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Trinity

TRINITY

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Yooji Choi • *Editorial Office:* SBTS Box 832, 2825 Lexington Rd., Louisville, KY 40280, (800) 626-
5525, x 4413 • *Editorial E-Mail:* journaloffice@sbts.edu

Editorial: Our Glorious Triune God

STEPHEN J. WELLUM

Stephen J. Wellum is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*. He received his PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is the author of numerous essays and articles and the co-author with Peter Gentry of *Kingdom through Covenant* (Crossway, 2012) and *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2015), and the co-editor of *Building on the Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Crossway, 2015 with Gregg Allison), and *Progressive Covenantalism* (B&H, 2016 with Brent Parker), and author of *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Crossway, 2016) and *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Zondervan, 2017).

Why an issue of *SBJT* focused on various essays from historical theology on the Trinity? There is a sense in which that question should never be asked given that reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity is always necessary and vitally important for the life and health of the church. It is almost a truism to say that at the heart of Christian theology is our glorious triune God and to know him is life eternal, yet we must never tire of saying it. Nothing is more important than our growing in the knowledge of the true and living God. After all, he is not only worthy of our reflection, love, adoration, and obedience, but the very purpose of our existence is to know and glorify him. Every generation of the church must repeatedly return to deep theological reflection on who God is as the triune God, not to re-invent the doctrine, but to be disciplined anew in the great truths of the Christian faith. In fact, if we do not get our doctrine of God right, especially the doctrine of the Trinity, it will not be too long before other areas of our theology begin to falter and crumble. Every doctrine of Christian theology ultimately finds it grounding in the great and glorious triune God of Scripture. It is always our privilege

and joy to think more deeply about the Trinity and hence the reason for the subject matter of this issue of the journal.

However, there is also another reason why this issue of *SBJT* is devoted to the Trinity. Over the last number of years within evangelical theology there has been a growing and heated debate on some of the specifics of the doctrine. The debate had been brewing for a number of years but in the last year it came to a head in the blogosphere, in various conferences, and now in the publications of various books. The main point of contention has centered on our understanding of the person-relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity (*ad intra*), and the relations of the divine persons in the execution of God's plan in redemptive-history (*ad extra*). Specifically, the debate centered on the question of whether we should think of the divine person-relations in eternity (*ad intra*) in terms of authority-submission relations or not. Is it right and biblical to say that the Father, from eternity, is distinguished from the Son and Spirit because he alone has the person-property of "authority" while the Son and Spirit do not? Or is "authority" best viewed in relation to the divine nature and as an exercise of divine attributes, so that the divine persons equally share the same nature and thus authority, yet exercise authority according to who they are *as* Father, *as* Son, and *as* the Holy Spirit?

For some evangelicals, as represented by the label ERAS (eternal relational authority and submission), the Father is distinguished from the Son and Spirit by his eternal possession of the personal property of "authority." The Son and Spirit, on the other hand, are distinguished from the Father by not having this personal property of authority; instead they have the personal properties of submission and procession respectively. The ERAS view contends that the way the divine persons are distinguished is not merely by eternal "relations of origin" (*taxis*) but also by this authority-submission ordering between the Father, Son, and Spirit from eternity (*ad intra*). In this way, ERAS argues for a specific kind of *taxis* between the divine persons from eternity that includes relations of origin (paternity, eternal generation, and eternal procession) *and* authority-submission relations. What occurs in the economy (*ad extra*), especially in regard to the submission and obedience of the *incarnate* Son, is true of what the Son is from eternity as the Son who submits to the Father and derives his authority from him. "Authority," then, is not an attribute of the divine nature; instead it is a personal relationship

or role that is crucial in distinguishing the divine persons.

Other evangelicals reject the ERAS view for at least two reasons. First, they argue that ERAS is not the consistent teaching of pro-Nicene orthodoxy and out of step with the tradition. Second, they argue that Scripture does not teach that there is an additional authority-submission ordering in eternity between the divine persons. Instead, the only eternal ordering (*taxis*) between the divine persons is the distinguishing person-properties of paternity (Father), sonship/eternal generation (Son), and eternal procession (Spirit). In other words, the only distinguishing person-properties of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are the “relations of origin” or “modes of subsistence” and *not* additional person-properties of authority-submission relationships or roles. Also, contra ERAS, this view argues that “authority” is best understood as an exercise of divine attributes tied to the divine nature which Father, Son, and Spirit share equally although they exercise authority according to their mode of subsistence, namely, the Father through the Son by the Spirit.

As noted, this trinitarian disagreement among evangelicals has led to a lot of current discussion, especially in the last year. Most recently it started on the blogs but now it is reflected in a number of recent books on the subject. When the most recent discussion began, some of it was not helpful due to the overheated rhetoric on both sides. The reason for this was partly due to the fact that the debate occurred in the blogosphere, which is not always the best place to debate serious and difficult theological issues. Yet, for the most part, the discussion has been helpful and if used rightly, it affords a wonderful opportunity to think deeply about our glorious triune God. We must never grow tired of gaining greater precision and clarity in our theological thinking, especially when it is about the God who has created and redeemed us.

Probably some of the most useful discussion has centered in the area of historical theology. In an overgeneralized way, it is fair to say that evangelical theology has been weak on historical theology, especially in regard to the Patristic and medieval eras. In much of our theological training of students, evangelical seminaries have done a wonderful job in teaching people the original languages, grounding them in biblical studies and in many areas of systematic theology. Yet, in certain doctrinal areas such as the Trinity and Christology, our grasp of historical theology has been weaker than in other areas such as the doctrine of salvation. One of the results of the recent trinitarian discussion and debates has been a renewed look at church history. It

has allowed us to go back and looked anew at how the church formulated the doctrine of the Trinity in the past. By starting with Nicaea and thinking through pro-Nicene trinitarian theology, greater clarity and precision has been brought to the overall discussion.

No doubt, Scripture is our final authority and we gladly confess *sola Scriptura*. But as many acknowledge, the Reformation confession of *sola Scriptura* does not entail that Scripture is read and theology is practiced apart from the wisdom of the past. Previous confession and creeds serve as secondary standards, but they are still very important for us. This is especially the case in the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. Why? Because from the earliest of councils to the present, there has been a consistent confession and theological formulation of the Trinity and the person of Christ. To ignore the past in these specific doctrinal areas is very unwise. Yes, we *must* test these statements and formulations by Scripture, but we also stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, and given the consistent theological affirmation of these doctrines, we are wise to go back and to think anew about what our forefathers have said on these issues.

With that in mind, this issue of *SBJT* will not engage the current debate directly. Instead, we thought it most helpful to engage past theologians who have contributed much to our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as they have reflected deeply on Scripture. Given our space limitations we sought to engage with past theological giants from the beginning of the church until recent times, hence the reason for essays starting in the Patristic era, to the medieval world, the Reformation, and the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Our goal is to learn from the past in order to sharpen us in the present. Before we can engage constructively in the current debate, it is crucial to listen to the past and to learn from those who have preceded us. In that spirit, we offer this issue of *SBJT* on the glorious doctrine of the Trinity. It is my prayer that the current discussion and debate will lead us to a greater knowledge of who our great triune God is, how the divine persons relate to one another—not merely as an exercise in speculative theology—but for the life and health of the church. What is desperately needed today is to think big thoughts about God and wrestling with the doctrine of the Trinity is certainly the place to begin. May our glorious triune God teach us more about himself as we reflect on his Word and learn from our theological forefathers.

The Pattern of the Father: Divine Fatherhood in Gregory of Nazianzus¹

D. BLAIR SMITH

D. Blair Smith is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina. He earned his ThM in Theology from Harvard Divinity School, where he wrote his thesis on “Athanasius’s Trinitarian Theology of Redemption, with Special Reference to the Holy Spirit,” and he is currently a PhD candidate in Historical Theology (Patristics) at Durham University in England. The working title of his dissertation is “The Fatherhood of God in Fourth-Century Pro-Nicene Trinitarian Theology.” Blair has also served as a Research Visitor at the University of Notre Dame. He is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and has served as the Pastor of Adult Education at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland.

INTRODUCTION

One of the more evocative elements of Gregory of Nazianzus’s (hereafter, Nazianzen) teaching on the Trinity is that of a “superabundant” one which moves to two and stops at three (*Ors.* 23.8; 29.2). If we associate the “one” with the Father, we see a dynamism which moves out from his person resulting in the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit. This “dynamic movement” not only moves out from the Father but also returns to him in a convergence within the divine life (*Ors.* 29.2; 20.7; 42.15).

This is the “pattern of the Father” because, according to Nazianzen, the “beginning” and “end” of this pattern is the person of the Father. This pattern is not without antecedents, both philosophical (perhaps Plotinus) and theological (Origen). While these will be briefly explored, the thrust of this article will be concerned with arguing for what we learn of divine

Fatherhood within Nazianzen's theology by taking note of a pattern that begins with priority in the divine life yet is unmistakably mirrored within Nazianzen's thought in the economy of God's actions and human involvement in *θεωρία*. We will see that an account of the monarchy of the Father within the dynamic movements of the Trinity is crucial for understanding Nazianzen's articulation of the unity and diversity of the Godhead. Out to these considerations we will be able to conclude with some thoughts on whether Nazianzen's articulation of the Father entails an understanding of a hierarchy of authority among the Trinitarian relations.

THE PATTERN OBSERVED

Before referring to its manifestations elsewhere, we begin with an extended section from *Or.* 23 that allows us to gain our bearings in observing this dynamic quality of movement that is essential to understanding the Father and the Trinity in Nazianzen:

I ... by positing a source of divinity (*θεότητος ἀρχὴν*) that is independent of time, inseparable, and infinite, honor both the source as well as what issues from the source (*τὴν τε ἀρχὴν τιμῶ καὶ τὰ ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐπίσης*): the source because of the nature of the things of which it is the source; the issue, because of their own nature as well as of the nature of the source from which they are derived, because they are disparate neither in time, nor in nature, nor in holiness. They are one in their separation and separate in their conjunction (*ἐν ὄντα διηρημένως καὶ διαιρούμενα συνημμένως*), even if this is a paradoxical statement; revered no less for their mutual relationship than when they are thought of and taken individually; a perfect Trinity of three perfect entities; a monad taking its impetus from its superabundance, a dyad transcended (*Τριάδα τελείαν ἐκ τελείων τριῶν, μονάδος μὲν κινηθείσης διὰ τὸ πλούσιον, δυάδος δὲ ὑπερδαθείσης*) — that is, it goes beyond the form and matter of which bodies consist—, a triad defined by its perfection since it is the first to transcend the synthesis of duality in order that the Godhead might not be constricted or diffused without limit, for constriction is an absence of generosity; diffusion, an absence of order (*Τριάδος δὲ ὀρισθείσης διὰ τὸ τέλειον, πρώτη γὰρ ὑπερβαίνει δυάδος σύνθεσιν, ἵνα μήτε στενὴ μένη θεότης, μήτε εἰς ἄπειρον χέηται. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀφιλότιμον, τὸ δὲ ἄτακτον*). The one is thoroughly Judaic; the other, Greek and polytheistic.²

In his familiar mode of navigating between two erroneous alternatives, Nazianzen's description of source and issue bring together a central concern of his Trinitarian theology: the Triune God's unity and diversity. Each of the three are worthy of equal reverence: the Father because he is the source, and "what issues from the source" because they share the source's nature and holiness. Yet a consideration of both what they share and how they relate brings one to the "generosity" and "order" established by the Father. In seeking to avoid an absence of "generosity" in the Father, Nazianzen is distinguishing Trinitarian faith from what is traditionally "monotheistic." In seeking to uphold the ordered relations emerging from the Father, Nazianzen is protecting Trinitarian thought from diffusing into what is "polytheistic." Weaving these various elements together, Nazianzen uses the dynamic image of a "superabundant" monad that, because of its generous character, cannot but issue forth into a dyad. Yet, to settle there would be to suggest a constriction held in duality. Consequently, a triad speaks to a generous perfection that flows out of the "superabundant" one—that is, the Father—yet is, nonetheless, ordered within particular relations. With this image of a move from a monad to a dyad to a triad Nazianzen is addressing what he sees as the dynamic nature of the Trinity, containing within it a certain "divine movement" that is set in motion from the Father leading to the Son and Spirit. The dynamic movement that Nazianzen portrays within the Trinity necessarily entails a logical "starting point," and so causes the knower to "start" with the Father as it is his superabundance that prompts the dynamic movement. This "outward" manifestation of the abundance of the one, the Father, also dynamically returns.

The "return" of the movement converging on the "one" brings us to a famous passage from Nazianzen's "third theological oration" concerning the monarchy. We will evaluate the contested aspect of the divine monarchy in Nazianzen later in this article. For now, though, we simply observe in *Or.* 29.2 this notion of "return:"

Monarchy (μοναρχία) is what we hold in honor—but not a monarchy that is contained in a single person (μοναρχία δὲ, οὐχ ἦν ἐν περιγράφει πρόσωπον) (after all, it is possible for a self-discordant one to become a plurality) but one that is constituted by equality of nature, harmony of will, identity of action, and the convergence to the one of what comes from it (ἀλλ' ἦν φύσεως ὁμοτιμία

συνίστησι, καὶ γνώμης σύμπνοια, καὶ ταυτότης κινήσεως, καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῶν ἑξ αὐτοῦ σύννευσις) ..., so that while there is numerical distinction, there is no division in the substance (τῇ γε οὐσίᾳ μὴ τέμνεσθαι). For this reason, from the beginning (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) a monad is moved to a dyad and stops at a triad. And this means for us the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The [Father] is begetter and producer (ὁ μὲν γεννήτωρ καὶ προβολεύς), to be certain without passion, and without reference to time, and not in a physical manner. But of the others, the [Son] is begotten, the [Spirit] is produced (τῶν δέ, τὸ μὲν γέννημα, τὸ δὲ πρόβλημα)—I do not know how to express this in any way that does not reference visible things.³

Intermingled with a mode of philosophical explanation, Nazianzen is here speaking to the dynamic movement in the Godhead we noted in *Or.* 23.8. This dynamic nature raises the question of upholding both a “starting point” of the Godhead and its unceasing movement, a potential tension we will return to later. For now, it is enough take note of this pattern within the divine life in order to set up a reference of its use within three realms, to which we now turn.

The first realm is creation. The notion of a dynamic outward movement within a Trinitarian frame is vaguely portrayed in his oration *On the Theophany* when in *Or.* 38.9 Nazianzen addresses the apparent “first” creation of the angels and other spiritual beings. God is a “superabundant” “Goodness” that is not “set in motion simply by contemplating itself, but the Good needed to be poured out, to undertake a journey (ἀλλ' ἔδει χεθῆναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὁδεῦσαι), so that there might be more beings to receive its benefits—for this, after all, is the height of Goodness! (τῆς ἄκρας ἢν ἀγαθότητος)—it first thought of the angelic, heavenly powers; and that thought was an action, brought to fulfillment in the Word and made perfect in the Spirit (λόγῳ συμπληρούμενον καὶ Πνεύματι τελειούμενον).”⁴ He goes on to describe their existence as being “immovable (ἀκινήτους)” towards what is evil but moveable towards the good, “since they surround God and are the first glimmerings to shine forth from God (τὰ πρῶτα ἐκ Θεοῦ λαμπομένας); for beings in this world belong to a second phase of that shining”⁵ (This gesture toward light and its shining in conjunction with dynamic movement is also a theme to which we shall return.). After taking note of the lesson Satan provides for the stubborn possibility of movement toward evil in the immaterial order of creation, Nazianzen goes on in 38.10 to refer to the “second world (δεύτερον

... κόσμον)” God brought into being. He suggests a parallel structure to this “material and visible (ὕλικὸν καὶ ὁρώμενον)” creation, which, along with the immaterial creation, is “praiseworthy for the natural excellence of each of its parts, but still more praiseworthy for the proportion and harmony of all them to the whole, in order to bring a single, ordered universe to completion (εἰς ἑνὸς κόσμου συμπλήρωσιν).”⁶ We find hints here of the dynamic movement reflective of the divine life while also notions of unity and diversity held together. In this creation of both the immaterial and material worlds Nazianzen remarkably states, “[God reveals] his own nature to himself (δείξει ... οικείαν ἑαυτῷ φύσιν).”⁷

The second re-instantiation of Nazianzen’s dynamic pattern of divine life is the mirroring of creation in the redemptive mission of the incarnate Son found several chapters later in *Or.* 38.15. He sets up this section by meditating upon the creation of humanity in paradise and the subsequent introduction of sin into the world. God provided many remedies for sin but, in the end, Nazianzen reads the coming of the Word as the provision of a “stronger medicine (ισχυροτέρου ... φαρμάκου)”⁸ needed to root out finally the pernicious root of sin. It is in the sending of the “enfleshed Word” that we see again the dynamics of which we are taking note: “Think of the good pleasure of the Father as a mission (Τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀποστολήν), and that [the Son] refers all that is his back to him (ἐφ’ ὃν ἀναφέρει τὰ ἑαυτοῦ), both because he reveres him as his timeless source (ἀρχὴν τιμῶν ἄχρονον) and in order to not seem to be God’s competitor.”⁹ The Son is sent by the Father on a mission. While his title as Son is an expression of equal honor with the Father, his status as the “sent one” who “refers all that is his back to [the Father]” brings attention to the status of the Father as one who sends and receives back.

The third and final re-instantiation of the pattern is found in Nazianzen’s description of illumination. In the “fifth theological oration” we see him relate the progressive revelation of the Trinity throughout salvation history and the Spirit’s epistemic priority. In the Trinitarian *taxis*, the revelation of the Spirit stands in “third place,” as it were, as a result of the preparation for the coming of the Son and, then, the Spirit’s “gradual” revelation by the Son within the course of his earthly ministry culminating in his ascension. Within *Or.* 31.26-29 specifically, Nazianzen speaks of the gradual revelation of the Spirit, in accord with the disciples’ capability to receive him. It is a light that

shines “bit by bit” or “gradually” (κατὰ μέρος).¹⁰ Even though Nazianzen is primarily speaking here of a grand view of God’s revelation of himself in salvation history, he is secondarily suggesting and then outlining the Spirit’s unique work within the seeker—including “illumination (φωτιστικόν):”¹¹

The old covenant proclaimed the Father clearly (Ἐκήρυσσε φανερώς ἡ Παλαιὰ τὸν Πατέρα), the Son more obscurely. The new covenant manifested the Son and suggested the divinity of the Spirit. Now, the Spirit resides amongst us (Ἐμπολιτεύεται νῦν τὸ Πνεῦμα), giving to us a clearer demonstration of himself ... But by gradual additions, “ascents” (ἀναβάσεις) as David said (Psalm 84:7), and by progress and advances “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18), that the light of the Trinity should shine with greater clarity (τὸ τῆς Τριάδος φῶς ἐκλάμψει τοῖς λαμπροτέροις).¹²

The Father as source is evident again, from whom comes the manifestation of his Son. In a fully Trinitarian sweep, now there is the Spirit perfecting the revelation of the Trinity. It is the Spirit who consequently turns us in a course back to the Father through illumination. According to Nazianzen, illumination is needed in order to enter into a vision of God within which is Trinitarian nature of God is progressively revealed.

While we can trace here dynamic notions of going out and returning, it is through probing further into Nazianzen’s understanding of illumination that we begin to glimpse the nuances of his Trinitarian doctrine that will ultimately come into play when we make conclusions regarding the Father. The connections between illumination, vision, and the Spirit are sometimes implied and other times made more explicit in Nazianzen’s writings. It is in his use of the imagery of light, specifically when he speaks of the Spirit as *light*, that the connections come together. The Spirit is not simply one of the lights of the Trinity, an object of our spiritual vision—he enables “access” to the other divine lights. In the words of *Or.* 41.9, “[H]e is light and distributes light... He is the Spirit... through whom the Father is known and the Son glorified, and by whom alone he is known (φῶς καὶ χορηγὸν φότης ... Πνεῦμα ... δι’ οὗ Πατὴρ γινώσκειται καὶ Υἱὸς δοξάζεται καὶ παρ’ ὧν μόνων γινώσκειται)”¹³ Put simply: the vision of God is *enabled* by the illuminating Spirit. The Spirit has primary epistemological importance, which is to say the content of *θεωρία* that we receive through illumination is *first received* on

account of the Spirit. In *Or.* 31.3, Nazianzen explains this dynamic through David's prophetic vision in Psalm 36:9: "In your light we shall see light." He then puts this "Trinitarianly," "We receive the Son's light from the Father's light in the light of the Spirit (ἐκ φωτὸς τοῦ Πατρὸς φῶς καταλαμβάνοντες τὸν Υἱὸν ἐν φωτὶ τῷ Πνεύματι)."14 In terms of the pattern, just as in the life of the Trinity, the Father is the source whose light is comprehended in light, so through the Spirit's illuminating work wrought in *θεωρία* we are led to the other divine persons by "adding" light to light. Clarity on what ultimately guides and orders this vision is the subject we are exploring.

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF THE PATTERN

We will pick up *θεωρία* and themes of light in Nazianzen again as we attempt to reach some conclusions on the Father within his thought. Before that, though, let us briefly comment on the potential sources of the dynamic pattern we have been observing. As is well-known, Nazianzen is not in the habit of explicitly sourcing aspects of his theology, so it is difficult to know with any precision whom he appropriated and where. We can be fairly certain, however, of a measure of influence on the pattern in question from, first, a theological and, then, a philosophical source.

The likely theological source is, not surprisingly, Origen of Alexandria. Due to the appropriation of Origen's legacy by anti-Nicene theologians, Nazianzen had to be subtle in the ways he marshaled the Alexandrian theologian's categories. The schema of moving from the Father to the Son and to the Spirit, and then returning to the Father as the "goal" with which perfection is associated can be found in Origen's *De Principiis* I 3, 8:

God the Father of all things gives to beings existence (*Deus pater omnibus praestat ut sint*); participation in Christ, who is word or reason, makes them rational. From this it follows that they are worthy of praise or blame, because they are capable alike of virtue and of wickedness. Accordingly there is also available the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that those beings who are not holy by their nature may be made holy by participating in him (*ut ea que substantialiter sancta non sunt, participatione ipsius sancta efficiantur*). When therefore they obtain first their being from God the Father, secondly their rational nature from the Word, and thirdly their holiness from the Holy Spirit (*Cum ergo primo ut sint habeant ex*

deo patre, secundo ut rationabilia sint habeant ex uerbo, tertio ut sancta sint habeant ex spiritu sancto), they become capable again of receiving Christ in respect that he is the righteousness of God, those, that is, who have been previously sanctified through the Holy Spirit; and those who have been deemed worthy to advance to this degree through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless will obtain the gift of wisdom according to the power of the working of Spirit of God (*et qui in hunc gradum proficere meruerint per sanctificationem spiritus sancti, consequuntur nihilominus donum sapientiae secundum uirtutem inoperationis spiritus dei*). And this is what I think Paul means when he says that “to some is given the word of wisdom, to others the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:8). And while pointing out the distinction of each separate gift, he refers all of them to the source of everything when he says, “There are diversities of operations, but one God, who works all in all” (1 Cor 12:6).¹⁵

We note that Origen is here describing the Trinitarian activity of God in creation but then he reverses the Trinitarian *taxis* (ordering or relations) in order to describe how “rational beings” are perfected through “ascent” to the Father. This is a deft mirroring of creation and redemption in the guise of a trinitarian divinization where the final stage of the progression is participation in God the Father. Karen Jo Torjesen details the process of “returning” to the Father,

[For perfection] there are stages which they must pass through, each of which is the appropriate preparation for the next. The work of the Holy Spirit is purification. He is the principle of holiness. Through participation in the Holy Spirit the soul itself becomes holy. This is the preparation stage which makes it possible for the soul to receive the wisdom and knowledge of Christ. As Logos, Christ is wisdom and knowledge and the soul receives the gifts of wisdom and knowledge through participation in the Logos. The final stage of this progression is participation in God the Father. Participation in the perfection of the Father means the perfection of the soul, its own complete likeness to God or divinization.¹⁶

There are obvious commonalities within Nazianzen to this Trinitarian schema in Origen. The shape and order is determined by the Father. What is more, just as the Father is source of the realm of creation as well as spiritual life, he is of a position to receive back the movement of spiritual growth found

in his creatures inhabited by the Holy Spirit. Not surprisingly, the hierarchical element within Origen's Trinitarian theology is pronounced within his articulation of this schema, as perfection is equated with the Father who stands as the one fully divine. Nonetheless, what shines through as potential framing influence on Nazianzen is the integration of a dynamic movement among the Trinitarian persons out from and returning to the Father, which is discerned through a spiritual progression.

The philosophical sources of Nazianzen's thought are complex and his appropriation largely contingent on their usefulness in articulating the unity and diversity of the Triune God. As John Dillon has pointed out, it seems there is a clear connection with a Plotinian schema in Nazianzen's pattern of the Father, though it must be viewed through a Porphyrian filter. Porphyry provides, Dillon contends, the metaphysical understanding for Nazianzen and other pro-Nicene theologians to appropriate the reality of co-ordinate persons within the Godhead.¹⁷ While Plotinus' hierarchical triad of the One, the Intellect, and the Soul asserts separation inimical to the equality of divine persons, his articulation of the triadic schema proved quite fertile for Nazianzen's conception of the "dynamic three." First there is a parallel noted by Dillon in the passage already quoted in *Or.* 29.2, where there is a movement from the Father which goes out and returns to him. In *Enn.* V, 2, 1, Plotinus states,

This, we may say, is the first act of generation (γέννησις): the One (ὄν), perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows (ὑπερρρύη), as it were, and its superabundance (τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ) makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it (εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπον καὶ νοῦς). Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect (καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα τὸν νοῦν).¹⁸

While Dillon is right to note the metaphysical incompatibility in Plotinus, the overlap in schema with Nazianzen—of going out and returning—is striking. Beyond schema, in *Or.* 29.2 there is also the direct use of the language of "convergence" (σύννευσις), which is explicitly found in *Enn.* III, 8, 11. Here Plotinus is commenting on the Good and the Intellect. Plotinus asserts the

simple independence of the Good that is in need of nothing. The Intellect, however, is completed by gazing upon the Good, the Good leaving a trace upon the Intellect through its influence. Plotinus writes,

The Good ... has given the trace of itself on Intellect to Intellect to have by seeing, so that in Intellect there is desire, and it is always desiring and always attaining (ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἔχνοσ αὐτοῦ τῷ νῶ ὁρῶντι ἔδωκεν ἔχειν· ὥστε ἐν μὲν τῷ νῶ ἡ ἔφεσις καὶ ἐφιέμενος ἀεὶ καὶ ἀεὶ τυγχάνω), but the Good is not desiring—for what could it desire?—or attaining, for it did not desire [to attain anything]. So it is not even Intellect. For in Intellect there is desire and a movement to convergence (σύννευσις) with its form.¹⁹

Plotinus goes on to describe the Intellect in terms of light, the shadows of which are seen in “this beautiful universe (ὁ καλὸς οὗτος κόσμος).” Illumination is, of course, first received from the Intellect by turning toward the Good. This desire and move toward the Good that produces illumination in the Intellect pictures the dynamism of Nazianzen’s pattern, even if carries overtones of dependence contrary to pro-Nicene Trinitarianism. What is interesting is the Plotinian use of light to describe ability to move toward the Good, for it is Nazianzen’s use of light imagery that will add to not only the dynamism of Trinitarian life but also its discernment in *θεωρία*. This is not to draw a direct line from Plotinus to Nazianzen in their appropriation of light imagery, but for both it appears to evoke similar themes of dynamism and invitation to understanding while at the same time adding mystery to the depth of that understanding.

Having noted the dynamic Trinitarian pattern and its re-iterations throughout Nazianzen’s corpus with regard to creation, redemption, and illumination, as well as two potential sources of the schema, we are now in a position to observe what the texture of this pattern combined with light imagery might communicate about the Father in particular. In doing so I am well aware I am venturing into contested territory.²⁰ It is certainly my opinion that Nazianzen’s lack of clarity has contributed to the diverging interpretations of his theology when it comes to the place of the Father. While sorting through divergent interpretations of Nazianzen is a worthwhile task, space precludes such an investigation here. For now, my conclusions must be judged in light of the power of this dynamic pattern and the role it plays in providing description to Trinitarian life within Nazianzen’s writings.

THE PATTERN AND THE FATHER

Central to my conclusions regarding this dynamic pattern and the Father is the *monarchia*. There are distinct places within his writings where Nazianzen identifies the Father with the monarchy (e.g., *Ors.* 20.6-7; 23.6-8; 25.15-16). However, as we noted in the consequential passage of *Or.* 29.2 quoted earlier, Nazianzen also appears to identify the *monarchia* with the three persons, rather than being the possession of the Father alone. Nazianzen explicitly states here that he does not uphold the *monarchia* of a single person. Is Nazianzen being inconsistent or simply comfortable being less than clear due to the mystery at hand? In arriving at a conclusion, it is important to note the overall sense of this passage. It and *Or.* 23.8 speak to the dynamic movement of the Godhead among the divine persons. Yet, even within this movement, as Nazianzen goes on to argue in the very next chapter (29.3), the Son and Spirit are *from* the Father. This dynamic nature apparently creates the flexibility to consider that there is a certain irreversibility to the “starting point” of the Godhead *and* that the nature of the “movement” in the Godhead, where the two spring forth from the one in their respective ways, creates a divine receptivity with the monarchy also seen as in some sense possessed by all three. An argument for the complementarity of the Father possessing the monarchy and, because of the dynamism flowing out of the “abundant” Father, speaking of the monarchy being found in all three as well, is strengthened by Nazianzen’s reference to “convergence (σύννευσις)” in this passage. While it must be said his language is vague, it seems that Nazianzen is saying the “extension” of the monarchy beyond the Father is upheld in that there is a convergence toward the source. That is to say, while out of the one abundant Father flow the divine riches possessed by the Son and Spirit, there is a “return” or “convergence” from the Spirit and Son returning to the Father. This hints at the later doctrine of *perichoresis* where there is a dynamic movement of the persons toward one another, though here it certainly seems that movement flows out of and returns to the Father—the “beginning” and “end” of the dynamic movement of the Trinity. Consequently, because of the lack of clarity in Nazianzen’s use of *monarchia*, perhaps it is better to conceive of his thought in terms of the dynamics of Fatherhood and see monarchy as a subset of Fatherly dynamism.

Such an interpretation is perhaps confirmed by examining Nazianzen's flow of thought in *Or.* 42.15. Here he is again dealing with the dynamic nature of the Godhead. He separates "beginning" and "without beginning" from being an element of the nature of God, since "nature is never a designation for what something is not, but for what something is (οὐδεμία γὰρ φύσις ὃ τι μὴ τόδε ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὃ τι τοδε."²¹ For each of the three persons there is simply one nature: God. That one nature is first associated with the Father:

The unity [among the divine persons] is the Father, from whom and toward whom everything else is referred, not so as to be mixed together in confusion, but so as to be contained, without time or will or power intervening to divide them (Ἐνωσις δὲ ὁ Πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ καὶ πρὸς ὃν ἀνάγεται τα ἐξῆς οὐχ ὡς συναλείφεισθαι, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχεσθαι, μὴτε χρόνου διείργοντος μὴτε θελήματος μὴτε δυνάμεως).²²

Tracing Nazianzen's lines of thought is not easy. He is dealing in a variety of contexts with differing theological enemies, often with rhetorical constructions designed more to evoke the mysterious character of his subject than provide crystal clarity. Nonetheless, we gain an overall sense of the dynamic nature of the Triune God in his thought when we consider the Father. From the Father we see Nazianzen's willingness to associate the unity of the three with him, "God" in the primary position of the Son and Spirit coming from him. Yet, as the two come from him, they "return" to him, in the words of Brian Daley, in a "timeless, unchanging rhythm."²³ Thus it is appropriate, in a certain sense, to say the Father's monarchy is the monarchy of the whole Godhead for in the dynamic, superabundant life springing forth from him there is a movement that goes from one to two to three only to return back to him in unity.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic movements of the Trinitarian persons within Nazianzen's thought provide understanding for the variety of ways he articulates the *monarchia*. I think we are on firm footing in stating Nazianzen holds to the monarchy of *the Father*, so long as that is understood within the dynamic movements of the Godhead—perhaps it would be better, though, to highlight dynamic Fatherhood and consider Nazianzen's notions of monarchy

according to it. That is to say, we are able to account for the variety of ways Nazianzen articulates the monarchy if we connect it to both the Father and the dynamic movements of the Godhead. And rather than this seeking to probe more deeply into the divine mystery than is appropriate, such an account adds to the overall mystery.

When Nazianzen begins probing the divine mystery of the Trinity, he highlights that not only does mystery designate the nature of God; it especially refers to the Father. The very construction and content of Nazianzen's "multi-volumed" works on the Trinity (if I may so call the *Poemata Arcana* and *Theological Orations*) indicate nothing much at all can be said of the Father in a direct sense. Only by examining his relations of derivation with the Son and Spirit do we begin to move out of apophatic determinations of who he is. Within the Triune relations we do understand the Father's unique position as the "starting point"—as the origin and cause—and so to conceive the monarchy as his unique possession is appropriate. As Father, this means he never becomes Father, nor accumulates anything to his "fatherhood," nor loses it—he is always Father in the distinctive manner in which he has one eternal Son, and from him come both the Son and Spirit.²⁴ Yet to consider Fatherhood as "dynamic" takes into account the sense of movement within the Trinity, where all that is the Father's springs forth in the Son and Spirit and then returns as the Son and Spirit converge upon their source. Such movements create that "timeless, unchanging rhythm" within the Godhead resulting in the rather fluid vision of unity and diversity Nazianzen returns to again and again. One such statement is found in the famous passage of *Or* 40.41: "When I first know the one I am also illumined from all sides by the three; when I first distinguish the three I am also carried back to the one (Οὐ φθάνω τὸ ἔν νοῆσαι καὶ τοῖς τρισὶ περιλάμπομαι ὁὐ φθάνω τὰ τρία διελεῖν καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔν ἀναφέρομαι)."²⁵ The fluidity of this vision—even its "virtual simultaneity"—matches the fluidity of the divine life itself as described by Nazianzen.

As Nazianzen contemplates God he is not led to a nature with certain common attributes that set it apart. He is led, rather, to the divinity of the *Father*—the "personal way of the supreme being's existence: how he is; how he acts."²⁶ This means the integration of *θεωρία* and *θεολογία* within Nazianzen's thought entails a "journey" through the personal relations of the Godhead. From the standpoint of the seeker, the Spirit plays a crucial

role in “casting” the contemplative vision: he “brings” light to the knower; he illuminates the seeker; he opens up the possibility of divine knowledge. But that vision opened up by the Spirit carries the theologian in the convergence to the “one” then out to the “three” and then, again, to the “one.” This “dizzying” *θεωρία* is a product of the Father’s initial “action”—the Father as *verb*—that gives rise to the divine life manifest in three distinct persons. Yet, these divine persons are continually moving toward one another rather than existing in static separation.

The generative power “moving out” from the Father is not explicitly characterized as that of “love” within Nazianzen, nor the convergence; but the “rhythmic” going forth and returning has the Father as the beginning and end. Such a rhythmic reciprocity patterns the “give and return” that marks the dynamics of biblical love (e.g., Eph 5:1-2). *Fatherhood* in Nazianzen, then, has a fruitful and self-giving quality, setting love “in motion” and enabling its full reception, even compelling its return. Such movements are most clear and defined in his Trinitarian description as discerned through *θεωρία*, yet they are even glimpsed in the aforementioned movements out from the Father resulting in creation and redemption. As creatures receive the strong medicine of the Word, they are drawn back to the good Father in order to receive his benefits. His Fatherhood is an unceasing generous fount with dynamics “spilling out” of the eternal life in order to bring divine goods to creatures in and through the Son and Spirit.

The Spirit’s involvement in this “rhythmic reciprocity” is crucial, for he is often presented by Nazianzen as the “perfection” of the Trinity. It is he that enables the “dyad” to move beyond constriction as another eternally equal manifestation of the Father’s generosity. Nazianzen’s theological attention to the status of the Spirit as eternally proceeding from the Father is not incidental to the overall role he plays in his Trinitarian vision. His essential epistemological role is in opening up to human beings knowledge of the divine light. That is to say, he brings “illumination” even as he draws one into the threefold light of the Godhead. His drawing in, however, follows the “rhythms” of the Godhead, so that convergence upon the unity of the Father is the lodestar of that vision.

Yet, rather than the vision “settling” on the Father’s light, it moves out and in among the dazzling threefold lights of the Godhead. Is there something here of there being too much light to take in, so it races to and fro?

Is there something to the Father that “repels” attention as his selfless generosity moves “outward” to the other persons? Whatever is the case, the connections between light imagery, the Spirit, and the contemplation of the Triune character of God deepens our consideration of the mystery of the Father. Movement toward the source of light never settles but sends one back out only to return again and again as the seeker is drawn into an infinite source of light that gradually illumines even as it continually exceeds one’s grasp.

The extensive consideration given to the *dynamic* nature of the Fatherhood of God has the result of mitigating overly rigid notions of rank or position within the Godhead, and, consequently, heeds Nazianzen’s warning not to “show a perverse reverence for divine monarchy (τὴν μοναρχίαν κακῶς τιμῆσης).”²⁷ Interestingly, this strong warning comes soon after one of Nazianzen’s clearest assertions of the Father’s monarchy.²⁸ On the one hand, Nazianzen’s teaching on the monarchy of the Father is quite traditional and occupies an essential place in his Trinitarian theology. On the other hand, his conception of the teaching in terms of the dynamic outflow and convergence has a “balancing” effect on notions of rank and position that are often emphasized in light of the monarchy. This brings us briefly again to the persistent suggestion within Nazianzen’s teaching of the later doctrine of *perichoresis*. To be sure, Nazianzen himself did not elaborate on this term. But within the sweep of his thought we see the divine persons in or with one another through a dynamic movement toward unity. While the convergence is upon the source, that is, the Father, it entails the co-presence of each of the divine persons. Consequently, Nazianzen has found a way to at times clearly uphold a traditional sense of the monarchy of the Father while at the same time providing the “theological tools” for a robust expression of divine three-in-oneness.

Such being the case, categories like relational “authority” in recent evangelical Trinitarian theology are out of place within the structures or Nazianzen’s thought. While there is one way of reading the *monarchia* in Trinitarian theology that carries with it the entailment of the Father having authority within the Trinity, according to Pro-Nicene theologians, such as Nazianzen, subsequent positions of subordination among the divine persons do not follow. In a bare sense “authority” could denote origin (*auctor*) and so would not be completely foreign to Nazianzen’s view of the Father as the

source (ἀρχή) or cause (αἴτιος). In its more robust connotations, however, it communicates such notions as a division of power or eliciting obedience within the eternal Trinity. These are ideas Gregory would see as foreign to the unity of the Godhead, even if that unity finds its impulse in the Father.²⁹ Inversely, “subordination” could denote simply being “ordered under,” an idea again consistent with Nazianzen’s use of ἀρχή and αἴτιος for the Father and the consequent *taxis* of the Trinity. Such a claim, though, must be so carefully nuanced in order to avoid misunderstanding that it is generally unhelpful. Indeed, Nazianzen would find use of subordination language as dividing the glorious unity of the Godhead:

We do not weigh out the Godhead, nor do we divorce the one and inaccessible nature from itself by unnatural differences (Οὐ γὰρ θεότητα ταλαντεύομεν οὐδὲ τὴν μίαν καὶ ἀπρόσιτον φύσιν ἀποξενούμεν ἑαυτῆς ἐκφύλοις ἀλλοτριότησιν). Nor do we cure one evil by another, dissolving the impious contraction of Sabellius by a more impious separation and division (διαρέσει καὶ κατατομῇ). This was the disease of Arius ... Without honoring the Father, he dishonored what proceeded from him by maintaining unequal degrees in the Godhead (διὰ τῶν ἀνίσων βαθμῶν τῆς θεότητος). But we recognize one glory of the Father, the equality of the Only-begotten, and one glory of the Son, the equality of the Holy Spirit. And we believe that to subordinate anything of the three is to destroy the whole. We venerate and acknowledge three with respect to attributes; one, with respect to Godhead (Καὶ ὁ τι ἂν τῶν τριῶν κάτω θῶμεν, τὸ πᾶν καθαιρεῖν νομίζομεν, τρία μὲν ταῖς ιδιότησιν, ἓν δὲ τῇ θεότητι σέβοντες καὶ γινώσκοντες).³⁰

It is no question that, consistent with other Pro-Nicene theologians, Nazianzen’s Trinitarianism involves a delicate balance that accounts for the precise relation between order and equality among the divine persons. The Father is at the center of that “balance”—indeed, he is crucial for holding these claims together.³¹

Nazianzen’s theology is a rhetorical theology requiring our attention to the *way* he argues as much as to the words he uses. There is a suppleness to the theological constructions he chooses to employ depending on the enemies before him and whether he is writing verse or speaking an oration. Finding absolute consistency of expression among these is a fool’s errand. Gregory had several ways of putting his teaching. Nevertheless, this article

has sought to enter into the structures of his Trinitarian thought in order to find a coherence to the unity and diversity of the Godhead through a dynamic conception of the Fatherhood of God.

¹ A version of this article was presented as a paper at the 2016 annual meeting of the North American Patristics Society.

² Or. 23.8; SC 270:296-298, 1-15; Vinson, 137: Ἐγὼ...θεότητος ἀρχὴν εἰσάγων ἄχρονον καὶ ἀχώριστον καὶ ἀόριστον τὴν τε ἀρχὴν τιμῶ καὶ τὰ ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐπίσης τὴν μέν, ὅτι τοιούτων ἀρχὴ τὰ δέ, ὅτι οὕτως καὶ τοιαῦτα καὶ ἐκ τοιούτου μήτε τῷ ποτὲ μήτε τῇ φύσει μήτε τῷ σεπτῷ διεργόμενα, ἐν ὄντα διηρημένως καὶ διαιρούμενα συνημμένως εἰ καὶ παράδοξον τοῦτο εἰπεῖν οὐχ ἦτον ἐπαινετὰ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσεως ἢ καθ' ἑαυτὸ ἕκαστον νοουμένον τε καὶ λαμβανόμενον. Τριάδα τελείαν ἐκ τελείων τριῶν, μονάδος μὲν κινήσεως διὰ τὸ πλούσιον, δυάδος δὲ ὑπερδαθείσης ~ ὑπὲρ γὰρ τὴν ἕλην καὶ τὸ εἶδος, ἐξ ὧν τὰ σώματα ~, Τριάδος δὲ ὀρισθείσης διὰ τὸ τέλειον, πρώτη γὰρ ὑπερβαίνει δυάδος σύνθεσιν, ἵνα μήτε στενὴ μὲν θεότης, μήτε εἰς ἄπειρον χέηται. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀφιλότιμον, τὸ δὲ ἄτακτον καὶ τὸ μὲν ἰουδαϊκὸν παντελῶς, τὸ δὲ ἑλληνικὸν καὶ πολύθεον.

In my examination of Or. 23 I have made use of Martha Vinson's English translation, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations* (The Fathers of the Church 107; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003) and the Greek in *Discours 20-23* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1980).

Even though Nazianzen does not directly refer here to the Father as the source and the Son and Spirit as "what issues from he source," it is my understanding that this passage cannot be understood within his Trinitarian theology other than by these associations.

³ SC 250:178, 6-18; Wickham, 70: Ἡμῖν δὲ μοναρχία τὸ τιμώμενον μοναρχία δὲ, οὐχ ἦν ἐν περιγραφῇ πρόσωπον ~ ἐστὶ γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐν στασιάζον πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πολλὰ καθίστασθαι ~ ἀλλ' ἦν φύσεως ὁμοτιμία συνίτησι, καὶ γνῶμης σύμνοια, καὶ ταυτότης κινήσεως, καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ σύννευσις... ὥστε καὶ ἀριθμῷ διαφέρει, τῇ γε οὐσία μὴ τέμνεσθαι. Διὰ τοῦτο μονάς ((ἀπ' ἀρχῆς)), εἰς δυάδα κινήσεισα, μέχρι τριάδος ἐσθι. Καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν ἡμῖν ὁ Πατήρ, καὶ ὁ Υἱός, καὶ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα ὁ μὲν γεννητῶν καὶ προβολεύς, λέγω δὲ ἀπαθῶς, καὶ ἀχρόνως, καὶ ἀσωμάτως τῶν δέ, τὸ μὲν γέννημα, τὸ δὲ πρόβλημα, ἢ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἂν τις ταῦτα καλέσειεν, ἀφελῶν πάντη τῶν ὁρωμένων.

In my examination of the *Theological Orations* I have made use of Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham's English translation, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002) and the Greek in *Discours 27-31* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1978).

⁴ SC 358:120, 1-6; Daley, 121: τὸ κινεῖσθαι μόνον τῇ ἀετῆς θεωρίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔδει χεθῆναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὀδεῦσαι, ὡς πλείονα εἶναι τὰ εὐεργετούμενα ~ τοῦτο γὰρ τῆς ἄκρας ἦν ἀγαθότητος ~, πρῶτον μὲν ἐννοεῖ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς δυνάμεις καὶ οὐρανίους καὶ τὸ ἐννόημα ἔργον ἦν, Λόγω συμπληρούμενον καὶ Πνεύματι τελειοῦμενον.

In my examination of Ors. 38 I have made use of Brian Daley's English translation, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2006) the Greek in *Discours 38-41* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1990).

⁵ SC 358:120, 12-13; Daley, 121: ἄτε περὶ Θεὸν οὐσας καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἐκ Θεοῦ λαμπομένας τὰ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα, δευτέρας ἐλλάμψεως.

⁶ SC 358:122, 6-9; Daley, 121: ἐπαινετὸν μὲν τῆς καθ' ἕκαστον εὐφύας, ἀξιεπαινετώτερον δὲ τῆς ἐξ ἀπάντων εὐαρμοστίας καὶ συμφωνίας, ἄλλου πρὸς ἄλλο τι καλῶς ἔχοντος καὶ πάντων πρὸς ἅπαντα, εἰς ἐνὸς κόσμου συμπλήρωσιν.

⁷ SC 358:122, 10; Daley, 121.

⁸ Or. 38.13; SC 358:132, 8; Daley, 123.

⁹ Or. 38.25; SC 358:138, 4-6; Daley, 125: Τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀποστολὴν εἶναι νόμισον, ἐφ' ὃν ἀναφέρει τὰ ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ ὡς ἀρχὴν τιμῶν ἄχρονον καὶ τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀντίθεος.

¹⁰ Or. 31.27; SC 250:328, 1; Wickham, 138.

¹¹ Or. 31.29; SC 250:334, 30; Wickham, 140.

¹² Or. 31.26; SC 250:325, 4-17; Wickham, 137: Ἐκῆρυσσε φανερώς ἡ Παλαιὰ τὸν Πατέρα, τὸν Υἱὸν ἀμυδρότερον. Ἐφανέρωσεν ἡ Καινὴ τὸν Υἱόν, ὑπέδειξε τὸ Πνεύματος τὴν θεότητα. Ἐμπολιτεύεται νῦν τὸ Πνεῦμα, σαφεστέρων ἡμῖν παρέχον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δῆλωσιν... ταῖς δὲ κατὰ μέρος προσθήκαις, καὶ, ὡς εἶπεν Δαυῖδ, ((ἀναβάσσει)), καὶ ((ἐκ δόξης εἰς δόξαν)) προόδους καὶ προκοπαῖς, τὸ τῆς Τριάδος φῶς ἐκλάμψιεν τοῖς λαμπροτέροις.

- ¹³ SC 358:334-336, 15-23; Harrison, 151-152. In my examination of *Or. 41* I have made use of the Nonna Verna Harrison's English translation, *Festal Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008) and the Greek in *Discours 38-41* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1990).
- ¹⁴ *Or. 31.3*; SC 250:280, 20-21; Wickham, 118.
- ¹⁵ *Prin. 1 3, 8*; SC 252:162, 272-292; Butterfield, 48-49: *Deus pater omnibus praestat ut sint, participatio uero Christi secundus id, quod uerbum (uel ratio) est, facit ea esse rationalia. Ex quo consequens est ea uel laude digna esse uel culpa, quia et uirtutis et malitiae sunt capacia. Propter hoc consequenter adest etiam gratia spiritus sancti, ut ea que substantialiter sancta non sunt, participatione ipsius sancta efficiantur. Cum ergo primo ut sint habeant ex deo patre, secundo ut rationalia sint habeant ex uerbo, tertio ut sancta sint habeant ex spiritu sancto : rursus Christi secundus hoc, quod iustitia dei est, capacia efficiuntur ea, quae iam sanctificata ante fuerint per spiritum sanctum ; et qui in hunc gradum proficere meruerint per sanctificationem spiritus sancti, consequuntur nihilominus donum sapientiae secundum uirtutem inoperationis spiritus dei. Et hoc puto Paulus dicere, cum ait quibusdam sermonem dari sapientiae, aliis sermonem scientiae secundum eundem spiritum. Et designans unanquamque discretionem donorum, referat omnia ad uniuersitatis fontem et dicit: Diuisiones sunt inoperationum, sed unus deus, qui operatur omnia in omnibus.*
 In my examination of *Prin. 1* I have made use of the English translation by G. W. Butterworth in *Our First Principles* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013) and the Greek in *Origène: Traité Des Principes, Tome I* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1978).
- ¹⁶ *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1986), 71.
- ¹⁷ John Dillon, "Logos and Trinity," in *The Philosophy in Christianity* (ed., Godfrey Vesey, 1-14; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10-14. Dillon writes, "For Porphyry..., the First Principle is the Father of the intelligible triad. This betokens a significant simplification even of Plotinus' metaphysical scheme, and is certainly in stark contrast to the much greater elaboration of those of Iamblichus and his successors.... Porphyry also, however, maintained the absolute transcendence of the first God.... For Porphyry, it would seem, the first principle, the Father, while maintaining his "incomparable superiority", also presides over a triad made up of Potency of Life, and Activity (*energeia*) or Intellect. The fact that the Intellect contemplates the Father, in so far as it can (and we must suppose that Porphyry maintained the distinction made by Plotinus between the One in itself and the One as object of intellection), does not compromise the Father's non-co-ordination with anything else ... Only in Porphyry's version of the doctrine [of the triad], itself a creative development on *Chaldaean Oracles*, do we find what we want, and even in Porphyry there are subtleties which most Christians missed, or chose to miss. Porphyry does seem to distinguish between the One (a term he still maintained), or Father, viewed "in himself", and the One as object of intellection (*noeton*), in which capacity he is properly "Father of the noetic triad". He was thus able to accept all of Plotinus' characterizations of the One, while still "telescoping" it into what in later Neoplatonism, certainly (from Iamblichus on), was seen as a quite distinct level of reality, the Intelligible, or One-Being."
- ¹⁸ Armstrong, *Ennead V*, 58-59: *καὶ πρώτη οἷον γέννησις αὐτῆ· ὃν γὰρ τέλειον τῷ μηδὲν ζήτησι μηδὲ ἔχειν μηδὲ δεῖσθαι οἷον ὑπερέρρηθαι καὶ τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο· τὸ δὲ γενόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπον καὶ νοῦς οὗτος. καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὃν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα τὸν νοῦν.* In my examination of the *Enneads* I have made use of both the English translations and Greek of A. H. Armstrong, trans., *Ennead*, 6 vols. (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966-88).
- ¹⁹ Armstrong, *Ennead III*, 398-401: *Τὸ μὲν... ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἤχνος αὐτοῦ τῷ νῷ ὁρῶντι ἔδωκεν ἔχειν· ὥστε ἐν μὲν τῷ νῷ ἡ φρεσις καὶ ἐπιμένους αἰεὶ καὶ αἰεὶ τυγχάνων, ἐκεῖ<νο> δὲ οὕτε ἐπιμένους—τινος γάρ;—οὔτε τυγχάνων· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπιέτω. Οὐ τοίνυν οὐδὲ νοῦς. "Φρεσις γὰρ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ καὶ σύννευσις πρὸς τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ.*
- ²⁰ For diverging views, see: Christopher Beeley, "Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus," *HTR* 100:2 (2007): 199-214; idem, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Richard Cross, "Divine Monarchy in Gregory of Nazianzus," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006): 105-16; Volker Henning Drecoll, "Remarks on Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God. In your Light We Shall See Light*," *SJT* 64:4 (2011): 456-473; John Egan, "Primal Cause and Trinitarian Perichoresis in Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration 31.14*," *SP* 27 (1993): 21-28; Andrew Louth, "St Gregory of Nazianzus on the Monarchy of the Father," in *Gott Vater und Schöpfer: Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens* (eds., Isabel de Andia and Peter Leander Hofrichter; Innsbruck: Tyrol, 2007).
- ²¹ SC 384:80-82, 9- 10; Daley, 147. In my examination of *Or. 42* I have made use of Brian Daley's English translation, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2006) and the Greek in *Discours 42-43* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1992).

- ²² Or. 42.15; SC 384:82, 17-20; Daley, 147. Nazianzen argues similarly (from 1 Cor 8:6) for the unity of the Godhead being found in the Father in Or. 39.12, though without the corresponding notions of divine movement: ““For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things,” and one Holy Spirit in whom are all things. The phrases “from whom” and “through whom” and “in whom” do not divide natures (μη φύσεις τεμνόντων)—for then there could be no change of prepositions or of the order of the words—but rather express the peculiar characteristics of one unconfused nature (ἀλλὰ χαρακτηριζόντων μίας καὶ ἀσυγχύτου φύσεως ιδιότητος)” (SC 358:172-174, 1-6; Daley, 133).
- ²³ Brian E. Daley, S.J., *Gregory of Nazianzus* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 46.
- ²⁴ Or. 25.16: “We should believe that the Father is truly a Father, far more truly father, in fact, than we humans are, in that he is uniquely, that is, distinctively so, unlike corporal beings; and that he is one alone, that is, without mate, and Father of one alone, his Only-Begotten; and that he is a Father only, not formerly a son; and that he is wholly Father, and father of one wholly his son, as cannot be affirmed of human beings; and that he has been Father from the beginning and did not become Father in the course of things. We should believe that the Son is truly a Son in that he is the only Son of one only Father and only in one way and only a Son. He is not also Father but is wholly Son, and Son of one who is wholly Father ... We should also believe that the Holy Spirit is truly holy in that there is no other like him in quality or manner and in that his holiness is not conferred but is holiness in the absolute, and in that it is not more or less nor did he begin or will he end in time. For what the Father and Son and Holy Spirit have in common is their divinity and the fact that they were not created, while for the Son and the Holy Spirit it is the fact that they are from the Father. In turn, the special characteristic of the Father is his ingenerateness, of the Son his generation, and of the Holy Spirit his procession” (Vinson, 171-172).
- ²⁵ SC 358:294, 17-19; Harrison, 137. In my examination of Or. 40 I have made use of the Nonna Verna Harrison’s English translation, *Festal Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008 and the Greek in *Discours 38-41* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1990).
- ²⁶ John McGuckin, “Gregory of Nazianzus,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Part 1 (ed., Lloyd Gerson; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 491.
- ²⁷ Or. 25.18; SC 284:200, 1; Vinson, 173. In my examination of Or. 25 I have made use of Martha Vinson’s English translation, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations* (The Fathers of the Church 107; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003) and the Greek in *Discours 24-26* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1981).
- ²⁸ Or. 25.15: “Define... for us our orthodox faith by teaching us to recognize one God, unbegotten, the Father, and one begotten Lord, his Son, referred to as God when he is mentioned separately, but Lord when he is named in conjunction with the Father, the one term on account of his nature, the other on account of his monarchy; and the Holy Spirit proceeding, or, if you will, going forth from the Father, God to those with the capacity to apprehend things that are interrelated.... Neither should we place the Father beneath first principle, so as to avoid positing a first of the first, thus necessarily destroying primary existence; nor say that the Son or the Holy Spirit are not without beginning. Thus we shall avoid depriving the Father of his special characteristic. Paradoxically, they are not without beginning, and, in a sense, they are: they are not in terms of causation, since they are indeed from God although they are not subsequent to him, just as light is not subsequent to sun, but they are without beginning in terms of time since they are not subject to it...” (Vinson, 170-171).
- ²⁹ See ft. 22 above. Similarly, in Or. 40.41 Nazianzen begins a long section on the Triune God by asserting “the one divinity and power, found in unity in the three, and gathering together the three as distinct (τὴν μίαν θεότητά τε καὶ δύναμιν ἐν τοῖς τρισὶν εὐρισκομένην ἐνικῶς καὶ τὰ τρία συλλαμβάνουσαν μεριστῶς)” and then closes that same sentence by saying each divine person is “God because of the consubstantiality, one God because of the monarchy (ἐκεῖνο διὰ τὴν ὁμοουσιότητα, τοῦτο διὰ τὴν μοναρχίαν)” (SC 358:292-294, 7-17; Harrison, 136-137).
- ³⁰ Or. 43.30; SC 384:192-194, 9-21; McCauley, 53: Οὐ γὰρ θεότητα ταλαντεύομεν οὐδὲ τὴν μίαν καὶ ἀπόρσιτον φύσιν ἀποξενούμεν ἑαυτῆς ἐκφύλοις ἀλλοτριότησιν οὐδὲ κακῶ τὸ κακὸν ἰώμεθα, τὴν ἄθεον Σαβελίου συναρεσιν ἀσεβεστέρᾳ διατρέσει καὶ κατατομῇ λύοντες, ἣν Ἄρειος νοσήσας, ὁ τῆς μαγίας ἐπώνυμος, τὸ πολὺ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διέδεισε καὶ διέφθειρεν, οὗτε τὸν Πατέρα τιμήσας καὶ ἀτιμάσας τὰ ἐξ αὐτοῦ διὰ τῶν ἀνίσων βαθμῶν τῆς θεότητος. Ἀλλὰ μίαν μὲν δάξαν Πατρὸς γινώσκουμεν τὴν ὁμοτιμίαν τοῦ Μονογενοῦς, μίαν δὲ Υἱοῦ τὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος, Καὶ ὁ ἅν τῶν τριῶν κάτω θώμεν, τὸ πᾶν καθαιρεῖν νομιζόμεν, τρία μὲν ταῖς ιδιότησιν, ἐν δὲ τῇ θεότητι ἐβρόντες καὶ γινώσκοντες. In my examination of Or. 43 I have made use of Leo P. McCauley, SJ’s English translation, *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory of Nazianzus and Saint Ambrose* (The Fathers of the Church 22; Washington,

DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953) and the Greek in *Discours 42-43* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1992).

- ³¹ To my knowledge, the best article seeking to hold together Pro-Nicene order and equality within Trinitarian discourse is Steven D. Boyer's "Articulating Order: Trinitarian Discourse in an Egalitarian Age," *Pro Ecclesia* 18:3 (2009): 255-272.

Trinity and Economy in Thomas Aquinas

STEVEN J. DUBY

Steven J. Duby is Instructor of Theology at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. He earned his PhD in Systematic Theology at the University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Scotland. He is the author of *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (T&T Clark, 2015) and various articles in journals such as *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, *Modern Theology*, and *Journal of Reformed Theology*. Dr. Duby's primary research interests are in the doctrine of God and Christology.

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity is a catholic teaching, a common possession of Christ's whole church which expresses our understanding of the one who possesses and keeps us by his redeeming grace. Yet this doctrine that ought to foster a sense of unity among all orthodox believers has been a point of contention in recent times, not least in the world of evangelical theology where questions about the nature of the Son's submission to the Father's authority have generated significant controversy.¹ My task in this essay is not to address any of these recent proposals directly but rather to consider how one of the church's greatest theologians, Thomas Aquinas, handles the doctrine of the Trinity and how reflection on his work helps to cultivate the kind of theological discernment needed for faithful articulation of trinitarian teaching today. I propose to do this by focusing especially on the way in which Thomas sees God's triune existence shaping God's action in the economy of salvation. More specifically, we will focus on the question of how closely God's own triune being corresponds to his activity in the incarnation. To show how Thomas's perspective provides a helpful pathway into this matter, I will seek to do three things. First, I will set forth the basic concepts and

structure of Thomas's trinitarian doctrine, particularly his understanding of the divine processions, relations, persons and personal properties. Second, I will examine how this view of the processions and mutual relations of the persons gives shape to Thomas's view of the mission and incarnation of the Son. Finally, I will comment on the strength of Thomas's position on the correspondence between God's trinitarian existence and his activity in the incarnation in dialogue with two alternative approaches to the question (those of Karl Barth and some Reformed orthodox theologians).

THE STRUCTURE OF THOMAS'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas begins his account of the Trinity with a discussion of the triune processions (i.e., the Son's eternal generation by the Father and the Spirit's eternal procession from the Father and Son), for, according to Thomas, the divine persons are distinct from one another by "relations of origin." He distinguishes a catholic view of the processions from the Arian and Sabellian views by stressing that procession in God is neither the procession of an effect from a cause (as Arius understood the Son's procession) nor the procession of a cause to an effect (as Sabellius understood the Father to "proceed" in assuming flesh and to be called the Son in that respect). To preserve both the true deity and genuine distinction of the persons in orthodox trinitarianism, Thomas explains that procession here is to be understood not as an outward act but rather as an inward act that "remains in the agent himself." It is an origination or "emanation" after the manner of a concept proceeding from the intellect or a spoken word proceeding from a speaker.² The procession of the Son in particular is called "generation," not because the Son passes from non-existence to existence or from potency to actuality as in the generation of something corruptible, but because he is one living who proceeds from a "living principle." Such a procession is properly called "birth" (*nativitas*), and, indeed, the particular birth of the Son is of the sort in which the one born is properly called "begotten," for he shares the same nature as the one who begets him (God the Father).³ Thomas believes the procession of the Son (who is aptly called the "Word") occurs in the manner of an "intelligible action" where the concept of the thing known remains in the agent knowing (here, the Father), while the procession of the Spirit occurs in the manner of a "volitional action"

where the object loved remains in the one willing and loving (in this case, two – both the Father and the Son).⁴ Yet Thomas is clear that the communication of the divine essence to the Son and Spirit in their processions does not multiply the divine essence or yield multiple deities. It is not that the divine essence is generated by the Father; rather, the Son is generated and, in being generated, receives from the Father the same essence the Father has.⁵

The processions in God require discussion of the relations of origin among the divine persons. The relation of the Father to the Son is called paternity; the relation of the Son to the Father is called filiation; the relation of the Father and Son to the Spirit is called spiration; the relation of the Spirit to the Father and Son is called procession.⁶ Thomas clarifies that these are not just logical relations existing in the human mind as it compares one thing to another. In that case, God would not really be Father, Son or Spirit, which would result in the error of Sabellianism. Instead, these relations are “real,” since the Father and Son, for example, are in fact “ordered toward one another” and have an “inclination” toward one another. This is supported by the fact that the processions in God occur within a single nature and order of being so that the relations among the persons are mutually constitutive.⁷ The relation of one person to another in the Trinity is, for Thomas, really identical with (the same “thing” as) the divine essence itself. If it were not the divine essence, it would be a creature. Accordingly, the relations among the divine persons are not accidents added to God’s essence; rather, their being (*esse*) is just that of the divine essence. Yet, this does not mean that the relation is the essence considered as such or absolutely, for what the relation is—in Thomas’s language, the proper *ratio* of the relation—is a reference or “habitude” toward another. Nor does it mean that the essence is reduced to a relation, for relation here does not signify all that the essence is.⁸ Thomas adds, against Sabellianism, that these relations are “really” distinct from one another—not as one “thing” (*res*) or being from another but as distinct in reality and not just in the human mind. For, if a real relation is present—a real “respect of one to another”—this assumes a real distinction between the one and the other. Thus, there is real distinction in God, not with respect to what is absolute (i.e., the essence) but with respect to what is relative (i.e., the persons). Indeed, though the relations are identical in their being to one and the same thing (i.e., the essence), they are not identical to one another since they are not identical to the essence absolutely but formally import or involve a respect toward another.⁹

The Concept of Person

After dealing with the concepts of procession and relation in the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas is ready to discuss the concept of person.¹⁰ He affirms Boethius's definition of "person" (an "individual substance of a rational nature," which Thomas takes to be equivalent to the Greek *hypostasis*) and argues that it is rightly used to designate the Father, Son and Spirit, as long as it is recognized that certain creaturely factors that might be associated with the definition do not obtain in the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, individuation occurs by matter in many created substances, and created substances are often called such because they "stand under" accidents, but neither is true of God.¹¹

Thomas then asks whether *persona* in the Trinity signifies relation, anticipating some of the careful work he will do a few questions later in the *Summa Theologiae* in clarifying the relationships among the various features (relation, person, essence and so on) included in the doctrine of the Trinity. *Persona* is not one of the "essential names" (like wisdom or power) that are attributed absolutely to God's essence and are thus one in God. Yet, in itself, "person" does not have reference to another as paternity or filiation does. Thomas prefers to resolve the matter by saying that *persona* signifies relation "directly" and the divine essence "indirectly." For, on the one hand, person signifies something that is distinct in a given nature rather than the nature as such (*this* particular individual as distinct from others), and, as noted, the persons of the Trinity are distinct by their relations toward one another. This means that *persona* must directly signify relation in the case of the Father, Son and Spirit. Yet, as noted, the relations of origin in the Trinity are not accidents added to God's essence but really are the divine essence itself as it subsists in the distinct persons.¹² *Persona* thus signifies not merely a relation but rather the relation *as subsisting*. In light of this, when Thomas calls the divine persons "relations," he is not reducing the meaning of person to a mere respect or habitude toward another. He does affirm that *persona* signifies a distinct individual and that the divine persons are constituted as distinct from one another just by the relations of origin in God, which entails that the denotative content of *persona* as applied to the Father, Son and Spirit gives special prominence to the notion of relation. At the same time, the relations in the Trinity really are the divine essence as it subsists in the Father, Son and Spirit, so person as signifying

a relation also includes all the fullness of God's essence as it subsists in a certain manner. *Persona* thus does not signify relation as such but only as the constitutive, individuating principle of the *hypostasis*.¹³ Accordingly, given that *hypostasis* in God is really identical with God's essence, *persona* may from another angle be said to signify the essence directly and relation indirectly as an individuating factor. Given his emphasis on *persona* being a name suited—not merely by amended usage but “by the fittingness of its own signification”—to the Father, Son and Spirit in their distinctness from one another, Thomas's view of the term differs from that of Augustine, who did not view *persona* as especially suited to designate the Father, Son and Spirit. For Augustine, *persona* designates the three simply because something has to be said when someone asks “three what?” in discussion of the Trinity.¹⁴ However, with Augustine, Thomas can say that because *persona* is equivalent to *hypostasis* and because in God *hypostasis* (‘what is’) and essence (that ‘by which’ a *hypostasis* is) are really identical, the content of the term *persona* includes the divine essence.¹⁵

The Concept of “Notion”

Another important feature of Thomas's doctrine of the Trinity is the concept of a “notion.” By “notion” Thomas means an abstract representation of the distinct character of a divine person, by which the person can be readily identified by us. He draws attention to five notions that set forth the distinct subsistences of the Father, Son and Spirit. To the Father belong “innascibility” (not proceeding from another person) and paternity (his begetting of the Son); to the Son belongs filiation (proceeding from the Father in a filial manner); to both the Father and Son belongs common spiration (eternally bringing forth the Holy Spirit); to the Spirit belongs procession (coming forth from the Father and Son in what Thomas regards as a volitional manner). Four of these are relations (innascibility expresses no relation of the Father to another person and so is the exception). Four of these are unique to one person (common spiration belongs to two persons and so is the exception here), and these four are thus called properties (characteristics proper to just one person). Three of these are what Thomas calls “personal” in the sense that they are fundamentally constitutive of the persons: paternity, filiation, procession.¹⁶ Significantly, Thomas does not describe the notions or personal properties after the manner of creaturely properties, which are, in classical

metaphysics, accidents (things that inhere in another in order to exist) naturally and automatically adjoined to the essence of a thing (as risibility is to human nature). Instead, to uphold God's simplicity and confirm that there are no accidents in the divine persons, he explains that the personal properties are really identical to the divine persons themselves. They simply prescind the peculiar relative manner of subsisting of each person and express it in the abstract as a formal *ratio* by which each person is distinct from the others. The function of the personal properties is therefore, by an alternative mode of signifying the persons, to provide an answer to the question of how (*quo*, "by what") there are three persons in God.¹⁷

To connect this at a very general level to contemporary debates about the distinctions among the divine persons, it is worth noting that Thomas does not envision any faculties (intellect, will) or inhering features that might distinguish the persons, only their relations to one another. Anything included in the divine essence itself (e.g., intellect and will) is ruled out as an individuating factor that might distinguish the divine persons. The principles of individuation in the doctrine of the Trinity are strictly the persons' relative modes of subsisting: begetting the Son (the Father's mode of subsisting), proceeding filially from the Father (the Son's mode of subsisting) and proceeding from the Father and Son (the Spirit's mode of subsisting). Even the power by which the Father generates the Son, for example, is not a power unique to the Father but simply the common divine power as modified and eternally enacted by the Father under a relation to the Son.¹⁸

With this basic understanding of the structure of Thomas's trinitarian theology in hand, it is now fitting to inquire about how he views the relationship between God's own triune being and his activity in the economy. How do the processions, relations of origin and notions or personal properties give shape to God's outward works, particularly the mission and incarnation of the Son? Do all the dynamics of the Son's mission and incarnation (especially his submission to the Father) have an antecedent in the Son's procession and eternal relation to the Father? These questions will occupy us in the next section.

THE MISSION, INCARNATION AND SUBMISSION OF THE SON

It is relevant to our discussion of God's activity in the incarnation that when Thomas discusses the individual persons in greater detail in the *Summa Theologiae*, he touches upon the equality of the Father and Son. He explores the question of whether the Father is rightly called a "principle" of the Son and argues that he is rightly called such because a principle is simply "that by which something proceeds." "Principle" has a wider meaning than "cause," which, though it is used by the Greek fathers in the doctrine of the Trinity, is imprudent to use in this case since causal language suggests a "diversity of substance." While Thomas, quoting Hilary of Poitiers, is willing to grant a certain *auctoritas* (a word that may denote "authority" or "originating power") to the Father in that the Father begets the Son, he refuses to allow any "subjection" (*subjectio*) or "minority" or "less-ness" (*minoritas*) pertaining "in any way" to the Son (or the Spirit). For, as he puts it, "every occasion of error should be avoided."¹⁹

This links up with Thomas's later discussion of whether the Son is equal to the Father in greatness (*secundum magnitudinem*). Philippians 2:6 is crucial here: the Son did not consider it "robbery" (*rapina* in the Latin text Thomas uses) to be equal to God the Father.²⁰ For the Son receives from the Father the very nature of the Father, and greatness is nothing but the "perfection of the nature itself." That the Son is indeed equal to the Father is further underscored by the fact that his generation is not like the transition from potentiality to actuality that occurs in human generation; the Son is generated eternally by the Father, with no gradual development or perfection taking place over time. Thus, when Christ states that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), this pertains to his human nature. So too 1 Corinthians 15:28 ("the Son himself will be subject to him who subjects all things to him"): "those words are understood as said about Christ according to the human nature, in which he is less than the Father and subject to him." Thomas references Athanasius here, affirming that the Son is "equal to the Father according to divinity, less than the Father according to humanity." He then references Hilary again, apparently conceding that the Father might be called "greater" just in the sense that he generates the Son and in so doing communicates the divine nature to him. However, the quotation of Hilary continues and affirms that "he is not less to whom the one being is given."²¹

Thomas then includes another quote from Hilary where Hilary distinguishes between the subjection of God the Son and the subjection of creatures: “the subjection of the Son is a natural devotion (*naturae pietas*),” which is, according to Thomas, “recognition of the *auctoritas* of the Father,” “but the subjection of the rest is a matter of the weakness of creation.”²²

That Thomas would not posit a subordination or obedience of the Son as God or in his eternal relation to the Father is clear not only from the strong statements already mentioned here but also from his Christology. In the third part of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas directly addresses the question of whether the Son is “subject” to the Father, and there the subjection and obedience of the Son are restricted to his human nature alone (or, better, to the Son only as he subsists and acts in his human nature). It is proper to humanity to be subject to God’s authority (*potestas*) and to be required to obey God’s commands. It is therefore according to his human nature that Jesus always does what is pleasing to the Father (John 8:29) and that he obeys the Father even unto death (Phil 2:8). In this article, Thomas takes into account an objection that might be raised on the basis of the fact that only creatures are subject to God. In response, Thomas does not argue that a divine person as such might be subject to another divine person. Rather, he accepts that only creatures are subject to God and then argues that while Christ is not a creature “simply” (without any added qualification), he is a creature according to his human nature and may therefore be subject to the Father according to his human nature. Indeed, Thomas writes, while it is permissible to say that Christ is subject to the Father and leave the qualification “according to his human nature” to be implicit, it is wiser to add the qualification in order to avoid the error of Arius, who held that the Son is less (*minor*) than the Father.²³

The restriction of submission and obedience to Christ in his human nature appears in Thomas’s commentary on the Gospel of John. For example, in John 5:19-20 Jesus clarifies that he is not in competition with the Father by saying that he does nothing “from himself” but only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does, for the Father loves the Son and shows him what he is doing. Thomas takes it that these are works performed by the Son according to his divine nature and thus rules out that this passage might imply a minority of the Son in relation to the Father, for such a minority would be applicable to Christ only according to his human

nature. Drawing upon Augustine, then, Thomas argues that the Son never acting “from himself” refers back to his eternal relation to the Father. Just as the Son’s very being (*esse*) is “from the Father,” so too does he share in the one divine power and action “from the Father.”²⁴ Thomas paraphrases: “the Son, as he does not have *esse* except from the Father, so he is not able to do anything except from the Father.” Likewise, that the Father “shows” the Son what he does indicates not that the Father acts and then the Son subsequently learns and imitates but rather that the Father has communicated the divine knowledge to the Son as he has communicated the one divine essence and power to the Son in his eternal generation.²⁵

To be sure, Christ also uses the future tense and says that the Father *will* show him greater works (5:20b), but Thomas holds that this signals not that the Father is waiting to give the divine knowledge, power and authority to the Son in the future but instead that the Father will “show” the aforementioned works to the Son (and to all who will marvel at them) in that he will execute these works through the Son at a time in the future and make them known to the world at that point. These greater works are epitomized in the resurrection of the dead, which the Father and Son accomplish together (5:21). The fact that Jesus says the Son gives life “to whom he wills” evokes Thomas’s comment that the Father and Son do not give life to different sets of persons. Rather, the Father and Son share the one divine will and the Father always works through the Son (though not as if the Son were a mere “instrument”). Jesus then says that the Father judges no one but gives all judgment to the Son (5:22). Thomas then notes two traditional expositions of this verse. Augustine’s exposition suggests that Jesus is no longer talking about himself acting according to his divine nature (in which he always acts with and “from” the Father). If the Son alone is acting in the judgment, it must be according to his human nature (compare Acts 10:42), which would be fitting since this means that those who receive damnation at the judgment will not see God in his divine nature and will not unjustly receive the beatific vision. The “more literal” exposition of Hilary and John Chrysostom differs slightly in positing simply that the Son has “judgment” from the Father in that he has the divine wisdom (as opposed to “judgment” in the sense of granting approval and condemnation to others) from the Father by which he performs his works.²⁶

Later in John 5 Jesus says again that he does nothing “from himself” but

judges as he “hears” and that his judgment is just because he seeks not his own will but the will of the one who sent him (v. 30). Here Thomas comments that this can be taken with reference to the Son as man, in which case “hearing” would have the sense of “obeying.” In that case obedience could be intended because, if the text speaks of Christ in his human nature, it speaks of him in that respect in which he is “less” than the Father and could therefore receive a command from him. Christ’s human will, Thomas points out, is always “ruled” by the divine will. Alternatively, Jesus could be speaking of himself with regard to his being the divine Son, in which case the language of “hearing” is employed just because we receive knowledge often by hearing and Christ receives the divine knowledge from the Father in his eternal generation. If it is Jesus in his divine nature and action in view, then the text does not imply that the Father and Son have two distinct divine wills but rather reflects the fact that the Son has the divine will “from” the Father and therefore fulfills it as he has it “from another.” Thomas paraphrases Christ’s words: “I do not seek my own will, which is originally mine from myself, but [a will] which is mine from another, namely, the Father.”²⁷

The key observations are (1) that Thomas believes that filial obedience applies to Christ only where the biblical text speaks of Christ in his human nature, for he is less than the Father and commanded by the Father according to that human nature alone, and (2) that he believes that Christ in his divine nature always wills and acts from the Father in keeping with his eternal procession from and relation to the Father. There is therefore in Thomas’s theology a significant dissimilarity between the dynamic of submission and obedience in the economy and the eternal relation of the Son to the Father. This is because in the incarnation Christ has a human nature and will as well as the divine nature and will and therefore can and does act in a manner (i.e., submissively) that does not apply to him in his divine nature and eternal relation to the Father. Yet, there is still an important correspondence between Christ’s divine action in the economy and his eternal relationship to the Father, namely, that he acts from the Father just as he eternally has the divine essence and power from the Father. In other words, his mode of acting corresponds to and derives from his eternal mode of subsisting in the Godhead.²⁸

But, one might ask, what about the Son being sent of the Father? Does that imply that, even prior to his assumption of a human nature, the Son submits

to the Father? Thomas's description of the sending or "mission" of the Son does not involve subordination or obedience. In fact, the first objection in the *Summa Theologiae* raised against one divine person sending another insists that sending and being sent would entail superiority and inferiority. Thomas responds not by granting that the Son might be less than the Father but by stating that sending implies superiority and inferiority only if it occurs by the command of one who is greater or by the counsel of one who is wiser. In God, however, since the Son is equal to the Father, the mission of the Son is simply his coming forth "from" the Father "according to origin" (not according to "command" or "counsel") and coming forth "toward" his human nature. The mission thus consists of (1) a relation to the one from whom he is sent (the Father) and (2) a relation to that toward which he is sent to exist in a new mode, the *terminus ad quem* here being his human nature. Put differently, the mission is the act of the eternal procession with the addition of a temporal term and effect.²⁹

Given the relationship between the Son's mission and his eternal, constitutive procession and relation to the Father, there is a dissimilarity between the (human) obedience of the Son after his assumption of a human nature and his coming forth from the Father to assume that nature. However, according to Thomas, there is still an important connection between the Son's mission and his procession because a divine person may be "sent" only insofar as he proceeds from another. As noted, procession from another is included in the very definition of mission. By contrast, it does not "agree" with the Father to be sent because he does not proceed from another in the Trinity.³⁰ At one point in his account of the incarnation, though, Thomas is arguably less concerned to maintain this correspondence between the structure of the economy and the eternal order of the divine persons. He asks whether any of the three persons (not just the Son) could have assumed a human nature, and he answers affirmatively. For the divine power is "commonly" and "indifferently" present in the three persons. If the Son, then, had the power to be incarnate, so too did the Father (and Spirit). In addition, though Christ is the "Son of Man," this is only a "temporal sonship" that (unlike eternal sonship) does not constitute the person of the Son and therefore could have been applied to the Father or Spirit without undoing the eternal order of the persons. In other words, the "temporal birth" in the incarnation would not undermine the innascibility of the Father. Indeed, the reason

why the Son is said to be “sent” in the incarnation—and being sent does conflict with innascibility—is that he takes on flesh as a divine person who proceeds from another, not that taking on flesh itself entails being sent or proceeding from another.³¹

So far we have seen that Thomas recognizes a significant dissimilarity between the filial submission of the Son according to his human nature in the incarnation and the Son’s eternal relation to the Father. This is because, in Thomas’s view, submission involves receiving a command from another, which itself involves being in some way “less” than the one who commands. Moreover, his commitment to the traditional principle that the outward works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*) implicitly precludes any divine submission on the part of the Son. For, as Thomas emphasizes, the Father and Son (with the Spirit) do not possess distinct divine wills or perform distinct divine actions but rather will and perform the same actions, each according to his peculiar manner of having the divine essence and power. The dissimilarity here holds true even with respect to the Son being sent of the Father and coming forth from the Father to assume a human nature. Indeed, as noted, Thomas is willing to say that the Father (or Spirit) could have assumed human flesh in the incarnation. To appreciate and assess Thomas’s position a little better, it may help to consider it alongside two other approaches to the correspondence between God’s own triune being and his triune action in the incarnation.

TWO ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Karl Barth

Here we will touch briefly upon how Karl Barth and some of the Reformed orthodox handle the questions at hand. Barth insists on a strong correspondence between God in himself and God for us in the economy of salvation, and he is particularly forceful on this point when he deals with the obedience of the Son.³² For Barth, there is no discrepancy between God in himself and God for us in the incarnation because God in himself is already characterized by humility: “for God it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high.”³³ Or,

What marks out God above all false gods is that they are not capable and ready for [condescension to us]. In their otherworldliness and supernaturalness and

otherness, etc., the gods are a reflection of the human pride which will not unbend, which will not stoop to that which is beneath it. God is not proud. In His high majesty He is humble. It is in this high humility that He speaks and acts as the God who reconciles the world to Himself.³⁴

Barth sees this humility in the incarnate Son's obedience to the Father and ultimately locates that obedience back in the Son's very deity and eternal relation to the Father. The meaning of "deity," Barth writes,

cannot be gathered from any notion of a supreme, absolute, non-worldly being. It can be learned only from what took place in Christ...Who the one true God is, and what He is, i.e., what is His being as God, and therefore His deity, His "divine nature," which is also the divine nature of Jesus Christ if He is very God – all this we have to discover from the fact that as such He is very man and a partaker of human nature, from His becoming man, from His incarnation and from what He has done and suffered in the flesh.³⁵

But this revelation of deity in the incarnation takes place in the Son's "self-humiliation" and obedience to the Father. Yet even in the midst of this humiliation and obedience, it must be affirmed that the Son does not alter or relinquish his deity, lest his atoning and reconciling work be emptied of its efficacy. "He went into a strange land, but even there, and especially there, He never became a stranger to Himself."³⁶

Therefore, to ensure that the genuine condescension of the Son aligns with his deity in its original fullness, Barth infers that such condescension is not a departure from true deity but rather always was eternally included in "the most inward depth of His Godhead." Since "God is in Christ" and "what the man Jesus does is God's own work," the "self-humbling of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God." Barth concedes that "it is a difficult and even an elusive thing to speak of obedience which takes place in God himself," but he believes it is possible to speak of such obedience without undermining the *homoousia* of the Son like historical forms of "subordinationism" have done. He is committed to the notion that superiority and subordination cannot be purely economic phenomena but must apply to God's "proper being," for otherwise the Son's obedience would not "bring us into touch with God himself."³⁷ Still this must not be taken

to imply inequality among the divine persons, for upholding the full deity of the Son in order to secure the efficacy of his work is precisely the point here. Barth's strategy in addressing this problem is to emphasize that if there is a "*prius* and *posterius*, a superiority and subordination" in God, it need not include the human dynamic of "degradation" and "inferiority." Instead of assuming that subordination entails a lack or deprivation on the part of God the Son, we should let our conception of subordination be corrected by the particular triune being of God, in which there is subordination with dignity rather than inferiority.³⁸ In Barth's position, then, "we cannot avoid the astounding conclusion of a divine obedience." As the Son obeys the Father in the incarnation, "He does not do it without any correspondence to, but as the strangely logical final continuation of, the history in which he is God."³⁹

Reformed Orthodoxy

Though they are not without diverse opinions on various theological topics, earlier Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries treat the obedience of the Son differently than Barth does, affirming the more traditional position advocated by Thomas and yet also differing from him in some relatively minor but still noteworthy ways. Unlike Barth and with Thomas, they do not posit a subordination of the Son in his deity or his constitutive, eternal relation to the Father. The "minority" and subordination of the Son pertain to him with respect to his human nature.⁴⁰ Yet, according to many of the Reformed orthodox, subordination and obedience pertain to him with respect to his economic, mediatorial office as well. In other words, the Son's subjection to the Father, though not applicable to the Son as God, does apply to him in his voluntary condescension in his economic role.⁴¹

The development of the concept of the *pactum salutis* ("covenant of redemption") in Reformed thought during this period provided fresh angles from which to consider the Son's submission to the Father.⁴² The concept of the *pactum salutis* distills the fact that in Scripture the Father promises to give to the Son a chosen people for whose salvation the Son should be the sponsor and mediator, while the Son promises to fulfill his covenantal obligations in perfect obedience to the Father's will (see, e.g., Isa 42:6; Jn 6:37-40; 17:6-12; Heb 7:21-28; 10:5-10). The Reformed were aware that this distillation of biblical teaching might be taken to imply an eternal submission of the Son to the Father but are careful to reject that inference.

Johannes Coccejus, for example, writes that, in the covenant between the Father and the Son, the Father “stipulates” obedience for the Son and thus calls the Son “my servant” (e.g., Isa. 42:1). The covenant accordingly “imports an emptying (*exinanitio*) of the Son toward assuming the form of man.” Throughout his incarnate life, the Son is a “voluntary servant” of the Father, submitting himself to the Father’s will (Ps 40:6-7; Jn 6:38-40; Rom 5:18-19; Heb 10:5-10). In this “economy,” the Father has the role of “legislator” and “ruler,” exercising both justice and mercy through the mediatorial work of the Son, and is often called “God” in a special way since he “performs this right of deity.” But this does not mean that the Son submits to the Father in the founding itself of the *pactum salutis* (or in his constitutive personal relation to the Father). Unlike Adam when he entered a covenant with God, the Son “was held by no law” in entering this covenant, for he did not think it “robbery” to be equal with God (the Father) (Phil 2:6). The Son was not “less” than the Father “outside the state of humiliation (*status exinanitionis*) and according to deity.” Indeed, it was a matter of the free grace of the Son no less than the Father that the Son took up his role as the “sponsor” of God’s people. Hence it is after assuming flesh and being born of a woman that the Son lives “under the law” (so Gal 4:4).⁴³

Coccejus’s fellow Dutch orthodox theologian Herman Witsius handles these issues similarly. He reasons that the acts of generation and spiration imply no “distinction of dignity” among the persons, for in those acts one and the same divine essence is communicated to the Son and Spirit. Those acts convey no “authority,” “right” or “rule” of the Father toward the Son or Spirit. Nor does the mission of a divine person convey any of this, for mission is “wholly economical” (*tota kat’ oikonomian*) and “founded in the common counsel of the whole Trinity.” The Father is peculiarly called “God” and called “greater” than the Son not with respect to God’s own triune being (*kata theologian*) but with respect to the Son’s humanity and with respect to the “economy of humiliation” (*kat’ oikonomian, oeconomia exinanitionis*) and the covenant in which the Son is mediator.⁴⁴

In treating the *pactum salutis*, Witsius invokes a threefold distinction regarding how the mediator can be considered: (1) as God; (2) as man; (3) as mediator or “God-man” (*theanthrōpos*). As man and born of a woman, the Son “subjects himself to the law” (Gal. 4:4). But as God “he is subject to no law, to no superior person, and is not able to be subjected.” For this is

“repugnant” to that deity which the Son shares with the Father. No subjection pertains to deity but only the “highest eminence.” Here Witsius quotes approvingly the pointed words of an ancient imperial decree: “the Christian is one who believes that the deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one in equal power (or “authority,” *exousia*), that the deity is one under equal majesty; truly he who teaches against the things now said is a heretic.” In light of this, Witsius clarifies that the Son taking up the role of “sponsor” of the people of God “imports no subjection,” for the Son accepts this role by an act of his divine will and chooses to subject himself to the Father not as God but as man. He is bound by no necessity to do this, acting with the Father (and Spirit) according to his free good pleasure.⁴⁵ Yet, though Witsius refuses to say that Christ is subject to any law with respect to his divine nature and in the founding of the *pactum salutis*, he grants that after the assumption of the human nature and because of the union of Christ’s two natures his divine nature is “drawn into the company of this subjection.”⁴⁶ The divine nature itself as “characterized” in the Son does not undergo subjection, but in union with the Son’s human nature it does not show “all its magnificence” or hinder the Son as man in his service to the Father. This not a “real negation of divine superiority” but only an “economic concealment” (*oeconomica occultatio*). In keeping with the Reformed emphasis on the “real” (not merely “verbal”) communication of the properties and experiences of the human nature to the person of the Son, Witsius, without promoting any divine subordination of the Son to the Father, writes that there is a “relation of inferiority” and an economic obedience that genuinely apply not just to the human nature but to the person of the God-man himself. Were the arrangement not so, one would have either a divine Son who could not perform the work of obedience or a merely human person whose obedience would not suffice to merit our salvation.⁴⁷

Another difference between Thomas and many of the Reformed authors is that the latter hold that only the Son could have been incarnate. In his large work on Christology, Jerome Zanchi, for example, though a debtor to Thomas in his theologizing, draws upon Augustine and other writers and argues that the Father could not have been incarnate. He invokes Peter Lombard to make the point that the incarnation is the “mission itself of the Son, by which he is said to have been sent from the Father.” This view of the relationship between incarnation and mission of course precludes the

(innascible) Father being incarnate.⁴⁸ Turretin likewise envisions a stronger connection between incarnation and mission: “the Father is not able to be incarnate, for as he is first in order, he is not able to be sent by anyone, or to act as mediator toward the Son and Holy Spirit.” Turretin insists that the logic of the processions and the attendant proper modes of acting of the persons shape the logic of the incarnation. It is the beloved Son and perfect image of the Father who is suited to make us God’s beloved in whom he delights and to restore the image of God in us. It is the one through whom all things were made who is fit to be the one through whom they are remade.⁴⁹

Comparison with Thomas Aquinas

Though this has been a primarily historical and descriptive essay to this point, what might be said about the strength of Thomas’s position, particularly now that it can be viewed alongside other notable approaches to the relationship between God’s triune being and his activity in the incarnation? First, while there is not space to discuss the issues at great length on the constructive level, in my judgment Thomas’s reasoning is not only sound but also vital to an orthodox view of the Trinity where he reasons that the equality and, indeed, numerical unity of the divine essence, wisdom, will, power and action of the divine persons precludes a divine submission of the Son to the Father. This is hardly an invention of Thomas but is rather drawn from the well of catholic patristic theology and, more importantly, is a setting forth of the scriptural teaching that there is but one God and that the Son is fully God. If the Son shares the one divine will and action with the Father (and Spirit)—even as he performs that action in a mode expressive of his personal mode of subsisting—in what way would it be meaningful to speak of the Son as God acquiescing to a prior determination of the Father?⁵⁰ I would emphasize, then, that when Thomas identifies a dissimilarity between the filial obedience that takes place in the economy and the eternal personal relation of the Son to the Father, it is important that we follow him (and others) in making this move.

Second, at the same time, Barth’s emphasis on the alignment of God’s being and economic action is, in my view, worth taking into account here. His guiding question in the material outlined above in *Church Dogmatics* IV.1—*Quo jure Deus homo*, “by what right does God become man?”⁵¹—regarding what it is in God’s being that entails his fitness for the incarnation pushes us

to think carefully about the correspondence between who God is and what God does. However, to my mind, positing a divine obedience of the Son and locating this in his eternal relation to the Father is not necessary to uphold that the divine Son himself obeys and atones for sin or even that the Son's economic relationship to the Father expresses something of his eternal filial relation toward the Father.⁵² In fact, positing such divine obedience on the part of the Son seems much less compelling when we note that in Scripture it is the *human* obedience of the divine Son that is so essential to undoing the first Adam's work (cf. Rom 5:18-19; Gal 4:4; Heb 2:9-18).

Third, a catholic and Thomistic understanding of the Son's submission to the Father may be enriched by the early Reformed discussion of the *pactum salutis* and the Son's mediatorial role. Taking into account the *pactum salutis* can help us to reinforce (1) that the Son was not "less" than the Father or under his command in eternally willing to assume his economic role and (2) that, even if the concept of mission did include some authority structure, mission is already located under the economy established by the free decree of the whole Trinity. Further, appropriating the notion that the Son submits to the Father not only in his human nature but also in his mediatorial office broadens our options for interpreting biblical statements about the Son: they may apply to him with respect to his divine essence, his eternal procession from the Father, his proper mode of acting from the Father, his human nature or his mediatorial office.

Finally, Thomas's assertion that the Father (or Spirit) might have been incarnate may understate the connection between the logic of the processions and the logic of the economy, especially if the incarnation does involve a divine person being sent (not just the enfleshment of a divine person who may or may not be sent). For if the incarnation entails being sent and if being sent presupposes procession or origin from another divine person, then only one who proceeds from another can be incarnate. At this point Thomas's argument that any divine person could be incarnate because they share the same divine power would lose its force. For it would not be the common divine power taken absolutely that enables a divine person to be incarnate but rather that power as it is distinctly modified by the Son who is generated by the Father. Because this common power is in the Son alone in this particular manner, he alone is able to incarnate. In my estimation the incarnation does presuppose a coming forth from another, and I see Thomas's denial of

this as a weakness in his (on the whole, very compelling) approach to the relationship between God's triune being and his activity in the incarnation.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have attempted to shed light on the central concepts and structure of Thomas Aquinas's trinitarian thought, with a view to examining how Thomas sees God's triune being giving shape to his economic action in the incarnation. We explored the meaning and function of the concepts of procession, relation, person and notion or personal property in the doctrine of the Trinity. From here, we looked at how this framework promotes for Thomas a strong sense of the equality of the divine persons. When pressed to deal with biblical statements about the Son being "less" than the Father and obeying the Father, Thomas resolutely argues that the minority and submission of the Son pertain to him according to his human nature, which entails a dissimilarity between the filial obedience of the Son in the economy and his eternal, constitutive relation to the Father. However, in biblical texts such as John 5:19-30, Thomas also identifies one way in which the economy is shaped by and corresponds to the processions in God: the Son wills and acts from the Father in the economy just as he proceeds from the Father eternally. Indeed, the Son can be sent from the Father to assume a human nature only by virtue of his eternal procession from the Father. Yet, according to Thomas, the incarnation does not necessarily presuppose a sending of one divine person from another, so even the Father could have been incarnate.

We then considered two alternative approaches to the correspondence between God's triune being and his activity in the incarnation (those of Karl Barth and some of the Reformed scholastics). After noting similarities and differences among the approaches, I indicated that in my estimation Thomas (and the Reformed orthodox) are right to avoid positing any divine obedience of the Son and to attribute the economic obedience to the Son in his human nature, with the Reformed usefully underscoring that the obedience pertains to the person of the God-man himself in his mediatorial office. While Barth does helpfully encourage us to think about what it is in God's being that renders him fit for the incarnation and secures the genuine presence of God himself in his incarnate work, in my view this need not compel us to posit a divine obedience of the Son, particularly if we hold that the incarnation

presupposes the mission of the Son and flows out of the personal character of God the Son as the Father's perfect filial image and the one through whom the Father always acts. Through this study, then, I hope to have shown that a catholic trinitarianism in which there is no *divine* obedience of the Son can cohere with a significant alignment of God's action in the incarnation and God's own triune being.

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- ¹ For relevant literature, see, e.g., Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 249-52; Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); 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); Bruce A. Ware and John Starke, eds., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015); Michael J. Ovey, *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility* (London: Latimer Trust, 2016).
- ² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Pars Prima*, in *Opera Omnia* (vol. 4; Leonine ed.; Rome: ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1888), Ia.27.1, 305-6 (hereafter *ST*). ET: *Summa Theologica* (5 vols.; trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; New York: Benziger Bros., 1948).
- ³ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.27.2 corp., 309.
- ⁴ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.27.3 corp., 311.
- ⁵ So *Contra Errores Graecorum*, in *Opera Omnia* (vol. 40A; Leonine ed.; Rome: ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1967), L4-5, 74-5.
- ⁶ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.28.4, 325-6. Thomas believes the processions or origins and the relations signify the same "thing" (*re non differant*) but do so with different modes of signification. "Generation," for example, signifies the Father's relative act of begetting the Son as an action (*per modum actus*) while "paternity" signifies the Father's relative act of begetting the Son as a formal expression of that relation that is constitutive of the Father (*per modum formae*). Both origin and relation are principles of distinction among the divine persons, but in our understanding, because a relation or property like "paternity" expresses something intrinsic to the Father, it logically precedes "generation," a term indicating action directed toward another (Ia.40.2 corp. and ad 4, 413, 414; cf. 40.4, 418; 41.1 ad 2, 421-2; cf. *De Potentia*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae* (vol. 2; 10th ed.; ed. P. Bazzi et al.; Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1965), II.5 ad 8, 36).
- ⁷ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.28.1 corp. and ad 3, 318, 319.
- ⁸ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.28.2 corp. and ad 3, 321, 322. That the essence is not made relative to a divine person is further secured by the fact that a person's relation here is not ordered to the essence but rather to another person with whom that person stands in relation.
- ⁹ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.28.3 corp. and ad 1, 324. Cf. Ia.39.1 ad 1, 396-7. Thomas also clarifies that while the "absolute" divine properties like wisdom and goodness may be one and the same thing (the divine essence), the relations of the persons are "mutually opposed" and therefore cannot be just one subsistent. Hence the presence of multiple mutually opposed relations entails multiple subsisting persons (Ia.30.1 ad 2, 336).
- ¹⁰ Gilles Emery observes that Thomas is following a logical sequence here that is designed to integrate procession, relation and essence (discussed before the Trinity in the *Summa Theologiae*) in the concept of person ("Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in Saint Thomas Aquinas?," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 537-8, 562).
- ¹¹ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.29.1 and 3, 327-8, 331-2. Cf. Ia.30.1 ad 1, 336.
- ¹² Again, if two or more are "really" identical, this means they are one and the same as to "thing" or "being." They may still be distinct in various other ways within that one being. In addition, Thomas and other scholastic theologians will sometimes call two things "really" distinct when they mean not that they are two "things" or "beings" in the strict sense but that they are in some way distinct in reality and not just in

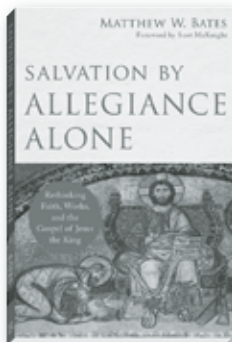
- the human mind.
- ¹³ Cf. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (trans. Francesca Aran Murphy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 117-18, 121.
- ¹⁴ See Augustine, *The Trinity* (trans. Edmund Hill; Hyde Park: New City Press, 1991), V.2.10, 196.
- ¹⁵ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.29.4 corp. and ad 1, 333-4. Cf. Ia.39.1 corp. and ad 1, 396. Thomas thus acknowledges, with Augustine, that *persona* can designate the Father, Son and Spirit *ad se* (with respect to what they are, without primary emphasis on their mutual relations) rather than just *ad alterum* (with respect to their mutual relations alone).
- ¹⁶ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.32.3 corp., 355.
- ¹⁷ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.32.2 corp. and ad 2, 351-2; 40.1 corp. and ad 1-2, 411-12.
- ¹⁸ See Thomas, *De Pot.*, II.2, 27-9; II.4 ad 1-2, 33; *ST*, Ia.41.5, 430.
- ¹⁹ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.33.1, 358.
- ²⁰ However modern translators might wish to render the Greek word *harpagmos* in Philippians 2:6, the point remains: the Son was and is fully equal to the Father in his deity.
- ²¹ *Donantis auctoritate Pater major est, sed minor non est cui unum esse donatur.*
- ²² Thomas, *ST*, Ia.42.4 corp. and ad 1 and 2, 441. Michael Waldstein (“The Analogy of Mission and Obedience: A Central Point in the Relation between *Theologia* and *Oikonomia* in St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Commentary on John*,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas* (ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 104 *et passim*) contends that Thomas’s comments here (and in various places in his commentary on John’s Gospel) come “quite close” to ascribing obedience to the Son in his divinity. In my view, Thomas is speaking in a loose manner when he grants that the Son’s subjection to the Father’s *auctoritas* may pertain to his procession from the Father. It seems to me that Thomas is indicating that the language may be taken to refer back to the Son’s procession and reception of the essence from the Father without importing a concept of subjection or obedience in any strict or common sense back into the Son’s eternal relation to the Father.
- ²³ Thomas Aquinas, *ST, Pars Tertia, in Opera Omnia* (vol. 11; Leonine ed.; Rome: ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1903), IIIa.20.1 corp. and ad 1, 247-8. Consistent in his affirmation that divinity entails lordship (as opposed to servanthood), Thomas is prepared to say that Christ in his human nature is subject to himself in his divine nature (without this implying two persons) (*ST*, IIIa.20.2 corp., 249).
- ²⁴ Strictly speaking, the Father and Son share the same being (*esse*), which is really identical to the essence they share. They do not, then, have distinct “existences” but only distinct modes of subsisting within the divine essence and existence (cf. *De Pot.*, II.1 corp., 25). However, one can say that the Son receives the divine *esse* from the Father by generation.
- ²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura* (5th ed.; ed. Raffaele Cai; Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1952), V.3.1.746-51, 140-1. ET: *Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-5* (trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010). Cf. *ST*, Ia.42.6 ad 1 and 2, 444. In Thomas’s judgment, Christ uses the language of “seeing” and “showing” in this text simply because these are common ways in which we receive knowledge. Also, as noted above, according to Thomas, the Father’s communication of knowledge and power to the Son is a matter of the Father generating not a second version of the divine essence and absolute attributes in the Son but rather the Son who with him shares in the one divine essence and absolute attributes.
- ²⁶ Thomas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis*, V.4.1.755-4.769, 143-5.
- ²⁷ Thomas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis*, V.5.4.794-5.798, 150-1. To say that the Son exercises the divine will as he has it “from the Father” is very different from saying that the Son as God or under his eternal relation to the Father submits to the will of the Father. The former is simply an implication of the eternal generation of the Son; the latter, however, would imply that the Son has a distinct divine willing and acting of his own in which he would respond to an antecedent decision of the Father, and the fact that the Son shares the one divine will and action with the Father (and Spirit) precludes such an arrangement of “functional subordination” in the Trinity.
- ²⁸ Indeed, while Thomas recognizes that certain outward works of God are only “appropriated” to the Son (attributed to the Son on account of some analogy between the character of the work and the proper character of the person of the Son), he recognizes this mode of working “from the Father” to be itself “proper” to the Son (*Super Evangelium S. Ioannis*, I.2.1.76, 17; *ST*, Ia.39.8 corp., 410).
- ²⁹ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.43.1 corp. and ad 1, 445; 43.2 corp. and ad 3, 446.
- ³⁰ Thomas, *ST*, Ia.43.4, 449. Because of his commitment to the unity of the action of the Father, Son and Spirit, Thomas is willing to affirm that the Son, in a qualified sense, sends himself in the economy. On the

one hand, if the sender is considered with respect to him being the principle of the person sent, then the sender should be identified as just the person from whom the one sent eternally proceeds. In that respect, only the Father sends the Son. On the other hand, if the sender is considered with respect to him being the principle of the temporal effect of the mission, then, since all three persons together accomplish God's outward works, all three persons may be said to have sent the one who is sent (Ia.43.8 corp., 454).

- ³¹ Thomas, *ST*, IIIa.3.5 corp. and ad 1 and 3, 63. Thomas still holds the incarnation of the Son to be "fitting" in a number of significant ways (on which, see Matthew Levering, "Christ, the Trinity, and Predestination: McCormack and Aquinas," in *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (ed. Michael T. Dempsey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 252-71).
- ³² For different appraisals of Barth on the Son's obedience, see Paul D. Molnar, "The Obedience of the Son in the theology of Karl Barth and of Thomas F. Torrance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67 (2014): 50-69; Darren O. Sumner, "Obedience and Subordination in Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 130-146. It is a matter of debate in Barth studies today whether he eventually reached the conclusion that God in fact could not and would not have been God without choosing to create the world and save sinners in the incarnation. On this, see, e.g., Bruce L. McCormack, "Grace and Being," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (ed. John Webster; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92-110; "Processions and Missions: A Point of Convergence between Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth," in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Thomas Joseph White; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 99-126; Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election*; Paul D. Molnar, *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015); George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).
- ³³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley et al.; London: T & T Clark, 2009), IV.1, 192 (hereafter *CD*).
- ³⁴ Barth, *CD*, IV.1, 159.
- ³⁵ Barth, *CD*, IV.1, 177.
- ³⁶ Barth, *CD*, IV.1, 177, 179-80, 183-7.
- ³⁷ Barth connects this approach to the Sabellian heresy.
- ³⁸ Barth believes those who assume that subordination entails inferiority are thinking in an "all too human" way about God. Given this caution about anthropomorphism, it is perhaps surprising that Barth does seem to accept that the "self-evident presupposition that a son owes obedience to a father" applies in the case of God (*CD*, IV.1, 202, 209-10).
- ³⁹ Barth, *CD*, IV.1, 193, 195-210.
- ⁴⁰ E.g., Jerome Zanchi, *De Incarnatione Filii Dei* (Heidelberg, 1593), I.3, 52; Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* (2nd ed.; Utrecht, 1724), II.26.18, 258.
- ⁴¹ E.g., Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Systema S. S. Theologiae*, in *Operum Omnium quae Extant* (vol. 2; Geneva, 1614), I.4, p. 94; Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanoviae, 1615), VI.13, 364; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (vol. 1; ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; trans. George Musgrave Giger; Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1992), III.15.12, 269; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1992), I.4, 175; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, II.26.18, 258.
- ⁴² On this development, see Carl Trueman, "From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant: Mythological Excess of Doctrinal Development?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009): 378-97.
- ⁴³ Johannes Coccejus, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (Amsterdam, 1688), V.88, 85-7; 89, 89; 91-3, 91-2; 94-5, 94. ET: *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God* (trans. Casey Carmichael; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016).
- ⁴⁴ Herman Witsius, *Exercitationes Sacrae in Symbolum quod Apostolorum dicitur* (2nd ed.; Franeker, 1689), VII.20, 102; 22-3, 103. ET: *Sacred Dissertations on the Apostles' Creed* (2 vols.; trans. Donald Fraser; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012).
- ⁴⁵ Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus* (2nd ed.; Leeuwarden, 1685), II.3.4-9, 113-14; 21, 117. ET: *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (2 vols.; trans. William Crookshank; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012).
- ⁴⁶ *Divina quoque ejus natura in subjectionis hujus consortium trahatur.*
- ⁴⁷ Witsius, *Oeconomia Foederum*, II.3.16-20, 115-17.
- ⁴⁸ Zanchi, *De Incarn.*, II.3, 95-8.

- ⁴⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (vol. 2; ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; trans. George Musgrave Giger; Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1992), XIII.4.5-6, 304-5.
- ⁵⁰ Steven Boyer ("Articulating Order: Trinitarian Discourse in an Egalitarian Age," *Pro Ecclesia* 18 (2009): 265-7) suggests that the distinct modes in which the Father and Son have and exercise the divine will might be rendered in terms of "command" and "obedience" within a "single, shared volition." But the submission revealed to us in Scripture pertains to the economy; Scripture does not invite us to posit command and obedience in the processions and constitutive relations of the persons. Human sons are surpassed by human fathers in age and experience and (we hope) in wisdom, moral fortitude and strength and so are in this way less than and obedient to human fathers. None of this applies in the eternal processions in God. It is crucial, then, to avoid reading the economic dynamic of obedience back into God's own triune being. Scott Swain and Michael Allen ("The Obedience of the Eternal Son," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15 (2013): 125-8, 130-1) also appear to interpret the Son's proper mode of willing and acting as a matter of divine obedience to the Father and adduce Thomas's commentary on John 5:30 in support this view. However, as noted above, in his comments on John 5:30, Thomas says that if the text pertains to Christ as man, then it would involve obedience, but if it pertains to Christ as the divine Son, then it would witness to the fact that the Son has the divine will from the Father by generation. In other words, for Thomas, the options are either (human) obedience or divine willing according to the Son's proper mode, not divine willing from the Father as itself obedience.
- ⁵¹ See Barth, *CD*, IV.1, 184.
- ⁵² For an attempt to flesh out the latter, see Thomas Joseph White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 522-33 and "Intra-Trinitarian Obedience and Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology," *Nova et Vetera* 6 (2008): 397-401.

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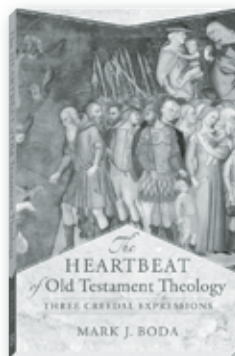
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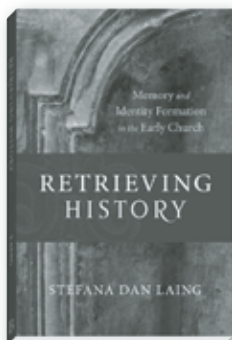
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“Uttering the Praises of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit:” John Calvin on the Divine Trinity¹

MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN

Michael A. G. Haykin is Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also Adjunct Professor of Church History and Spirituality at Toronto Baptist Seminary in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Haykin is the author of many books, including *“At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word”: Andrew Fuller As an Apologist* (Paternoster Press, 2004), *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Evangelical Press, 2005), *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Evangelical Press, 2007), *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Crossway, 2011), and *Patrick of Ireland: His Life and Impact* (Christian Focus, 2014).

“It is impossible to praise God without also uttering the praises of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit”²

In a masterful study of the unfolding of early Christian thought, Jaroslav Pelikan, the doyen of twentieth-century Patristic studies, noted that the “climax of the doctrinal development of the early church was the dogma of the Trinity.”³ And the textual expression of that climax is undoubtedly the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that was issued at the Council of Constantinople (381), in which Jesus Christ is unequivocally declared to be “true God” and “of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father” and the Holy Spirit is described as the “Lord and Giver of life,” who “together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.” The original Nicene Creed, issued by the Council of Nicaea in 325, had made a similar statement about the Son

and his deity, but nothing had been said about the Holy Spirit beyond the statement “[We believe] in the Holy Spirit.” When the deity of the Spirit was subsequently questioned in the 360s and 370s, it was necessary to expand the Nicene Creed to include a statement about the deity of the Holy Spirit. In the end this expansion involved the drafting of a new creedal statement at the Council of Constantinople.⁴

Although some historians have argued that these fourth-century creedal statements represent the apex of the Hellenization of the church’s teaching, in which fourth-century Christianity traded the vitality of the New Testament church’s experience of God for a cold, abstract philosophical formula, nothing could be further from the truth.⁵ The Nicene and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds helped to sum up a long process of reflection that had its origins in the Christian communities of the first century. The New Testament itself provides clear warrant for the direction that theological reflection upon the nature of God took in fourth-century Christian orthodoxy. As Douglas Ottati, an American professor of theology once put it, “Trinitarian theology continues a biblically initiated exploration.”⁶ Or, in the words of the early twentieth-century theologian, the American Presbyterian Benjamin B. Warfield: the “doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view.”⁷

THE SERVETUS AFFAIR

Apart from the controversy between the Greek East and the Latin West over the *filioque*, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed essentially closed the door on debates about the Trinity for the next millennium. With the upheaval, however, caused by the Reformers’ questions about salvation, worship, and the source of authority, it is not surprising that some would broach questions about Trinitarian matters long thought settled. On three distinct occasions, for instance, John Calvin (1509–64) found himself embroiled in controversy about the Triune nature of God. One is all too well known, namely, the controversy with the Spanish humanist and physician Michael Servetus (1511–53), whose execution in Geneva on October 27, 1553, has defined, for many, Calvin’s character as a theocratic tyrant.⁸ Servetus had been incessant in his rejection of the ontological deity of Christ and in his

anti-Trinitarian campaigning, even daring to call the blessed Trinity a “hell’s dog with three heads, [a] devilish phantom,” and “an illusion of Satan.”⁹

He also appears to have been obsessed with coming to Geneva to finally confront the man he regarded as the archenemy of the true Reformation.¹⁰ For his part, Calvin viewed Servetus as a very dangerous heretic. Yet, while the French reformer did play a role in Servetus’ condemnation, Calvin’s Geneva was not a theocracy by any stretch of the imagination.¹¹ Moreover, at the time of Servetus’ execution Calvin did not have the political power to sentence anyone to death, and those who condemned Servetus in this regard were actually Calvin’s opponents, who used the occasion to assert their authority over the French Reformer.¹² Nevertheless, as Sebastian Castellio (1515-63), a one-time co-worker of Calvin who later became one of his most ardent opponents, observed in a work that he wrote against Calvin’s 1554 defence of the heretic’s execution:

To kill a man is not to protect a doctrine, but it is to kill a man. When the Genevans killed Servetus, they did not defend a doctrine, they killed a man. To protect a doctrine is not the magistrate’s affair (what has the sword to do with doctrine?) but the teacher’s. ... But when Servetus fought with reasons and writings, he should have been repulsed by reasons and writings.¹³

THE CONTROVERSY WITH PIERRE CAROLI

Two decades before this controversy with Servetus, though, the shoe had been on the other foot, as Calvin, along with his close friends Guillaume Farel (1489-1565) and Pierre Viret (1511-71), had been charged with Arianism by Pierre Caroli (c.1480–c.1547). Like Farel, Caroli had come from the circle of reform associated with Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (c.1455–1536), but, unlike Farel, Caroli never decisively committed himself to the theological agenda of the Reformation. A one-time professor of theology at the Sorbonne, Caroli had fled France in the 1530s after embracing Protestantism. He eventually made his way to Lausanne, where he was appointed the main preacher in the city. Caroli was theologically unstable, though, and returned to the Roman Church in the summer of 1537, only to leave that communion for Protestantism once again in 1539. B. B. Warfield has rightly described

him as “one of the most frivolous characters brought to the surface by the upheaval of the Reformation.”¹⁴

Caroli found ammunition for his charge against Calvin and his friends in the fact that Farel, in his *Sommaire et brève déclaration* (1525), the first work in French to set forth the essential aspects of the Reformed faith, omitted any clear reference to the Trinity, as did the confession of faith drawn up in 1536 for the church in Geneva.¹⁵ The emptiness of Caroli’s accusation is immediately apparent, however, when one considers that in the first edition of Calvin’s *Institutes*—published in Basel in March, 1536, and available to Caroli before he made his accusation—the French Reformer had set forth a decisive rejection of Arianism and a clear affirmation of his faith in the Trinity:

Persons who are not contentious or stubborn see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one God. For the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Spirit is God: and there can be only one God.

On the other hand, three are named, three described, three distinguished. One therefore, and three: one God, one essence. Why three? Not three gods, not three essences. To signify both, the ancient orthodox fathers said that there was one *ousia*, three *hypostases*, that is, one substance, three subsistences in one substance.¹⁶

Here there is not only a solid declaration of the Trinity, but Calvin is also quite happy to express this declaration by means of non-biblical terms hammered out in the debates about the Trinity in the fourth century, namely *ousia* (“being”) and *hypostasis* (“subsistence”).

Caroli leveled his accusation against the French Reformers during a disputation between Calvin, Viret, and him at Lausanne on February 17, 1537, over the rectitude of praying for the dead.¹⁷ Calvin’s immediate response was to cite a catechism that was used in the church at Geneva, in which there was a brief statement of the Triunity of God. It is noteworthy that he did not refer to the passage from his *Institutes* cited above. Caroli refused to consider the catechism to be an adequate expression of Trinitarian faith, and demanded that Calvin subscribe then and there to the time-honored Athanasian Creed. Calvin refused to acquiesce to Caroli’s demand, for, he explained, he was not prepared to regard any text as authoritative for doctrine unless it had first been tested against the Word of God. At this point,

Caroli apparently became incensed and dramatically yelled back that Calvin’s explanation was “unbecoming a Christian man.”¹⁸ Nearly ten years later, in his pseudonymous *Defence of Guillaume Farel and his colleagues against the calumnies of Pierre Caroli* (1545), Calvin was also somewhat critical of the format of another of the Ancient Church’s creeds, the Nicene Creed, which, as has been noted above, was regarded as the definitive expression of the Trinitarianism. Calvin felt that the creed contained needless repetition in clauses like “God of God, light of light, true God of true God.” “Why this repetition?” he asked. “Does it add any more emphasis or greater expression? You see, therefore, it is a song, more to be sung, than a suitable rule of faith, in which one redundant syllable is absurd.”¹⁹

Not surprisingly, such statements gave substance to Caroli’s accusations and the suspicion that Calvin was unsound regarding Trinitarian doctrine dogged him for years to come.²⁰ But Calvin was unwilling to have his faith confined to the exact wording of the Ancient Church’s creeds. The touchstone of Scripture was alone requisite in deciding between what was orthodox and what was not.²¹ On the other hand, Calvin was equally insistent in the course and aftermath of the Caroli affair that he and his colleagues were fully committed to orthodox Trinitarianism. At a synod that was convened in the Franciscan church in Lausanne on May 14, 1537, to settle the Caroli controversy, Viret spoke for Calvin and Farel when he stated that:

We confess one God, in one essence of divinity (*sub una divinitatis essentia*), and we hold together the Father with his eternal Word and Spirit. We thus call the Father God in such a way that we proclaim the Son and his Spirit to be the true and eternal God with the Father. We neither confuse the Father with the Word, nor the Word with the Spirit. For we believe the Son to be other than the Father, and again the Spirit to differ from the Son, although there is [only] one [divine] being.²²

What is noteworthy about this confession is that it is not only an unambiguous rejection of Arianism, but it also avoids another bugbear of the Ancient Church, namely Sabellianism or modalism.²³

The Caroli controversy reveals Calvin to have been thoroughly convinced that one must reverently accept the Triunity of God as fully biblical, but also

determined to maintain an independence of the wording of the patristic creeds.²⁴ In the words of Arie Baars, Calvin “strongly opposes any theology that is characterized by a speculative . . . inquisitiveness that does not respect the boundaries of Scripture.”²⁵ Thus, in his conflict with Caroli Calvin made little use of the Patristic way of distinguishing the hypostatic differences within the Trinity, namely, that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father and that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.²⁶ But Calvin was determined to uphold the Trinitarianism of the Ancient Church and showed a willingness at times, as the first edition of the *Institutes* shows, to use extra-biblical terms to clarify Scriptural truth.²⁷

THE BATTLE WITH THE ITALIAN ANTI-TRINITARIANS

Controversy with anti-Trinitarianism in the 1550s, that of Michael Servetus earlier in the decade and then that of various Italian Protestants in the latter part of the decade, forced Calvin to develop a more explicit and detailed Trinitarianism, which is evident in the final edition of the *Institutes* (1559).²⁸ An Italian congregation had been meeting for regular worship in Geneva since 1542, but when their minister Celso Martinengo (1515–57) died in the summer of 1557, the community was wracked by quarrels over the doctrine of the Trinity. One of the instigators of these theological quarrels was Matteo Gribaldi (c.1505–64), who had taught law at the University of Padua before taking up a position at the university in Tübingen.²⁹ Gribaldi had been in Geneva at the outset of the trial of Servetus and had taken the heretic’s side though his own conviction about the Godhead appears to have been tritheistic.³⁰ Gribaldi’s opposition to orthodox Trinitarianism subsequently had a major influence over a number of the members of the Genevan Italian community, including Giorgio Biandrata (1516–88),³¹ Giovanni Alciati (c.1515/1520–73) and Valentino Gentile (c.1520–66), from Calabria, who began to voice their views in the course of 1557 and 1558.

Biandrata, for example, argued that “Jesus never revealed to the world a God other than his Father.” In his teaching, Jesus never once taught about God being “one essence in three persons,” something that Biandrata deemed “clearly incomprehensible.”³² Gentile, on the other hand, argued that there are indeed three persons in the Godhead, but “only the Father is *autotheos*, that is, has his essence (*essentiatus*) from no superior deity, but is God of

himself.”³³ Neither the Son nor the Spirit are *autotheos*, for the Father poured, as it were, some of his divine being into them and thus deified them.³⁴

Calvin responded to these arguments through a number of written texts as well as personal meetings with the Italians.³⁵ From New Testament texts like Romans 9:5, John 1:1, 20:28, and 2 Corinthians 12:8–9, Calvin can only conclude that Jesus is recognized to be fully God by the New Testament authors.³⁶ And to Biandrata’s argument that “the one essence in three persons was not revealed by Christ,” Calvin responded by referring, among other things, to the baptismal command of Matthew 28:19 where Christ “distinctly and undeniably named . . . [the] three persons of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”³⁷ This appeal to Scripture reflected Calvin’s conviction that theological reflection about “the one essence and the three persons” is not a waste of time, for the Scriptural witness about God clearly proceeds from the presupposition of the Trinity.³⁸ In fact, at the close of his brief reply to Biandrata, Calvin appealed to the Nicene Creed and the writings of “Athanasius and other ancients,” which, according to his reading of their texts, affirmed that though “the Son is distinct from the Father, nevertheless, he is true God, and the same God with him, except in what pertains to his person” and that there are “three coeternal [persons] but nevertheless one eternal God.”³⁹

In May of 1558, Calvin helped to draw up a Trinitarian confession of faith for the Italian church in which the errors of Gentile were specifically condemned: “whatever is attributed” to the Father’s “deity, glory and essence, is suitable as much to the Son as to the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that in this confession, Calvin uses the classical concepts of eternal generation and eternal procession to distinguish the Father from the Son and the Spirit. In his words: “we profess God the Father even to have begotten his Word or Wisdom from eternity, who is his only Son, and the Holy Spirit thus to have proceeded from them both since there is one sole essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁴¹

In Calvin’s main response to the arguments of these heterodox Italians, namely, the fifth edition of his *Institutes* (1559), Calvin employs Scripture to demonstrate the consubstantiality of the Father with both the Son and the Spirit.⁴² And because Gentile also argued for his position from the writings of the second-century Fathers, Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200) and Tertullian (flourished c.190–220),⁴³ Calvin sought to show that neither of these

Patristic authors, properly interpreted, supported Gentile's position.⁴⁴ In fact, Calvin is confident that his own Trinitarian perspective is in complete harmony with that of the Ancient Church.⁴⁵

THE FATHERS AS CONVERSATION PARTNERS⁴⁶

Calvin can be critical of the Fathers, but those occasions occur mostly in his exegetical commentaries, and then, in relation to the Fathers's unwarranted use of biblical texts to support their dogmatic statements.⁴⁷ In his 1548 commentary on Colossians, for instance, Calvin notes the fact that "the old writers" during the Arian controversy employed Colossians 1:15 to "emphasize the equality of the Son with the Father" and to assert the Nicene watchword, the consubstantiality (*homoousia*) of the Father and the Son.⁴⁸ One of the "old writers" that Calvin has in mind was John Chrysostom (c.347–407), the one-time Patriarch of Constantinople. According to Calvin, Chrysostom argued that the word "image" speaks of Christ's divine status since "the creature cannot be said to be the image of the Creator." Calvin, though, found this to be a very weak argument since Paul can use the very word "image" of human beings, as, for example, in 1 Corinthians 11:7, where Paul says man is "the image and glory of God." The word "image," Calvin points out, does not refer to Christ's essence, but is being used as an epistemological term. Christ is "the image of God because he makes God in a manner visible to us." He can only do so, Calvin avers, because he is "the essential Word of God" and consubstantial with the Father. Behind this affirmation lies a key principle that Calvin has drawn from his reading of the Church Fathers: only God can reveal God. Colossians 1:15 therefore does speak of the Son sharing the "same essence" (*homoousios*) with the Father and is "a powerful weapon against the Arians." Calvin thus arrives at the same place as Chrysostom, but he does so by a more rigorous hermeneutic that pays proper attention to the text. Calvin concludes that this text is a good reminder that "God in himself, that is, in his naked majesty" is invisible to both the physical eye and the eye of human understanding. Only in Christ is God revealed. To seek God elsewhere is to engage in idolatry.

A second example in which Calvin engages Patristic Trinitarian exegesis is his commentary on Hebrews 1:2-3,⁴⁹ which the French Reformer wrote the year following his commentary on Colossians. Hebrews 1 was regularly

mined in the Patristic era for proof of Christ’s divinity, and understandably so in light of its high Christology. Following in the train of this exegetical tradition, Calvin deduces the eternal nature of Christ from the fact that he made the world. Since the Father is usually identified as the Creator of the world, this means that there are at least two “persons” involved in this divine work. Since Calvin assumes only God can do such creative work, the Son must be fully divine and share a “unity of essence” with the Father. As persons they are to be distinguished, but as God they have in common “whatever belongs to God alone.”

Hebrews 1:3 also speaks of the deity of Christ, though Calvin is careful to note at the outset of his commentary that the reader of Hebrews should not seek to investigate the “hidden majesty of God” by enquiring into the exact way “the Son, who is of one essence with the Father, is the glory shining forth from his brightness.” By describing Christ in this way, the author of Hebrews is not seeking to depict “the likeness of the Father to the Son within the Godhead,” for “God is incomprehensible to us in himself.” Rather, this description is yet another vital reminder that “God is revealed to us in no other way than in Christ.”

Hebrews 1:3 also states that Christ is “the very image” of the Father’s “substance” (*hypostasis*). By *hypostasis* Calvin understands the hypostatic distinctiveness of the Father, not the “essence of the Father.” To make the latter point would be redundant, Calvin believes, since both the Father and the Son share the same essence. Calvin is conscious that his interpretation follows in the pathway of Patristic exegesis, for Latin exegetes like Hilary of Poitiers (c.300–c.368), a staunch opponent of Arianism, made the same point. In other words, Calvin is convinced that this clause declares that anything we know of the Father we find revealed in the person of Christ. While Paul’s intention in this text is not to discuss Christ’s divine being, which some of the Fathers might not have grasped, yet Calvin believes this clause “refutes the Arians and the Sabellians.” It ascribes to Christ what belongs to God alone, namely the power to reveal God, and thus the reader is right to infer that “the Son is one God with the Father.” At the same time it upholds the distinctiveness of the Father and the Son as persons.

Another key text used by Patristic authors like Athanasius (c.299–373) and Basil of Caesarea (c.329–79) to prove the deity of the Son and the Spirit was the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19. Calvin likewise sees in this verse

evidence of the triune nature of God.⁵⁰ Until the coming of Christ, “the full and clear knowledge” of God’s nature remained hidden. While God’s Old Covenant people had some knowledge of the Wisdom and Spirit of God, it was only when the gospel began to be preached that

God was far more clearly revealed in three persons, for then the Father manifested himself in the Son, his lively and distinct image, while Christ, irradiating the world by the full splendor of his Spirit, held out to the knowledge of men both himself and the Spirit.

Tying this Matthean verse to another Trinitarian text, Titus 3:5, Calvin concludes that there is a very good reason for Jesus to mention all three persons of the Godhead since there can be no saving knowledge of God “unless our faith distinctly conceive of three persons in one essence.”

Finally, consider some of Calvin’s exegetical remarks on Isaiah 6, the commissioning of the prophet.⁵¹ Calvin notes that verse 3 was often cited by the “ancients,” that is, the Church Fathers, when they wished to prove that there are three persons in one essence of the Godhead.” On one level Calvin does not disagree with this interpretation. He has no doubt that the angelic worship of God involves all three persons of the Godhead as it is impossible to praise God without also uttering the praises of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit.” But, Calvin argues, there are much stronger passages to prove this article of the Christian Faith. And he fears that the use of such “inconclusive” texts as this one will simply embolden the opposition of heretics. Calvin actually does find a good support for Trinitarianism a few verses later, when the question is asked by God, “Who will go for us?” Calvin believes that the use of the plural here, as in Genesis 1:26, unquestionably reflects the Father’s consultation “with his eternal Wisdom and his eternal Power, that is, with the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Finally, Calvin does not fail to reflect on the Trinitarian implications of the fact that the message given to Isaiah to deliver to Israel is twice cited in the New Testament. In the first citation in John 12:37–41, John states that when Isaiah heard these words he saw the glory of Christ. Then Paul cites this same passage as a word from the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25–28). From these two New Testament citations of the Isaiah text, it is evident, Calvin argues, that:

Christ was that God who filled the whole earth with his majesty. Now, Christ is not separate from his Spirit, and therefore Paul had good reason for applying this passage to the Holy Spirit; for although God exhibited to the Prophet the lively image of himself in Christ, still it is certain that whatever he communicated was wholly breathed into him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A CONCLUDING WORD

From Calvin’s response to Pierre Caroli’s charges against him and his friends Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret in the 1530s to his debates with the Italian anti-Trinitarians Giorgio Biandrata and Valentino Gentile in the 1550s, the French divine is increasingly conscious of being an heir of the Patristic formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. But as a minister of the gospel under the authority of the Word of God alone, he was also determined to refrain from making “any assertion where Scripture is silent.”⁵² As Calvin read the Scriptures, he saw, as had the Fathers before him, that it clearly sets forth the oneness of the Three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the same time, though, the restraint of Scriptural declaration about the relationships within the immanent Trinity required great circumspection in theological reflection on the Godhead.

What needed to be said most clearly in the eyes of Calvin was well summed up by a saying of the Greek Christian author Gregory of Nazianzus (c.330-89), which, Calvin said, gave him vast delight: “I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one.”⁵³

¹ For help in locating sources for this paper, I am indebted to Dr. David Puckett, and my one-time assistant at the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, Dr. Steve Weaver.

² *Commentary on Isaiah 6:2* in his *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (trans. William Pringle; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 1:205.

³ *The Christian Tradition: Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 172.

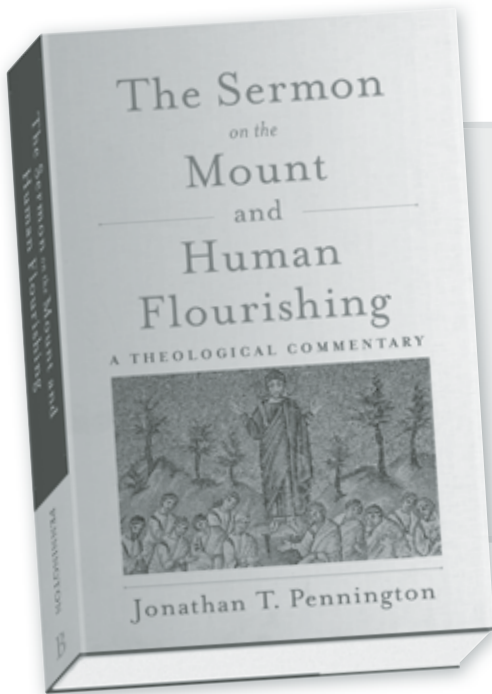
⁴ For the text of these two creeds, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (2nd ed.; London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1960), 215–216, 297–298. See also Johannes Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine: The theological challenges* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire/New York: Routledge, 2006), 123–126.

⁵ Stephen M. Hildebrand identifies Edwin Hatch and Adolf von Harnack as two of the scholars who argued

- along these lines. See his *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 7.
- 6 “Being trinitarian: The shape of saving faith,” *The Christian Century*, 112, no. 32 (November 8, 1995), 1045.
 - 7 “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” in his *Biblical and Theological Studies* (ed., Samuel G. Craig; Philadelphia: P&R, 1952), 22.
 - 8 Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), 217. On Calvin’s controversy with Servetus, see Eric Kayam, “The Case of Michael Servetus: The background and unfolding of the case,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 8, no.2 (Fall, 1992), 117–46; Gordon, *Calvin*, 217–32; Jean-Luc Mouton, *Calvin* ([Paris]: Éditions Gallimard, 2009), 302–42; Christoph Strohm, “Calvin and Religious Tolerance” in *John Calvin’s Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009* (trans. David Dichelle; ed., Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallmann; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2009), 176–9.
 - 9 Cited Kayam, “Case of Michael Servetus,” 123.
 - 10 Gordon, *Calvin*, 218–9.
 - 11 On Geneva not being a theocracy, see Mark J. Larson, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the State* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 1–19.
 - 12 J. I Packer, “John Calvin and Reformed Europe” in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (ed., John D. Woodbridge; Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 212–3; Gordon, *Calvin*, 217–29.
 - 13 *Contra libellum Calvini in quo ostendere conatur haereticos jure gladii coercendos esse* (Holland, 1612). Though published in 1612, Castellio actually wrote this work in 1554 as a response to Calvin’s *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate* (1554), his justification of the execution of Servetus. For the quote, I am indebted to Marian Hiller, “Sebastian Castellio and the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience” (<http://www.socinian.org/files/castellio.pdf>; accessed February 13, 2017), 10, and Timothy George, “Calvin’s Biggest Mistake: Why he assented to the execution of Michael Servetus,” *Christianity Today*, 53, no.9 (September 2009), 32. For an overview of Castellio’s views on religious tolerance, see Strohm, “Calvin and Religious Tolerance,” 187–8.
 - 14 “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity” in his *Calvin and Augustine* (ed., Samuel G. Craig; Philadelphia, PA: P&R, 1980), 204. For an extremely thorough overview of the so-called Caroli affair, see Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1995), 309–45. For the course of the affair, see also Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 204–12; Richard C. Gamble, “Calvin’s Controversies” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed., Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 199; Gordon, *Calvin*, 72–5.
 - 15 Guillaume Farel, *Sommaire et brève déclaration* (transcribed and edited Arthur-L. Hofer; Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Éditions « Belle Rivière, ” 1980), 13–14.
 - 16 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.A.7 (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: H. H. Meeter Center for Calvin Studies/Eerdmans, 1986), 45. For the rejection of Arianism, see *Institutes* 2.A.9 (p. 47–8).
 - 17 Barth, *Theology of John Calvin*, 317–8.
 - 18 Letter to Kaspar Megander [February, 1537] in John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters* (ed. Jules Bonnet, and tr. David Constable; 1858 ed.; repr. Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 4:49.
 - 19 *Pro G. Farelo et collegis eius adversus Petri Caroli calumnias defensio Nicolai Gallasii in Ioannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt omnia* (trans. Michael A. G. Haykin; eds. Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz and Eduard Reuss; Brunswick: C.A. Schwetschke and Son, 1868; repr. New York/London: Johnson Reprint Corp./Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, G.m.b.H, 1964), 7:315–6. Henceforth the works of Calvin will be designated as *Calvini opera* with the appropriate volume and column.
 - 20 A. Mitchell Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin. A Modern Interpretation* (2nd ed.; London: James Clarke & Co., 1950), 42–3; Bernard Cottret, *Calvin. A Biography* (trans. M. Wallace McDonald; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 124–6.
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 - 22 *Pro G. Farelo...defensio* (*Calvini opera*, 7:312), trans. Michael A.G. Haykin.
 - 23 Barth, *Theology of John Calvin*, 324–5.
 - 24 Hunter, *Teaching of Calvin*, 41; Stephen M. Reynolds, “Calvin’s View of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds,” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 23 (1960–1961), 33–7.
 - 25 “The Trinity,” *The Calvin Handbook* (trans. Gerrit W. Sheeres; ed., Herman J. Selderhuis; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2009), 246.
 - 26 Paul Helm, *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 44.
 - 27 Baars, “Trinity,” 245–6; Helm, *Calvin*, 41–4.
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 - 29 On Gribaldi, see James T. Dennison, Jr. and George C. Young II with Francis X. Gumerlock and Andrea

- Rafanelli, “Trinitarian Confession of the Italian Church of Geneva (1558),” *Kerux* 21, no.1 (May 2006), 3–4 and n.4; Peter Hughes, “Matteo Gribaldi” (<http://uudb.org/articles/matteogribaldi.html>); accessed February 13, 2017).
- ³⁰ Dennison, Jr. and Young II with Gumerlock and Rafanelli, “Trinitarian Confession of the Italian Church,” 4, n.4.
- ³¹ On Biandrata, see Joseph N. Tylenda, “The warning that went unheeded: John Calvin on Giorgio Binadrata,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, 12 (April–November 1977), 24–62; Charles A. Howe and Peter Hughes, “George Biandrata” (<http://uudb.org/articles/giorgiobiandrata.html>); accessed February 13, 2017).
- ³² Tylenda, “The warning that went unheeded,” 52–3.
- ³³ *Impietas Valentini Gentilis detecta et palam traducta, qui Christum non sine sacrilega blasphemia Deum essentiatum esse fingit* (1561) (*Calvini opera* 9:374).
- ³⁴ *Institutes* 1.13.23–26. See also Thomas F. Torrance, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, 25, no.2 (November 1990), 180–1; Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 256; Baars, “The Trinity,” 250.
- ³⁵ See, for example, John Calvin, *Ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae responsum* (1558) (*Calvini opera* 9:321–32); “Confession of Faith set forth in the Italian Church of Geneva May 18, 1558” (Dennison, Jr. and Young II with Gumerlock and Rafanelli, “Trinitarian Confession of the Italian Church,” 6–10); *Impietas Valentini Gentilis* (*Calvini opera* 9:361–420).
- ³⁶ *Ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae responsum* (1558) (*Calvini opera* 9:327–9).
- ³⁷ *Ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae responsum* (1558) (*Calvini opera* 9:328) (trans. Tylenda, “The warning that went unheeded,” 58).
- ³⁸ *Ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae responsum* (1558) (*Calvini opera* 9:331).
- ³⁹ *Ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae responsum* (1558) (*Calvini opera* 9:331–2) (trans. Tylenda, “The warning that went unheeded,” 61–2).
- ⁴⁰ “Confession of Faith set forth in the Italian Church of Geneva May 18, 1558” (Dennison, Jr. and Young II with Gumerlock and Rafanelli, “Trinitarian Confession of the Italian Church,” 9).
- ⁴¹ “Confession of Faith set forth in the Italian Church of Geneva May 18, 1558” (Dennison, Jr. and Young II with Gumerlock and Rafanelli, “Trinitarian Confession of the Italian Church,” 8).
- ⁴² *Institutes* 1.13.23–25.
- ⁴³ *Impietas Valentini Gentilis* (*Calvini opera* 9:394–396).
- ⁴⁴ *Institutes* 1.13.27–28.
- ⁴⁵ *Institutes* 1.13.29.
- ⁴⁶ This expression is that of Baars, “The Trinity,” 247.
- ⁴⁷ Baars, “The Trinity,” 247.
- ⁴⁸ Commentary on Colossians 1:15, trans. T. H. L. Parker, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Calvin’s Commentaries; Edinburgh/London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 308.
- ⁴⁹ Commentary on Hebrews 1:2–3 in *The Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter* (trans. William B. Johnson; Calvin’s Commentaries; 1963 ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans / Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 6–9.
- ⁵⁰ Commentary on Matthew 28:19 in *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (trans. William Pringle; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 3:387.
- ⁵¹ Commentary on Isaiah 6 in *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (trans. William Pringle; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 1:198–220.
- ⁵² Commentary on Isaiah 6:2 (*Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. Pringle, 1:203).
- ⁵³ *Institutes* 1.13.17.

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Charles Hodge on the Doctrine of the “Adorable Trinity”

PAUL KJOSS HELSETH

Paul Kjoss Helseth is Professor of Christian Thought at the University of Northwestern, St. Paul, Minnesota. He earned his PhD from Marquette University in Systematic Theology. Dr. Helseth is the author of *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (P&R, 2010). He is also a contributor to *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Zondervan, 2011) and *Reforming or Conforming?: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church* (Crossway, 2008). In addition, Dr. Helseth is co-editor of *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Crossway, 2004) and *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Crossway, 2003).

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the untimely death of his brother’s son in December 1850, Charles Hodge wrote to his brother Hugh gently to remind him that the only way to cultivate the kind of sorrow that “is [in] every way healthful to the soul” is to mingle sorrow “with pious feeling, with resignation, confidence in God, [and] hope in his mercy and love.”¹ “The great means of having our sorrow kept pure,” Hodge counseled, “is to keep near to God, to feel assured of his love, that he orders all things well, and will make even our afflictions work out for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.”² But precisely how did Hodge encourage his brother Hugh to “keep near to God,” and in so doing to cultivate the kind of sorrow that works life and not death, the kind of sorrow that is best described as “sorrow after a godly sort”?³ In short, Hodge encouraged his brother to cultivate godly and not “worldly”⁴

sorrow by remembering the doctrine of the Trinity. “When we speak of keeping near to God,” Hodge maintained, “we mean God in Christ, and God as reconciled and made propitious to us by his blood. And Christ is near to us, and dwells in us, and shows us His love, and works all grace in us by the Holy Spirit ... If, therefore, God will graciously give you and Margaret the Holy Ghost, He will thereby give you Himself, and open to you the infinite sources of peace and consolation that are to be found in Him [alone].”⁵

Among other things, what this rather poignant exchange between Hodge and his brother serves to illustrate is Hodge’s understanding of the formative and immensely practical role that doctrine ought to play in the life of every believer. While Hodge is well known in the historiography of North American evangelicalism for his relentless insistence upon doctrinal rigor and precision, he is perhaps less well known for his unambiguous insistence that God did not reveal the “doctrines of the Bible” merely “to teach men science, but to bring them to the saving knowledge of Himself.”⁶ The doctrines of the Bible “are ... intimately connected with religion, or the life of God in the soul,” he maintained, for they not only “determine the religious experience of believers,” but they “are [also] presupposed in that experience,”⁷ and for that reason they are essential to “the Christian’s practical faith, [and constitute] the truth on which he daily lives.”⁸ As the exchange between Hodge and his brother Hugh makes clear, Hodge was persuaded that this is especially the case with what he refers to in a number of places as the doctrine of “the adorable Trinity.”⁹ “It is a great mistake,” he argues in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*,

to regard that doctrine as a mere speculative or abstract truth, concerning the constitution of the Godhead, with which we have no practical concern, or which we are required to believe simply because it is revealed. On the contrary, it underlies the whole plan of salvation, and determines the character of the religion (in the subjective sense of that word) of all true Christians. It is the unconscious, or unformed faith, even of those of God’s people who are unable to understand the term by which it is expressed. They all believe in God, the Creator and Preserver against whom they have sinned, whose justice they know they cannot satisfy, and whose image they cannot restore to their apostate nature. They, therefore, as of necessity, believe in a divine Redeemer and a divine Sanctifier. They have, as it were, the factors of the doctrine of the Trinity in their own religious convictions.

No mere speculative doctrine, especially no doctrine so mysterious and so out of analogy with all other objects of human knowledge, as that of the Trinity, could ever have held the abiding control over the faith of the Church, which this doctrine has maintained. It is not, therefore, by any arbitrary decision, nor from any bigoted adherence to hereditary beliefs, that the Church has always refused to recognize as Christians those who reject this doctrine. This judgment is only the expression of the deep conviction that Antitrinitarians must adopt a radically and practically different system of religion from that on which the Church builds her hopes. It is not too much to say with [G. A.] Meyer, that “the Trinity is the point in which all Christian ideas and interests unite; at once the beginning and the end of all insight into Christianity.”¹⁰

How, then, did Hodge conceive of the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine that he regarded as the most essential and practical of all the biblical doctrines? In the discussion that follows, I summarize Hodge’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity by considering what he calls the biblical, ecclesiastical, and philosophical “forms”¹¹ of the doctrine, and I do this while paying particular attention to the precise nature of the “subordination” that he believed is characteristic of the enduring relationships between the distinct persons of the Godhead. Following an analysis that is largely descriptive, I conclude by offering a brief assessment of how the subtleties of Hodge’s understanding of subordination might be relevant to discussions of the Trinity that are currently taking place in the evangelical camp.

THE “BIBLICAL FORM” OF THE TRINITY

Charles Hodge’s discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity is characterized by the same erudition and restraint that typifies his approach to discussions of other biblical doctrines more generally. While aware of the many ways that all sorts of commitments can and do inform how theologians move from the text of Scripture to the formulation of particular doctrines, his discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in an aversion to all forms of presumptuous speculation on the one hand, and a readiness to defer to what he repeatedly refers to as the “facts” of biblical revelation on the other.¹² As such, Hodge’s approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is marked by an unwillingness to extrapolate beyond what he believed is warranted by the

teaching of Scripture, an unwillingness that he insisted was sorely lacking in the approaches of those contemporaries who spoke and wrote as if “‘the deep things of God’ had [all] been revealed to [them,]” and who as a consequence imagined that their powers of perception were so profound that they could, so to speak, march “through rivulet and river, puddle and ocean, with equal ease, ... [and find] bottom everywhere.”¹³ For example, just as he was persuaded that Horace Bushnell’s “cheating mirage of a trinity”—a “trinity of revelations” rather than a Trinity of distinct persons¹⁴—was finally grounded not in the teaching of Scripture but in Bushnell’s eagerness to submit to nothing more than the determinations of his own understanding, so too he insisted that Samuel Baird’s perhaps overstated insistence “That man’s nature was designed to reveal the relations of the persons of the Trinity” was finally informed not by careful attention to the nuances of the text, but by “an overweening and unfounded confidence” in his own powers of discernment, an “absence of modesty” that led him to read Scripture while mistakenly presuming that he had “a special gift for philosophical discrimination and analysis.”¹⁵ So what did Hodge believe a faithful reading of the Bible would lead believers to think about the doctrine of the Trinity? What did he think is included, in other words, in the “biblical form” of the doctrine?

Near the beginning of his discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge implicitly acknowledges that Scripture is not a textbook on systematic theology, but an organic book that reveals “all the great doctrines of the Bible” in a progressive fashion.¹⁶ “What at first is only obscurely intimated is gradually unfolded in subsequent parts of the sacred volume,” he argues, “until the truth is [finally] revealed in its fullness” in the New Testament.¹⁷ Hodge contends that the “great doctrine” of the Trinity is no exception to this rule. While the Trinity is nowhere explicitly “presented in a doctrinal formula in the Word of God,” nevertheless “the several constituent elements” of the doctrine “are [gradually] brought into view, some in one place, and some in another,” and together they yield a biblical doctrine that can be summarized according to what Hodge calls five “particulars.”¹⁸

The first “particular” has to do with the unity of the divine essence, and it asserts that “There is one only living and true God, or divine Being.”¹⁹ The Scriptures, Hodge contends, unambiguously and “everywhere” affirm that there is one, and only one, God.²⁰ The second “particular” relates to “the

true and equal divinity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.”²¹ According to Hodge, just as the Scriptures make clear that “all [the] divine titles and attributes are ascribed equally to the Father, Son, and Spirit,” so too they reveal that “The one is as much the object of adoration, love, confidence, and devotion as the other.”²² The third “particular” relates to the distinct personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Hodge maintains that “The terms Father, Son, and Spirit do not express [merely] different relations of God to his creatures,” but they point to the real existence of three “intelligent subject[s] who can say I, who can be addressed as Thou, and who can act and can be the object of action.”²³ As such, the third “particular” declares that according to the Scriptures, “The one divine Being subsists in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.”²⁴

The fourth and fifth “particulars” are of particular relevance to the central focus of this essay because they have to do with the ultimately mysterious nature of the relations in which the distinct persons of the Godhead stand not only to one another, but also to “the Church and the world” in which we live.²⁵ According to the fourth “particular,” although it is no doubt true that Scripture reveals the Father, Son, and Spirit to be “the same in substance, and equal in power and glory,” nevertheless “it is no less true” that “according to the Scriptures, (a.) ... the Father is first, the Son second, and the Spirit third. (b.) The Son is of the Father ... and the Spirit is of the Father and of the Son. (c.) The Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit. [And] (d.) The Father operates through the Son, and the Father and Son operate through the Spirit.”²⁶ Since “The converse of these statements is never found” in the teaching of Scripture—since, in other words, the Son “is never said to send the Father, nor to operate through Him; nor is the Spirit ever said to send the Father, or the Son, or to operate through them”—Hodge concludes that according to the Scriptures, there is within the Trinity (i.e., the Trinity *ad intra*) a subordination of the persons not in terms of nature or essence, but “as to the mode of subsistence and operation.”²⁷ The fifth and final “particular” of the “Biblical form” of the doctrine—the form which Hodge contends “is the form in which the doctrine has always entered into the faith of the Church, as a part of its religious convictions and experience”²⁸—addresses the way in which the distinct persons of the Godhead relate to one another in all of their actions. According to Hodge, while the Scriptures clearly teach that “the persons of the Trinity concur in all acts *ad extra*,” nevertheless they

also make clear that not only are there some acts “which are predominantly referred to the Father, others to the Son, and others to the Spirit,” but there are also “certain acts, or conditions predicated of one person of the Trinity, which are never predicated of either of the others.”²⁹ In this regard, Hodge ends his discussion of the “biblical form” of the doctrine of the Trinity by insisting that those who read Scripture faithfully will conclude that within the Trinity (i.e., the Trinity *ad intra* and not *ad extra*), “generation belongs exclusively to the Father, filiation to the Son, and procession to the Spirit.”³⁰

THE “ECCLESIASTICAL FORM” OF THE TRINITY

Throughout his discussion of the “biblical form” of the doctrine of the Trinity, Hodge maintains that the “particulars” outlined above—which, in his estimation, form the at least implicit “foundation” of the “religious consciousness” of every believer—are informed by “no philosophical element,” but are “simply an arrangement of the clearly revealed facts bearing on this subject.”³¹ While Hodge insists that this form of the doctrine “includes everything that is essential to the integrity of the doctrine, and all that is embraced in the faith of ordinary Christians,”³² nevertheless he acknowledges that the biblical “particulars” alone could never have provided an adequate basis for the ongoing life of the Church. Indeed, not only was there an increasingly apparent necessity for a statement of the doctrine that would guard the truth “from the evil influence of false or erroneous exhibitions of it,” but there was also—within the Church—an “inward” as well as an “outward necessity ... for a clear, comprehensive, and consistent statement of the various elements of this complex doctrine of the Christian faith.”³³ According to Hodge,

When a doctrine so complex as that of the Trinity is presented as an object of faith, the mind is forced to reflect upon it, to endeavor to ascertain what it includes, and how its several parts are to be stated, so as to avoid confusion or contradiction. Besides this internal necessity for a definite statement of the doctrine, such statement was forced upon the Church from without. Even among those who honestly intended to receive what the Scriptures taught upon the subject, it was inevitable that there should arise diversity in the mode of statement, and confusion and contradiction in the use of terms. As the Church is one, not externally merely, but really and inwardly, this diversity and confusion are as

much an evil, a pain, and an embarrassment, troubling its inward peace, as the like inconsistency and confusion would be in an individual mind.³⁴

For Hodge, then, the “ecclesiastical form” of the doctrine of the Trinity relates to the shape it assumed in the early centuries of the Church as believers sought not only to clarify the Biblical “particulars” for those who already claimed to believe them, but also—and at the same time—to defend those “particulars” in response to the burgeoning theological controversies of their day.³⁵ According to Hodge, the definitive statements that are associated with this process of historical development are found in the Nicene, Constantinopolitan, and Athanasian Creeds, and together, these constitute—with only minor differences of “amplification”—what he calls the “Church Form of that fundamental article of the Christian faith.”³⁶ In his overview of the relevant history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity—and before distinguishing his understanding of the Trinity from that of those who insisted upon going “beyond”³⁷ what he contends are the biblical affirmations that are found in these doctrinal standards—Hodge highlights what he believes are the affirmations of these creeds that are essential to the confessional orthodoxy of the Church. The first is in response to the Sabellians, or those who endorsed some form of “a modal trinity,” and it affirms “that the terms Father, Son, and Spirit were not expressive merely of relations *ad extra*,” but of “internal, necessary and eternal relations in the Godhead; ... they are personal designations, so that the Father is one person, the Son another person, and the Spirit another person.”³⁸ The second is in response to the Arians and Semi-Arians, or those who denied that all of the members of the Godhead are “the same in substance, and equal in power and glory,” and it affirms that “Whatever divine perfection, whether eternity, immutability, infinity, omnipotence, or holiness, justice, goodness, or truth, can be predicated of the one, can in the same sense and measure be predicated of the others.”³⁹ “It is not the Father as such, nor the Son as such, who is self-existent, infinite, and eternal,” these Creeds affirm, “but the Godhead, or divine essence, which subsists in the three persons.”⁴⁰

The third affirmation expands upon the second by addressing what Hodge believes the Nicene Creed asserts about the mutual relations of the distinct persons of the Godhead. In the first place, and perhaps most controversially, Hodge insists that Nicaea’s articulation of the orthodox consensus entails

the affirmation of the Son's "subordination" to the Father, and of the Spirit's "subordination" to the Father and the Son, not in terms of essence, but in terms of "the mode of subsistence and operation, implied in the Scriptural facts that the Son is of the Father, and the Spirit is of the Father and the Son, and that the Father operates through the Son, and the Father and the Son through the Spirit."⁴¹ In the second place, Hodge argues that the Nicene Creed affirms that the relations between the distinct persons of the Godhead are expressed "by their distinctive appellations. The first person is characterized as Father, in his relation to the second person; the second is characterized as Son, in relation to the first person; and the third as Spirit, in relation to the first and second person. Paternity, therefore, is the distinguishing property of the Father; filiation of the Son; and procession of the Spirit."⁴² In the third and final place, Hodge contends that the Nicene Creed affirms "the intimate union, communion, and [co-]inhabitation"⁴³ of the distinct persons who always and everywhere relate to one another as Father, Son, and Spirit. "As the essence of the Godhead is common to the several persons," Hodge argues, "they have a common intelligence, will, and power. There are not in God three intelligences, three wills, three efficiencies. [Rather,] The Three are one God, and therefore have one mind and will," and for this reason the faithful must insist that "the Son is in the Father, and the Father in the Son; that where the Father is, there the Son and Spirit are; [and] what the one does the others do."⁴⁴

Near the end of his discussion of what he contends are the essential contributions of the Nicene Creed to the "ecclesiastical form" of the doctrine of the Trinity, Hodge distinguishes the affirmations of the Nicene Creed—which he is eager to embrace precisely because he is persuaded that they are "nothing more than a well-ordered arrangement of the facts of Scripture which concern the doctrine of the Trinity"—from what he claims are the extra-confessional "speculations" of those who "framed" and "defended" that Creed.⁴⁵ According to Hodge, "the Nicene Fathers" were not content, in their own writings, merely to state "the facts of Scripture" in a well-ordered and comprehensive fashion, but they were eager to find a rational explanation for those facts by "go[ing] beyond" the clear teaching of the text, particularly on matters relating "to the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father, and to what is meant by generation, or the relation between the Father and the Son."⁴⁶

With respect to “the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father,” Hodge maintains that while the Nicene Creed unambiguously affirms, “without any attempt at explanation,” that both the “unity of essence” and the simultaneous “subordination” of the distinct persons are compatible within the Trinity, the Nicene Fathers “endeavored to explain what was the nature of that subordination” by doing something that Hodge himself was loath to do, namely “go beyond” what he again calls “the facts of Scripture.”⁴⁷ According to Hodge, the explanation of subordination put forward by the Nicene Fathers is “objectionable”⁴⁸ because, while they denied to the Father “any priority or superiority to the other persons of the Trinity, as to being or perfection,” nevertheless they “still spoke of the Father ... as having in order of thought the whole Godhead in Himself; so that He alone was God of Himself ... he [alone] was the fountain, the cause, the root, *fons, origo, principium*, of the divinity as subsisting in the Son and Spirit ... [and thus] he [alone] was greater than the other divine persons.”⁴⁹ In short, Hodge takes “exception” to the speculations of the Nicene Fathers on these matters because he is persuaded that “self-existence and necessary existence, as well as omnipotence and all other divine attributes, belong [not to the Father alone, but] to the divine essence common to all the persons of the Trinity.”⁵⁰ He is convinced, in other words, that “it is the Triune God who is self-existent, and not one person in distinction from the other persons,” and for this reason he insists—in opposition to the speculations of the Nicene Fathers—that “when the word God is used indefinitely [in Scripture and in the Creed] it means the Triune God, and not the Father in distinction from the Son and Spirit.”⁵¹

This tendency to “go beyond the facts of Scripture” in transparently problematical ways is also seen, Hodge contends, in the Nicene Fathers’ treatment of the “eternal generation” and “sonship” of the second person of the Trinity. According to Hodge, while the Nicene Fathers were fully persuaded that “the relation between the First and Second persons of the Trinity ... is that of filiation or sonship,” nevertheless in their own writings they were not content to leave the matter of sonship “where the Scriptures [and the Creed] leave it.”⁵² Indeed, they undertook not simply to affirm the notion of sonship as it is set forth in Scripture and in the Nicene Creed, but “to explain what is meant by sonship.” They concluded that sonship, whether among men or within the Trinity, first and foremost has to do with the “derivation of essence.” They

based this conclusion largely on their assumptions regarding “the nature of sonship among men” and their interpretation of Jesus’ insistence in John 5:26 that “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.”⁵³ “The First Person of the Trinity is Father,” they reasoned, “because He communicates the essence of the Godhead to the Second Person; and the Second Person is Son,” not because “the essence of the Son” is eternally and necessarily generated by the Father, but because the Son “derives that essence from the First Person” in the sense that “the person of the Son is generated (i.e., He becomes a person)” by “an eternal [and necessary] movement in the divine essence” itself.⁵⁴

While Hodge recognizes that this understanding of eternal generation certainly follows from the Nicene Fathers’ more speculative construal of the subordination of the Son to the Father, he nevertheless contends that it is problematic. The problem is not only that “it is unreasonable to assume” that “derivation of essence”—whether “in human paternity” or in the generation of the Son by the Father “in the Trinity”—is “essential to sonship,” but also because it privileges an interpretation of John 5:26 that is open to challenge.⁵⁵ According to Hodge, while the word “Son” is often used in Scripture “as a designation of the ... Second Person of the Trinity,” it is also often used to refer to the incarnate Logos, or “the Word made flesh.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, Hodge maintains that if the word “Son” in John 5:26 “means Logos, then it does teach that the First Person of the Trinity communicated life, and therefore the essence in which that life inheres, to the Second Person,”⁵⁷ and the Fathers’ more speculative construal of eternal generation can be tethered directly to the teaching of the Bible. However, if the word “Son” refers to the incarnate Logos, the God-man, or the Word made flesh, then, Hodge contends, “the passage teaches no such doctrine,”⁵⁸ and the Fathers’ construal cannot be justified, at least not by this text.

So what does Hodge believe the word “Son” refers to in this text, and why does he insist that the question of what it refers to really matters? In short, Hodge contends that in this text, the word “Son” does not refer to the Logos, or the second person of the Trinity, but to the incarnate Logos, or the Word made flesh. As such, the “subject of discourse” in the context of this verse does not have to do, as the Nicene Fathers maintained, either with “the nature of the relation of the Father to the Son in the Godhead,” or with the notion “that [the] derivation of essence is essential to sonship.”⁵⁹

Rather, it has to do with the “constitution” of “the historical person who ... could be called both God or man, because He was both God and man.”⁶⁰ For Hodge, if this is the correct interpretation of the word “Son” in John 5:26, then it matters because it suggests despite what the Nicene Fathers would have us believe, that “the divine essence” essential to sonship is not derived in any sense, but, on the contrary, is already the possession of the one who is properly called “Son”—a name that according to the Creed is rightly applied not just to the divine Logos, the second person of the Trinity, but also to Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man, the Word made flesh. This is so “because of the eternal relation which He sustains to the First Person of the Trinity.”⁶¹ “The [Nicene] Council declared,” Hodge maintains,

that our Lord is the Eternal Son of God, i.e., that He is from eternity the Son of God. This of course involves the denial that He became the Son of God in time; and, consequently, that the primary and essential reason for his being called Son is not his miraculous birth, nor his incarnation, nor his resurrection, nor his exaltation to the right hand of God. The Council decided that the word Son as applied to Christ, is not a term of office but of nature; that it expresses the relation which the Second Person in the Trinity from eternity bears to the First Person, and that the relation thus indicated is sameness of nature, so that sonship, in the case of Christ, includes equality with God. In other words, God was in such a sense his Father that He was equal with God.⁶²

Before moving on to his discussion of the “philosophical form” of the doctrine of the Trinity, Hodge concludes his overview of what he contends are the essential contributions of the confessional consensus to the “ecclesiastical form” of the doctrine by addressing—almost as an afterthought—what he insists the Nicene, Constantinopolitan, and Athanasian Creeds require the faithful to believe about the relation of the Spirit to the other persons of the Godhead. Just as Hodge is persuaded that the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople were “fully justified by Scripture in teaching” that the second person of the Trinity relates eternally to the first person of the Trinity as “Son,” so too he contends that they had “Scriptural grounds” for affirming that “the relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son ... is [best] expressed by the word procession.”⁶³ According to Hodge, there are three Scriptural grounds for expressing the relation of the Spirit to the other persons of the

Trinity by the word “procession.” The first has to do with the “signification of the word spirit.”⁶⁴ The word “spirit,” Hodge maintains, “means breath, that which proceeds from, and which gives expression and effect to our thoughts. Since Father and Son, as applied to the First and Second persons of the Trinity, are relative terms, it is to be assumed that the word Spirit as the designation of the Third Person, is also relative.”⁶⁵ The second Scriptural ground relates to “the use of the genitive case”⁶⁶ when addressing the relation of the Spirit to the Father. “The revealed fact is that the Spirit is of the Father, and the Church in calling the relation, thus indicated, a procession, does not attempt to explain it.”⁶⁷ The third ground is associated with John 15:26 and “the Latin and all other Western” churches’⁶⁸ affirmation of the *filioque* clause that was added to the Nicene Creed by the Synod of Toledo in 589 A.D. That “the Latin and all other Western” churches “are authorized in teaching that the Spirit proceeds not from the Father only, but from the Father and the Son, is evident,” Hodge insists, “because whatever is said in Scripture of the relation of the Spirit to the Father, is also said of his relation to the Son.”⁶⁹ The Spirit, in other words, “is said to be the ‘Spirit of the Father,’ and ‘Spirit of the Son;’ He is given or sent by the Son as well as the Father; the Son is said to operate through the Spirit. [And] The Spirit is no more said to send or to operate through the Son, than to send or operate through the Father. The relation, so far as revealed, is the same in the one case as in the other.”⁷⁰ Based on these Scriptural grounds, Hodge summarizes “the common Church doctrine” of the relation that is expressed by the word “procession”—and in so doing brings his overview of the “ecclesiastical form” of the doctrine of the Trinity to an end—by insisting: “(1.) That ... [procession] is incomprehensible, and therefore inexplicable. (2.) That it is eternal. (3.) That it is equally from the Father and the Son. ... [And] (4.) That this procession concerns the personality and operations of the Spirit, and not his essence.”⁷¹

THE “PHILOSOPHICAL FORM” OF THE TRINITY

Hodge begins his discussion of the third and final “form” of the doctrine of the Trinity by insisting that this “philosophical form” of the doctrine is related to the “philosophical statements” that are typically advanced either “to vindicate the doctrine of the Trinity, by showing that it is not out of

analogy with other objects of human thought,” or to “explain it away” so that “something which has not the least analogy with the doctrine of the Christian Church” can be embraced in its place.⁷² While Hodge demonstrates that he is aware of these latter kinds of statements and notes that they proliferate among those who are eager to substitute “the formulas of speculation for the doctrine of the Bible,” nevertheless his primary interest in this section of his discussion is with the former kinds of statements, i.e., with those statements of the doctrine that “have been intended by their authors either to prove it, or to illustrate it.”⁷³ According to Hodge, no matter how useful these kinds of statements might be in calling our attention to “the fact that in other and entirely different spheres there is ... [a kind of] community of life in different subsistences,” still such statements are of “little value” and “do not serve to make the inconceivable [finally] intelligible,” he contends, for the “mysteries” of the Godhead—particularly the mystery of how God can be simultaneously one in essence and three in person—are “ineffable,” and they are so precisely because they are supernatural and as such have “no counterpart in the constitution of our nature, or in anything around us in the present state of our existence.”⁷⁴

Since this is the case, and since Hodge is persuaded that whatever “philosophical statements” the believer puts forward can never “hold as to the main point” of the Trinity’s supernatural three in oneness,⁷⁵ then in what sense does he believe that such statements might still play a positive role in helping the faithful to vindicate at least some aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity? Such statements for Hodge are helpful, it seems, neither because they serve as comprehensive “illustrations of the [ineffable] relations of the persons of the Trinity,” nor because they absolve the faithful from having to believe “what we cannot [finally] understand.”⁷⁶ Rather, such statements are helpful because they offer “somewhat analogous” examples of “triplicity in unity,” that help the faithful begin to make at least some sense of the “Scriptural fact” that “Subordination as to the mode of subsistence and operation” is “consistent” with “the perfect and equal Godhead of the Father and the Son [and the Holy Spirit].”⁷⁷

That this is the case is perhaps nowhere more clearly manifest in Hodge’s work than in what he insists is the parallel between the “triplicity in unity” of the Trinity, and what he contends is the “triplicity in unity” of the human soul. Throughout his works, including in his discussion of the doctrine of the

Trinity in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge makes it clear that in his estimation, the human soul is not comprised of discrete faculties or powers that have the ability to operate in isolation from one another. Rather, according to Hodge, the soul is a single unit that always acts as a single substance. This is the case despite the fact that the intellect which, like the other faculties or powers of the soul, is simply a particular manifestation of the psychic totality of the whole soul or mind itself, always enjoys a kind of primacy in all rational and moral activity.⁷⁸ “We distinguish between acts of the intellect, and acts of the will,” Hodge maintains, “and yet in every act of the will there is an exercise of the intelligence; as in every act of the affections there is a joint action of the intelligence and will.”⁷⁹ Hodge concedes that the analogy between the human soul and the Trinity is finally inadequate because the “triplicity in unity” of the soul tends necessarily towards a form of modalism that is anathema to the “triplicity in unity” of the Trinity. The analogy, he asserts in conclusion, is nevertheless helpful because it offers an illustration of how there can be a form of subordination that is consistent with identity of essence within a single entity that manifests or expresses itself in a multiplicity of different subsistences. “In the consubstantial identity of the human soul there is,” Hodge simultaneously asserts and concludes, “a subordination of one faculty to another, and so, however incomprehensible to us, there may be a subordination in the Trinity consistent with the identity of essence in the Godhead.”⁸⁰ Clearly, what this quote suggests is that for Hodge, although the analogy between the “triplicity in unity” of the Trinity and the “triplicity in unity” of the human soul does not finally explain the mystery of how subordination “as to the mode of subsistence and operation” can be “consistent” with “the perfect and equal Godhead of the Father and the Son [and the Holy Spirit],”⁸¹ nevertheless it still tells us something about the nature of subordination within the Godhead that is essential for a better understanding of this foundational doctrine of the Christian faith.

CONCLUSION: SUBORDINATION AND SUBJECTION IN HODGE’S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

To this point in this essay I have tried to summarize the broad outline of Charles Hodge’s doctrine of the Trinity, particularly as it is found in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*. Having completed that task, and having

seen how Hodge, among other things, distinguishes the affirmations of the Nicene Creed from what he contends are the more problematic speculations of the Nicene Fathers, I will now conclude my analysis by offering a brief assessment of how Hodge’s understanding of subordination might be relevant to discussions of the Trinity that are currently taking place in the evangelical camp.

As we have seen in our overview of his understanding of the biblical, ecclesiastical, and philosophical “forms” of the doctrine of the Trinity, Hodge is persuaded that affirming a form of subordination in the ontological Trinity (i.e., in the Trinity *ad intra*) is essential to the biblical and confessional orthodoxy of the Church. According to Hodge, the biblical, ecclesiastical, and philosophical “forms” of the doctrine all affirm that within the Trinity, the Son and Spirit are subordinate to the Father, not in terms of essence, but in terms of “the mode of subsistence and operation, implied in the Scriptural facts that the Son is of the Father, and the Spirit is of the Father and the Son, and that the Father operates through the Son, and the Father and the Son through the Spirit.”⁸² While this affirmation of subordination in the ontological Trinity centers on that ordering of distinct persons that is associated with what Hodge refers to as their “distinguishing propert[ies]”⁸³ of generation, filiation, and procession, what is notably absent in his discussion is any suggestion of the notion that subordination within the Trinity has to do with the subjection of either the Son or the Spirit *to the authority of the Father*.

The same cannot be said, however, for the form of subordination that Hodge believes is found in the economic Trinity (i.e., in the Trinity as it relates to the works of the Godhead *ad extra*). In his *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hodge offers a concise summary of what he believes the Scriptures teach about the subordination of the second person of the Trinity to the first. According to Hodge, there is in Scripture “a threefold subordination” of the Son to the Father:

1. A subordination as to the mode of subsistence and operation, of the second, to the first person in the Trinity; which is perfectly consistent with their identity of substance, and equality in power and glory.
2. The voluntary subordination of the Son in his humbling himself to be found in fashion as a man, and becoming obedient unto death, and therefore subject to the limitations and infirmities of

our nature. [And finally,] 3. The economical or official subjection of the theanthropos. That is, the subordination of the incarnate Son of God, in the work of redemption and as the head of the church. [In this form of subordination,] He that is by nature equal with God becomes, as it were, officially subject to him.⁸⁴

What is noteworthy about this summary of the ways in which the Son is subordinate to the Father is what it suggests about Hodge's understanding of the basic difference between the subordination of the Son to the Father in the ontological Trinity, and the subordination of the Son to the Father in the economic Trinity. While the subordination of the Son to the Father in the ontological Trinity does not entail, for Hodge, the subjection of the second person of the Trinity to the first, the subordination of the Son to the Father in the economic Trinity in fact does entail the subjection of the Son to the Father, but the Son that is subject is "not the second person of the Trinity as such, but that person as clothed in our nature."⁸⁵ The subjection described by Hodge is not, in other words, the subjection "of the Son as Son, but of the Son as incarnate; and the subjection itself is official and therefore perfectly consistent with equality of nature."⁸⁶

If this is the case, and if it is therefore true that for Hodge, the Son is subject to the Father only as the God-man and within the context of the economic Trinity,⁸⁷ then how might Hodge's understanding of subordination be relevant to discussions of the Trinity that are currently taking place in the evangelical camp? In short, Hodge's understanding of subordination is relevant precisely because it does not lend itself to the more partisan claims of those on either side of the "eternal subordination of the Son" divide, claims that more often than not are grounded, it seems, in the mistaken assumption that for Hodge, subordination is always and everywhere synonymous with subjection. While Hodge certainly affirmed the "eternal subordination of the Son" to the Father, he did not equate the "eternal subordination of the Son" with the "eternal subjection or submission of the Son," and as such he offers a mediating perspective on the notion of subordination that, if recovered, could offer fresh – even if not entirely original – insights into the mutual relations of the three distinct persons that constitute the Godhead.

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- ¹ Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1880), 373.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 373-74.
- ⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989; 1871-73), 1:442.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 374.
- ⁹ For examples just in his systematics, see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:473; 2:361, 431, 639.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:443. As this quotation suggests, Hodge was persuaded that the doctrine of the Trinity is the “fundamental doctrine” of the Christian religion (Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891; 1857], 314). In this regard, see also, for example, *idem.*, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974; 1860), 243; *idem.*, “The Promise of the Spirit,” in *Conference Papers: Analyses of Discourses, Doctrinal and Practical; Delivered on Sabbath Afternoons to the Students of The Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 68; and *idem.*, “The Unpardonable Sin,” in *Conference Papers*, 113.
- ¹¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:443.
- ¹² In his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge’s first of many references to “the Scriptural facts” is found on 1:444.
- ¹³ Charles Hodge, review of *The First and Second Adam: The Elohim Revealed in the Creation and Redemption of Man*, by Samuel J. Baird, in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 32 (1860): 336.
- ¹⁴ Charles Hodge, review of *God in Christ: Three Discourses Delivered at New Haven, Cambridge, and Andover, with a Preliminary Dissertation on Language*, by Horace Bushnell, in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 21 (1849): 261; cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:58-59.
- ¹⁵ Hodge, review of *The First and Second Adam*, 336, 335, 337.
- ¹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:446; cf. Charles Hodge, review of *The History of the Apostolic Church, with a General Introduction to Church History*, by Philip Schaff, in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 26 (1854): 164-66.
- ¹⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:446.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:446, 443.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:443.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:443-44.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 1:446.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 1:444.
- ²³ *Ibid.* Note that for Hodge, the acts of these distinct persons are voluntary acts. For example, see Hodge, “The Promise of the Spirit,” 69.
- ²⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:444.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:445.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:444-45.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:445.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.* On the concurrence of the persons of the Trinity in all acts *ad extra*, see, for example, Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993; 1886), 261; *idem.*, *A Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991; 1856), 113; *idem.*, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 303; and *idem.*, *Systematic Theology*, 2:629, 639.
- ³⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:445.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:448, 445.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 1:448.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 1:449.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:459. For a brief summary of how the Westminster Confession is related to this consensus, see *ibid.*, 2:407.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:465.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:452, 459.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:459.

- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:459-40.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 1:461.
- ⁴² Ibid. According to Hodge, the first person of the Trinity is Father “in virtue of the eternal relation subsisting between the first and second persons in the Godhead” (Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300); the second person of the Trinity is Son not just because “he is consubstantial with the Father,” but also because of “the relation of the second to the first person in the Trinity, as it exists from eternity” (idem, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 18); and the third person of the Trinity is Spirit because “He is of the Spirit of Christ in the same sense in which he is the Spirit of God. In other words, the Spirit stands in the same relation to the second, that he does to the first person of the Trinity” (ibid., 258).
- ⁴³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:462.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 1:461. On the concurrence of the distinct persons of the Trinity in all acts *ad extra*, see note 29 above.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:462, 471, 465.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:465, 462.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 1:462, 467, 465.
- ⁴⁸ Cf. ibid., 1:464-67.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:465.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:468, 467.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 1:467.
- ⁵² Ibid., 1:468.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 1:468, 469, 468.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:468-69.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:469, 470.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:470.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:470, 471, 470.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:470-71.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 1:474, 472.
- ⁶² Ibid., 1:471.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 1:477.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:477-78.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:478. In his *Commentary on Romans*, Hodge insists that “all Christians” owe a debt of gratitude to the Latin Church for the *filioque* clause, “as it vindicates the full equality of the Son with the Father. No clearer assertion, and no higher exhibition of the Godhead of the Son can be conceived,” he contends, “than that which presents him as the source and the possessor of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit proceeds from, and belongs to him, and by him is given to whomsoever he wills” (Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, 258).
- ⁷¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:477.
- ⁷² Ibid., 1:478, 481, 478, 481.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 1:481, 478.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:462, 478, 462, 478.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:479.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:462.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:478, 474.
- ⁷⁸ Note that Hodge’s emphasis upon the “primacy” of the intellect should not be confused with an emphasis upon the “final dispositive authority” of the intellect. For Hodge, it is possible to affirm the “primacy” of the rational faculty in all rational and moral activity without at the same time affirming the “final dispositive authority” of the rational faculty in all rational and moral activity. Note that the quotation marks here are mine. For clarification of this point, see Paul Kjoss Helseth, “*Right Reason*” and the *Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).
- ⁷⁹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:461-62.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 1:474.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 1:461.

⁸³ Ibid.

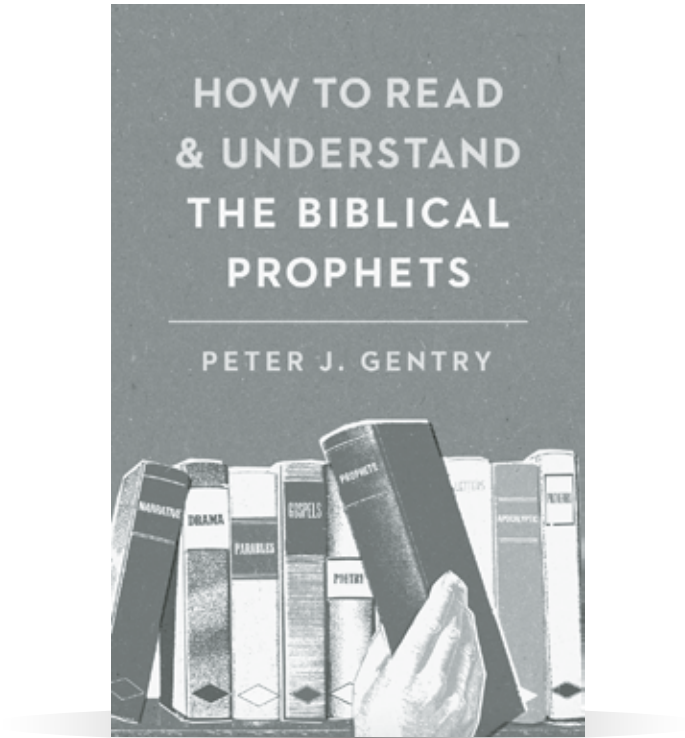
⁸⁴ Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 63.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 334.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:394.

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Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on the Doctrine of the Trinity

FRED G. ZASPEL

Fred G. Zaspel is Pastor of Reformed Baptist Church of Franconia, Pennsylvania and Adjunct Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned his PhD at the Free University of Amsterdam where he wrote a dissertation on B. B. Warfield. He is the author of a number of books including *Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel* (Crossway, 2012), *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Crossway, 2010), and co-author with Tom Wells, *New Covenant Theology* (New Covenant Media, 2002). Dr. Zaspel is also the Executive Editor of "Books at a Glance."

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) left his lasting impress on Reformed theology most famously in his careful exposition and defense of the doctrine of inspiration, but he also made important contributions in Christology and other areas of doctrine. With the recent rise of interest in Warfield (indeed, in all things Old Princeton) his understanding and treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity has gained increasing and deserved recognition, not always with complete agreement but consistently with great appreciation. His famous ISBE article on the Trinity¹ repays careful reading always, as does his in-depth contextual analysis of Tertullian's² and Calvin's³ doctrine of the Trinity. His theological exposition of the apostle Paul's common expression, "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"⁴ reveals the Princetonian's keen exegetical eye and is rich with Trinitarian implications also. Beyond his many studies on God, the Holy Spirit, and especially the person of Christ all constitute a gold mine of exegetical, historical, and theological reflection of value for Trinitarian studies.⁵

WARFIELD ON THE REVELATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Warfield is eager to remind us that the Triunity of God is God's highest and most profound self-revelation. In the created order we see God's wisdom, power, and glory. In the Old Testament revelation we learn, further, that God is one, that he is personal, righteous, sovereign, and merciful.⁶ And of course all this is only heightened and clarified in the New Testament revelation. But in the New Testament the most significant advance on the previous revelation is in regards to the *persons* of God. Here we are faced not with a simple monotheism but an obvious *Trinitarian* monotheism—that there is one God but three Persons who equally share the whole essence of deity.

Exploring the question of just *how* God has revealed himself as Triune is the first contribution Warfield makes to the discussion.

Revelation and Reason

It is important for Warfield to emphasize initially that God's triunity is, in fact, *revealed* truth. It is not something that is discoverable apart from God's own self-disclosure. In fact, it is nowhere discoverable in "general revelation," and there are no analogies to it, even in man himself created in God's image. In fact, the doctrine is incapable of proof from human reason. God is uniquely triune, and our knowledge of him as such depends entirely on his own special disclosure. We can know nothing else and nothing more about the Trinity other than what is revealed in Scripture.⁷

Warfield considers the attempts of "speculative thinkers" to establish rational proof of the doctrine apart from the Scriptures—Bartholomew Keckermann's argument from God's self-consciousness, the argument from the nature of love (Valentinus?, Augustine, Richard of St. Victor, and others), and Jonathan Edwards' ontological proof.⁸ Attractive as some of these attempts may be, the fact remains that no one ever surmised God as Triune before he specifically revealed himself as such. Yet the logic works well, and reflecting on these famous speculations Warfield acknowledges its relative value: this kind of logic cannot prove or establish the doctrine of the Trinity, but once that doctrine has been revealed,

It carries home to us in a very suggestive way the superiority of the Trinitarian conception of God to the conception of him as an abstract monad, and thus brings important rational support to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Warfield explains further:

Difficult, therefore, as the idea of the Trinity in itself is, it does not come to us as an added burden upon our intelligence; it brings us rather the solution of the deepest and most persistent difficulties in our conception of God as infinite moral Being, and illuminates, enriches and elevates all our thought of God. It has accordingly become a commonplace to say that Christian theism is the only stable theism. That is as much as to say that theism requires the enriching conception of the Trinity to give it a permanent hold upon the human mind—the mind finds it difficult to rest in the idea of an abstract unity for its God; and that the human heart cries out for the living God in whose Being there is that fullness of life for which the conception of the Trinity alone provides.

That is to say, impossible as this doctrine is to discover apart from special revelation, and difficult as it is to comprehend once it is revealed, once we have in fact seen it, it is easier to believe than not! Triunity is found to be “essential to a worthy idea of God,” and once we learn it, it becomes an aid in our understanding of God and our worship of him.⁹

Old Testament Allusions

Warfield cannot quite agree with those who argue that because God is, in fact, triune, it would be impossible to make himself known except as Trinity, and he finds the purported Old Testament “evidence” for this notion often a bit stretched. Yet he sympathizes with this view and even highlights the familiar scattered data found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The otherwise mysterious plural pronouns and plural verbs, the deity of Messiah, the tendency to hypostatize the Word, Wisdom, and Spirit of God—all these considerations and more suggest that God is not a simple monad. The Old Testament never collates all this data for us to form a full doctrine of the Trinity, but Warfield treats them as significant pieces of information that naturally reflect the true, Triune God and yet remain inexplicable until the full revelation is given.¹⁰ His famous summary always bears repeating:

This is not an illegitimate reading of New Testament ideas back into the text of the Old Testament; it is only reading the text of the Old Testament under the illumination of the New Testament revelation. 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.¹¹

New Testament Clarifications

Even with reference to the New Testament Warfield acknowledges that “the doctrine of the Trinity is given to us not in formulated definition but in fragmentary allusions,”¹² and at times he offers the familiar summary accordingly:

We may content ourselves with simply observing that to the New Testament there is but one only living and true God; but that to it Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are each God in the fullest sense of the term; and yet Father, Son and Spirit stand over against each other as I, and Thou, and He. In this composite fact the New Testament gives us the doctrine of the Trinity ... When we have said these three things, then—that there is but one God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct person—we have enunciated the doctrine of the Trinity in its completeness.¹³

But of course there is more to be said—and, for Warfield, much more.

In Warfield’s day it had become popular in some circles to claim that the theological distinctives of the Christian faith stemmed from the later influence of Greek philosophical thought. As Christianity spread in the Greek world, it was alleged, it took on philosophical baggage that was not original to the religion of Jesus or the apostles. Of course high on the list of supposed examples of this was the doctrine of the Trinity.

In answer to this B. B. Warfield loved to demonstrate from all available evidence that the traditional, historic faith of the Christian church was indeed the faith of the aboriginal church. He seemed particularly to enjoy presenting compelling evidence of a “presupposed” Trinitarianism in the language of the early church. That is, he would expose the shared Trinitarian convictions of the earliest Christians as reflected in unguarded statements that were not

intended to *teach* Trinitarian theology per se, but which plainly reflected that understanding nonetheless. Their monotheism remains intense: they worship and proclaim the God of Israel and like the prophets of old insist on his unity. Yet without betraying any sense of innovation they continuously refer to this God in a three-fold fashion.

One of the most striking examples of this is found in his detailed analysis of the phrase, “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (and its slight variations) as it appears in Paul’s epistles (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1-2; Gal 1:1, 3; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Rom 1:7; Eph 1:2; 6:23; Col 1:2; Phlm 1:3; Phil 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; and 2 Tim 1:2).¹⁴ Warfield notes first that this phrase, so commonly employed by the apostle, appears to be one already in long use among Christians generally. “All the articles have been rubbed off, and with them all other accessories; and it stands out in its baldest elements as just ‘God Father and Lord Jesus Christ.’” This was evidently a common way the earliest Christians spoke in reference to God. The precise wording is varied and evidently can as easily be reversed, as in Galatians 1:1, where Paul describes the divine origin of his apostleship as “through Jesus Christ and God the Father.” What is striking here is that God is referred to as “Jesus Christ and God the Father,” and for Warfield the Trinitarian overtones are unmistakable.

Similarly, in each occurrence of this phrase, the apostle is invoking divine blessing. He is praying that “grace, mercy, and peace” will be given “from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, the divine source of blessing is spoken of in terms of both Christ and the Father. His prayer is not merely that the grace of God will come channeled through Jesus Christ. His prayer is that this grace will come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together, “as the conjoint object addressed in his petition.” The God of blessing is freely spoken of in terms of a plurality. Two persons are brought together in closest possible relation, yet they are not absolutely identified. They both are divine, yet they are distinct persons.

The two, God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, are steadily recognized as two, and are stately spoken of by the distinguishing designations of “God” and “Lord.” But they are equally steadily envisaged as one, and are stately combined as the common source of every spiritual blessing.

Accordingly, the two persons are united under the single governing preposition, “from” —

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is normal with Paul. God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are not for him [Paul] two objects of worship, two sources of blessing, but one object of worship, one source of blessing.¹⁵

Further, this God spoken of in both singular and plural terms. Warfield cites four passages (1 Thess 3:11; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:16; 3:16) in which the pronoun “himself” (*autos*) is employed and determines that “the *autos* is to be construed with the whole subject”—“God” and “Lord.” Both the plurality and the unity are maintained as God is referred to as “our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father Himself.”¹⁶

All this is to say that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are essentially one yet personally distinct, and each worthy objects of prayer. Thus, Trinitarianism is embedded in the very language of the earliest of Christian slogans. It is not formally taught in the pages of the New Testament as much as it is presupposed everywhere. It was the very natural and universal mode of reference to him, and the language reflects a doctrine that was common property to Christians everywhere, a firmly established understanding of the being of God.

Warfield finds further evidence of this “presupposed” Trinitarianism in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Paul’s argument here, Warfield points out, rests on a firm assertion of monotheism: “there is no God but one” (v. 4) This thought governs Paul’s whole argument: there is only one God. False gods and lords are many (v. 5), but only one God. But Paul reaffirms this statement of monotheism in language

that reflects a settled Trinitarian understanding of God: “yet for us there is one God, the Father ... and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Two are mentioned, but his point in it is to refute pagan polytheism: “there is but one God—the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only God who exists.” Paul could hardly be understood as saying that these two Gods demonstrate that there is only one God. His point, clearly, is that these two who are God, are one God, the only God who is.¹⁷ Again, the language reflects a firmly established Trinitarian understanding that was shared by the original Christians.

Warfield also surveys the implicit Trinitarianism in the Gospel of John and in particular the upper room discourse, where the distinction of Persons within the unity of God is on display.¹⁸ But it is in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19) Warfield finds “the nearest approach to a formal announcement of the doctrine of the Trinity which is recorded from our Lord’s lips, or, perhaps we may say, which is to be found in the whole compass of the New Testament.” This refers to this as the church’s “guiding principle” in developing a careful statement of the Trinity. Here the Lord Jesus does not speak of “the names” (plural), as though the three were entirely separate beings. Nor does he speak of “the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” as though these were three designations of the same person.

With stately impressiveness it asserts the unity of the three by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name; and then throws up into emphasis the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article: ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’

There is distinction, but distinction within unity. Moreover, the expression “the name,” in Jewish contexts, was understood clearly as reference to God.

When, therefore, Our Lord commanded His disciples to baptize those whom they brought to His obedience “into the name of...,” He was using language charged to them with high meaning. He could not have been understood otherwise than as substituting for the Name of Jehovah this other Name “of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”; and this could not possibly have meant to His disciples anything else than that Jehovah was now to be known to them by the new Name, of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The only

alternative would have been that, for the community which He was founding, Jesus was supplanting Jehovah by a new God; and this alternative is no less than monstrous. There is no alternative, therefore, to understanding Jesus here to be giving for His community a new Name to Jehovah and that new Name to be the threefold Name of “the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost” ... This is a direct ascription to Jehovah the God of Israel, of a threefold personality, and is therewith the direct enunciation of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁹

Echoing Calvin, Warfield comments on the same in connection with the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5. “As we are initiated by baptism into faith in the one God and yet baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ... it is ‘solidly clear’ that the Father, Son and Spirit are the one God.”²⁰

The Trinity Revealed in Fact

With all this Warfield presses the observation that in the New Testament the doctrine of the Trinity is not argued, as such, or formally presented; it is assumed. And it appears already fully formed, and the simple confidence with which it is stated reflects a document and a community that are already “Trinitarian to the core ... The doctrine of the Trinity does not appear in the New Testament in the making, but as already made.”²¹ This doctrine underlies the whole New Testament as its constant presupposition and determines everywhere its forms of expression.²²

This observation is important for two reasons. First, as we have already seen, it is important for Warfield to establish that Trinitarian thinking was indeed the common property of the earliest Christians. But Warfield finds it significant also in that it reflects just how this new thinking took hold among those first Christians so easily. It is somewhat surprising that religious people so committed to monotheism adjusted so quickly to a distinctly Trinitarian monotheism, and this is best explained, Warfield concludes, by the fact that God’s Triunity was not first revealed in words but in fact. These people had been personally acquainted with the incarnate Son. They were deeply convinced of his absolute deity, and on this pivot “the whole Christian conception of God turned.” Their “eyes had seen and their hands had handled the word of life” (1 John 1:1), and they had heard him speak of “Father, Son, and Spirit.” Moreover, they had themselves witnessed and experienced the

outpouring of the Spirit of God himself. At Christ's baptism, they heard the Father speak and saw the Spirit descend as a dove. They heard the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration. They had seen first-hand that God had sent his Son to redeem and his Spirit to replace him. "In the missions of the Son and Spirit" God's tri-unity had been specially revealed. It was revealed personally and in fact, and the New Testament bears witness to this experience, not only in its recording of the events but also in its very natural, frequent, unguarded, and unchallenged allusions to God the Trinity.²³ "The advent of Christ involved a clearer revelation of God and therefore a fuller knowledge of the personal distinctions in His being."²⁴

Gospel Revelation

All this leads Warfield to a further observation. He has already emphasized that the doctrine of the Trinity is a truth that is purely revealed. It is not discoverable by human reason but is entirely dependent on special revelation. Its full disclosure awaited the fullness of revelation recorded in the New Testament. The doctrine of the Trinity, in other words, is *gospel* revelation. Indeed, it was only in the outworking of God's saving promise, that his tri-unity came to light also. Important as the doctrine of the Trinity is, in and of itself, it was only in the revelation of his saving purpose that God so made himself known. The promise and long hope of Israel was that God himself would come, bring deliverance to his people, and dwell with them, and it is in the fulfilling of that promise that we learn of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This, God's highest self-disclosure, is a gospel revelation.

Given that God's revelation of himself as triune was given in connection with the outworking of his saving purpose, it is not surprising that the New Testament so often frames and describes salvation "trinitarianly." The apostolic benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 may be the most outstanding example, but "it is everywhere assumed that the redemptive activities of God rest on a threefold source in God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit," and it is this triune God-wrought salvation that shapes Christian devotion accordingly.²⁵

Pressing one step further, Warfield points out that "the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of redemption, historically, stand or fall together." It is no surprise to Warfield that Unitarianism would teach a Pelagian anthropology and a Socinian soteriology. In the absence of a doctrine of the Trinity,

there is an absence of a doctrine of redemption also. It is in this intimacy of relation between the doctrines of the Trinity and redemption that the ultimate reason lies why the Christian church could not rest until it had attained a definite and well-compacted doctrine of the Trinity. Nothing else could be accepted as an adequate foundation for the experience of the Christian salvation. Neither Sabellianism nor Arianism could satisfy the biblical data regarding God's nature and relations. But their problem was deeper: neither could they satisfy the Christian's consciousness of salvation. For the Christian, a Trinitarian concept of God is a necessary one if this concept of God is to correspond to our own experience of salvation. This, at bottom, is what gives the doctrine its significance. For Calvin and all the Reformers, as for every Christian since the very beginning of Christianity, "the nerve of the doctrine was its implication in the experience of salvation, in the Christian's certainty that the Redeeming Christ and Sanctifying Spirit are each Divine Persons." And again, "Every redeemed soul, knowing himself reconciled with God through His Son, and quickened into newness of life by His Spirit, turns alike to Father, Son and Spirit with the exclamation of reverent gratitude upon his lips, 'My Lord and my God!'"²⁶

WARFIELD'S HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Atop Warfield's concerns with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity is the principle of equalization. That every Christian heart eagerly and instinctively gives worshipful praise to Christ, as well as to the Father, is an oft-repeated given for him. This was so, he insists, from the very earliest days of the church, and this was the driving consideration, along with the church's inherited monotheism, that informed the struggle for theological statement that climaxed at Nicaea, Chalcedon, and the settled Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Early Efforts

The worship of Christ was preserved in Logos Christology, and Warfield suggests that, deficient though it was, the Logos Christology in its context of the second century may have served to preserve the church's witness both to the unity of the indivisible God and the deity of the historical Jesus. But what it lacked Monarchianism seemed to offer, giving both God and Jesus their just due. Thus, Monarchianism challenged Logos Christianity to "show

itself capable of doing justice to the deity of Jesus, while yet retaining in integrity the unity of God." Warfield presents Tertullian (160-220) as the man of the hour. Hampered though he was with the Logos Christology and the subordinationism inherent in its ideas of divine prolations, it fell to Tertullian "to establish the true and complete deity of Jesus, and at the same time the reality of His distinctness as the Logos from the fontal-deity, without creating two Gods." Warfield further comments, "This is, on the face of it, precisely the problem of the Trinity. And so far as Tertullian succeeded in it, he must be recognized as the father of the Church doctrine of the Trinity"—even if (Warfield adds) we must also acknowledge that, given his pre-commitments to Logos Christology, "Tertullian was not completely successful in so great a task." The historical Jesus must be acknowledged as more than a mediating being. In the Rule of Faith and Baptismal Formula the Father, the Son, and the Spirit appear as coordinate persons, to whom each is ascribed true deity, and Tertullian's challenge was to give due weight to all this within the constraints of Logos subordinationism. His attempt to do so fell short, yet he did provide a "formula of sameness of essence with distinction of persons," Warfield observes, that elevated Trinitarian discussion to a higher level. Indeed, "in his hands the Logos Christology was stretched "beyond its tether and was already passing upward in his construction to something better." In Warfield's estimation, therefore, "we may fairly call Tertullian the father of the Nicene theology."²⁷

It is the natural Christian impulse to understand God in terms of eternity and equalization of persons. This impulse will be stated for us in Nicene orthodoxy and the "completed Trinitarianism" of Augustine (354-430), "to whom the persons of the Trinity are not subordinate one to another but coordinate sharers of the one divine essence." But in Tertullian we find it, essentially, even if not in its final, mature form.

It is, of course, not the close of this process of thought that we see in Tertullian, but its beginning. But in him already appears the pregnant emphasis on the equality rather than the graded subordination of the personal distinctions in the Godhead, by the logical inworking of which the whole change in due time came about. So far as we can now learn it was he first, therefore, who, determined to give due recognition to the elements of the Church's faith embodied in the Rule of Faith, pointed out the road over which it was necessary to travel in order to do justice

to the Biblical data. Say that he was in this but the voice of the general Christian consciousness. It remains that it was left to him first to give effective voice to the Christian consciousness, and that it was only by following out the lines laid down by him to their logical conclusion that the great achievement of formulating to thought the doctrine of the triune God was at length accomplished.²⁸

Briefly put, it was the church's struggle to shed itself of all subordinationist tendencies, and in Tertullian the principle of equalization of the Persons reached a new level, thus paving the way for Nicene orthodoxy (325).

Warfield notes that in the century following Tertullian subordinationist tendencies persisted until the Logos Christology "ran to seed in what is known as Arianism," and he highlights further milestones in the development and statement of the doctrine. He lauds Athanasius (296-373) for his influence in shaping Nicene Christianity and then "the three great Cappadocians" who carried Tertullian's torch also and through whose influence the principle of equalization was asserted with lasting and definitive effect at Constantinople (381). He praises Augustine for his statement of the doctrine in still greater fullness and which, in turn, informs the so-called Athanasian Creed (5th-6th century) whose statement retains "its place as the fit expression of the faith of the church as to the nature of its God until today."²⁹

Again, it is the principle of equalization that Warfield stresses, and he watches the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity with this principle continually in view. But he is suspicious that certain standard Trinitarian language such as "begotten," "God of God," "light of light," and "true God of true God," retains traces of subordinationism. And so while he praises the advance of Nicaea and of the Athanasian Creed he also raises caution:

The language in which it [the Athanasian Creed] is couched, even in this final declaration, still retains elements of speech which owe their origin to the modes of thought characteristic of the Logos Christology of the second century, fixed in the nomenclature of the church by the Nicene Creed of 325 A.D., though carefully guarded there against the subordinationism inherent in the Logos-Christology, and made the vehicle rather of the Nicene doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit, with the consequent subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father in modes of subsistence as well as of operation.

He goes on to note, however, that in the Athanasian Creed,

the principle of the equalization of the three Persons, which was already the dominant motive of the Nicene Creed—the *homoousia*—is so strongly emphasized as practically to push out of sight, if not quite out of existence, these remnant suggestions of derivation and subordination.³⁰

Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity

Warfield examines Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity carefully, at length,³¹ and (as he would say) *con amore*. Still with an eye on the principle of equalization he extols Calvin's "profound sense of the consubstantiality of the Persons," his "ascription of self-existence (*autoousia*) to the Son," and his attributing of *autotheos* to the Son (and the Spirit), as marking a new epoch in the developing statement of the doctrine. Here, at last, the principle of equalization was given its due.³² "Thus Calvin takes his place, alongside of Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine, as one of the chief contributors to the exact and vital statement of the Christian doctrine of the Triune God."³³

This of course was the question at issue in in the early centuries of the church. With genuine effort to be faithful to the Rule of Faith (which Warfield in this context essentially identifies with the baptismal formula) and the Trinitarian teachings of Scripture their thinking was yet dominated by philosophical pre-commitments that pulled their Christology downward. Moreover, without yet a doctrine of eternal generation ("struggling in the womb" of thought though it may have been³⁴) and still laboring under the influence of Logos subordinationism, men such as Novatian (200-258) and Hippolytus (170-235) could scarcely conceive of the Son as both coming from God and at the same time himself eternally God.³⁵ "Tertullian's formula of sameness of essence with distinction of persons" pointed the better way³⁶ that in Calvin was finally brought to its rights.³⁷

With the principle of equalization primarily in view Warfield analyzes related areas of shaping interest in Calvin's teaching also. First, he characterizes Calvin as holding to a *necessary* Trinitarianism:

The tripersonality of God is conceived by Calvin ... not as something added to the complete idea of God or as something into which God develops in the process

of His existing, but as something which enters into the very idea of God, without which He cannot be conceived in the truth of His being ... According to Calvin ... there can be no such thing as a monadistic God; the idea of multiformity enters into the very notion of God ... [I]n Calvin's view a divine monad would be less conceivable than a divine Trinity.³⁸

Warfield emphasizes further that Calvin's interest in the doctrine was not merely speculative but religious: "The nerve of the doctrine was its implication in the experience of salvation, in the Christian's certainty that the Redeeming Christ and the Sanctifying Spirit are each Divine Persons."³⁹ This is a doctrine essential to salvation and to a right understanding of salvation and must therefore be taught diligently even to the newest Christians. He notes with obvious appreciation Calvin's unwillingness to engage in speculation regarding the Trinity. No illustration or "proof" from metaphysical reasoning will do; he cared for Scriptural proof only.⁴⁰ Yet because it was a point of considerable controversy surrounding Calvin Warfield feels compelled at length in this connection to place the Reformer's teaching within the stream of Nicene Christianity and to demonstrate that he (Calvin) understood "the ecclesiastical definitions" of the doctrine of the Trinity "as merely a republication of the Scriptural doctrine in clearer words."⁴¹ Calvin assented fully to the statements as historically given and honored by the church, but—committed as he was to the sole authority of Scripture—he would not allow them a role of tyrannical authority in the church.⁴²

Still, although Warfield understands Calvin as firmly committed to Nicene Christology, he also characterizes him as "sitting rather loosely to the Nicene tradition."⁴³ This discussion pertains to Calvin's understanding of the relations of the Persons of the Trinity and then, in particular, the doctrines of eternal generation and procession.⁴⁴ Warfield confirms that Calvin "departed in nothing from the doctrine which had been handed down from the orthodox Fathers" but places him distinctly—"if distinctions must be drawn"—decidedly in sympathy with the Western rather than the Eastern conceptions, Augustinian rather than Athanasian. "That is to say, the principle of his construction of the Trinitarian distinctions is equalization rather than subordination." Warfield explains:

He [Calvin] does, indeed, still speak in the old language of refined subordinationism which had been fixed in the Church by the Nicene formularies; and he expressly allows an “order” of first, second and third in the Trinitarian relations. But he conceives more clearly and applies more purely than had ever previously been done the principle of equalization in his thought of the relation of the Persons to one another, and thereby ... marks an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁵

Something of Warfield’s own thinking comes through in this, as we shall examine in due course, but his purpose here is, 1) to place Calvin squarely within the stream of Nicene Christianity, and 2) to demonstrate that though consistent with that stream the Reformer’s own expressions give fuller justice to it.

For Calvin, as with the larger tradition he had received, the doctrines of eternal generation and procession entail an “order and grade in the Persons of the Trinity,” a “doctrine of derivation” that was understood “not with respect of the essence, but the order” of the Persons. The distinguishing properties of the three Persons in their consubstantiality are found precisely and exclusively in their respective generation, begottenness, and procession. The Reformer found only the barest (though sufficient) exegetical support for eternal generation: 1) the implications of “Father, Son (begotten), and Spirit,” and particularly 2) our adoption in Christ which points to a higher sonship that belongs to him. For Calvin this latter argument in particular is “worth a thousand distorted texts.” Warfield points out, however, that Calvin “seems to have drawn back from the doctrine of ‘eternal generation’ as it was expounded by the Nicene Fathers” who understood eternal generation “not as something which has occurred once for all at some point of time in the past ... but as something which is always occurring, a perpetual movement ... always complete, never completed.” Such a concept Calvin found “difficult, if not meaningless.” For Calvin the point to emphasize is “that three Persons have subsisted in God from eternity.” Warfield clarifies that Calvin’s disagreement here is not with the Nicene Creed⁴⁶ and not with the doctrine of eternal generation itself—a point of doctrine that “manifestly was a matter of fixed belief with him”—but with the doctrine “as it was expounded by the Nicene Fathers.” Most importantly—for Warfield and for Calvin (in Warfield’s view)—his doctrine of eternal generation did not enjoy the structural status it had in the Fathers. For Calvin, the principle of equalization ruled,

and it seems that for this reason Warfield can say of Calvin that though his conception of the Trinity included a doctrine of eternal generation and procession, it did not include it “necessarily.” These are “bare facts” only and not matters of structural concern.⁴⁷ We may summarize Warfield’s understanding of Calvin on this point as follows:

1. Calvin affirmed a doctrine of eternal generation, but it was with respect only to the persons, not natures.⁴⁸
2. Calvin found comparatively little exegetical support for the doctrine: 1) the implications of “Father, Son, and Spirit,” and 2) our adoption in Christ points to a higher sonship that belongs to him.⁴⁹
3. Calvin did not follow the Nicene Fathers in their related “speculations” on the doctrine. That is, he did not accept the notion that eternal generation was an eternally continuous act as some of the fathers had argued but that it was simply before all time.
4. The doctrines of eternal generation and procession were not Calvin’s governing concern as it seems to have been with the Nicene Fathers. Equalization remained for Calvin the leading principle of his Trinitarian thought.
5. Calvin’s doctrine of eternal generation, unlike that of the Fathers, was not a “necessary” part of his Trinitarian thought.

Immediately following this discussion Warfield cites Charles Hodge at some length as evidence that Calvin created a distinct “party”—a view that became distinctive of the Reformed churches.⁵⁰

WARFIELD’S FORMULATIONS

In most of these features of Calvin’s doctrine we discover Warfield’s own thinking reflected also. He expresses disagreement only rarely, and most of his analysis is stated as a matter of fact. But on the whole his comments have a sympathetic tone, and his remarks elsewhere bear this out. The most obvious point of agreement with Calvin is in regard to Christ as *autotheos* and its implications—the principle of equalization. Warfield advances this notion not only in his works on the Trinity, specifically, but also in his many works on the deity of Christ—a very favorite theme of the Princetonian. He finds it implicit in the common lingo of the early church, as we have

seen, in the Old Testament prophecies of the divine Messiah,⁵¹ in the many designations and attributions of deity to Christ that underlie virtually every line of the New Testament,⁵² and (as we have seen) in the prayers offered to Christ from the apostle Paul.⁵³ There is in the New Testament a “constant and decisive witness to the complete and undiminished Deity of each of these Persons; no language is too exalted to apply to each of them” in order to express the writers’ recognition of the full deity of each.⁵⁴ Warfield extols Calvin for forcing the church to recognize this, and he everywhere seeks to further it himself.

Warfield notes that the language of the New Testament writers differs somewhat from that of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Jesus speaks of “Father, Son, and Spirit,” but the apostle Paul more commonly speaks of “God, Lord, and Spirit.” The difference, Warfield surmises, is found in the speakers themselves and their respective relations to the Trinity. “Lord” would not be the most natural term for Jesus to use of himself; “Son” would be more fitting. Paul and the apostles, on the other hand, speak as worshipers, and for worshipers “Lord” is the more natural designation. The significance of this title used of Jesus as acknowledgment of his deity, however, is inescapable.

It is of further significance for Warfield that these appellations hold no necessary order in Pauline usage. It may be “God, Lord, and Spirit” or as easily “Lord, God, and Spirit” or even “Spirit, Lord, and God.” For Warfield all this is just further demonstration of the principle of equalization.⁵⁵

Warfield’s commitment to equalization leads him to criticize some of the language of Nicaea itself. He notes Calvin’s slight reservations with regard to the expressions, “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,” verbiage the Reformer found repetitious and potentially confusing. Warfield seems to go further and finds the language “at least verbally contradictory” to the Creed’s larger affirmation of the eternal deity of the Son and with Calvin’s insistence that “He is not of another but of Himself.” Just how much Warfield intends to imply by the words “at least”—“at least verbally contradictory”—is difficult to say, but he does find them misleading and seems clearly to prefer that they had not been employed at all.⁵⁶

This criticism of Nicene language as “refined subordinationism,”⁵⁷ “the remnants of the conceptions and phraseology proper to the older prolationism of the Logos Christology,” “the leaven of subordinationism,”⁵⁸ and unworthy of the Creed’s larger teaching⁵⁹ is a note Warfield sounds several

times over. “The current modes of stating the doctrine of the Trinity left a door open for the entrance of defective modes of conceiving the deity of the Son,”⁶⁰ he writes. Given the teaching of Nicaea and the traditional acceptance of the consubstantiality of the three persons of the Trinity Warfield finds it surprising that Calvin’s doctrine of the Son as *autotheos* teaching was met with such opposition, and the explanation he finds for the conundrum is the Nicene creed itself—its subordinistic terminology.⁶¹ Yet it should be emphasized that this criticism betrays no reservation at all on Warfield’s part regarding the larger Nicene doctrine. Indeed, he argues that the Creed’s own teaching rendered this language “innocuous.”⁶²

In the Athanasian Creed ... the principle of the equalization of the three Persons, which was already the dominant motive of the Nicene Creed—the *homoousia*—is so strongly emphasized as practically to push out of sight, if not quite out of existence, these remnant suggestions of derivation and subordination.⁶³

Warfield regards himself—like Calvin—as preserving Nicene doctrine. His concern here is for complete consistency of expression.

When he comes to the doctrine of eternal generation, however, Warfield’s reservations with Nicaea go beyond mere language to substance. He understands that the doctrine of eternal generation originally served to protect the deity of the Son, and his mention of this factor seems to reflect his favorable regard for the doctrine.⁶⁴ He seems in agreement with Calvin’s position that eternal generation concerns Persons and not the nature. And he never explicitly denies the doctrine; in fact, at one point he seems to understand that “orthodoxy” demands it. But he does not find the doctrine reflected in the term *monogenēs*, and he expresses suspicion that the concept itself reflects subordinationist tendencies—that there is a degree of tension between the notions of eternal generation on the one hand and equalization—*homoousios*, *autoousia*, *autotheos*—on the other.⁶⁵

Warfield argues that because the Nicene doctrine affirms that the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit are “necessary movements in the divine essence and not voluntary acts of God the Father,” it “carries with it the ascription of necessary existence,” or “self-existence,” and that, therefore, no Nicene Christian should find Calvin’s teaching regarding the Son as *autotheotēs* objectionable. Objection to it (Christ as *autotheos*) would, in

fact, betray “a lurking leaven of subordinationism in their thought.” Warfield manifestly sees Calvin as consistently Nicene and even as making clearer statement of its teaching. And Warfield obviously appreciates Calvin for this “great service.” But his following explanatory remarks further reveal his thinking with regard to Nicaea’s doctrine of eternal generation.

It [the denial of *autotheotēs*] indicates a tendency to treat the Nicene doctrine of eternal generation, not, as it was intended by its framers, as the safe-guard of the absolute equality of the Son with the Father, but rather as the proclamation of the inferiority of the Son to the Father: the Son because generate must differ from the ingenerate Father—must differ in this, that He cannot be, as is the Father, self-existent God, which is, of course, all one with saying that He is not God at all, since the very idea of God includes the idea of self-existence.⁶⁶

It would seem from this that Warfield in fact does not deny eternal generation. However, after noting again Calvin’s slim exegetical grounding of the doctrine, Warfield seems to imply that preferable explanations later became available that do not require holding the doctrine at all,

As, for example, that the terms “Son,” “Spirit” are not expressive of “derivation” (by “generation” or “spiration”) but just of “consubstantiality.” The Son is the repetition of the Father; the Spirit is the expression of God.

Warfield is in fact “astonished at the persistence . . . of the Nicene phraseology” in Augustine and even Calvin, not to mention their successors, given their established commitment to the principle of equalization.⁶⁷ His dissatisfaction is clear: he considers Nicene language inadequate to, even inconsistent with, its actual teaching. And he suspects that eternal generation may be reflective of the same.

This, in turn, leaves Warfield to explain the significance of the “Father-Son” language of the New Testament, and here he also speaks in a somewhat non-traditional tone. His observation of the varied ordering of the Persons of the Trinity in the New Testament, as we have already noted, raises for Warfield a question regarding both the ordering and even the relations of the Persons themselves, and here we find one area in which Warfield appears to depart from Calvin and the general Nicene tradition. Perhaps it would be

more accurate to say that he extends Calvin's thought further than Calvin himself had. First, Warfield questions whether "Father and Son" represent the essence of the relationship of these two persons. Paul speaks as a worshiper, to be sure. "It remains remarkable, nevertheless, if the very essence of the Trinity were thought of by him [Paul] as resident in the terms 'Father,' 'Son,' that in his numerous allusions to the Trinity in the Godhead, he never betrays any sense of this."⁶⁸ And this remains true, he says, of the other New Testament writers also. And given the varied ordering of the three Persons in the New Testament Warfield further questions whether "Father, Son, Spirit" (Mt. 28:19) should be considered stable.

The question naturally suggests itself whether the order Father, Son, Spirit was especially significant to Paul and his fellow-writers of the New Testament. If in their conviction the very essence of the doctrine of the Trinity was embodied in this order, should we not anticipate that there should appear in their numerous allusions to the Trinity some suggestion of this conviction?⁶⁹

The apostles' varied terminology and ordering present basic "facts" that for Warfield not only bear strong witness to the unity of the Godhead and the principle of equalization but also raise questions regarding the interrelations of the Persons of the Godhead themselves. Is there among the three persons a necessary ordering of Father, Son, and Spirit? And do the terms "Father" and "Son" express the essence of the relationship of these two? Warfield expresses doubt on both of these scores. Factors contributing to his doubts include the following.⁷⁰

1. The standard terminology of the New Testament writers is not that of Father, Son, and Spirit, but rather God, Lord, and Spirit.
2. The ordering of these designations is altogether varied in the New Testament.
3. Sonship does not suggest subordination or derivation of being but, simply, "likeness" and equality. (Along with this it might be noted that Warfield does not understand *monogenēs* in terms of generation but of uniqueness.)
4. "Spirit" does not suggest derivation or subordination but is simply the "executive name of God—the designation of God from the point of view of his activity—and imports accordingly identity with God.

In short, Warfield simply finds no exegetical evidence. He sums up his discussion of these latter two points crisply:

If ... the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father in modes of subsistence and their derivation from the Father are not implicates of their designation as Son and Spirit, it will be hard to find in the New Testament compelling evidence of their subordination and derivation.⁷¹

With respect to “the modes of operation” and, more specifically, “the redemptive process” and the incarnation of the Son, Warfield very happily allows the notion of subordination, but he is not sure that this is reflective of eternal relations. “It is not so clear that the principle of subordination [in the modes of operation] rules also in ‘modes of subsistence,’ as it is technically phrased; that is to say, in the necessary relation of the Persons of the Trinity to one another.” This, he says, is difficult to discern with any certainty. It may seem natural to assume that the modes of operation are expressive of the modes of subsistence, but this may be just as easily explained in terms of a Trinitarian agreement or covenant. “It is eminently desirable, therefore, at the least, that some definite evidence of subordination in modes of subsistence should be discoverable before it is assumed.” Warfield does not find this evidence in the language of Father and Son, as we have already seen. Though this terminology does reflect “their eternal and necessary relations” it does not imply any notion of subordination.⁷²

It must at least be said that in the presence of the great New Testament doctrines of the Covenant of Redemption on the one hand, and of the Humiliation of the Son of God for His work’s sake and of the Two Natures in the constitution of His Person as incarnated, on the other, the difficulty of interpreting subordinationist passages of eternal relations between the Father and Son becomes extreme. The question continually obtrudes itself, whether they do not rather find their full explanation in the facts embodied in the doctrines of the Covenant, the Humiliation of Christ, and the Two Natures of His incarnated Person. Certainly in such circumstances it were thoroughly illegitimate to press such passages to suggest any subordination for the Son or the Spirit which would in any manner impair that complete identity with the Father in Being and that complete equality with the Father in powers which are constantly presupposed, and frequently

emphatically, though only incidentally, asserted for them throughout the whole fabric of the New Testament.⁷³

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Warfield is utterly committed to the principle of equalization and protective of the truth—a truth he revels in—that in Christ God himself, and no one less, has come to the rescue of sinners. He lauds the fact that in Calvin all subordinationist tendencies are finally shed and due acknowledgment of Christ is more fully stated. And he is very careful therefore not to allow any notion that potentially threatens the complete equality of the three Persons. In all this Warfield has sought to give Calvin's notion of *autotheotēs* its fullest rights, and, it would seem, has extended his thought even further. Whether his related decisions on this score are both good and necessary, or whether they have gone too far, and how they square with biblical teaching, all are questions for another time.

¹ Works, vol.2 (hereafter W2), 133-172.

² W4, 3-109.

³ W5, 189-284.

⁴ W2, 213-231.

⁵ Other Warfield works that touch this subject include the following: "God" (*Selected Shorter Writings*, vol.1; hereafter SSW1, 69-74); "Godhead" (SSW1, 75-81); "The God of Israel" (SSW1, 76-87; "Antitrinitarianism" (W5, 88-92). Related works that focus on the person of Christ or the Holy Spirit include, first, *The Lord of Glory*, Warfield's book-length treatment of the deity of Christ as presented in the New Testament, and the following articles: "The Foresight of Jesus" (W2, 71-97); "The Person of Christ" (W2, 175-209); "The Christ that Paul Preached" (W2, 235-52); "Jesus' Mission, According to His Own Testimony" (W2, 255-324); "The Divine Messiah in the OT" (W3, 3-49); "Jesus Christ" (W3, 149-77); "Concerning Schmiedel's 'Pillar Passages'" (W3, 181-255); "The 'Two Natures' and Recent Christological Speculation" (W3, 259-310); "The Twentieth-Century Christ" (W3, 371-89); "The Supernatural Birth of Jesus" (W3, 447-458); "The Principle of the Incarnation" (SSW1, 139-47); "John's First Word" (SSW1, 148-50); "The Deity of Christ" (SSW1, 151-7); "The Human Development of Jesus" (SSW1, 158-66); "Incarnate Truth" (SSW2, 455-67); "Why Four Gospels" (SSW2, 639-42); "The Gospel of John" (SSW2, 643-46); "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament" (W2, 101-29; SSW2, 711-17); "On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit" (SSW1, 203-19); plus many more, including his many sermons published in his *The Power of God Unto Salvation, Faith and Life*, and *The Savior of the World*, as well as many significant reviews of books. This list is by no means exhaustive.

⁶ See especially Warfield's "God" and "The God of Israel"; SSW1, chapters 10 and 12.

⁷ W2, 133-134.

⁸ W2, 234-239.

⁹ W2, 138-139.

¹⁰ W2, 139-41; cf. W2, 101-129; W3, 3-49.

- ¹¹ W2, 141-2.
¹² W2, 133.
¹³ W2, 146-147; cf. SSW, 1:73.
¹⁴ W2, 213-231; cf. 237-238.
¹⁵ W2, 237-238.
¹⁶ W2, 218.
¹⁷ W2, 227-230.
¹⁸ W2, 149-152, 198.
¹⁹ W2, 153-154, 169; cf. W4, 17-18.
²⁰ W5, 228.
²¹ W2, 143, 145.
²² W2, 147.
²³ W2, 169; SSW1, 88.
²⁴ W5, 227-228; cf. W2, 145.
²⁵ W2, 160; cf. 167.
²⁶ W2, 167-168.
²⁷ W4, 22-25, 35-36, 99-100.
²⁸ W4, 109.
²⁹ W2, 169-70.
³⁰ W2, 170; cf. W5, 233.
³¹ W5, 189-284.
³² W5, 232-233.
³³ W2, 171.
³⁴ W4, 97.
³⁵ W4, 90-98.
³⁶ W4, 99-100.
³⁷ W5, 284.
³⁸ W5, 190-192.
³⁹ W5, 195; cf. 195-197.
⁴⁰ W5, 224-225.
⁴¹ W5, 194; cf. 198, 200-201.
⁴² W5, 205-218.
⁴³ W5, 275.
⁴⁴ W5, 228-
⁴⁵ W5, 229-230.
⁴⁶ Warfield further comments in this vein that Calvin agreed with the language “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God” as “true and useful” but objected to it only because it was repetitious and potentially confuses the distinction between Persons and nature. W5, 248-250.
⁴⁷ W5, 244-250; 256-258.
⁴⁸ Cf. W5, 258-60.
⁴⁹ Cf. W5, 202, 277.
⁵⁰ W5, 250-252.
⁵¹ “The Divine Messiah in the Old Testament,” W3, 3-49.
⁵² This is Warfield’s thesis, developed in great detail, in his 1907, *The Lord of Glory* (New York: The American Tract Society).
⁵³ W2, 215.
⁵⁴ W2, 162-163.
⁵⁵ W2, 161-163.
⁵⁶ W5, 252.
⁵⁷ W5, 230.
⁵⁸ W5, 233.
⁵⁹ E.g., W5, 279.
⁶⁰ W5, 283-284.
⁶¹ W5, 232-233.
⁶² W5, 233.
⁶³ W2, 170-171; cf. W5, 228-230, 233.

⁶⁴ W4, 97.

⁶⁵ W2, 163-164, 170-171.

⁶⁶ W5, 272-273.

⁶⁷ W5, 277-279.

⁶⁸ W2, 162.

⁶⁹ W2, 162.

⁷⁰ W2, 162-165.

⁷¹ W2, 165.

⁷² W2, 165-166.

⁷³ W2, 166-167.

Book Reviews

Debated Issues in Sovereign Predestination: Early Lutheran Predestination, Calvinian Reprobation, and Variations in Genevan Lapsarianism. By Joel R. Beeke. Reformed Historical Theology 42. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017, 252 pp., 65,00 €.

Joel Beeke sets out to trace the doctrine of double predestination in sixteenth-century Lutheranism and in John Calvin and his successors in Geneva through the eighteenth century. He also contributes to the scholarly debates surrounding these issues.

In part 1, Beeke states, “by way of analyzing Article 11 of the Formula of Concord in its historical/doctrinal *germination, formulation, comparison, and reception*, I hope to show that its role in historical theology’s development of a scriptural doctrine of predestination is by no means negligible as commonly assumed” (16). The germination took place with Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon. While Luther affirmed double predestination, some of his theological distinctions, and especially his emphasis on consolation, sowed the seeds of later confessional single predestination. Beeke defends Melancthon against charges of synergism, but notes his refusal to separate reprobation from foreknowledge does open his teaching up for misunderstanding. A distinctly Lutheran formulation of predestination emerged in the controversy between Johann Marbach and Jerome Zanchi in Strasbourg and was codified in the Formula of Concord. For confessional Lutherans, predestination is singular, election is the historical outworking of salvation, and the doctrine can only be considered in Christ for the comfort of God’s people. Thus, there is no place for reprobation. Beeke contrasts this with the Canons of Dort and then shows that “Lutheran history confirms that monergistic, single predestination is neither a biblical or rational solution; repressed reprobation must end in repressed election” (74).

Part 2 focuses exclusively on reprobation in Calvin’s theology. After defending his isolation of the doctrine of reprobation, Beeke argues that “Calvinian reprobation is replete with inherent tensions, but Calvin utilized such tensions to present a uniform doctrine that accords with Scripture’s

presentation and balance” (92). His approach first examines Calvin’s method and then moves to his historical development as a young theologian, during his time in Strasbourg, and throughout his second tenure in Geneva. As Calvin defended double predestination in various polemical battles, he drew the distinction between proximate and remote causes to explain how man’s will is the cause of sin and God’s the cause of damnation. How these two fit together is a mystery. For Calvin, election and reprobation are inseparable as the unified decree of predestination. In his final edition of the *Institutes*, “reprobation is accorded a significant place and major import within his theology as a systematic whole.” Yet even here, Calvin’s focus remains on showing that also this doctrine is designed to promote genuine piety” (151). Predestination glorifies God and humbles man.

Beeke articulates two goals in Part 3: “first, to answer the unwarranted accusations of present day academia by revealing the Christological emphases of both Bezan and Turretinian predestinarianism; second, to shed some light on the movement from Beza’s supralapsarianism to Turretin’s infralapsarianism in terms of theology proper and church history” (167). To accomplish his goals, Beeke narrates the story of Geneva after Calvin, a story that ends in capitulation in the eighteenth century. Before relating the history, however, Beeke includes a discussion of the lapsarian options that is worth the price of the book. Historically, as the Reformed consensus developed that the fall must be included in the divine decree, questions of decretal order came to the fore, though *supra* and *infra* language was not used until shortly before Dordt. Theologically, the key question is this: “Was man, as the object of predestination, contemplated *in the divine mind* as created and fallen (*infra*) or only as creatable and fallible (*supra*)” (170)? So “Infralapsarians maintain that the decree of predestination must logically *follow* the decree of creation and the fall” and “Supralapsarians believe that the decree of divine predestination must logically *precede* the decree concerning mankind’s creation and fall” (169). Beyond these basic definitions, Beeke helpfully breaks the orderings down and offers the positive claims of each position. Overall, he brings great clarity to a complex debate.

In his preface, Beeke remarks that election and reprobation are doctrines that are “friends of sinners” and claims that eternal predestination is a “precious doctrine.” The care he gives to these topics throughout the book reflect these personal convictions. Further, Beeke’s depth of insight and facility in

the secondary literature confirm his desire to publish this work for over thirty years (9). For example, regarding rational speculation as a source of theology, he writes, “I believe that confusion on this score has infiltrated Calvin studies primarily because the bulk of modern scholarship insists on dichotomizing a trinitarian, causal, metaphysical, systematic, eternal and discriminatory concept of predestination from a Christocentric, soteriological, historical, pastoral, doxological, and scriptural approach” (103). The reader can expect such perceptive conclusions and syntheses throughout.

The book lacks only a unifying thesis, or at least the clear articulation of one. An introduction to the book as a whole, in which the argument and unity of the work was explicitly communicated, would aid in this regard. As it stands, the reader must work to see a connection between the parts and is left with the question of why these three snapshots of controversy were chosen. To be fair, an association does emerge between Lutheranism and the Reformed tradition through the Marbach-Zanchi controversy and it seems natural to pick up with later Genevans after spending time on Calvin.

Overall, I recommend this book without reservation. Beeke faithfully handles a difficult theological and historical subject. While it is a scholarly monograph, it is written in an accessible enough fashion that a broader interested audience will certainly benefit from it. And Beeke’s concluding remarks reveal this larger purpose. Three will illustrate this: 1) “The attempt to affirm the Augustinian doctrines of total depravity and salvation by grace alone, but to reject Augustinian double predestination, results in a system that is incoherent and unstable.” 2) “The abolition of requirements for subscription to confessional statements in the name of toleration opened the door for apostasy from essential Reformed doctrines.” 3) “A theological synthesis that seeks to satisfy both the minds of unbelievers and honor the teachings of Scripture fails to do either, but results in theological liberalism that has lost the core of Christianity” (221-22). These and similar theological considerations undergird the excellent historical work of this book.

Andrew S. Ballitch
Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky

Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God. By Carl R. Trueman. The 5 Solas Series. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017, 261 pp., \$21.99 paper.

Much confusion surrounds the idea of grace today. The phrase “salvation by grace” is not controversial. Without definition and specification, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and all varieties of Protestant Christians would affirm this concept. What Carl Trueman does in *Grace Alone* is offer a definition of grace, a definition both biblical and faithful to the Christian tradition, which culminated in the Reformation. From his exegesis and historical narrative, he then draws lessons for the present day.

Trueman articulates his thesis in his opening: “grace is far more than a mere attitude or sentiment of God. God does not turn a blind eye to human rebellion. In fact, he tackles it head-on in the person and work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ . . . to talk about grace is to talk about Christ” (17). A bit later, he memorably remarks that “sin is violent, lethal rebellion against God; and biblical grace is God’s violent, raw, and bloody response” (31). With this contention in view, chapter 1 begins the first part of the book, “Sola Gratia in Scripture and History,” with biblical exegesis. Trueman’s survey demonstrates that the unified witness of the Bible testifies to the Christian life originating in and being lived by God’s grace.

Chapters 2 through 6 make up Trueman’s historical theology of grace, in which he highlights Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. In the *Confessions*, Augustine’s spiritual autobiography, he narrates the grace of God in his life. It is a story of enslavement to sin and the unilateral work of God in Augustine’s salvation. Doctrinal precision is added in Augustine’s defense of his position against Pelagius. This controversy brought clarity to the related concepts of human freedom and original sin. The will is only truly free when it chooses to love God. The sinner is like a fish that uses its natural capabilities to beach itself, at which point the creature is less free and will die, though it can still choose to flop around on the shore (78). God’s sovereign grace is thus necessitated. There were advocates of this Pauline-Augustinian notion of grace throughout the Middle Ages. Trueman provides Aquinas as one example in chapter 4. While Aquinas’s idea that Adam and humanity needed grace in the state of innocence is problematic, he is an ally on the sovereign priority of God in salvation.

Chapter 5 initiates the discussion of grace in the Reformation era with

justification by grace in the theology of Luther. Luther viewed his *Bondage of the Will* as one of very few of his works worth preserving. He understood the Reformation as fundamentally about the nature of grace. The human will is impotent in matters of salvation and therefore salvation is a monergistic work of God. Trueman does not uncritically appropriate Luther, however. The logic that God's foreknowledge is based on his foreordination makes the treatise overly deterministic and problematic as a result. The Reformed tradition, with Luther, did not regard it as possible to believe consistently in justification by grace through faith without being predestinarian. Though in Calvin, one finds two helpful qualifications. First, he warns against speculating beyond what Scripture reveals. And second, Christ is the mirror in which one should gaze upon God's sovereign, electing grace. In Christ the free favor of God is clearly seen and in Christ God sets forth his merciful intention in such a way that all who come by faith will be saved.

The whole of Protestant piety depends on the fact that salvation is all of God. In Part 2, "Sola Gratia in the Church," Trueman focuses on the place, ways, and means of confrontation with God's grace, namely, the church, word, sacraments, and prayer. For the Reformers, the church both originated in God's grace and drew its ongoing life from grace. Because church is not our response to grace, but "a component part of God's plan of grace, we need to structure it according to God's design" (171). Trueman points to two elements: elder governance and doctrinal confession. The proclamation of God's word is the primary means of God's grace. The Reformers adamantly insisted that it was not with the eyes and tongue that one apprehends God, but rather with the ears. When the preacher preaches faithfully, it is God who speaks to the people, and divine speech is not merely communicating information, but it is the "typical mode of his presence and power" (180). The Spirit works to regenerate and sanctify through the proclamation of the word. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace by which Christ is offered. The sacraments, according to the Reformers, enrich the way we receive Christ; they reinforce and seal the promises of God in Christ. Finally, prayer ought to be considered as both a response to God's grace and a means of grace. Prayer is an avenue by which God builds up his saints and furthers his kingdom. By way of summary and conclusion, Trueman answers the question of what a "grace alone church" would look like today with ten identity markers.

As a good church historian, Trueman is sensitive to historical context, nuance which is often lost in popular discussions of significant individuals from the past. He places Aquinas in the context of the rediscovery of Aristotle in the West, Luther in his late medieval background, and Calvin in the variegated Reformed tradition. He notes the development in Augustine and Luther. He understands assurance of salvation as the key existential and pastoral issue of the Reformation. As a good historical theologian, Trueman critically appropriates the past. He explicitly identifies problems, even with such heroes of the Reformation tradition as Augustine and Luther. He is not afraid to appreciate someone like Aquinas and give credit where credit is due. In short, he has no time for caricatures. As a good pastor, Trueman begins with the Bible and does not hesitate to draw applications from exegesis and history for the contemporary church. His discussions of the nature of preaching, the relationship of predestination and assurance, the benefits of formal prayer, and God as the agent in baptism are a few of his more insightful moments.

Grace Alone aims at a popular level audience. Both pastors and church members will find this work readable and helpful. Trueman adds his wit and eye for shortcomings in much of contemporary evangelicalism to The 5 Solas Series, making this both an entertaining book and, at times, one that hits close to home. Those looking for scholarly insight into the Reformation *sola gratia* will need to look elsewhere in Trueman's writings. What *Grace Alone* offers is a distillation of what the Reformers taught and an evaluation of why it still matters today, specifically for the local church.

Andrew S. Ballitch
Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky

Not the same God: Is the Qur'anic Allah the LORD God of the Bible? By Sam Solomon with Atif Debs. London: Wilberforce Publications, 2016. 223pp. \$10.50 Paper

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? This is one of the most pressing theological issues of our times. This question has wide-ranging

ramifications, not only for Christian mission and interfaith relations, but also for the domestic and foreign policy of nations. Yet, it is a question on which Christians find themselves deeply divided.

This important book by Sam Solomon, with the collaboration of Atif Debs, is the most substantial and informed contribution to date on the “no” side of the debate. Too often the “same God” debate has been marred on the Christian side by a superficial knowledge of Islam. What is distinctive and valuable about this work is its deep familiarity with Islamic theology. Both authors, now Christians, were formerly Muslims, and Solomon a Muslim jurist.

While acknowledging the “apparent similarities” (20) between Allah of Islam and the God of the Bible, they contend that these two entities are “diametric” opposites to each other, “in nature, knowability, description, and attributes” (20). The Qur’an, they propose, “has as its main objective to undo the message and mission of Christ”, and the confusion caused by the “same God” claim only hampers Christians’ ability to grasp this. This claim also undermines mission, making it more difficult for Muslims to engage with and respond to the saving attributes of the God revealed in the Bible.

As Solomon points out, it is a dogma of Islam that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, for the Qur’an states “Do not argue with the People of the Book (Christians and Jews) except by what is best ... say ... ‘Our God and your God is one.’” Solomon proposes further that the sole reason this issue has arisen in interfaith encounters is because Islam asserts sameness (23), so the debate is driven and controlled by an Islamic agenda. On the Christian side, a superficial awareness of apparent similarities, combined with a desire to engage with Muslims can make people insensitive to the “realities of Islam” (32). Solomon is concerned for Christians to grasp that the Qur’an incorporates features of the Bible in order to gain authority for Muhammad, “while at the same time becoming a mechanism to house very different doctrinal claims” (43). On other hand, readily apparent differences between the Qur’an and the Bible are accounted for en masse by the doctrine of *ta rīf* or Biblical corruption (54ff). For Christians to emphasize sameness, while overlooking the doctrine of Biblical corruption is to fall into a trap carefully laid by the Qur’an itself.

The Qur’anic strategy for claiming sameness is to repurpose and Islamize Biblical figures, and indeed humanity itself. Biblical stories are remanufactured

in service of the Qur'an's doctrinal agenda. This is illustrated in the fourth chapter by a detailed analysis of the "omissions, replacements, additions, changes and distortions" in the narratives of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. These Qur'anic messengers serve as model forerunners to validate Muhammad's mission. The doctrine of *fitrah* (96) serves as a counterpoint to that of Islamicized prophets, subverting the biblical idea of original sin and replacing it with a conception of the innate Muslimhood of humankind. In this way claimed "similarities" between Qur'an and Bible in fact are exploited to affirm the Islamic character, not only of biblical prophets, but of humanity itself.

The fifth chapter explores the implications of the Islamic doctrines of *taw īd* "unity" and *tanzīh* "incomparability," which means Allah is "free of all anthropomorphisms and absolutely incomparable to anything or anyone" (129). This construct implies that Allah is unknowable. Another implication is a denial of any likeness or participation by Allah in the human condition, such as the biblical account of God walking with Adam in the Garden (134), tabernacling with his people (168) or communicating directly with people. Yet another implication is the strict prohibition of any kind of discussion, questioning or speculation concerning the attributes of Allah—indeed of the whole discipline of theology—since "they will never encompass anything of his knowledge" (Sura 10:110), and "Allah cannot cross over his realm in the other world to man's world for any reason" (160). This distant creator cannot even speak directly to humans, but must do so using a new revelation process, *wa y*, or "sending down" verses through two intermediaries: the angel *Jibrīl* (Sura 42:51), and a human messenger, Muhammad. This mode of communication reveals, not Allah's person, but his will. Furthermore, the concept of the unity of Allah degenerates into the dogma of the finality of the messenger: instead of a personal relationship with their god, Allah offers people only a connection of obedience and devotion to Muhammad, whose will is equated to that of Allah, by which Muhammad is elevated to the status of co-legislator with Allah.

Contra Miroslav Volf's Allah, Solomon emphatically rejects any notion that the Qur'an supports love of one's neighbor: instead it teaches *al-walā' w-al-barā'* "allegiance and rejection," which calls for association and sympathy with fellow Muslims, but dissociation and rejection of non-Muslims. Furthermore, Allah's relationship to Muslims is not covenantal. So, there

is nothing which can be equated with the biblical concept of covenantal love, neither on Allah's part, nor from human beings towards Allah, who are instead commanded to love Muhammad as Allah's proxy.

In conclusion, Solomon finds that "the attractions of 'similarity' and 'sameness' which appear in the Qur'an are nothing but a mirage intended to validate the counterclaims of Islam and its prophet" (194). The real function of apparent similarities with the Bible is to show that the distinctive monotheism of Islam is the only true message. Christians who swallow the bait of similarity, in a naïve desire to engage Muslims and bring them to Christ, are attempting to take a stand on what they suppose to be "common ground" but is nothing but quicksand.

This theological agenda, Solomon points out, has been coordinated with an historically instantiated "formidable system of enslavement and constitutional discrimination from which there is little room to move or chance of escape" (196). Solomon's chief concern is about the subversion of Christian missions. Missions is compromised when one attempts to build a gospel message on the sameness illusion. In doing so, one unwittingly validates and conceals false Islamic monotheism. The solution, at every point, is to affirm "the person, the message, and the mission of Christ Jesus" (197), who is the fulfillment of the prophets and the image of the invisible God.

One of the unique values of this book for Christian thought-leaders is its overview of Islamic theology, particularly in relation to prophets, revelation, and the unity of Allah. It defines and illustrates theological terms which are key to grasping the structure and intent of Islamic theology in relation to biblical faith. This is a much-needed corrective to well-meaning but simplistic accounts of Islam which make much of the (apparent) similarities between the faiths, but are not well-grounded in Islamics.

Although this is a deeply interesting and informative work, some aspects of the way the materials are presented are frustrating. There are multiple critical references to Miroslav Volf's Allah. However, these references, while clear enough to someone who is familiar with Volf, are not explicit. Likewise, when Solomon refers to "current missiological practices" and "many Christian theologians and missiologists" setting aside biblical typologies to accommodate a Qur'anic agenda, readers would have been greatly assisted if the theologians and missiologists had been identified and their works referenced.

Not the same God also raises a crucial question of intent. It reports that “Muhammad and Allah . . . are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the Jews.” On the other hand, it concludes that the Qur’an “has as its main objective to undo the message and mission of Christ” (21). This seems to imply two levels of intent in the Qur’anic text. On the one hand, there are the Qur’an’s immediate preoccupations with the Jews, as well as other groups, such as the Meccan pagans and the “hypocrites.” On the other hand, there is, according to Solomon, a deeper, organizing theological principle which stands implacably opposed to the gospel of Christ and coordinates Qur’anic doctrines to this end.

Not the same God is a major landmark in Western Christianity’s ongoing challenge of coming to terms with Islam and its absolutist claims. A valuable primer in Islamic theology, it also offers a comprehensive framework, not only to understand the differences between the Islamic Allah and the God of the Bible, but also to account for the deceptive attraction of the “sameness” trap which continues to entice many well-meaning Christians.

Mark Durie
Adjunct Research Fellow
Arthur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam
Melbourne School of Theology



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2825 Lexington Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40280
(502) 897-4413 • 1 (800) 626-5525
www.sbts.edu