnessed a crisis in the classical metaphysics that had flowed from and supported the Nicene, orthodox doctrine of God. The so-called "Enlightenment" period was really a resurgence of ancient, pagan ideas leading to the rejection of classical metaphysics. The anti-nominalist, anti-mechanist, anti-materialist metaphysics of the classical tradition was rejected by a series of thinkers, culminating in the work of David Hume. Immanuel Kant accepted the Enlightenment rejection of classical metaphysics and was a great enough thinker to realize that the implications of this rejection were relativism and skepticism. By developing his critical philosophy, Kant attempted to stave off relativism and skepticism, even though he conceded that it is no longer possible to claim to have true knowledge of a truly transcendent God, as the tradition of historic, Christian orthodoxy had claimed for 1,500 years.

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[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, 1–49,* Q. 10, Art. 1., Latin-English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 13, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2012), 79.

[13] Boethius, *De Trinitatae*, Loeb Classical Library 74, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 23.

[14] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. I*, ed. J. T. Dennison, Jr., trans. G. M. Giger (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992), 202.

[15] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 85–86.

Kant's thought marks the end of the dominance of classical metaphysics in the West; some would say it is actually the end of philosophy.[16] Insofar as the great systems of German Idealism (Hegel, Schelling, Fichte, etc.) and all the various "schools" that come after them (Positivism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Pragmatism, etc.) are determined by historicism, they are not philosophy as it was understood in the broadly Platonic tradition, which includes Plato, Aristotle, most of the church fathers including Augustine, many of the medieval scholastics including Thomas Aquinas, and post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism. In the mainstream of classical metaphysics, true knowledge of that which is eternal, and determinative of all reality, is possible. It is arguable that without such knowledge, philosophy ceases to exist. The rationalism of the Enlightenment leads to a philosophical naturalism that is corrosive of human knowledge of the eternal God and reduces all grand philosophical systems to myths. The emergence of postmodern critique of "grand narratives" in such a situation was inevitable.[17] Once philosophical naturalism has destroyed all traditional metaphysics, what is left is mythology. This explains why Christian theologians in the modern period face a strong temptation to modify or abandon the metaphysical attributes of God, including his eternity. The embrace of process theology and dynamic panentheism by liberal theology and the embrace of theistic personalism by Evangelical theology are trends that do not arise in a vacuum. Individual theologians may not realize the extent to which they are being carried along by the philosophical shifts in the culture, but they should not be so naïve as to think that what seems plausible to contemporary thinkers is unaffected by the attacks on classical metaphysics culminating in Kant's critical philosophy.

The Eternal Trinity and the Economic Trinity

Historically, orthodox theology has made a distinction between the eternal (or immanent) Trinity, which refers to God as God in himself eternally, and the economic (or temporal) Trinity, which refers to God in his actions in history. This move is fraught with danger, yet the risks are worth taking. The biggest danger, of course, is that someone will misunderstand us as meaning to imply that there are two Gods, one that we know and another unknowable God behind the known God. Another danger is that we will be understood to mean that the true God is not really revealed in the Bible. It seems to me, however, that the alternative to making this crucial distinction is to fall into the trap of reading temporality into the being of God and thereby dragging him down to the level of a creature, eroding all mystery relating to God's being, and in the end, substituting an idol of our own making for the one, true, living God of Jesus Christ.

This is the reason why I chose, in my book, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, to speak of recovering "Trinitarian classical theism."[18] I do not want to back down from the challenge of defending classical theism at the precise moment

[16] Lloyd Gerson points out that Richard Rorty has made a cogent argument to this effect in *Platonism and Naturalism: The Possibility of Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 2020), 3ff.

[17] Jean-Francoise Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[18] Craig A. Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021).

in history when anti-classical theisms are prevalent and tempting to Christians. But I also do not want to defend a generic classical theism that is not shaped by Scripture; hence, the inclusion of "Trinitarian" in the phrase to signal that we are speaking of a distinctively Christian classical theism. The God of the Bible is the God of Trinitarian classical theism.

In the fourth century Arian crisis, pro-Nicene theologians like Athanasius wanted to defend the decision of the Council of Nicaea in 325 to insert the word *homoousios* into the creed, even though it was not a term found in the Bible itself. All parties to this dispute took for granted that God is simple, but the Arians took that to mean that Father must be the one, true God and the Son and Spirit must be created beings. They could not see how the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—could possibly be one, simple God. Their answer was subordinationism. They saw Son and Spirit as subordinate in being to the Father, who is the metaphysically ultimate, simple God. The problem addressed most vigorously by the Cappadocian Fathers—Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory Nazianzus—was how to apply Divine simplicity to the Holy Trinity. How can the Father, the Son, and the Spirit be one, simple being? In a sense, the problem was not solved and can never be solved by human creatures, at least not if by "solved," we mean rationally comprehended.

Augustine famously quipped, "if you can understand it, it's not God," and this was more than a quip. He meant is quite seriously. God is incomprehensible to the creature. All we can know of him by reason is that an immutable, simple, perfect, First Cause must exist to explain the existence of the universe as we experience it. But there is no way for human beings to reason from our experience of creation to the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet Scripture clearly teaches that God is three persons, co-equal in glory and majesty, and one in power and will, who constitute one Divine being. This we know only because of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as attested by the prophets and apostles of Holy Scripture. But we do know it. So, we have to take it into account in our doctrine of God. How do we speak of the simple, Triune God? We confess God to be one in being (*homoousios*) and three persons (*hypostases*). God is irreducibly one and irreducibly three and the *ousia*/*hypostasis* distinction is meant to show that what we have here is a paradox, not a contradiction. God is one in being and three in person. But if you ask for a precise, rationally comprehensible explanation of the difference between being and person, you will be told that there is one, but we cannot define it in human language. Strictly speaking, there is no analogy in human language or experience for the Holy Trinity. God is a mystery beyond our comprehension, which is what we should expect of the transcendent Creator. Wisdom consists in distinguishing between what we can know and what we cannot know of the being of God. It is not that we know nothing, and it is not that we comprehend totally. Our knowledge of God is in between these two extremes. This is where the crucial distinction between philosophy and theology becomes important.

Philosophy and Theology

We must recognize that we speak of God in two ways. One is the way of philosophy and when we speak of God as part of our metaphysics, we do so by beginning with our sense experience of the world and reasoning from there. From the

reality of change in the world, we can discover the principle of causality—all the change that occurs requires a cause. By employing Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality, we can explain how change is caused. Every existing thing (except God) is made up of a mixture of actuality and potentiality. An acorn has a nature that makes it an acorn and not a stone or a horse. An acorn cannot be made into a fireplace or pull a wagon, but it can grow into an oak tree. An acorn has the potential to grow into an oak tree but only that which is actual can actualize that potential. Actual water, nutrients and sunlight are required to actualize the acorn's potential. The sunlight, rain and soil minerals can cause the acorn to grow, but something has to cause the water, nutrients, and sunlight or they would not exist. So, all change occurs as a result of a chain of causation with one thing being caused by another.

It is not difficult to understand that the chain of causes cannot extend backward indefinitely. There must be a First Cause, that is, an Unactualized Actualizer, because if there were no such First Cause, the causal chain would never have started, and thus would not be operating right now, which would mean that change would not be occurring in the world at this moment. Yet it is. So, there must be at least one cause that is not itself in need of being caused and that means that one cause must have no potentiality in it. It must be pure act; it must be fully actual. It must be a being that is different—in ways we are powerless to completely specify or predict in advance—from any creature we have ever experienced for ourselves. This means that philosophy can tell us that God must exist, but it can only tell us a limited number of facts about God. It can tell us that God is the one, simple, perfect, immutable, impassible, self-existent First Cause of all that exists. It can us that God is Pure Act. But it cannot tell us much more. It tells us nothing of *creatio ex nihilo*, the Trinity, the Incarnation, or God's redemption of creation.

Christians in the first few centuries knew all this and they also knew that the Bible tells us that the Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) created the universe out of nothing, sustains it continuously in being, made us in his own image for fellowship with himself, and acts in history to judge the world and save his people through Jesus Christ. Obviously, then, we have a tension between the immutable, eternal God and the God who speaks and acts in history. But, on the one hand, the church fathers did not want to deny that the God of the Bible is the God of the philosophers, because to do so would have reduced the God of the Bible to the level of one of the many gods of polytheism. The ancient world had a slot all ready for that kind of God—the God of the Christians would be welcome in the pantheon. But the church fathers quite rightly judged that to allow that would be a denial of the Christian doctrine of God as the transcendent Creator of all. Genesis 1 portrays God as the Creator of all that is not God. On the other hand, the church fathers did not want to compromise the reality of the Biblical revelation of God as the Redeemer of the created order or the truth of the Incarnation. They were not prepared to back away from the full deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The deity of Christ pervades the New Testament.

So, the orthodox doctrine of God holds that God in himself eternally is the one, simple, perfect, immutable, impassible, eternal, self-existent First Cause of all that is not God (the God of the philosophers), and it also holds that this God has spoken through the prophets and acted in history to judge and save his people. Thus, we say that the immanent Trinity is eternal and that the three persons are distinguished

only by the eternal relations of origin. The Father eternally begets the Son and the Son is eternally begotten by the Father. The Father and the Son eternally breath out the Spirit and the Spirt is eternally spirated by the Father and Son. These eternal relations do not occur in time, and they are not sequential. Rather, they are constitutive of the one, eternal God. The Father is Father eternally because he eternally begets the Son. What is known by revelation does not contradict what is known by philosophy, but it deepens, supplements, and sometimes corrects our mistakes in reasoning. Philosophy and theology work together in the task of speaking truthfully about the one, true, God.

Christology and Eternity

When the Son or Word becomes incarnate by assuming a human nature into the hypostatic union with himself, the eternal Son or Word become united to a human nature without changing into that human nature and, in fact, without changing at all. By means of the hypostatic union, Jesus Christ is one person with two natures and so everything that is true of either nature is true of the person. This allows the eternal God to enter time and suffer for the sins of the world. But note well, even though we can say that the Son, Jesus Christ, suffered because he has a human nature in union with his divine nature, that does not allow us to say that the Father suffered. The Son suffered and so God suffered in the person of the Son. But God did not suffer in the person of the Father or the Spirit. Not all that can be said of the Son can be said of the Father or Spirit.

This helps us see why it is true that not all that can be said of the economic Trinity can be said of the eternal Trinity. Insofar as the eternal act of God is experienced in time by creatures, we can (from our creaturely point of view) speak of God speaking, acting, and otherwise changing as a creature does. But, strictly speaking, God in himself is not changing because of the effect of God's eternal act on creatures in time. We change. So, when the Son prays, "Father not my will but yours be done," in the Garden of Gethsemane, the human will of Christ is changing so as to come into alignment with both the Father's will *and* with the Son's divine will. The divine nature of Christ is not changing even as the human nature is changing. It is right and proper to say that Jesus Christ changes in the sense that what happens to him in his human nature really does happen to him as a person. So, it is correct to say that Christ submits, changes, suffers, and even dies. All that is true. But the whole point of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation is that the eternal God enters history to redeem the fallen creation without ceasing to be the eternal God.

When we speak of the eternal God as God is in himself, we must avoid projecting onto the eternal Trinity what is true of the economic Trinity, just as when we speak of the suffering of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, we must be careful not to project that suffering onto the Father. It might seem like nitpicking to make such fine distinctions, but it is extremely important that we do so. Why? Because it is just as important to affirm that it was the *eternal God*, the transcendent Creator, who died for our sins as it is to affirm that God *really did die* for our sins. In our haste to say the latter, we must avoid wording things in such a way that we obscure or compromise the true identity of the One who died for us. If the God who is incarnate in Christ is capable of change, then that one is not the transcendent Creator. We must be extremely

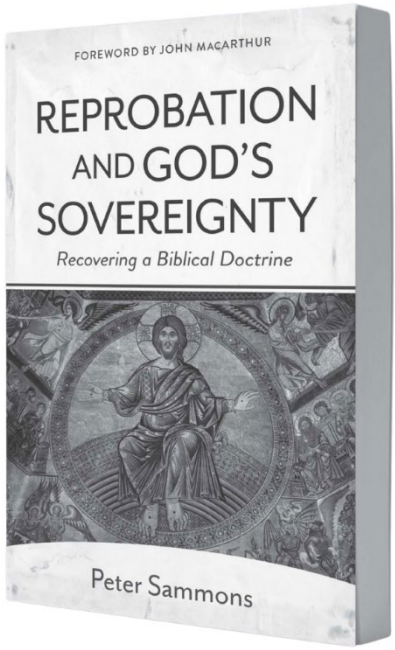
careful to affirm the identity of the God of salvation and the way we do that is by zealously guarding the mystery of the Divine being.

Conclusion

It should now be clear why giving up on the metaphysical attributes under the anti-metaphysical pressure of late modernity is such a bad idea—why I have termed it a "temptation" for Evangelical theology. It is a matter of proclaiming the true message of the Bible, namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself. It may seem counter-intuitive to many people today, but refusing the let the God of the Bible be separated from the God of the philosophers was the wisest move the church fathers ever made. We should imitate them by affirming that God is eternal in his being and by refusing to read economic activity back into the eternal Trinity as if there were no absolute metaphysical distinction between time and eternity. This distinction is fundamental to the Creator-creature distinction and therefore the basic precondition for worship. We do not worship that which we understand because it is like ourselves; rather, we worship what exceeds our capacity to comprehend because it is different from us. This is how we avoid idolatry (1 John 5:21). The gap between our understanding and the One whom we worship is like incense around the altar reminding us that we cannot penetrate the Divine mystery. If we are to know this God, he must reach out to us and reveal himself to us. The good news is that he has done just that. The Christian religion is a religion of grace precisely because God is a mystery beyond our grasp.

The purpose of Christian theology is to say all that we can say about God by means of exegesis, doctrine, and the metaphysical implications of doctrine. It is important that we not say too much or too little. The goal is to say as much about the being of God as humans can possibly say without reducing God to our level or allowing reason to corrode the mysteries of the faith. When we are tempted to deny Divine eternity, we are being tempted to break with the doctrine of God that has formed the core of Christian orthodoxy throughout the history of the church. To do that is to become sectarian and to surrender our catholicity. To do that is to reduce God to an idol fashioned in our own image. Such an idol may be rationally comprehensible, but such a God will not be the transcendent Creator of the Bible.

GOD'S RIGHT TO JUDGE HUMANITY IS WRITTEN ON THE VERY FABRIC OF HUMAN EXISTENCE



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TRIUNE PARTICULARISM: WHY UNITY IN THE TRINITY DEMANDS A PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

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The doctrine of the Trinity is the fundamental doctrine of Christian theology, and thus is rightly brought to bear on every doctrinal locus. Trinitarianism is particularly relevant to the doctrine of the atonement, and the extent of the atonement more specifically. The doctrine of inseparable operations (grounded in consubstantiality) has implications for the unity of the saving intentions and acts of the persons of the Trinity, namely, the Son cannot act to atone for the sins of any more or any fewer persons than the Father has elected and than the Spirit will regenerate. Particular redemption coheres most consistently with a particular election and a particular regeneration, and thus inseparable operations provides a theological argument for embracing a particular rather than universal atonement. These conclusions are vindicated by examining how the multiple intentions view of the extent of the atonement fails to account for Trinitarian unity, demonstrating that particular redemption is most consistent with orthodox Trinitarianism.[1]

* * * * *

Introduction

Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck once wrote that "Every [theological] error results from, or upon deeper reflection is traceable to, a departure in the doctrine of the Trinity."[2] While such a sweeping statement may strike one as hyperbole intended for rhetorical effect, upon consideration, one finds himself contemplating the different *loci* of systematic theology and nodding in agreement.

[1] This article is adapted from portions of Michael Riccardi, "'To Save Sinners': A Critical Evaluation of the Multiple Intentions View of the Atonement" (PhD diss., The Master's Seminary, 2021).

[2] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 288.

This only makes sense, for the Triunity of God is, as Charles Hodge put it, "the fundamental doctrine of Christianity."[3]

Trinitarianism is the heart of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. There is no Christianity without the Trinity, because there is no Christianity without God, and the Trinity is who God is.[4] Bavinck captured it well when he wrote elsewhere,

> The entire Christian belief system, all of special revelation, stands or falls with the confession of God's Trinity. It is the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its dogmas, the basic content of the new covenant. ... At stake in [the historical] development [of the Trinity] was not a metaphysical theory or a philosophical speculation but the essence of the Christian religion itself. ... In the doctrine of the Trinity we feel the heartbeat of God's entire revelation for the redemption of humanity.[5]

Just as much as every portion of a building must be rightly founded upon its foundation, so also every article of systematic theology, if it is to teach genuinely *biblical* doctrine, must be rightly related to the Trinity. For example, a proper understanding of the person of Christ or the Holy Spirit depends upon a sound theology of each person's deity and thus the relation in which He stands to the other persons of the Trinity. Therefore, in examining any particular theological proposal, one must ask whether it is consistent with orthodox Trinitarianism.

Trinity and Atonement

While Christology and pneumatology are rather obvious examples, the same is true with of the doctrine of soteriology, and specifically with the doctrine of the atonement. The Trinity and the atonement are not only related; they do not only need to remain consistent with one another. In truth, they are inextricable: one cannot speak of the one doctrine without the other. The atonement is what the Savior *does* to save sinners; the Trinity is who the Savior *is* who saves sinners. The Savior who saves by the atonement is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because the God who saves is Trinitarian, the gospel itself is therefore fundamentally Trinitarian, for all that God does is grounded in who God is—His saving acts are rooted in His triune being.

As a result, Scripture casts salvation in Trinitarian language. For example, in Galatians 4:4–6, Paul writes, "But when the fullness of the time came, *God* sent forth His *Son*, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might *redeem* those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, *God* has sent forth the *Spirit* of His *Son* into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Paul notes that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each carry out the work of redemption

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[3] Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Geneva Commentary Series (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 690. Theologian William Shedd wrote, "The doctrine of the Trinity . . . is the foundation of theology. Christianity, in the last analysis, is Trinitarianism" (as cited in James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998], 21).

[4] Commentator Philip Hughes wrote that the Trinity is "the foundation of all [man's] knowledge of the being and mind of God" (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], 489).

[5] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:333.

according to their persons-appropriate roles. That is, the gospel is inherently Trinitarian: the Father sends the Son into the world; the Son assumes a human nature so that He might stand in man's place and *redeem* those who because of their sin were bound to suffer the curse of the Law (cf. Heb 2:17); and the Spirit is then sent to apply to sinners all of the blessings the Son has accomplished for them, adoption being what Paul emphasizes here. Salvation—the rescue of sinners by means of atonement—is inexorably Trinitarian.

The Trinitarian shape of the gospel not only colors how one sees the atonement conceived generally, but also how one understands the *extent* of the atonement in particular. The debate over the extent of the atonement is often cast as a game of proof-text volleyball. The one holding to universal atonement argues, "Paul says Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for *all*!" (1 Tim 2:6). The particularist counters, "Well, Jesus says He gave His life as a ransom for *many*!" (Mark 10:45). And back and forth they go. The particularist aims to explain why ostensibly universalistic language ought not to be interpreted as absolutely universal (i.e., all of all sorts, all without exception) but rather as indicating some of all sorts, all of some sorts, or all without distinction. Advocates of universal atonement respond that such interpretive moves do not accord with the plain sense of Scripture, and both sides furnish a cadre of commentators supporting their mutually exclusive claims. It is at this point that the conversation typically reaches a stalemate or, worse, gives way to frustration and uncharitable discourse.

The key to breaking that stalemate is to recognize that Scripture's comments on the *extent* of Christ's death must be interpreted in light of its comments on the *design* and the *nature* of the atonement as well. The *scope* of the atonement must be understood in light of both the *substance* of the atonement (i.e., what the atonement is) and the *scheme* of the atonement (i.e., what it is designed to accomplish).[6] If Scripture teaches that Christ's death did not merely make salvation possible (as in many strains of universal atonement) but actually accomplished the salvation of those for whom He died (as in particular redemption), then when confronted with one text that speaks of Christ's death for "all" (e.g., 1 Tim 2:6) and a virtually identical text that speaks of Christ's death for "many" (e.g., Mark 10:45), there will be an exegetical basis for interpreting "all" in 1 Timothy 2:6 to mean "all without distinction" rather than "all without exception." The same is true for the design—or

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[6] Thus, the biblical doctrine of the extent of the atonement is not a product of any particular text or set of texts that explicitly states, "Jesus died for all people in history without exception," or "Jesus died for the elect alone and no one else." Rather, a biblical doctrine of the extent of the atonement is formulated similarly to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity—held together by the affirmation that the Father and Son are ὁμοούσιος, of the same substance, though such a term never appears in Scripture—or the biblical doctrine of the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in Christ, though no one text explicitly names Christ as one πρόσωπον subsisting in two φύσεων.

As David and Jonathan Gibson put it, " ... the diverse biblical parts demand the patient work of synthesis to portray the theological whole. ... definite atonement is a *biblico-systematic* doctrine that arises from careful exegesis of atonement texts and synthesis with internally related doctrines. ... When both exegetical and theological 'domains of discourse' are respected as such *and* taken together, then reductionist objections to definite atonement lose their force and this reading of the meaning of the death of Christ emerges as profound and faithful." David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, "Sacred Theology and the Reading of the Divine Word: Mapping the Doctrine of Definite Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 38, emphases original.

the divine intention—of the atonement. If Scripture teaches that God intended the atonement not merely to *provide* a salvation that could be accepted or rejected (as in many strains of universal atonement) but actually and definitively to *save* those for whom it was accomplished (as in particular redemption), then one could not escape the conclusion that the atonement extends no further than to those who partake of its saving benefits. In both instances, Scripture's clear teaching on the design and nature of the atonement helps interpret the less clear teaching on the extent of the atonement.

This is where the doctrine of the Trinity may be brought to bear on the doctrine of the extent of the atonement. In speaking of the design, or intent, of the atonement, one necessarily speaks of the Designer, or Intender, of the atonement, who is none other than the Triune God Himself. And since the very nature of God's *being* as Trinity shapes all God's *acts* as Savior, one must ask what, if any, implications God's Triunity have for the atonement planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Spirit.

The thesis of this article, then, is that the unity of the Trinity is a legitimate exegetical-theological argument in favor of the doctrine of particular redemption.[7] That is, because the Father, Son, and Spirit are perfectly united in their essence, they must be perfectly united in both their saving intentions and their saving acts. What the Father wills must be what the Son wills, and what the Son wills must be what the Spirit wills. Those whom the Father intends to save must therefore be the same exact number as those whom the Son intends to save, and those whom the Son intends to save must be the same exact number as those whom the Spirit intends to save. Accordingly, since Scripture teaches (a) that the Father has chosen to save a particular people and not all without exception, and (b) that the Spirit will regenerate that *same* particular people and not all without exception, therefore it also teaches (c) that the Son has atoned for that same particular people and not all without exception. To say otherwise is to strike at the unity of the Triune God.

The first major section of this article aims to prove the above argumentation is biblical. The second major section of this article tests this argumentation against an increasingly popular mediating view between particular and universal atonement: the multiple intentions view. It concludes that, like other species of non-particularism, the multiple intentions view fails to account sufficiently for Trinitarian unity and thus ought to be rejected.

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[7] Particular redemption is here defined as the teaching that the Father's intention in sending Christ, and Christ's intention in dying on the cross, was to save the elect (and them alone) by dying in their place as an atonement for their sins (and theirs alone), thus securing everything necessary to put them into possession of saving faith by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Packer defines particular redemption as "Christ's actual substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners, through which God was reconciled to them, their liability to punishment was for ever destroyed, and a title of eternal life was secured for them" (J. I. Packer, "Saved by His Precious Blood: An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*," in *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement*, ed. J. I. Packer and Mark Dever [Wheaton: Crossway, 2007], 119–20). Also helpful is David and Jonathan Gibson's definition: "The doctrine of definite atonement states that, in the death of Jesus Christ, the triune God intended to achieve the redemption of every person given to the Son by the Father in eternity past, and to apply the accomplishments of his sacrifice to each of them by the Spirit. The death of Christ was intended to win the salvation of God's people alone" (David and Jonathan Gibson, "Sacred Theology," 34).

Neither Unison nor Discord, but Harmony

One of the greatest causes for confusion and misunderstanding concerning the nature and extent of the atonement is the failure properly to root the Son's saving mission in the eternal Trinitarian plan of salvation.[8]

The acts of the Triune God in creation, providence, and salvation are inextricably grounded in the Trinitarian life of God Himself. In other words, God does what He does because He is who He is. And the most essential comment one can make about the identity and being of God is that He is Triune—that the single, undivided divine essence subsists eternally in three coequal, consubstantial persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16–17; 28:19–20; 1 Cor 12:4–6; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:4–6; Eph 4:4–6; Titus 3:4–6). Therefore, precisely because the *persons* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can never be divided, neither can their *works* be divided (John 14:10). This doctrine of the inseparable operations is a fundamental axiom of classic Trinitarian theology: *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*: the external works of the Trinity are undivided.[9] That is, in every act that God performs, all three persons of the Trinity are directly involved. Because they share an identical being, no one person of the Trinity ever acts without the other two. They are always indivisibly working together in perfect harmony.[10] As Letham explains, "in all God does, all three persons are directly involved. God's various actions, while particularly attributable—or *appropriated*—to one of the three are yet indivisibly those of all three working together in harmony."[11] So for example, while Scripture identifies God the Father as the creator of the world (Gen 1:1; 1 Cor 8:6a), creation is also attributed to the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6b; Col 1:16) and to the Spirit (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6). The Father creates by speaking, the Son is the Word spoken, and the Spirit is the breath by which the Word goes forth.

The Father created the world, the Son created the world, and the Spirit created the world, but these are not three separate acts of creation. There are not three worlds; rather; the one act of creation is performed *by* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy

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[8] Portions of this section are adapted from the author's contributions to *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, ed. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 513–16, 545–58.

[9] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 213. For a recent presentation of inseparable operations, see Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

[10] Gibson offers a helpful summary: ". . . who God is in the history of redemption arises from who God is in himself. His act reflects his being. And if God's being lives in harmony—three persons in one God and one God in three persons mutually cohering and complementing each other—then when the same God acts in history the economy of salvation, we should expect nothing less than the same harmony of purpose and love" (Jonathan Gibson, "The Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work of God in Christ," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 366).

[11] Robert Letham, "The Triune God, Incarnation, and Definite Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 440, emphasis original. This language is to be distinguished from how Ware employs it in Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 42. Ware's presentation is from the perspective of social Trinitarianism which sees the persons of the Trinity as three centers of consciousness collaborating unto a common end. I aim to employ this language to identify the traditional doctrine of inseparable operations grounded in a genuine unity of being—i.e., the three persons subsisting in the identical, undivided, simple divine essence and thus acting inseparably.

Spirit.[12] Three distinct persons act, but their acts, like their *essence*, are perfectly united and inseparable. God's indivisible being is represented in His indivisible acts.

This does not mean, however, that the acts of the Father, Son, and Spirit can never be *distinguished* from each other. Just as the persons themselves must be distinguished but never divided from one another, so also their works, while never being divided, can be distinguished. This is the doctrine of appropriations, the necessary complement to the doctrine of inseparable operations. While no person of the Trinity acts apart from the other two, each divine act is appropriated, or attributed, to one of the persons in particular. Thus, as in the previous example, though the Son and the Spirit are not absent from creation, it is appropriate to ascribe the work of creation to the Father, from whom are all things (1 Cor 8:6). For another example, while the Son alone is the subject of the incarnation (John 1:14; Phil 2:6–7), nevertheless He is sent into the world by the Father (1 John 4:9) and is conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).

Thus, the persons of the Trinity work in neither unison nor in discord, but in harmony.[13] The doctrine of appropriations ensures that they do not work in *unison*, because different acts are properly attributed to different persons. But the doctrine of inseparable operations ensures that they are never in *discord*, because their undivided acts are rooted in their undivided essence. In every act of God, all three persons of the Trinity must work in perfect *harmony*, or they are not one God.

The Triune Plan of Salvation

This principle of Trinitarian unity holds true for God's work of salvation as well. This means that the atoning work of Christ can never be adequately understood if it is considered in isolation from the saving work of the Father and the Holy Spirit. When the eternal Son took on flesh to dwell among man and accomplish our salvation by His atoning death, He was not acting as a rogue agent, divorced from the intentions and the actions of the other persons of the Trinity. Indeed, He openly declares, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). Jesus self-consciously conducted every aspect of His ministry in strict accordance with the will of the Father—a will that was made known to Him in the eternal council of the Trinity, in which the Father, Son, and Spirit devised a plan to rescue fallen humanity from the effects of sin and death.

Scripture testifies of this eternal plan of salvation in several ways. In the first place, several passages of Scripture characterize the saving work of the Son as being divinely predetermined. In Ephesians 3, Paul teaches that the gospel accomplished in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, which Paul preached (Eph 3:6)—the unfathomable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8) that revealed the long-hidden mystery of the administration in which Jew and Gentile would dwell together in one body through faith in Messiah (Eph 3:5–6, 9)—was all accomplished "in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11; cf. 1:9–11). That is, Christ's redemptive work

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[12] Augustine, *On the Gospel of John*, Tractate 20, *NPNF*[1] 7:131–37, *PL* 35:1556–64. See also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:319.

[13] Letham, "The Triune God, Incarnation, and Definite Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 442.

was carried out according to a predetermined plan, namely, the Father's purpose (πρόθεσις) designed in eternity past,[14] which Ephesians 1:11 calls "the counsel of His will" (τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ). Thus, when Jesus told the disciples of His impending betrayal at the Last Supper, He said, "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined [κατὰ τὸ ὡρισμένον]" (Luke 22:22), or, as a leading Greek dictionary renders it, "in accordance with the (divine) decree."[15] The design of this treachery predated Judas; it had been irrevocably determined in eternity past. According to 2 Timothy 1:9, God has saved us "according to His own purpose [πρόθεσιν] and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity [πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων]." So determinative is this eternal saving purpose of the Triune God that the elect are said to have received grace in Christ before they even existed; indeed, before time began.[16] Even the events of the crucifixion itself are described as the execution of this eternal plan of salvation, for Jesus was "delivered over by the predetermined plan [τῇ ὡρισμένῃ βουλῇ] and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23); His crucifiers only did "whatever [the Father's] hand and [the Father's] purpose [ἡ βουλή] predestined [προώρισεν] to occur" (Acts 4:28).

Secondly, besides such statements that the Son's atoning work was carried out according to the eternal divine plan, Scripture also explicitly identifies Jesus' saving mission as His obedience to the Father's will, which clearly indicates that this will had been made known to the Son in a prior agreement. In addition to John 6:38, already mentioned above, Jesus explained that the authority He had to lay down His life as a sacrifice for sin and to take it up again in victorious resurrection derived from the "commandment [He] received from [His] Father" (John 10:18). The author of Hebrews identifies Christ as the prophesied Servant to come who characterized His self-offering for sin as readiness to come and do the will of the Father (Heb 10:7–9; cf. Ps 40:6–8). Indeed, at the outset of His ministry, Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). At the close of His ministry, as He prepares to return to the glory of the fellowship of the Father which He had enjoyed from all eternity (John 17:5), He says, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). The work that fell to Him in the Triune council had been obediently discharged, and thus the κένωσις and ταπείνωσις of His incarnation and atonement are cast as matters of becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross (Phil 2:6–8).

A third category of biblical evidences for this pretemporal Trinitarian compact consists in passages which outline the Father and Son's roles in accomplishing salvation, in which the Father promises to reward the Son for the obedient completion of His mission. In Psalm 2:7–8, the Son Himself speaks of the Father's eternal decree in which He is promised to inherit the nations and to possess the ends of the earth.[17] The Father will put the Spirit upon the Son, His Servant, who

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[14] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 869.

[15] Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 723.

[16] Bauer, 33.

[17] William S. Plumer, *Psalms: A Critical and Expository Commentary with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1867), 43–45; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1993), 1:294–95. See

will work righteousness among the nations (Isa 42:1–3; 49:6). He will send the Son, appointed as a covenant to the people, to give sight to the blind and to free the captives (Isa 42:6–7; 49:8). The Father will accomplish this not only by sending the Son into the world, but by sending Him to intercede for sinners by bearing their iniquity unto death (Isa 53:10–12). But as a reward for rendering Himself a guilt offering, the Son is promised to see His offspring, to prolong His days, and to prosper in the Father's good pleasure (Isa 53:10). Because He would justify the many by bearing their sin in the anguish of His soul, He is promised to see His reward unto satisfaction (Isa 53:11–12). Thus, the roles of the three persons of the Trinity according to this council of salvation become clear: the Father will send the Son into the world to accomplish salvation; the Son will accomplish that salvation by working righteousness and dying a substitutionary death for sinners; and the Spirit, whose role is most clearly revealed only in retrospect, will empower the Son throughout His saving mission—from birth (Luke 1:35), throughout life (Luke 4:1, 14), in death (Heb 9:14), and finally unto resurrection (Rom 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16)—and will eventually apply the salvation the Son has accomplished to all those whom the Father has chosen (Gal 4:4–6; Titus 3:5). The Father will then reward the Son for His obedience to this divine plan (Phil 2:8) by highly exalting Him and exhibiting Him to all as the Lord of heaven and earth (Phil 2:9–11).[18]

These realities demand a perfect and complete unity of purpose and intention in the saving will and saving work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with respect to salvation. Though the three persons are attributed distinct roles—the Father electing, planning, and sending; the Son living and dying and rising to accomplish salvation; and the Spirit empowering the Son and applying the Son's accomplishments to sinners—nevertheless, the external works of the Trinity are undivided. No person of the Trinity works or wills out of accord with the others. While they work not in unison but in harmony, they indeed work in harmony and not in discord. The slightest rift in the saving will of the Father versus the saving will of the Son versus the saving will of the Spirit would undermine the consubstantiality of the persons of the Trinity.[19]

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also Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, ed. Scholastica Hebgin and Felicitas Corrigan (New York: Paulist, 1960), 1:27; and John Owen, *The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 12:240–43.

[18] Trueman summarizes the roles of the three persons of the Trinity in the plan of redemption: "In brief compass, the [plan] of redemption is that which establishes Christ as Mediator, defines the nature of his mediation, and assigns specific roles to each member of the Godhead. The Father appoints the Son as Mediator for the elect and sets the terms of his mediation. The Son voluntarily accepts the role of Mediator and the execution of the task in history. The Spirit agrees to be the agent of conception in the incarnation and to support Christ in the successful execution of his mediatorial role." Carl R. Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption: John Owen on the Nature of Christ's Satisfaction," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 214.

[19] As Trueman helpfully argues, "Significantly, the *homoousian* means the interaction between Father and Son cannot be construed in any terms that would imply even the most mildly adversarial relationship;" such would be to "clearly tend toward tritheism." Carl R. Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Mark A. Snoeberger (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 26.

Trinitarian Unity a Biblical Doctrine

One sees this Trinitarian unity reflected in key passages of Scripture which inextricably link the persons and their work in salvation, consistently presenting the Father's work in the plan of redemption, the Son's work in the accomplishment of redemption, and the Spirit's work in the application of redemption:

> (1) the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. (Galatians 1:4)

The Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sins to accomplish redemption (v. 4a), so that we might be rescued from this present evil age, an implicit reference to the Spirit's application of redemption (v. 4b), according to the will of the Father as expressed in the plan of redemption.

> (2) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:4–6)

Here we see that the Father sends the Son into the world according to the plan of redemption (v. 4); the Son accomplishes redemption by redeeming those under the Law that they might be received as adopted sons (v. 5); and the Spirit applies that redemption by being sent into the hearts of the redeemed in regeneration (v. 6).

> (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself ... In [the Beloved] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ... In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:3–5, 7, 13–14)

Paul's great hymn to the Triune Savior in Ephesians 1 shows us that the Father plans redemption for those He chooses in eternity past (vv. 4–5); the Son accomplishes their redemption through His blood (v. 7); the Spirit (implicitly in this verse) applies that blood-bought redemption unto the forgiveness of God's people (v. 7), sealing them (v. 13) for the time when the Spirit will consummate redemption by bringing God's people to their promised inheritance (v. 14).

> (4) But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in

> righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4–7)

Here in Titus 3, the Father's plan for redemption is represented by a reference to the love and kindness of His predestining plan (v. 4; cf. Eph 1:4–5; "in love He predestined us ... according to the kind intention of His will"); the Son accomplishes redemption by saving us in mercy (vv. 5–6); the Spirit applies redemption by regenerating and renewing us unto justification and eternal life (vv. 6–7).

> (5) ... God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel ... . (2 Timothy 1:8–10)

In this passage, God is represented as having saved us and called us with a holy calling, a reference to our effectual calling unto salvation by the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:28, 30; 1 Cor 1:9; Eph 4:4), which thus speaks of redemption applied. Such salvation was not according to our works, but according to the gracious, electing purpose of the Father in eternity past, which thus speaks of redemption planned. That plan has now been revealed by the atoning work of the Son whereby He abolished death and brought life and immortality, which thus speaks of redemption accomplished.

In summary, the predestining, electing work of the Father, the accomplishing, redemptive work of the Son, and the applying, regenerating work of the Spirit are wrought in perfect harmony. There is a perfect unity of purpose and intention in the saving will of the persons of the Trinity, for it is the identical, selfsame will. Therefore, the objects of these saving acts of God—election, atonement, and regeneration—must be coextensive. If any one person acts to save more or fewer sinners than any other person of the Trinity, they could not be said to be united in their saving will. The Father elects unto salvation; the Son redeems those the Father has chosen; and the Spirit gives life to those same people whom the Father has chosen and the Son has redeemed.

Particular Election, Particular Redemption

The question must be asked, then: Has the Father chosen all without exception to be saved, or has He chosen a particular people to be brought to Himself in salvation? Is the Father's election universal or particular? Scripture answers in favor of the latter. This eternal plan of salvation was not devised on behalf of sinners in general, but only on behalf of those whom the Father had chosen to receive salvation. Romans 8:28–30 establishes this definitively. Those on whom the Father has set His foreknowing, electing love He also predestined; and those He predestined He also effectually called to life in regeneration; and those whom He called He also declared righteous in Christ through faith; and those whom He justified He also glorified. Since (a) all who are predestined and chosen are eventually justified and glorified, and since (b) not all without exception are justified and glorified—a fact admitted by all who do not

embrace universal final salvation—therefore, it follows that (c) not all without exception have been predestined by the Father unto salvation. The designation "elect" (which appears a few verses later, Rom 8:33), against whom none can bring a charge, necessarily implies a category of those not elected who may indeed be justly charged for their sins and perish for them. As the following chapter makes clear, the Potter has fashioned from the same lump of clay both "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" as well as "vessels of mercy ... prepared beforehand for glory" (Rom 9:22–23). In His inscrutable wisdom, the Father has not chosen to save every human being without exception, but only a subset of those on whom He has set His sovereign love.[20]

Therefore, since the Father's election is particular and not universal, and since the Father and the Son must be perfectly united in their saving intention—indeed, since the Son's saving mission is nothing other than the Father's appointed means to save those whom He has chosen[21]—it must be that the Son's atonement is particular and not universal. Robert Reymond illustrates the impossibility of the alternative: "It is unthinkable to believe that Christ would say: 'I recognize, Father, that your election and your salvific intentions terminate upon only a portion of mankind, but because my love is more inclusive and expansive than yours, I am not satisfied to die only for those you have elected. I am going to die for everyone.'"[22] While few opponents of particularism would state their position in such terms, it is difficult to see how all forms of non-particularism do not logically necessitate such a conclusion. A particular election (and a particular regeneration) coupled with a universal atonement inevitably introduces a disjunction between the persons of the Trinity. It is to "separate the Father and the Holy Spirit from the Son, when the very essence of God is that there is one purpose in which they are united."[23] Gibson rightly observes, "This detracts from the indivisible, Trinitarian work of God in Christ—the Father and the Son united in their distinct works within the economy of salvation, as is the Son and the Spirit. Despite protests to the contrary, these various positions on the atonement cannot evade the accusation of a dysfunctional Trinity, where dissonance rather than harmony is the sounding note."[24] Unity in the Trinity, therefore, demands a particular redemption.

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[20] The same is true for the ministry of the Spirit. Since (a) it is by the ministry of the Holy Spirit that redemption is applied unto regeneration, justification, and glorification (cf. Rom 8:30), clearly implying that none who are justified will fail to be glorified; and since (b) there are some who do indeed perish in their sins (Matt 7:13–14; 25:46; 2 Thess 1:8–9; Rev 20:15; cf. 14:11); therefore, (c) neither is the regenerating work of the Spirit universal, but particular.

[21] That election circumscribes the atonement is substantiated by the previous passages cited. It is the Father's will that gives rise to the Son's mission (Gal 1:4); the Son redeems because the Father has sent Him to do so (Gal 4:4–5); the Father has chosen us *in Christ* (Eph 1:4), having granted us grace from all eternity *in Christ Jesus* (2 Tim 1:9). As Gibson argues, "the elective purpose of God the Father (Eph 1:4) and the redemptive purpose of God the incarnate Son (5:27) are one and the same: to present the elect as the Son's bride, holy and blameless on the last day. More specifically, Christ's death is the *means* to accomplish the electing purpose of the Father. In short, election circumscribes atonement." Jonathan Gibson, "The Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work of God in Christ," 346.

[22] Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 678.

[23] Roger R. Nicole, *Our Sovereign Savior: The Essence of the Reformed Faith* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2002), 65.

[24] Jonathan Gibson, "The Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work of God in Christ," 368. Barnes writes, "If God decided in eternity past whom he would call and save—i.e. to whom he would give grace in Christ

Notwithstanding all this, the argument for particularism grounded in Trinitarian unity is not based merely upon logical deductions from orthodox Trinitarianism. It is explicit in the text of Scripture itself. If it is plain that the Father sent the Son to earth for a specific purpose and to accomplish a specific mission, and if Jesus explicitly identified the will of the Father as the driving motivation in all His saving work (cf. John 4:34; 6:38; 10:17–18; 17:4; Heb 10:7), what then was the will of the Father as Jesus understood it? The following passages answer that Jesus knew He was to be the representative and substitute for all those and only those whom the Father had chosen for salvation—a group He identifies as those given to Him by the Father:

> *All that the Father gives Me* will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. *This is the will of Him who sent Me*, that *of all that He has given Me I lose nothing*, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37–40)
>
> I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and *I lay down My life for the sheep*. ... My Father, *who has given them to Me*, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:14–15, 29)
>
> Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to *all whom You have given Him*, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent ... I have manifested Your name to the men *whom You gave Me* out of the world; *they were Yours and You gave them to Me*, and they have kept Your word. ... I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of *those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours*; ... Father, I desire that they also, *whom You have given Me*, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:1–3, 6, 9, 24)
>
> For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise." And again, "I will put My trust in Him." And again, "Behold, I and the children *whom God has given Me*." Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the

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Jesus [2 Tim 1:9], if God decided in eternity past who would be united to Christ and thus receive his grace, then in what way can we say that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for sins and to remove the condemnation from those who are not part of this eternal decision? Are we to conclude that God on the one hand decided to pass over some and allow them to go their own way and not be saved, but yet on the other hand to 'save' them potentially by purchasing them, by paying their sins?" Tom Barnes, *Atonement Matters: A Call to Declare the Biblical View of the Atonement* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2008), 95–96.

> devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. (Hebrews 2:11–16)

It is in the context of these passages—in which Jesus declares the inextricable connection between His mission and the Father's will (e.g., John 6:38; 17:4)—that He also states that the Father has given to Him a particular group of individuals, and that it is particularly on their behalf that He accomplishes His redemptive work.

Consider the characteristics Scripture assigns to those for whom Christ died, which can only describe the elect.

- These individuals belonged to the Father ("they were Yours") in a way that the rest of the world did not (John 17:6), which can only refer to His foreknowing and predestining them unto salvation (Rom 8:30; cf. Eph 1:4–5; 2 Tim 1:9).
- At various points, Jesus calls these individuals His own (John 10:14) and His sheep (John 10:15),[25] whom He will never lose (John 6:39; 10:29).[26]
- He says they are His brethren (Heb 2:11–12), the children of the Father (Heb 2:11, 13–14);[27] and the seed of Abraham (Heb 2:16).[28]
- "Those whom [the Father] has given" the Son are distinct from "the world," on whose behalf Jesus does not pray (John 17:9; cf. 17:2). Thus, they are not all without exception; rather, they have been chosen out from among the world (John 17:6).
- Because the Father sovereignly draws them (John 6:44, 65), these sheep cannot fail to come to Christ in faith (John 6:37), to be freed from the slavery of death (Heb 2:14–15), and to receive eternal life (John 6:40; 10:28; 17:2).

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[25] Note that these sheep are so called not as a consequence of their faith in Him; rather, existence as a sheep belonging to Christ is the prerequisite for saving faith, such that Jesus says, "But you do not believe *because* you are not of My sheep" (John 10:26). Therefore, Jesus' people exist as His sheep even before they trust in Him for salvation. That is to say, they are those whom the Father has chosen and given to the Son, the elect. Note, then, especially in light of Jesus identifying the Pharisees as those who are not His sheep in John 10:26, that "Jesus lays down his life for a particular group of people (his sheep) in distinction from others (those who are not his sheep)." Matthew S. Harmon, "For the Glory of the Father and the Salvation of His People: Definite Atonement in the Synoptics and Johannine Literature," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 277. Indeed, for Jesus to say that He lays His life down for His sheep, and then immediately to identify certain persons to be not of His sheep, is to teach that He did not lay down His life for them, and so not for all without exception. For further comment on this, see Riccardi, "To Save Sinners," 245–48.

[26] Given this truth that Jesus loses none for whom He dies, alongside the truth that there are many who do perish in their sins and are finally lost (cf. Matt 7:13; 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 20:15), one cannot avoid the conclusion that Jesus did not die for all without exception.

[27] Owen comments, "Their participation in flesh and blood moved him to partake of the same—not because all the world, all the posterity of Adam, but because the *children* were in that condition; for their sakes he sanctified himself." John Owen, *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu: Or The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold, 24 vols., 10:139–428 (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 10:175.

[28] Note that the writer does not say that the Son gives help to the posterity of Adam, which would seem to be required if Christ died for all without exception, but rather to the seed of Abraham, a designation that particularizes the objects of Christ's help to those who eventually follow in the steps of the faith of Abraham (cf. Rom 4:12–13, 16; Gal 3:7, 9, 29).

- They are the exclusive beneficiaries of the Son's intercession which is denied to the rest of mankind (John 17:9).[29]
- They will eventually be raised to everlasting life (John 6:40); and they will dwell with Christ forever in glory (John 17:24).[30]

These are the ones for whom Christ died, and none of the above descriptors can be rightly applied to those who finally perish in their sins. Christ dies for His people (Matt 1:21), His friends (John 15:13), His church (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25), a people for His own possession (Titus 2:14), the elect (Rom 8:33).

The Multiple Intentions View

Since the Reformation period, several mediating views on the extent of the atonement have emerged in response to the traditional views of universal versus particular redemption.[31] These included the French hypothetical universalism of John Cameron and Moise Amyraut of the school at Saumur,[32] the British hypothetical universalism of James Ussher, John Davenant, and John Preston,[33] and the

[29] It is unthinkable that Jesus, the Great High Priest of the New Covenant, while interceding before the Father on behalf of those for whom He would soon offer Himself as an atonement for sins, would refuse the priestly work of intercession for any for whom He would offer His life as sacrifice for sins.

[30] Owen provides helpful clarity: "His own aim and intention, may be seen in nothing more manifestly than in the request that our Savior makes upon the accomplishment of the work about which he was sent; which certainly was neither for more nor less than God had engaged himself to him for. 'I have,' saith he, 'glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,' John 17:4. And now, what doth he require after the manifestation of his eternal glory, of which for a season he had emptied himself, verse 5? Clearly a full confluence of the love of God and fruits of that love upon all his elect, in faith, sanctification, and glory. God gave them unto him, and he sanctified himself to be a sacrifice for their sake, praying for their sanctification, verses 17–19; their preservation in peace, or communion with one another, and union with God, vv. 20–21. . .; and lastly, their glory, verse 24. . . . And in this, not one word concerning all and every one, but expressly the contrary, verse 9." *Death of Death*, 171.

[31] Classic universal atonement is well represented by the second article of the Remonstrance (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, Volume 3: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 6th ed. [1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 546), whereas classic particularism is well represented by Article VIII of the second head in the Canons of the Synod of Dordt (ibid., 3:587), as well as, famously, in John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (see note 27 for full bibliographic information).

[32] Moïse Amyraut, Moïse. *Brief Traitté de la Predestination et de ses principals dependances* (Saumur, France: Jean Lesnier & Isaac Debordes, 1634, 2nd ed., 1658). See also Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); and Roger R. Nicole, "Moyse Amyraut (1596–1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace, First Phase (1634–1637)," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1966).

[33] James Ussher, *The Judgement of the Late Arch-Bishop of Armagh, and Primate of Ireland* (London: John Crook, 1658); John Davenant, "A Dissertation on the Death of Christ, as to its Extent and special Benefits: containing a short History of Pelagianism, and shewing the Agreement of the Doctrines of the Church of England on general Redemption, Election, and Predestination, with the Primitive Fathers of the Christian Church, and above all, with the Holy Scriptures," in *An Exposition of St. Paul to the Colossians*, trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1832). On John Preston, see Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 71–169. On Ussher and Davenant, see ibid., 173–213.

neonomian hypothetical universalism of Richard Baxter.[34] In the twentieth century, there emerged the middle-way of what is often called four-point Calvinism, which holds to total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace, the perseverance of the saints, yet not limited atonement (or particular redemption).[35]

In the early 2000s, Dr. Bruce A. Ware began circulating a handout in his theology classes at Southern Seminary in which he began defending what he called a multiple intentions view (MIV) of the atonement.[36] He laments that "much of the debate over the extent of the atonement is owing to the fact that a *single* intention (rather than multiple intentions) was sought by both sides." Instead, he avers that "God's intentions in the death of Christ are complex not simple, multiple not single."[37] What particularism and universalism see as an either-or decision—*either* Christ died to infallibly the secure the salvation of the elect alone, *or* He died to make possible, or available, the salvation of all without exception—the MIV holds that Christ died for both of these reasons. That is, there are both particular and universal intentions which God designed by the death of Christ.

In 2008, Dr. Ware supervised the PhD dissertation of Gary L. Shultz, Jr., who wrote, "A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Extent of the Atonement,"[38] in which he aimed to develop Ware's thesis and to present "a full-length scholarly work explicitly explaining and defending a multi-intentioned view,"[39] which had not yet been done. Shultz argues that in sending His Son to die on the cross, the Father "had both particular and general intentions for the atonement," that "the Son then died to fulfill these multiple intentions," and that "the Spirit then works to apply the atonement in both particular and general ways."[40]

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[34] Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind, by the Lord Jesus Christ: Stated and cleared by the late learned Mr Richard Baxter. Whereunto is added a short Account of special Redemption, by the Same Author*, 1st ed. (London: John Salusbury, 1694). For an attempt to prove that Baxter was a neonomian, see Michael Brown, "Not by Faith Alone: The Neonomianism of Richard Baxter," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011): 133–52. For an attempt to exonerate Baxter, see Hans Boersma, *A Hot Peppercorn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004).

[35] E.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3: *Soteriology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 183–205; Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1986), 318–23; Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 240–42; John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody, 1980); idem., "Reconciliation," *BSac* 120 (1963): 3–12.

[36] Bruce A. Ware, "Extent of the Atonement: Outline of the Issue, Positions, Key Texts, and Key Theological Arguments" (Unpublished class handout, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, n.d.).

[37] Ware, "Extent of the Atonement," 3.

[38] Gary L. Shultz, Jr., "A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Extent of the Atonement" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008). A version of this dissertation was later published as idem., *A Multi-Intentioned View of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

[39] Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 11n23.

[40] Shultz, 12. According to Shultz, God's particular intention in the atonement is to infallibly secure the salvation of the elect, just as particularists would claim. In addition, Shultz also claims that God intended that the Son pay the penalty for the sins of all people without exception to accomplish at least five other ends: "[1] to make the universal gospel call possible, [2] to make general grace (and not only salvific grace) possible, [3] to provide an additional basis of condemnation for those who reject the gospel, [4] to serve as the supreme example of God's character, and [5] to make the reconciliation of all things possible."

Another recent defense of the multiple intentions view has been offered by Dr. John S. Hammett, Senior Professor of Systematic Theology at Southeastern Seminary,[41] offering legitimacy to Snoeberger's observation that "New variations of hypothetical universalism, among which are located the multiple-intention view defended in this volume, are again making advances in the evangelical church."[42] It is beyond the scope of this article to give an exhaustive evaluation of the multiple intentions view.[43] However, the MIV does represent a position closer to particularism than the traditional four-point Calvinism of the twentieth century, because it does see the cross accomplishing something more for the elect than for the non-elect. Nevertheless, it falls short of thoroughgoing particularism by broadening the scope of Christ's death to include all without exception. Given this, it is fitting to ask whether this recent mediating view between particular and universal atonement maintains the Trinitarian unity which the previous portion of this article has demonstrated to be biblically indispensable. The remainder of this article, then, will evaluate the merits of the MIV as it relates to Trinitarian unity. Does this species of non-particularism avoid the Trinitarian difficulties of more traditional forms of universal atonement? The following analysis contends that it does not.

The MIV and Trinitarian Unity

Proponents of the MIV are not insensitive to the need for the Father, Son, and Spirit to be perfectly united in their saving work. Shultz recognizes that traditional non-particularist positions are vulnerable to this critique, saying, "If the Son provided salvation for all, but the Father only intended to save some, then this introduces disjunction into the Godhead, as this implies that the Father and the Son have different salvific goals. Most Moderate Calvinists, who hold together unconditional election and unlimited atonement, are open to this charge."[44] He explains,

> The multi-intentioned view avoids this charge by asserting that God the Father had multiple intentions for the atonement. The atonement not only accomplishes his elective purposes, but his purposes for the creation and the nonelect as well. The Holy Spirit then works among the nonelect and the elect on the basis of the atonement, fulfilling the Father and the Son's intentions. Each person of the Trinity has general and particular intentions for creation. The unity of the Trinity is therefore upheld by the multi-intentioned view. Unconditional election has to do with God's particular purposes, which are accomplished in the atonement,

[41] John S. Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions View of the Atonement," in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Mark A. Snoeberger (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 143–94.

[42] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement*, 16.

[43] For such an evaluation, see Michael Riccardi, "'To Save Sinners': A Critical Evaluation of the Multiple Intentions View of the Atonement" (PhD diss., The Master's Seminary, 2021).

[44] Shultz, *A Multi-Intentioned View*, 125. In his dissertation, he calls these moderate Calvinists "four-point Calvinists" (idem., "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 229n12). Shultz is correct that the moderate Calvinist or four-point Calvinist position is vulnerable to the charge of Trinitarian disunity, as are Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, Amyraldianism, and even British Hypothetical Universalism (see Jonathan Gibson, "The Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work of God in Christ," 367–71; Letham, "The Triune God, Incarnation, and Definite Atonement," 442–43).

> but these particular purposes do not rule out his general purposes, which are also accomplished in the atonement.[45]

In other words, proponents of the MIV would aim to affirm much, if not all, of what is presented above: the Father chooses some and not all, the Spirit regenerates some and not all, and therefore it is consistent that the Son secures the salvation of some and not all.[46] However, they would say that this relates only to God's *particular* intentions for the cross. There are also general intentions for the cross shared by all three persons of the Trinity. The claim is that the Father intends the atonement not only to secure the salvation of the elect but also to purchase common grace, which the Father then dispenses upon all without exception as a result of the atonement.[47] Further, it is claimed that the Spirit exercises a ministry of universal conviction as part of the universal gospel call (cf. John 16:7–11), and, since the Spirit's ministry is contingent upon Christ's ascension to the Father (John 16:7), and since His ascension is contingent upon His resurrection, and since His resurrection is contingent upon His death, therefore the universal convicting ministry of the Spirit is purchased by the atonement.[48] Thus, according to Shultz, the Son's atoning work is not broader than the Father's or the Spirit's work; it is simply that the Father and the Spirit also have universal non-saving intentions tied to the atonement, and therefore the Son may die for all without Trinitarian discord.[49]

Despite these claims, however, the MIV does not in fact legitimately escape the censure of Trinitarian disunity.

An Internal Inconsistency

In the first place, while positing both particular and universal aspects to the Father's and Spirit's work would theoretically cohere with an atonement that accomplishes one set of benefits for all without exception and another set of benefits for the elect alone, the proponents of the MIV do not consistently present the atonement in this way. The strength of the MIV in distinction to the so-called "Moderate Calvinist" view that Shultz rejects is that the MIV (at least at times) conceives of the atonement as Christ accomplishing something different for the elect

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[45] Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 230n12; cf. 12. A similar model is presented in Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (n.p.: Good Books, 2003), 371; D. Broughton Knox, "Some Aspects of the Atonement," in *The Doctrine of God*, in *D. Broughton Knox: Selected Works*, ed. Tony Payne (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2000), 1:262, 265; Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 130. Douty calls it "a single transaction with a double intention." Norman F. Douty, *A Treatise on the Extent of Christ's Atonement* (1978; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 60.

[46] One might have simply said, "the Son atones for some and not all," but the MIV sees a disjunction between the concepts of "atonement" and "securing salvation." Unlike particularism, the MIV claims that these are not the same, and that the latter does not necessarily follow from the former. That is, the Son atones for some whose salvation is not secured. See Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 130n26.

[47] E.g., Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 183–95.

[48] E.g., Shultz, 172–74

[49] Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions View," 166.

than for the reprobate.[50] There are two accomplishments: "Christ procured the offer and provision of salvation for all people on the cross, *and* he also procured the definite application of salvation for the elect on the cross."[51] It is not, as the "four-point Calvinist" claims, that the atonement is a universal provision of salvation made on behalf of all men alike, which is only subjectively applied to the elect through faith. Such a view is "unable to account for any particularity in the atonement because it understands the atonement to be a general payment for all sin that only provides salvation for all, and asserts that the particular saving acts of God are then found in the Father's election and the Spirit's saving work."[52] Such a view is thus vulnerable to charges of Trinitarian disunity, because it exports particularity from the Son's work of atonement to the Spirit's work of regeneration.[53]

However, at other times, both Shultz and Hammett present the atonement in precisely this way—conceiving of it as a single provision for all alike, which only later is subjectively applied (or made efficacious) to the elect.[54] Commenting on 1 John 2:2, Shultz says, "It is also important to note that Christ is the propitiation for 'our sins' (believers) *in the same way* that he is the propitiation for 'the sins of the whole world' (unbelievers)."[55] According to the "two accomplishments" model of

[50] This is a strength only in a relative sense, namely, in that it could be seen to evade the charge of Trinitarian disunity. However, a double accomplishment is not without its own problems. First, Scripture never speaks of God's universal *intention* for the atonement which purchases for the reprobate blessings short of salvation, but only of a divine intention for the atonement to bring to salvation those for whom it is accomplished. There is a not a universal economy of salvation that runs parallel to a particular economy, but a single economy of salvation in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10; 3:9) (see Riccardi, "To Save Sinners," 107–37). Second, some have aptly argued that the doctrine of a double-accomplishment—present in British Hypothetical Universalism as well as the MIV—"presents a confused Christ" with a "split personality," resolving to die to make men savable, some of whom (i.e., those who never hear the gospel) He sovereignly determines never to reveal the means by which they might be saved (Gibson, "The Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work of God in Christ," 369). Turretin represents the confused Christ this way: "I desire that to come to pass which I not only know will not and cannot take place, but also what I am unwilling should take place because I refuse to communicate that without which it can never be brought to pass as it depends upon myself alone" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:467). Turretin also disputes the coherence of how Christ can die for the elect in one sense and die for the reprobate in another in a single act of dying (ibid., 2:460). The double accomplishment model does not pass biblical and theological muster.

[51] Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 176. Hammett agrees: ". . . another intention of God in sending Christ [i.e., in addition to providing salvation for all] and another intention of Christ in dying was actually to secure the salvation of some" ("Multiple-Intentions View," 169–70). There are two distinct accomplishments here: one for all without exception and one for the elect alone.

[52] Shultz, *A Multi-Intentioned View*, 125–26.

[53] Shultz, 125.

[54] Shultz says, "Jesus Christ, in fulfilling the Father's intentions for his atonement, accomplished several objective realities that only the elect subjectively experience. . . . While God intended for these objective realities [i.e., penal substitution, propitiation, etc.] to accomplish his general purposes in the atonement, he also intended for them to be subjectively applied to the elect, and only for the elect, in order to accomplish his particular purpose in the atonement. In order to fulfill this purpose, Jesus, on the basis of his atonement, sent the Holy Spirit to apply salvation to the elect" ("A Biblical and Theological Defense," 250–51). On this scheme, propitiation is accomplished provisionally for all, and that universal provision is applied and made particular only by the Spirit's ministry, not by anything particularizing in the atonement itself. Hammett says, ". . . in addition to making a universal objective provision for the salvation of all, God works subjectively in the hearts of some to apply that provision to them, making that provision efficacious for them" ("Multiple-Intentions View," 162n50; cf. 154). This is not an efficacious accomplishment of non-saving benefits for the reprobate, but a universal provision for elect and reprobate alike which is only made efficacious for the elect by the Holy Spirit.

[55] Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 116n59, emphasis added.

the atonement unique to the MIV, Shultz should have said here that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of believers in such a way that He secures their salvation, but that He is the propitiation for the sins of unbelievers such that He makes their salvation possible. Yet at this portion of his work, he believes the exegesis of 1 John 2 does not allow for that interpretation which he later accepts. Similarly, he says, "Just as he did in 4:14, John [in 1 John 2:2] stresses that Christ's saving work encompasses the sins of all people so that the heretics in the community would know that their sins were forgivable on the basis of the atonement."[56] Yet if propitiation makes the reprobates' sin forgivable, and Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the elect and reprobate "in the same way," then (a) the atonement is a singular provision that is later applied, not two accomplishments, and (b) the elect's salvation is not secured by the atonement; their sins are only made forgivable, which forgiveness is applied and particularized by the Spirit.[57] This is the very exportation of particularity from atonement to application that Shultz (rightly) claimed was open to the charge of Trinitarian disunity. Indeed, Shultz is elsewhere constrained by the inconsistency of his position to admit the very thing he previously denied: "The Son secured the salvation of the elect *by* sending forth the Holy Spirit to apply the salvific benefits of the atonement only to the elect,"[58] and, "*The way* that Christ secured the salvation of the elect was by sending the Spirit to only apply salvation to the elect."[59] If the Spirit's application of redemption is the *way* and *means* by which the Son secures the

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[56] Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 116–17.

[57] As another illustration of this, Shultz (156n196) approvingly cites Demarest who says, "In terms of the Atonement's provision Christ died not merely for the elect but for all sinners in all times and places. Christ drank the cup of suffering for the sins of the entire world. He died as a substitute, a propitiation, a ransom, etc. for the universe of sinners. The non-elect had their sins paid for on the cross, even though through unbelief they do not personally appropriate the benefits of his work. Christ, in other words, provided salvation for more people than those to whom he purposed to apply its saving benefits." Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 191. He then cites Ware, who says, ". . . we cannot speak correctly of Christ's death as actually and certainly *saving* the elect. No, even here, the payment made by his death on behalf of the elect renders their salvation *possible*" (Ware, "Extent of the Atonement," 5). These are clear affirmations of the same universal payment provided (note, not accomplished) for all, later particularized in the Spirit's application. Just a few pages later, however, Shultz says, "God also accomplishes the certain salvation of the elect through Christ's payment for the sins of all people" ("A Biblical and Theological Defense," 159). This seems to revert to the "two accomplishments" model. If God accomplishes the certain salvation of the elect via Christ's payment, why does Ware say we cannot speak of Christ's death as certainly saving the elect?

This internal inconsistency makes it difficult to critique the MIV, for when a criticism is legitimately brought against the former model of atonement, they insist on their adherence to the latter, and vice versa. This incoherence ultimately stems from attempting to hold two mutually exclusive positions (particularism and universalism) together.

[58] Shultz, *A Multi-Intentioned View*, 152, emphasis added.

[59] Shultz, 154, emphasis added. This notion is reinforced by multiple references to the "saving works of the Holy Spirit" (e.g., ibid., 144, 148) and statements that "the Spirit saves" (ibid, 151). Hammett says the "objective accomplishment" of the cross merely "removes obstacles to fellowship with God"—which does not secure salvation for anyone—while the "subjective application" is what actually effects that fellowship. The particular intention is achieved only by the Spirit's power to cause one to have faith in the gospel, such that the Spirit's application and Christ's accomplishment are "two aspects of the one work of atonement" (Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions View," 174). Thus, the particularity of Christ's work is nothing more than laying the groundwork for the eventually-particular, saving work of the Spirit. Despite hoping to avoid evacuating particularity from the Son's work, the MIV does just that, and therefore cannot maintain Trinitarian unity.

salvation of the elect, then the cross cannot be that way and means. Christ is reduced to the very "Possibility-Maker" which Hammett explicitly denies Him to be.[60]

Thus, though the MIV claims to uphold the notion that the Father, Son, and Spirit each have universal and particular intentions in their saving work, their own argumentation leaves no place for particularity in the Son's work. The atonement only lays the groundwork for the truly-particular saving work of the Spirit. When pressed for consistency, the MIV views the cross as *substantially* universal but only merely *formally* (and thus not really) particular. This leaves us precisely where the other species of hypothetical universalism fail: with a particular election, a particular regeneration, and yet a universal atonement. When its argumentation is tested, the MIV does not deliver on its promise of a genuinely particular intention in the Son's cross-work which corresponds to the Father's and the Spirit's particular intentions. Trinitarian unity is thus undermined.

Purchase versus Result

However, if one were to overlook this inconsistency and assume for the sake of argument that the MIV uniformly conceives of the atonement as two accomplishments—one particular and one universal—even in this case, the MIV's claim of Trinitarian unity fails. The truth of this claim depends on (a) the Father and the Spirit working in all people without exception, not merely the elect alone; and on (b) the notion that such work is purchased by Christ's universal payment for all sins. In other words, it is not the mere existence of common grace or the existence of the Spirit's work in the hearts of the reprobate that would prove the MIV's case; particularism grants that God is good to all without exception (e.g., Ps 145:9; Matt 5:44–45) and that the Spirit restrains evil even in those who will finally perish in their sins (cf. 2 Thess 2:6–7). Rather, for the MIV's claim of Trinitarian unity to obtain, the atonement must *purchase* both the Father's common grace to mankind and the Spirit's ministry to the non-elect.

Yet the MIV never successfully demonstrates this to be the teaching of Scripture. It is simply not the case that everything the Father and Spirit accomplish in the world, short of salvation, must be purchased by the atonement. Christ does not have to pay for the sins of all people without exception for the Father to be merciful to His enemies or for the Spirit to restrain wickedness in them.[61] There may be benefits that indirectly accrue to the reprobate as a result of the atonement made solely for the elect,[62] but the results of the atonement must not be conflated with the atonement

[60] Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions View," 171.

[61] Indeed, if the atonement is the highest display of God's mercy and goodness to sinners (which mercy is the cause of the atonement), and if God is not free to be merciful to sinners apart from purchasing these blessings by atonement, the atonement would be thus conceived as the cause of itself, a logical impossibility. But the love and kindness of God is a *cause* of the atonement (John 3:16; Titus 3:4), not its consequence.

[62] MacArthur and Mayhue give an example of this: "If God had not intended to save sinners through Christ's atonement, it is likely that he would have immediately visited justice on sinful man as he did the fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4). Yet because God intended to save his people through Christ in the fullness of time, even those whom he will not ultimately save will have enjoyed the benefits of common grace, divine

itself.[63] Particularism makes a very clear conceptual distinction between (a) the direct and proper *purchases* or *purposes* of the atonement, on the one hand, and (b) the indirect and consequential *results* of what the atonement did purchase, on the other. The atonement may be said to "give occasion for"[64] or "indirectly produce"[65] common grace blessings. But this does not mean that the atonement *purchases* the blessings of common grace as the proper and direct fruit of its nature as an *atonement*, or that the atonement was *intended* for all without exception on this basis. Christ does not need to pay for the sins of all people without exception in order for God to be kind to all people without exception.

This distinction between proper purpose and indirect result is observable in the way Scripture speaks about the design of the death of Christ. In John 3:17, Jesus says, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world [οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα κρίνῃ τὸν κόσμον], but that the world might be saved through Him."[66] Based on this verse, it may be safely concluded that the Father did not design the Son's saving mission, nor did the Son come into the world on His saving mission (which finds its climax in the atonement) for the purpose of judgment and the destruction of sinners' lives (cf. Luke 9:56). However, Jesus' comment in John 9:39 would seem almost contradictory to His words in John 3:17. Jesus says there, "For judgment I came into this world [εἰς κρίμα ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν κόσμον τοῦτον ἦλθον], so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." In John 3:17, He says He was not sent for judgment (οὐ . . . ἵνα κρίνῃ), while in John 9:39, He says He did come into the world for judgment (εἰς κρίμα). Unless one is ready to admit a contradiction in Scripture, one must admit a sense in which Christ did come for judgment and a sense in which He did not come for judgment. The direct and proper *purpose* of the coming of Christ into the world was salvific; it was "that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17).[67] However, when Christ is rejected in unbelief, judgment is the necessary *result* (cf. John 3:18). As the true Light which comes into the world, Christ enlightens every man (John 1:9); that is, the Light of truth "shines on all, and forces a distinction"[68] between those who love darkness, hate the light, and flee lest their deeds be exposed (John 3:19–20), and

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forbearance, and a temporary reprieve from divine judgment" (*Biblical Doctrine*, 544). This is not to say that the cross *purchased* these benefits; rather, it is to say that a particular redemption may have universal effects or results without requiring that it be a universal redemption.

[63] Cunningham captures it well when he writes, "[I]t is not denied by the advocates of particular redemption . . . that mankind in general, even those who ultimately perish, do derive some advantages or benefits from Christ's death; and no position they hold requires them to deny this. They believe that important benefits have accrued to the whole human race from the death of Christ, and that in these benefits whose who are finally impenitent and unbelieving partake. What they deny is, that Christ intended to procure, or did procure, for all men those blessings which are proper and peculiar fruits of His death, in its specific character as an atonement [e.g., redemption, reconciliation, etc.] . . . for all men." William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age, Volume 2* (1862; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 332–33.

[64] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:459.

[65] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:467.

[66] A related comment from Jesus in Luke 9:56 confirms the same thought: "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives [οὐκ ἦλθεν ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων ἀπολέσαι], but to save them."

[67] As He repeats in John 12:47, "For I did not come to judge the world [οὐ γὰρ ἦλθον ἵνα κρίνω τὸν κόσμον], but to save the world [ἀλλ᾽ ἵνα σώσω τὸν κόσμον]."

[68] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 124.

those who love the light, practice the truth, and come into the light that their deeds may be manifest as having been wrought in God (John 3:21). Thus, as Laney concludes, "the purpose of Christ's coming was redemptive. Yet, when His saving work is rejected, judgment results. Even though judgment results from unbelief, condemnatory judgment was not the purpose of the incarnation."[69] A distinction emerges, then, between purpose and result. Judgment and condemnation *result* from the incarnation and the cross, but it would be misguided to conclude that such condemnation is a proper purpose or intention for the atonement.[70] So also, common grace *results* from the incarnation and the cross, but it would be misguided to conclude that such blessings are a properly purposed purchase of the atonement.[71]

Shultz aims to defend the notion that whatever the Spirit does in the world is a direct, purchased benefit of the atonement by observing that the coming of the Spirit is a consequence of Christ's ascension, which is a consequence of His resurrection, which is a consequence of His death. On this basis, it is argued, His death must be universal.[72] Yet we might with the same consistency observe that Christ's death is a consequence of His obedient life, and His obedient life is a consequence of His incarnation. However, it would not be legitimate on this basis to conclude that the ministry of the Spirit was purchased by Christ's incarnation, or by His obedient life of righteousness, or even by His resurrection and ascension, which is a more immediate prerequisite of the Spirit's coming than the atonement is. The Spirit's ministry is as much a result of those other aspects of Christ's work as it is a result of the atonement, and yet, to take the incarnation as an example, Scripture explicitly declares the incarnation to have been designed with exclusively *salvific* intentions (John 3:17; 12:46; 1 Tim 1:15; Heb 10:5–10; 1 John 3:5; 4:9).[73] The Son partook of flesh and blood because the *children* (Heb 2:14) whom the Father had given Him

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[69] J. Carl Laney, *John*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 82.

[70] Interestingly, Hammett, though himself a proponent of the MIV, grants this distinction between proper purpose and indirect result on precisely these same textual grounds. He says that such judgment "seems more like [a] resul[t] or outcom[e] of the . . . atonement rather than [a] separate and additional purpos[e] or intentio[n] of the atonement. . . . Judgment and condemnation come upon those who reject Christ, but God's purpose in sending Christ was not for him to be rejected" ("Multiple-Intentions View," 190).

[71] An illustration from daily life may serve to elucidate this point. Scripture indicates that marriage is an illustration of Christ's relationship to the church; He is the bridegroom and she is His bride (cf. Eph 5:22–33; Rev 19:7–9). In the case of an earthly wedding, the proper and direct purpose of the wedding is for the bride and groom to be joined together in the covenant of marriage. Nevertheless, there are seemingly innumerable other details that come to pass as indirect results or benefits of the ceremony. One example is that the bridesmaids usually purchase dresses for the ceremony which, oftentimes, they keep for themselves after the wedding has ended. This is certainly a benefit which results from the marriage of the bride and groom; without the wedding, each bridesmaid would not have gotten a new dress. And such a benefit is certainly *designed*; the bride often expends significant effort with her bridesmaids in picking out dresses that each woman likes, that match the color scheme of the wedding, and that match the style of each other's dresses. But it would not be accurate to say that a *purpose* of the wedding is that the bridesmaids receive new dresses. Nor even would it be proper to say that the marriage was the *primary* purpose of the wedding ceremony while the bridesmaids receiving their dresses was a *secondary* purpose. No, the direct and proper purpose of the wedding is that the bride and groom be married to one another, even if there are spillover benefits—even *designed* spillover benefits—that are enjoyed as indirect results of the wedding. Such is the case with the atonement and the benefits of common grace. While various blessings for all mankind naturally and necessarily *result* from the death of Christ, those common grace blessings are not a *purpose* or *intention* of the atonement.

[72] For examples of this, see Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 100, 172–74, 218–19.

[73] See Riccardi, "To Save Sinners," 107–37.

(Heb 2:13; cf. John 17:9) were of flesh and blood; He gives help to the seed of Abraham, the believer (cf. Gal 3:9), not to the entire posterity of Adam (Heb 2:16), and *therefore* He had to be made like His *brethren* in all things, in order to make propitiation for the sins of His people (Heb 2:17). Thus, the MIV fails to provide conclusive biblical or theological evidence that the common grace of the Father or the Spirit's work among the reprobate are purchased by the cross.

The Spirit's Conviction Not Universal

Further, Shultz's basis for arguing for universality in the Spirit's work is that John 16:7–11 teaches the Spirit convicts "the world" of sin, righteousness and judgment, which Shultz believes refers, at least in part, to those who finally perish in their sins.[74] Yet if this claim is shown to be false, Shultz has no basis for arguing for a universal scope to the Spirit's ministry, and the MIV's case for Trinitarian unity fails.

A brief survey of the text shows just that. In order to make the case that "the world" refers at least in part to the reprobate, Shultz argues that the "conviction" of this text does not necessarily lead to conversion. In some cases, the term ἐλέγχω denotes a conviction that is not necessarily effectual unto salvation (e.g., Jude 1:15; cf. Jude 1:12–13, 18). However, in other instances, such as in the case of the unbeliever entering the worship gathering in 1 Corinthians 14:24–25, such a one is "convicted by all," called to account for his sin, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, such that he finally "fall[s] on his face and worship[s] God," which is indicative of conversion.[75] Thus, lexical considerations alone cannot determine whether the Spirit's conviction of John 16:7–11 is effectual unto salvation or not.

However, a key consideration suggests that this conviction is indeed effectual unto salvation. Jesus notes that this convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit is for the disciples' advantage (John 16:7). What advantage to the disciples would be accomplished by the Holy Spirit's conviction of the world? Given that Jesus is preparing the disciples for their persecution at the hands of unbelievers (John 15:18–16:2; cf. 16:32–33), it seems best to see this "advantage" as a reference to the encouragement they would enjoy when the very ones persecuting them would become their brothers in Christ by repenting and trusting in Him.[76] An example of this comes in Acts 2:36–38, where Peter's Pentecost sermon indicts the Jews for crucifying the One whom "God has made ... both Lord and Christ" (2:36). The Spirit's work of conviction is seen in their being "pierced to the heart" and crying out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" that is, to be saved (2:37; cf. Acts 16:30). Another example is the conversion of Saul, who, when he was converted, was the cause of

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[74] Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 171–74; idem., "Why a Genuine Universal Gospel Call Requires an Atonement That Paid for the Sins of All People," *EQ* 82, no. 2 (2010): 118–20. Shultz often conflates the category of unbelievers with the reprobate (see idem., *A Multi-Intentioned View*, 93; idem., "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 168). But there is such a thing as elect unbelievers, those chosen by God to receive salvation who have not yet come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Each one of the elect were at one point part of the unbelieving "world." Shultz does not need to prove the Spirit's work amongst *unbelievers*, but amongst the *reprobate*.

[75] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 687.

[76] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 619; cf. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols., in ICC, ed. A. H. McNeile (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1929).

joyful astonishment: "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" (Acts 9:21). As a result of the Spirit's ministry of conviction, the disciples were not only spared of the particular persecutions that would have come to them at Saul's hand; they were also mightily encouraged to continue in the work of gospel ministry even amidst other opposition, because the Lord was turning their enemies into their brothers.[77]

However, the disciples would have known none of these advantages if the Spirit's convicting ministry in the world did not result in the eventual conversion of those convicted. If the Spirit convinced unbelievers that they were in sin for refusing to believe in Jesus (John 16:9), that He was indeed righteous as evidenced by His resurrection (John 16:10), and therefore that their judgment of Him was satanically unrighteous (John 16:11), but such conviction was not effectual unto repentance and faith and was only temporary, one struggles to discern why those very unbelievers would not return to their former course of unrighteousness and continue to persecute Jesus' followers. It is difficult to see what *advantage* that convicting ministry would be to the disciples. Thus, it seems best to understand this conviction as that which would eventually result in the salvation of its objects, and thus it is best to understand the "world" whom the Spirit will convict as those elect persons not yet brought to faith, the sheep Jesus presently "has" but has not yet brought into the fold (John 10:16; 17:20), but who will not fail to be saved by the Good Shepherd (John 10:27–29; cf. John 6:39). Contrary to Shultz's claims, then, John 16:7–11 does not teach that the Spirit ineffectually convicts the reprobate, but effectually brings the unbelieving elect to repentance and faith in Christ.

Besides this, even if it were granted that the Spirit's ministry of conviction extended to sinners who finally perish in their sins, this would still not meet the burden of proof required to demonstrate that the Spirit's convicting ministry of "the world" in John 16:7–11 was an absolutely universal conviction. If there is to be a universal intention of Christ's atonement proven by a supposedly universal convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, the MIV must prove that the Spirit exercises this ministry in all persons throughout history without exception. But it is granted by all sides that, in God's providential control of history, the Holy Spirit has not brought the gospel (which Shultz declares to be the means of this conviction[78]) to the vast majority of persons who have lived, much less to all without exception. If the Spirit's conviction comes by means of the preaching of the gospel, and if the gospel has not been preached to all without exception, the Spirit's ministry of conviction cannot be universal. Gibson is correct when he concludes, "The unevangelized remain a problem for proponents of a universal atonement. In this regard, the Spirit underperforms and in so doing brings disharmony into the Trinity."[79] Therefore, a universal intention in the atonement is not supported by the Spirit's convicting ministry.

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[77] D. A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7–11," *JBL* 98 (1979): 564.

[78] "The Holy Spirit only convicts people through special revelation, or the gospel." Shultz, "A Biblical and Theological Defense," 181.

[79] Jonathan Gibson, "The Glorious, Indivisible, Triune Work of God in Christ," 369.

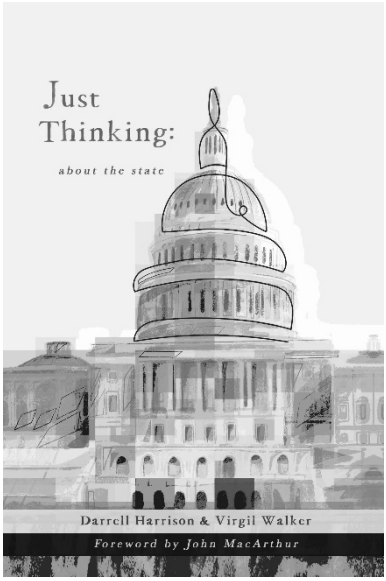
Thus, even on the supposition of a twofold accomplishment, a position not without its own problems,[80] the MIV is unable to account for a universal aspect of the Spirit's work on the basis of the atonement, and thus fails to coherently safeguard Trinitarian unity in the atonement. If there were no other reason to reject the MIV, one finds sufficient ground here, for it cannot cohere with the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is the fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, and that therefore every genuinely biblical doctrine must cohere consistently with it. It has also argued that the unity of the Trinity necessarily entails a particular redemption. By virtue of their own unity of essence, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly united in their saving will and work. Christ has been sent by the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit to save no more and no fewer people than the Father chooses and the Spirit regenerates. The Father has elected some, and not all; the Spirit regenerates some, and not all. To suggest that Christ has atoned for all, and not some, is to put the Persons of the Trinity at odds with one another—to say that the will of the Son is not the will of the Father and the Spirit. This not only threatens the consubstantiality of the Persons of the Trinity, but it contradicts Christ's explicit statements that He had undertaken His saving mission precisely to do the will of His Father. As the Father has given to the Son a particular people out of the world, it is for these—who Scripture calls His sheep, His own, the church, the many—that Christ lays down His life. Unity in the Trinity demands particular redemption.

After showing this argumentation to be biblical, this article then presented a test case in the multiple intentions view of the atonement, a recently-developed species of non-particularism somewhat akin to forms of 17th-century hypothetical universalism. Given that the MIV claims to hold to the notion that Christ died for the elect in a way that He did not die for the reprobate, it seems to be the variation of non-particularism that is closest to particularism. It also claims to evade the charge of Trinitarian disunity by positing both particular and universal intentions in the atonement for all three persons of the Trinity. However, it was demonstrated that, when pressed for consistency, the MIV fails to consistently maintain a genuinely particular intention in the Son's work of atonement, and it fails to substantiate a genuinely universal intention in the Spirit's work of conviction. Despite its claims, this leaves the persons of the Trinity at odds with one another in the very way Scripture prohibits. This worked example vindicates the thesis that only particular redemption consistently coheres with the orthodox doctrine of Trinitarian unity, and it stands as a compelling reason to reject all variations of universal atonement.

[80] See footnote 50.



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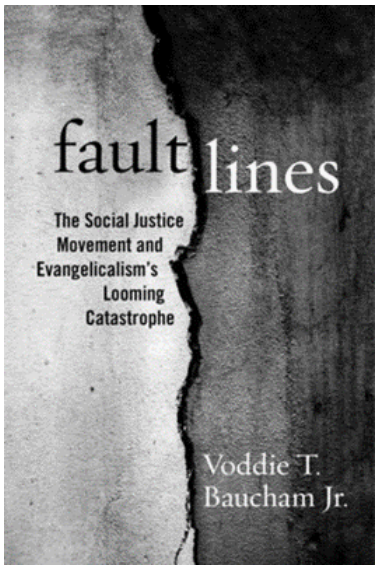

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WHAT IS ETERNAL GENERATION?

An Excerpt from *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit*[1]

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This contribution by Matthew Barrett is an excerpt from his book Simply Trinity. In this piece Barrett helps present the doctrine of Eternal Generation and its importance to a proper doctrine of the Trinity. Following this excerpt, we have an original interview between the TMSJ managing editor Peter Sammons and Matthew Barrett on some of the most pointed questions facing Christian education concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.

* * * * *

One of the most essential doctrines for a Christian understanding of the Trinity is eternal generation. When the equality of the Son with the Father was thrown into question in the fourth century, the church fathers turned to the doctrine of eternal generation not only to distinguish the Son from the Father, but to ensure the Son is equal with the Father. For this reason, it became a cornerstone of the Nicene Creed, that standard bearer of Christian orthodoxy. But over the last several decades, evangelicals have acquired a bad reputation for rejecting this same doctrine. Even when evangelicals have affirmed it, they do not appear to understand why. Could it be that we do not really grasp what eternal generation is in the first place?

I want to invite you on an adventure, an adventure into the mystery of this indispensable Christian doctrine. But instead of exploring eternal generation's biblical warrant—see my book *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* for that exciting journey—we will take the road less travelled and press into this doctrine's theological reasoning.

The word "generation" means "coming forth," and with reference to the Trinity, it refers to the Son coming forth from the Father's essence. The concept takes us to the very heart of what it means for the Son to be a Son. He is eternally from the

[1] Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021).

Father, which is why he is called Son. To be more specific, from all eternity, the Father communicates the one, simple, undivided divine essence to the Son.

At the risk of stating the obvious, a son is, by definition, one who is generated by his father, one who has his origin from his father. While we will point out dissimilarities between human and divine sonship soon enough, we cannot miss the one fundamental similarity: sonship means one is generated by a father. When the concept is applied to the Son of God—as it so often is by the authors of Scripture—it means in its most basic sense that he, as the eternal Son, is from his Father.

To clarify, to be from the Father does not refer to the incarnation, to Christ as Mediator; being sent by the Father to save may reflect eternal generation, but in no way constitutes eternal generation. Instead, to be from the Father refers to the Son's origin in eternity, apart from creation. Generation is between Father and Son, an eternal act, and not between the Trinity and creation, as if it were a temporal act. As we will learn, generation is internal to the triune God, ad intra as we like to say in Latin, as opposed to external, ad extra. The Father sending his Son into the world on mission for the world reflects his eternal origin from the Father (generation), but that mission in no way constitutes his eternal relation of origin. The Son is generated (begotten) by the Father before all ages apart from the world, irrespective of creation. He is Son whether or not he is ever sent into the world; he is the eternal Son from the Father whether or not he ever becomes incarnate. It is the immanent Trinity that is in view, not the economic.

There is another term that conveys the concept of generation: begotten. Perhaps you've heard the word used when reading those long genealogies in the Bible: so-and-so begat so-and-so begat so-and-so. But John applies this language to Jesus as well, referring to him as the only begotten Son of God (e.g., John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). This begotten language, however, long predates the King James Bible. Way back in the fourth century, the church fathers who wrote the Nicene Creed used it as well. For example, the Nicene Creed says, "We believe in ... one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time."

Since this is the one, undivided God we are talking about, for the Son to be begotten from the Father means that God is begotten from God, which is why the creed confesses the Son to be "true God from true God." To confess the Son as true God from true God is not an overstatement since he is, we dare not forget, consubstantial with the Father. Consubstantial means the Son is equal to the Father in every way, from the same essence or substance as the Father, no less divine than the Father. But we can only affirm such coequality if the Son is begotten from the Father's essence. For if the Son is not begotten from the Father, the divine essence cannot subsist (exist) in the Son.

Furthermore, generation alone is what distinguishes the Son as Son. There is not some other concept or function or activity in the Trinity that distinguishes the person of the Son from the Father. Generation alone can, for it alone conveys the nucleus of sonship. That is no small point, because without generation, not only is there no Son, but there is no Trinity. As the Baptist Calvinist John Gill warns, "Without his eternal generation no proof can be made of his being a distinct divine Person in the Godhead."[2] Without generation, we fall head first into Sabellianism, for what

[2] John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Pracical Divinity* (Atlanta: Turner Lassetter, 1957), 144.

previously distinguished Son from Father is dissolved, and as a result, the persons are conflated until there is no plurality of persons at all.

With the basic idea of generation in place, we must qualify Sonship in the Trinity lest we interpret it in a literalistic fashion, with a one-to-one correspondence to creaturely sonship. There are significant differences between a divine generation and a human one. Understanding these differences—what eternal generation is not—aids us in better understanding what eternal generation is. It also avoids legions of heresies. Let's begin with this question: when is the Son generated by the Father?

When Is the Son Generated?

That's a trick question if there ever were one. There is no "when." Why? The short answer: our triune God is eternal. He is not bound by time but is timeless; he has no beginning. A succession of moments cannot apply to him. He just is. That means the following question is most relevant:

Q: If God is timelessly eternal, what does that mean for the Son and his generation from the Father?
A: Unlike human generation, the Son's generation is eternal. There never was a time when the Son was not, nor ever a time when the Son was not from the Father.

Or, as fathers like Gregory of Nyssa like to say, there is no "sometime" for the Son because he was not generated in time. "He exists by generation indeed, but nevertheless He never begins to exist."[3]

It's not as if God the Son did not exist but then came into existence at a point in time, created by the Father and therefore after the Father. That may describe how generation works in our human existence, but it cannot depict the Son's generation. He is, says Nicaea, "begotten not created." He is, we cannot forget, the eternal Son from the Father. If the divine essence subsists in him, then he too shares in the attributes of deity, eternity being one of them. He is no creature, and if not a creature, then his generation cannot be temporal. The generation of the Son, said Gregory of Nyssa, "does not fall within time, any more than the creation was before time."[4]

If the Son's generation did fall within time, then not only is there a time when the Son was not, but there is a time when the Father was not Father. And if there was a time when the Father was not, then there was a time when the Trinity was not. As Athanasius points out, "If the Son is not proper offspring of the Father's essence, but of nothing has come to be, then of nothing the Triad consists, and once there was not a Triad, but a Monad."[5]

Furthermore, if he is Son because he is from the Father, then his sonship must be as eternal as the Father himself, at least if he is begotten from the same essence as

[3] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 5:94 (1.39).

[4] Ibid., 5:71 (1.26).

[5] Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 4:316 (1.6.17).

the Father. That is why the Nicene Creed stresses that the Son is "begotten from the Father before all time ... begotten not created ... through Whom all things came into being." The generation within God is unlike any other; it is not susceptible to the limitations of time. The Son's filial identity has no duration or succession of moments; it is timeless. Everlasting in nature, there never was a time when the Son was not begotten from the Father.

That may sound like a contradiction—how can someone be generated and eternal? It only sounds like a contradiction because we only know generation within the experience of our own finitude. For the infinite, timelessly eternal deity, the confines of our finitude do not apply. Let's not forget that whatever words are used of God—even scriptural words and metaphors—this is God we have in view, infinite and eternal, immutable and everlasting. Language is, by definition, analogical in every way. The metaphor must then be adapted to the incomprehensible One, not vice versa. So too with generation. As Augustine says, since the generation of the Son is eternal, "one exists not as before the other, but as from the other."[6] The Son is not generated after the Father, which would make him less than the Father, but the Son is generated from the Father and from all eternity.

One more thing: Scripture refers to the Son's eternal origin from the Father with a variety of metaphors, including Radiance, Image, Wisdom, Word, and Ancient of Days, each of which I treat at length in *Simply Trinity*. But one we can consider here is truth. As Jesus himself says, he is the truth (John 14:6). Was there ever a time when God the Father was without his Truth? The Arians of the fourth century said yes. With a look of terror on his face, the church father Athanasius ponders this bizarre scenario: "For if the Son was not before His generation, Truth was not always in God." It is a sin to say such a thing, Athanasius concludes. That sin multiplies if we also say there was a time when the Image was not, for "God's Image is not delineated from without, but God Himself hath begotten it; in which seeing Himself, He has delight. ... When then did the Father not see Himself in His own Image?"[7]

Answer: never. The Father always and forever has seen himself in his own image. So yes, the Son is the image of the Father, but unlike images in our finite world, there has never been a time when the Son was not the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).

**This excerpt is from *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Baker, 2021) and has only scratched the surface of the mysterious but essential doctrine called eternal generation. In the book, Matthew Barrett turns next to answer another difficult question, How is the Son generated from the Father? Read *Simply Trinity* to discover the nine marks of an unhealthy generation and why divine simplicity is central to eternal generation.

* * * * *

[6] Augustine, *Contra Maximinum* 2.14; cf. Aquinas, *Summa* 1a.42.3, emphasis added.
[7] Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 4:318 (1.6.20).

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW BARRETT

Why has orthodox trinitarianism become so neglected in modern evangelicalism?

The reasons are many, but I will focus on one. The evangelical outlook on the history of Christian thought is far too narrow. For good reasons, evangelicals connect their identity to the Protestant Reformation. However, evangelicals assume what preceded the Reformation was dispensable, as if the Reformation departed from its preceding patristic and medieval heritage. However, such a restrictive and condemning outlook on the first millennia and a half was not one the reformers themselves embodied. That outlook better suits those radicals who said church history was all dark ages since the apostles until the fanatics—as Luther called them—arrived on the scene. In contrast, the reformers could not stomach such chronological snobbery—as C.S. Lewis labeled it—not as long as Jesus promised to build his church. The Holy Spirit did not cease operation within the church after Pentecost but from age to age ensured the gospel continued to be delivered to the saints.

When Rome accused the reformers of novelty, even heresy, the reformers demonstrated their catholicity, defending the Reformation as a *renewal*, not a revolution. They considered their program evangelical because they were committed to the renewal of the one, holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic church, a renewal that was necessary due to Rome's recent departure from the Augustinian heritage retained by early and high medieval theologians.

Such a historical outlook matters for trinitarianism today: although the reformers took issue with Rome's doctrine of justification, for example, they assumed the patristic and medieval doctrine of God in every way. They never attempted to reform theology proper. On that score, the reformers considered themselves no less orthodox than Rome and they felt no need to contest Rome's doctrine of the Trinity—to do so would have put themselves outside of orthodoxy, proving Rome's accusations correct.

All that to say, evangelicalism's narrow outlook on history and striking ignorance of patristic and medieval theology has resulted in a neglect of orthodox trinitarianism, leaving evangelicals easy buyers for modernity's novel sell of social trinitarianism. In the twentieth century we were informed by modern theology that a renaissance of trinitarian thought was underway. However, as Lewis Ayres has observed in his book, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford University Press), the Trinity supposedly revived was not in fact orthodox trinitarianism. Classical metaphysics—with its emphasis on divine simplicity, modes of subsistence, and inseparable operations—was deconstructed and the Trinity was redefined in societal categories that privileged plurality, sometimes to the point of individual centers of consciousness and will. In the aftermath of Hegel and Rahner, the immanent and the economic were conflated and in the most aggressive forms historicized the eternal God.

Would you consider EFS a serious assault on Trinitarian dogma?

Evangelical Functional Subordination of the Son is a serious assault—a novel, modern one at that—on biblical and orthodox trinitarian dogma.

Biblically, it is an example of exegesis that is uncanny in its resemblance to the fourth century hermeneutics of Arianism and semi-Arianism.

Theologically, it is a cancer that eats away at the foundation of theology proper by collapsing the immanent life of the Trinity into the economy of salvation, allowing Christology to swallow theology proper whole.

Historically, it is a blatant contradiction to Nicene orthodoxy, one that reads modern, social categories back into historic, Nicene metaphysics, positioning evangelicals outside the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.

How baffling that evangelicals have no hesitation confronting denials of justification by faith alone and the inerrancy of scripture but have been so reluctant to do the same with EFS, especially since the doctrine of the Trinity is a primary doctrine and prerequisite for Christian orthodoxy. The hesitancy to confront EFS demonstrates that we find it easy to condemn unorthodoxy when we see it in modern theology but when modern theology has influenced our own, we either fail to recognize it for what it is or we find ways to justify its presence. Will future historians consider this inconsistency in doctrinal accountability the enduring stain on evangelical theology in the last century? To avoid such an outcome, evangelicals must have zero tolerance for EFS. Otherwise, evangelicals will retain little credibility when they claim distinction from modernity and its liberal consequences.

How should seminaries help future generations of pastors better understand the Trinity?

The first step forward involves a recovery of *theological* theology, as John Webster called it in *God Without Measure* (T&T Clark). The Protestant Scholastics, for instance, used to distinguish between theology and economy. By theology, they referred to God in and of himself, the object of theology, the reason theology is theological in the first place. Establishing who God is apart from the world, they were then prepared to discern what God does towards the world. In other words, they considered the object of theology God himself and then all things in relation to God.

The apostle John opens his gospel with such a distinction in view when he begins by establishing the Word who was with God and was God. He then positions Christ as the "only begotten Son," the one who is eternally begotten from the Father's divine essence. On that foundation, John can then make sense of the economy of salvation. For unless the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, he is not qualified or capable to be sent by the Father to redeem the lost. Only he who is Light from Light, as the Nicene Creed says, can descend into our darkness as the light of the world. Unless he is a Son by nature, he cannot make us sons by grace.

Unfortunately, seminaries that limit themselves to a focus on the economy of salvation alone and by consequence have little patience for metaphysics and those fathers who were careful to consider the proper relationship between God and the world. In some cases, seminaries so prioritize the economy of salvation that they project what occurs in the economy back into theology, that is, God in himself. Here is the death of theology, as the Protestant Scholastics defined it. The modern theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, exemplifies such a move when he turns to the suffering of Christ in the incarnation and projects that suffering back into divinity, including each person of the Trinity. Evangelicals have done something similar when they subordinate the Son; they observe Christ's obedience by virtue of his incarnation and for the sake of salvation only to project it into the immanent life of the Trinity, infusing hierarchy within the personal properties themselves.

The second step forward must be a step backward. Theological priorities are conspicuous in the books seminaries assign. How many professors teach class after class occupying their student's minds with contemporary books and therefore a contemporary outlook? Meanwhile, legions of seminarians graduate, and they have never read Gregory's *On God and Christ*, Augustine's *On the Trinity,* Anselm's *Proslogion,* or Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*? At a previous school I remember one soon-to-matriculate student—steeped as he was in biblicism (i.e., no creed but the Bible)—boasting to a class of peers that he had never even opened Calvin's *Institutes.* Why, then, are we shocked when seminarians enter pulpits and lecterns only to teach the next generation a doctrine of the Trinity that is far more in step with modern theology than historic orthodoxy?

What I am proposing then is a radical rehaul of seminary curriculum, one that gives the church catholic (universal) priority of influence. Such a curricular change will not happen, however, until the leadership of seminaries recognize what they risk by commissioning graduates untrained in the fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy, a risk that should scare them enough to take institutional steps towards infusing classical Christian theology within the bloodstream of their schools.

Third, seminaries need to take an honest, humble, and hard look at their doctrinal statements. Far too many are light on the Doctrine of God, which leaves their schools vulnerable to a variety of sub-orthodox perspectives. Evangelicals in the 80s and 90s occupied themselves—understandably so—with clarifying the doctrine of inerrancy. Unfortunately, our institutions have yet to do the same with theology proper. We use inerrancy as a litmus test; meanwhile we are allowing aberrant theologies of the Trinity and deviant denials of divine attributes to flourish within our institutions. This move would have shocked the church fathers and reformers alike and they would have considered it a dangerous neglect of institutional and ecclesiastical responsibility. If seminaries put the same amount of effort into their defense of theology proper as they have into their defense of inerrancy, we would be in a far healthier state of seminary education than we are today. May we work to that end moving forward.

Who do you believe is the most useful scholar of the Middle Ages on the Trinity?

Thomas Aquinas. At the start of his *Summa Theologiae* he says he is writing to help the student of theology understand not only what to believe but why. Writing with profound clarity and explanatory power, Thomas demonstrates the cohesion of the Christian faith and within the Augustinian and Anselmian spirit of faith seeking understanding.

By posing theological questions, he first identifies the erroneous answer but with a robust seriousness, considering with amicable fairness whether the opposing position is legitimate, even anticipating what scriptures and patristic sources could be appealed to for support. When he replies, he does so with unprecedented precision, weaving a synthesis of scriptural, historical, theological, and philosophical sources until he arrives at a conclusion that exhibits the legitimacy and coherence of Christianity.

It is a tragedy that evangelicals have cut themselves off from this theologian whom R. C. Sproul once said is the greatest theologian the church has ever known. Our separation from Thomas has occurred for no fault but our own. We have believed caricatures that paint the reformers as if they were anti-Thomistic when in truth the real

target of their disdain were later medievals (e.g., Gabriel Biel, William of Ockham) who departed from Thomas in significant ways. By neglecting half of church history—the Middle Ages spanning an entire millennium—we leave ourselves vulnerable to the inculcation of trinitarian foibles otherwise avoided by medieval scholastics like Thomas who outlined the mature consequences of Nicene trinitarianism.

Also, we have not treated Thomas with the same historical fairness and sobriety as other fallible theologians across the church's history. Of course the evangelical will disagree with Thomas on a doctrine like the sacraments, but we have failed to recognize that less than 12% of his *Summa* is content the evangelical will disagree with at all. Evangelicals might also be surprised to discover that they have an Augustinian ally in Thomas with doctrines as widespread as predestination, providence, inspiration, atonement, and Christian virtues. That starling statistic leaves evangelicals open to interrogation: are evangelicals actually reading Thomas or relying on easy caricatures that depend on serious inaccuracies? But more to the point, what other theologian in history would we abandon like this, especially when this same theologian was so responsible for the full development of the most foundational *loci* in orthodoxy: the Trinity and Christology. Roman Catholics recognized Thomas's indispensability to theology, but we have allowed them to take Thomas without a fight.

All that to say, if we have any hope of recovering Nicene trinitarianism then we can no longer afford to ignore the angelic doctor. Do we consider ourselves wiser than Peter Martyr Vermigli or John Owen or Peter van Mastricht—to name only a few—all of whom retrieved Thomas for their construction of the Christian faith? For good reason, many of them were called Reformed Thomists.

How have the Patristics helped shape your Trinitarian doctrine? How faithful do you find their hermeneutical method?

They have shaped my trinitarianism in a profound way. First, the patristics gave to the church a hermeneutic and grammar for how to: (1) interpret the text of scripture without violating the whole counsel of God and its teaching on the Trinity and (2) draw out the good and necessary consequences deduced from all of scripture for the sake of fortifying the metaphysical building blocks of theology proper. It was the Arians and Semi-Arians who read scriptures in isolation from the entire canon and at points adopted a literalistic hermeneutic that could not account for the New Testament's Christological reading of the Old Testament. I do not think it is accidental that EFS hermeneutics today closely parallel the Arians and semi-Arians while those defending pro-Nicene trinitarianism exemplify a hermeneutic that parallels the church fathers.

Also, the patristics have opened my eyes to the many ways trinitarian theology informs theological method, soteriology, Christology, the Christian life, and especially eschatology. I will explore these connections in my forthcoming *Doctrine of God* (Baker Academic), but the tapestry is breathtaking. For example, the fathers believed that the Trinity was not only the proper object of theology but also its *telos*. From David to Jesus, from John to Paul, scripture says the beatific vision—seeing the blessed Trinity—is the goal of the Christian life. "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one

degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Paul tells Titus that the appearing of our Lord Jesus is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13). If theology has any hope of becoming *theological* once more, we must recover this outlook: theology as *contemplation* of the Trinity. As David says, he has one passion: to gaze at the beauty of the Lord (Ps 27:4).

Trinitarian theology, therefore, is a spiritual exercise.

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REVIEWS

Kevin Zuber. *The Essential Scriptures: A Handbook of the Biblical Texts for Key Doctrines*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2021. 384 pp., $18.00 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Aaron Filbrun, Senior Pastor, Carlsbad Community Church.

As the Preacher said in Ecclesiastes 12:12, "be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body." Often, during my course of seminary study this passage was in the back of my mind as I made my way through technical books and challenging texts. But for the ordinary Christian trying to grow in their understanding of God and His works, many of these wonderful books are a bit too complex for the lay learner. This is especially true of the area of systematic theology, in which encyclopedic texts may prove to be too involved for the common pilgrim to wade through. This is exactly why Dr. Kevin Zuber's recent work, *The Essential Scriptures: A Handbook of the Biblical Texts for Key Doctrines* is such a welcome addition to the world of Christian resources.

The Essential Scriptures is designed to be a helpful work of systematic theology written for both the student and lay person alike. In it, Dr. Zuber follows the standard 10-point outline employed in most systematic theologies but does so in a concise and expositionally rich manner. The handbook is divided into chapters that each focus on a major tenet of systematic theology and present the various issues one would expect to encounter in a treatment of the primary doctrines of Scripture. In this matter, it is like many books of this ilk that have come before it and covers Prolegomena (Chapter 1), Bibliology (Chapter 2), Theology Proper (Chapter 3), Christology (Chapter 4), Pneumatology (Chapter 5), Anthropology and Hamartiology (Chapter 6), Soteriology (Chapter 7), Angelology (Chapter 8), Ecclesiology (Chapter 9), and Eschatology (Chapter 10). What makes *The Essential Scriptures* so unique among resources like it, is the succinct way in which Dr. Zuber includes and exposits the key texts that support each doctrinal area. Often systematic theologies list out the various proof passages for a given doctrine but do not necessarily interpret how these passages define and explain a particular doctrine. In such cases the reader is required to look up each reference and try to discern how it applies to the area under discussion. While this may be attainable for individuals well versed in Scripture, it often leads to confusion and a lack of clarity for those new to or unfamiliar with the biblical doctrines and makes such works seem burdensome rather than helpful.

But this is exactly where Zuber's book shines. In the introduction, Zuber himself notes that his book is not intended to be a comprehensive or exhaustive work of

systematic theology, but instead seeks to serve as a supplemental resource for those interested in a better understanding of Scripture. Accordingly, he seeks to accomplish two main objectives with this work. First, it is designed to provide "succinct but informative expositions of the selected key texts" (23) to aid and support one's understanding. Second, it is organized in such a manner as to "show the way for students to discover how to 'do theology'" (23) so that they may be able to develop the ability to independently discern the key texts throughout Scripture and apply them to germane doctrines. Dr. Zuber's goal is therefore not to wear out the reader or exhaust the subject but instead to provide a resource that Dr. John MacArthur describes in the foreword as "both a model for developing theological conviction as well as a tutorial on how to make the connection between the biblical text and the doctrine" (21).

So, the question arises, how does *The Essential Scriptures* fair in pursuing its objectives? It is the opinion of this reviewer, that Dr. Zuber has done a wonderful job of accomplishing both objectives throughout this work. The following are several strengths of this book.

The primary strength of this work resides in Zuber's commitment to the biblical record and his abundant use of full scripture quotations to support each doctrine.[1] This may seem like an unusual item to highlight, but many systematic theologies rely on long lists of Scripture references or "proof texts" but rarely quote, interpret, or interact with the Scriptures as completely as this resource does. What a blessing it is to see the words of Scripture in full, so the reader can interact with the arguments without needing to leave this book to look up a reference. This handbook is Scripture saturated and structured in such a way that each doctrine is presented, then the primary passages of support are quoted, then comment is given to exposit how the passage fits with the doctrine being treated. This method allows and encourages the reader to think logically and biblically through each area of doctrine and actually "do theology" for themselves. This approach serves as an effective tool for developing a theological foundation that is rooted in the biblical texts rather than in human opinion or reason.

Second, Dr. Zuber's desire to create a work that is clear and precise, yet not burdensome or overly scholastic makes this an excellent resource for anyone who wants to grow in their understanding of the doctrines of Scripture. I found this work to be both refreshing and informative. Throughout the book, Zuber's practical comments and timely exegetical insights are helpful in supporting the various points of doctrine. I also found the occasional Excursus sprinkled throughout the book to be useful and interesting as Dr. Zuber dealt more deeply with topics like "Why Believe in the Virgin Birth?", "Sudden Creation in Six Literal Days", "Regeneration Precedes Conversion", or the "Timing of the Rapture". If all of this was not enough, he also included applicable "Questions and Prompts for Further Study"[2] for each chapter as another mechanism in connecting the Scriptures to the greater themes and doctrines they support.

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[1] The New American Standard Bible (NASB 95) is used throughout this work.

[2] This is an Appendix found after chapter 10 in which Dr. Zuber provides helpful questions or prompts for each chapter. These would make wonderful discussion questions for a small group or Sunday school class working through this book together.

Third, this handbook's organizational structure and sound teaching makes it an excellent reference tool for study, as it identifies and comments on the key passages for each area of doctrine. When combined with the very helpful expanded table of contents at the front, and the subject index and scripture index included at the end of the work, this is the type of resource that a pastor, Bible study leader, biblical counselor, or just the ordinary Christian will want to have close at hand in their personal library.

In sum, as a pastor seeking to faithfully shepherd a local congregation *The Essential Scriptures* is a resource that I intend to use and recommend to others as I seek to lead those under my care. In a day and age in which biblical literacy is appallingly low and many in our pews are unacquainted with systematic theology, we must strive to provide resources that help our people grow to know the God presented in the Bible. We need books like this one that can help support and shape the theological views of our people. Everyone truly is a theologian. The question is, what kind of theologians will our people be? As Charles Ryrie put it, "There is nothing wrong with being an amateur theologian or a professional theologian, but there is everything wrong with being an ignorant or sloppy theologian" (26). *The Essential Scriptures* proves to be a concise, well-organized systematic theology that can help our people grow from ignorant or sloppy theologians into well-grounded theologians that know what they believe and why they believe it.

Fred Sanders. *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. 231 pp., $22.35 Paperback.

Reviewed by Jesse Randolph, Equipping Pastor, Mission Bible Church.

With his recent work, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity & Soteriology*, Fred Sanders has added to his already-substantial contributions to contemporary Trinitarian scholarship a work whose objective (as the subtitle indicates) is to develop a more robust understanding of the relationship between biblical conceptions of the Trinity and Christian soteriology.

Sanders, who has taught at Biola University's Torrey Honors College since 1999, is a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY (MDiv) and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA (PhD). He is regarded as one of the preeminent Trinitarian theologians of our day, having written multiple full-length books on the subject, including *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, *The Triune God*, and *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture*. In addition, Sanders has served as an editor for several other books on the Trinity, including *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective (An Introductory Christology)* (co-edited with Klaus Issler), *Advancing Trinitarian Theology* (from the "Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics" series, co-edited with Oliver Crisp), and *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (co-edited with Scott R. Swain). Last, Sanders has written dozens of journal articles on a variety of Trinitarian subjects, which are too numerous to list or mention here.

In *Fountain of Salvation*, the latest of his Trinitarian works, Sanders' stated aim is to present a "sustained investigation of salvation as access to the Trinity, and the

Trinity as the fountain of salvation" (9). In this, Sanders succeeds, as this book includes a detailed exploration of both fundamental Christian doctrines. Sanders navigates the reader through various tributaries of Trinitarian and soteriological thought, and does so through a nimble blend of biblical exegesis, historical-theological insights, and charitable interaction with (though not wholesale adoption of) theological perspectives from both neo-orthodox and higher-critical camps, all while highlighting the various intersection points between the Trinity and soteriology—two essential pillars of Christian doctrine.

Sanders' "sustained investigation" into the matter of the connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of soteriology is (appropriately) threefold in its division, though each of the three divisions of Sanders' work operate perichoretically (to borrow a phrase) with one another.

In the first section, dealing primarily with matters of essential Trinitarian doctrine, Sanders helps the reader to understand the Trinity as the "norm of soteriology" (chapter one), to approach the Trinity in light of the "scope of God's economy" (namely, in the "economy of salvation") (chapter two), to understand the Trinity in relation to one specific soteriological doctrine—the atonement (chapter three), and to consider the difference the triunity of God makes both to the ontology and mission of the church (chapter four). In each chapter, Sanders walks a fine line in exploring the Trinitarian roots of each of these various sub-disciplines of theology, while at the same time not allowing the principles underlying these sub-disciplines (e.g., atonement or ecclesiology) to re-purpose or re-define transcendent Trinitarian truths. Each of these chapters contains a statement similar to the following, wherein Sanders articulates his commitment, in order to "maintain good dogmatic order," to let "the doctrine of God retain its commanding role within the structure of theology" (85). The soteriological "tail," in other words, must not wag the Trinitarian "dog."

In the second section, whose focus is principally on matters of soteriology, Sanders guides the reader through an exploration of the topics of the Trinity and the Christian life (chapter 5), the roles the doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit play in the development of one's soteriology (chapters 6 and 7, respectively), and the connection between Trinitarian theology, gospel ministry, and theological education (i.e., how the doctrines of the Trinity and soteriology are taught, and how they ought to be taught) (chapter 8). Once again, as he works out the various nuances and ramifications of these subjects in each of these chapters, Sanders retains a tight grip on his views on Trinitarian precedence. As one representative example, Sanders states (in chapter 8): "The doctrine of the Trinity is important because it is true, and because the gospel and salvation depend upon it, but also for a more particular reason of special interest to teachers and students in the theological disciplines: it provides the essential basis for the unity of the various theological disciplines" (151).

In the third section, comprised of the final two chapters of the book, Sanders introduces (in chapter 9) various modern conceptions of the Trinity (including those that seek to re-cast Trinitarian truth in the image of one's soteriological system—by what Sanders refers to as "modern advocates of radically economic trinitarian soteriology" (154)), and then (in chapter 10) advocates for a retrieval of a Trinitarian theology, which requires "close attention to the way trinitarian theology is inherently

retrospective in its deep structures" (182) and which ultimately requires recognition of "the triune God [as] the fountain of salvation" (183).

Like any theological writing, Sanders' *Fountain of Salvation* has both strengths and its weaknesses. Two of each will be presented below, but as will be seen, even those items which are categorized here as "weaknesses" are minor, and ultimately point to the tall task Sanders (as gifted a Trinitarian theologian as there is in our day) has taken on in writing this book.

A particularly-noteworthy strength of this work is Sanders' deft scholarly ability to put two massive strands of biblical truth (the Trinity and soteriology) in conversation with each other. Drawing on scholarship from various different eras and traditions, Sanders helps the reader understand that Trinitarian theology and soteriology are not hermetically-sealed concepts of systematic theology. Rather, these subjects of study clearly tie in to each other and inform each other, helping us to understand God not only as a God who is Triune, but also as a God who saves. As Sanders notes: "The word Trinity denotes a field within which an extraordinary range of dogmatic material must be comprehended, brought to expression, and integrated" (32-33). Our understanding of the Trinity, Sanders continues, "determines the comprehensive loci of revelation and soteriology, taking up the full scope of salvation history and providing the framework for the confession of God's gracious self-giving in the economy of salvation" (33).

A further noteworthy strength of Sanders' work is his understanding of, and commitment to, the proper ordering of the doctrine of God (and particularly the doctrine of the Trinity) in the broader study of systematic theology. For instance, Sanders writes: "because God comes absolutely first in any possible order of being, the doctrine of God determines the doctrine of the Christian life—theology norms and forms soteriology and everything downstream from it. A particular God will accomplish a determinate sort of salvation" (89). Put another way, one must first come to understand what Scripture teaches about God as He *is* (i.e., Trinitarianism) before arriving at an understanding of God as He *does* (i.e., in salvation).

Notwithstanding its many strengths, *Fountain of Salvation* does have weaknesses. One such weakness has to do with Sanders' ordering of his material in the book. While, as alluded to above, Sanders attempts to structure his approach to his subject along tripartite lines (Trinitarian matters, soteriological matters, and a call to Trinitarian retrieval), it is not always clear why he chose to place certain arguments in one section of the book rather than another. For instance, it seems Sanders' call for Trinitarian retrieval would have been a better logical fit in the book's first section, while his chapters on ecclesiology and the atonement could have just as readily (if not more naturally) fit with the book's soteriological section as it does with the book's Trinitarian section. Ultimately, however, quibbles over which chapter would have been better placed, and where, may ultimately prove the point of Sanders' book, which is to highlight the various ways in which Trinitarian and soteriological truths intersect.

Another weakness of this work, which plainly is well-researched and draws from the author's deep well of Trinitarian knowledge, is that the book contains stretches of Sanders' theological musings where footnotes are scarce. Understanding that Sanders is a first-rate scholar in his field, this likely is a function of his aptitude for and comfort with his subject matter, which leads him to write in a stream-of-consciousness style in which he offers less support for the propositions he states than

a more novice theological writer might offer. This is not to say the book is footnote-free. It is not. This is not to say that the book is not well-researched. It is. But it is to say that for those (this reviewer included) who are not as instinctually-familiar with some of the primary sources that Sanders is able to rattle off from memory, a more rich supply of footnote content would have made the study even more edifying.

Fountain of Salvation comes highly recommended by this reviewer, as it makes an important contribution not only to the fields of Trinitarian theology and soteriology as disciplines within the broader field of systematic theology, but it also is an important addition to a growing body of scholarship on the subject of how to think of the traditional categories of systematic theology from an epistemological, taxonomical, and logical standpoint. Theology professors, teachers and students alike will be enriched in their understanding of both Trinitarian theology and soteriology in reading this work.

Scott Christensen. *What about Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. 576 pp., $33.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Jerod A. Gilcher, Pastor, Christ Community Bible Church.

The thorny question of the problem of evil, or *theodicy*, is one that every believer must eventually face and answer. The term *theodicy* is built upon two words, *theos* (God) and *dikaio* (to justify), and thus, theodicy is concerned with answering the question, "How does one seek to justify a good and sovereign God in the face of evil?" (p. 3). And while many throughout the centuries have supplied various responses to this question, the latest offering by Scott Christensen, *What about Evil?*, is not only the newest, but among the best.

Christensen's aim for the book is both daunting and lofty, namely, "to resolve the broader issue of why evil exists in the first place" (p. 7). He argues that we are "long overdue for a supremely muscular theodicy, a reorientation to Scripture's witness to God's purposeful and unyielding engagement with the powers of darkness—of chaos and misery" (p. 5).

The solution, therefore, to the problem of evil for which Christensen argues is what he calls the *greater-glory theodicy.* He explains that it is a refined version of what is called the *greater-good theodicy*, as well as the *best-of-all-possible worlds defense*. The *greater-good theodicy* is built on the assumption that "God decrees evil because it accomplishes some *particular* greater good" (p. 119, italics original). Christensen argues that "God would never ordain evil unless weightier second-order goods would emerge from it" (p. 128). In other words, God would never ordain the sin and evil He hates unless it would achieve a far weightier good than the evil itself.

On the other hand, the *best-of-all-possible worlds defense* argues that the ordering of evil's existence is part of the "broader beauty of the universe" (p. 134). In other words, while one can imagine alternative realities with less evil or no evil at all, those realities cannot be construed as better, otherwise God would have created them instead.

Christensen's methodology, however, is to take the best elements from both the *greater-good theodicy* and *the best-of-all-possible worlds defense*, merge and modify

them both into a tighter theodicy that is more faithful to Scripture's own explanation for the purpose of evil's existence. This nuanced theodicy he calls the *greater-glory theodicy*, because it resolves the problem of evil "by examining what brings God the greatest glory," which he argues, "is found in Christ's work of redemption" (p. 7). In other words, the fall was deliberately ordained by God because it brings about the greater good of redemption. He says, "A fallen-but-being-redeemed world is far better than an unfallen-not-needing-redemption world. Such a world brings greater glory to God. No better world seems possible than one in which Christ's redemptive work brings such supreme glory to God" (p. 8). To put it another way, sin and evil exists in the world as a sovereign design of God to display the supremacy of the Son.

While the above is the fundamental assertion of Christensen's magisterial work, it is buttressed by a comprehensive theology that supports and defends the *greater-glory theodicy*. Chapter 1 poses the problem of evil and provides a survey of the theodicies. Chapter 2 provides the historical, religious, cultural, social, and personal context for why evil is a problem. Chapter 3 defines what evil is, and how biblical theism alone can provide a coherent definition. Chapter 4, then, sets forth the parameters for establishing a faithful theodicy. Chapters 5 and 6 provide common solutions to the problem of evil offered throughout history. Chapter 7 argues that for a proper theodicy, namely, that God's power and sovereign control over history are essential. Chapter 8 supplies a biblical exploration of the relationship God has to sin and evil. Chapter 9 wrestles with the issue of human responsibility and divine culpability for the existence of evil. Chapters 10-13, then, are what Christensen calls "the heart of the book" as he explores the history of storytelling (ch. 10), and then in chapter 11 unfolds the salvation story of Scripture, which thus, helps us see "where evil fits into God's providential unfolding of history" (p. 10). Chapter 12, then, presents the case for the *greater-glory theodicy* and chapter 13 examines important episodes in the biblical canon that prove the theodicy of redemptive glory.

Chapters 14-15 are a unit and deep dive into the nature of Christ, His incarnation, and suffering which is the Christological center of the solution for the problem of evil. Chapter 16 expands the focus of the *greater-glory theodicy* to encompass the cosmic scope of redemption, while chapter 17 concludes the book by demonstrating a very practical and powerful effect of this theodicy, namely grace (what Christensen calls "the grace effect"). That is, the *greater-glory theodicy* results in the most grace, mercy and compassion extended towards suffering people. In other words, those who most believe the sovereignty of God, are those most equipped to show compassion.

In the end, therefore, what we have in *What about Evil?* is not just a book that retraces the familiar steps of theodicy, but even one that that cuts new grooves in a much-needed revisit of the subject. It asks the hardest questions, tackles the toughest arguments, and plunges into the deepest theological waters. It leaves no stone unturned, no question unasked, and no hard truth avoided. In other words, this book is theology with guts—that is, the unflinching courage to say what the Biblical writers mean and say when they speak of God's relationship to sin and evil in the world.

If there is any potential drawback to the book, one could point a finger at its length. Weighing in at nearly 550 pages, the sheer bulk and size of the book (not to mention its challenging content) will perhaps intimidate some. This is, unfortunately, the great "catch-22" of issues like theodicy. The problem of evil cannot be adequately addressed in a small pamphlet or brief booklet, but instead needs ample space to be

thorough, answer objections, clarify assertions, and chase all of the proverbial rabbits. This all demands a work of considerable length and space to adequately handle the subject. Despite the intimidating page count of the book, however, Christensen has made this work remarkably accessible. It is highly engaging, but also deeply exegetical. It is John Calvin meets J.R.R Tolkien. It is the highest theology and the deepest thoughts about God and pain shaped into something gripping and dramatic—even beautiful. It truly is theology how theology ought to be done—tough as iron, precise as a laser, profound as a poet, and warm like the sun. In other words, *What about Evil?* is towering theology in the hands of a shepherd, and it is an excellent tool for shepherds everywhere to pastor their people through the problem of pain and suffering.

William R. Osborne. *Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life in the Presence of God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 160 pp., $7.00 Paperback.

Reviewed by Paul Twiss, Associate Professor of Bible Exposition, The Master's Seminary.

Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life in the Presence of God comes as a recent addition to Crossway's growing series, *Short Studies in Biblical Theology*. The book's author, William R. Osborne, serves as associate professor of biblical and theological studies at College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri. Having already written across a range of disciplines, Osborne is well-placed to offer a concise, accessible biblical theological exposition such as this. Following a brief introduction (15–30), the book is divided into 5 short chapters, delineating a theology of blessing across the Scriptures: in the garden of Eden (31–48), through Abraham (49–74), through God's covenant with Israel (75–106), in the New Testament era (107–128), and into eternity (129–138). The book concludes with a bibliography (139–149), general index (150–154), and Scripture index (155–159). With minimal footnotes, and Osborne's non-technical style, *Divine Blessing* serves the layperson. In accordance with the stated aim of the editors, it is designed to make biblical theology accessible to the everyday believer (12).

In his introduction, Osborne draws attention to some salient points, to which he will return throughout the book. The first is the misuse of blessing in common parlance today, compared with the specificity of the term in biblical texts (15–16). Rather than connoting a generic state of well-being, the Scriptures portray blessing as intimately connected with the fullness of life in the presence of God (17). This misalignment between the Bible's teaching and common perception gives rise to Osborne's aim throughout: to establish a biblical theology of blessing that is derived from our status as citizens of God's kingdom (16). A second, related point raised in the introduction is the erroneous teaching concerning blessing, offered by the prosperity movement. Osborne notes the emphasis placed by many on health and wealth as expressions of God's blessing—and how this does not adhere consistently to the theology of the Bible (16–17). In many ways, this initial discussion sets the trajectory for much of what follows. Throughout the book, Osborne is concerned to demonstrate God's blessing as manifestation of his grace, and pertaining to more than just the physical realm.

The subsequent chapters tread out this theme through the Bible, beginning with Gen 1–3. Arguably the most important chapter insomuch as it lays a theological foundation for our understanding of blessing, therein Osborne deals with such topics as creation, image-bearing, dwelling with God, sin, and separation. Again, he is concerned to respond to flawed interpretations of the text, not least the televangelist claim that as vice-regents we have a right to God's blessing (41). In chapter 2, Osborne deals with the promulgation of God's blessing through Abraham and his lineage. Discussion is given to the promises of Gen 12:1–3, and the covenants in Gen 15, and 17. Osborne labors to show the lines of continuity from Gen 1-11 onwards, and the particular response offered by God's promises to the problems created by sin. The third chapter is perhaps the most ambitious, as Osborne attempts to show the development of the blessing theme across the remainder of the Old Testament. Beginning with Exodus, his exposition extends to the prophets, and wisdom literature—demonstrating both the immediate manifestation of God's goodness to Israel, and the anticipated eschatological hope. Chapters 4 and 5 will perhaps be the most familiar material for Osborne's readers, as he considers the New Testament witness to God's blessing, and the eternal blessing promised for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Undoubtedly, Osborne's contribution to Crossway's biblical theology series is a welcome addition. His treatment of the text demonstrates sensitivity to the multifaceted nature of the blessing theme. And his concern to correct prevelant misinterpretations evidences a desire to help his readers, pastorally. A particular strength of the book is the initial chapter, explaining the biblical foundation for our understanding of blessing. Most likely, the average layperson will be unfamiliar with many of the details to which Osborne draws attention as it relates to the creation narrative. The attention given to the relationship between God's blessing, the imago dei, and the adamic mandate is especially helpful—insomuch as a clear trajectory is established by which to interpret the meta-narrative of Scripture.

Correspondingly, Osborne's discussion of Abraham is helpful. By succinctly demonstrating a theological relationship between Gen 3-11 and 12:1–3, he undoubtedly helps readers better see the lines of continuity in an otherwise difficult portion of Scripture. With that noted, the presentation of his argument could be improved by ensuring a correspondence in the translation of the biblical text. Specifically, Osborne renders Gen 12:2d as purpose clause: "so that you will be a blessing" (56). However, in his explanation of the promises, he explains that God gives Abraham a second command, "be a blessing" (57). Notwithstanding the difficulty of the syntactical issue, consistency between translation and interpretation is important.

Beyond these initial two chapters, Osborne's presentation of the blessing theme is less evidently anchored to the defined trajectory. As he discusses God's goodness to Israel in the Old Testament, and the church in the New, Osborne moves somewhat disparately across a range of topics, including the land, the law, the king, and the Spirit. In these chapters it seems his argument is driven in particular by his concern to refute various misunderstandings of blessing. Seemingly of less concern is the extrapolation of various motifs established in his treatment of Gen 1–3. Certainly, the apologetic edge of Osborne's discussion is not wasted. However, by focusing more on various correctives pertaining to the blessing theme, certain biblical theological

opportunities are missed. If blessing connotes the fullness of life in the presence of God, more should be made of the Sinai experience, his glory indwelling the tabernacle, his leading the people in the wilderness, the construction of the temple, its subsequent destruction, the incarnation, the Spirit-filled community in Acts, and the consummation of God's dwelling in the eschaton. To be sure, Osborne mentions several of these events in passing. But, having so clearly established the precedent for blessing as life in God's presence, these pivotal points in redemptive history should be discussed more extensively.

Divine Blessing is a helpful introduction to a complex, yet important biblical theme. Responding in part to various misunderstandings, Osborne attempts to present a cohesive summation of the Bible's teaching on blessing. His careful treatment of Genesis establishes a helpful foundation by which to understand several contours of Scripture's metanarrative. His subsequent chapters draw less attention to the cohesion offered by the text. Nonetheless, they provide a helpful summation of the multifaceted nature of God's blessing.

Peter Sammons. *Reprobation and God's Sovereignty: Recovering a Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022. 296 pp., $25.99 Paperback.

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Dr. Peter Sammons is Assistant Professor of Theology and Director of Academic Publishing at The Master's Seminary. His PhD is from The Master's Seminary, where he studied the doctrine of reprobation. In 2020, Dr. Sammons' first book, *Reprobation: From Augustine to the Synod of Dort: The Historical Development of the Reformed Doctrine of Reprobation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020) was published. In January 2022, Kregel released Dr. Sammons' second book: *Reprobation and God's Sovereignty: Recovering a Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022). This most recent publication will be the focus of this book review.

Dr. Sammons wrote this work on reprobation in response to what he considered to be a deafening blind spot in recent theological literature (14). There are very few works on reprobation. This absence is surprising given the controversy that began as early as the fourth century regarding this doctrine. According to Sammons, acceptance or rejection of the doctrine of reprobation has often been relegated to the shadows of scholarly works, a trend which Sammons credits to the doctrine's "perceived divisiveness." It is far easier to slip it under the haze of the "mysteries of God" (Deut 29:29) and to proceed silently with one's presuppositions in tow.

Sammons believes, however, that the Word of God speaks clearly and boldly to this disturbing doctrine. Accordingly, Sammons has a two-fold purpose for this book: [1] "to properly define reprobation, and [2] to explore God's use of secondary causes in this doctrine" (15).

Dr. Sammons defines reprobation as "the eternal, unconditional decree of God for the non-elect. In this decree, he chooses to exclude the non-elect from his electing purposes of mercy and to hold them accountable to the strict standards of justice to

display the glory of his righteous wrath" (47). He grounds this definition in passages like Rom 9:22, a verse that speaks of "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction"; 1 Peter 2:8, describing men as appointed for "doom"; and Jude 4, which describes individuals "long beforehand marked out for this condemnation." He also builds his argument logically atop a strong stance regarding the sovereignty of God: "If God is sovereign over evil, including the wicked deeds of sinners, his sovereignty necessarily extends to the eternal destinies of all people, including those in hell" (47).

He then seeks to resolve the age-old *theodicy* with a robust account of secondary causality. Sammons writes, "A clear understanding of secondary causes preserves God's holy sovereignty and man's accountability with respect to reprobation" (15). Sammons argues that God does not implant sin into men in order to reach his desired end, which in some, is destruction; rather he preserves the volition of man and his own goodness through the instrument of secondary causes. Sammons explains, "The doctrine of causality safeguards the integrity of both agents (God and man), so God ensures a particular outcome without rendering it a robotic necessary cause" (192).

This work has much to be commended. First, and easily overlooked, the author should be credited for a section titled, "Assumptions and Presuppositions" in his introduction (16–18). Sammons acts as an example to scholarship, and especially that of believers, to state upfront and with clarity the assumptions and presuppositions that are brought into a work. Much confusion and controversy would be resolved if all authors would clarify the presuppositions they bring into a project.

Second, Sammons should be credited in that he does what he sets out to. He intends to define, defend, and explain the doctrine of reprobation as it pertains to secondary causality, and he does just that. The work would benefit from introducing a definition for "reprobation" earlier than page 47, even as early as his "Assumptions and Presuppositions" section. But he does define the term, nonetheless.

Third, Sammons deserves credit for his boldness. He has taken what he understands to be a clear and pervasive teaching of Scripture, and he has brought it to light. A survey of recent theological literature reveals that few have been so bold. Before indictments should be made regarding his tone or topic (of which, I am sure there will be many), critics should first ask the question, *But is this doctrine true?*

William Perkins wrote: "If there be an eternal decree of God, whereby he chooseth some men, then there must be another whereby he doth pass by others and refuse them." Dr. Peter Sammons, as seen in this book, agrees.