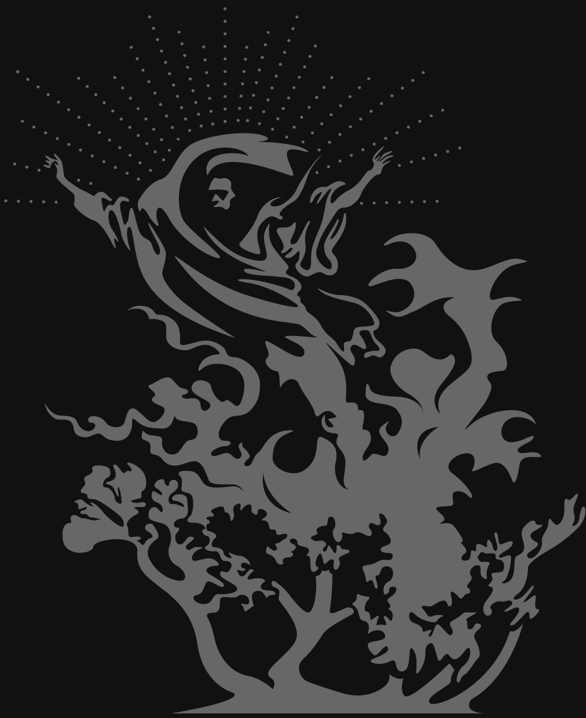

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Editor's Introduction

The modern theological scene continues to promote a doctrine of God more in line with an ontology of becoming, reflective of the socially oriented philosophy of our time. Many observing this drift from the classical doctrines of God and Christ, launched a retrieval mission, recovering the rich theology of the Great Tradition. This ressourcement project has continued to grow, as various traditions of the catholic faith look back to the conciliar theology of our forebears to address the theological issues of our day.

Journal of Classical Theology joins this mission, offering a platform to facilitate rigorous theological discussion pertaining to the retrieval *of* and advancements *in* classical theology. The church needs a *classical* dogmatic theology, grounded in the roots of the Great Tradition; it must look back if it is to move forward.

~ Romans 11:36 ~

Journal of Classical Theology

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On the Creation of Classical Theism

By J. V. Fesko[1]

In recent days talk and works on classical theism have been all the rage. Theologians across the spectrum have sought to recover classical theism—to return to the writings of the church fathers, medievals, and Reformers. The term *classical*, however, is something of a misnomer. There was a time when there was no such thing as classical theism—there was just theism—a theism commonly shared by theologians from the early church all the way through the seventeenth century, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. While there are significant doctrines that separate Rome from the Reformation, the doctrine of God is not one of them. So, what happened? And whence classical theism?

In the nineteenth century two key historical developments occurred that shaped the doctrine of God for the next century-plus. First, Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) created the myth of the Hellenization thesis. He claimed that the early church fathers had uncritically imbibed foreign Greek philosophical ideas that infected their theology. Theological concepts such as simplicity, aseity, and God as the first cause of all that is were supposedly more indebted to Aristotle's unmoved mover than the God of Scripture. The God of the church fathers, medievals, and Reformers was not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Second, Theodore de Regnon (1831–93), among others, made the claim that Eastern and Western theologians approached the doctrine of the Trinity from different starting points: Eastern theologians started from the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Western theologians started from the divine essence. Given that theologians such as Augustine (354–430) included doctrines such as simplicity and aseity as attributes of the divine essence, there was supposedly an inability to reach the fruit of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and the three persons from the philosophically infected soil of the divine essence. These two developments supposedly then set the stage for a Trinitarian renaissance in the twentieth century.

In the twentieth century theologians such as Karl Rahner (1904–84) wanted to return the doctrine of the Trinity to its proper place as the lodestar of theology. But he criticized medievals such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) for supposedly separating the divine essence from the three persons in his *Summa Theologica* because he first treated *de Deo uno* before he wrote of *de Deo Trio*. Another factor

[1] He presently serves at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS) as Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology.

was the influence of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and his “Trinitarian” philosophy. Hegel is probably the most dominant philosopher of the modern period who influenced nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologians to re-write the doctrine of the Trinity. The supposed corruption of patristic and medieval theology, the purported differences between Eastern and Western approaches to the Trinity, and the influence of Hegel all set the stage for the rise of social Trinitarianism and theistic personalism. Theologians began to speak of God as three distinct centers of consciousness and the Trinity in relational terms—that there was a real give-and-take among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and their creation. In more technical terms, the triune God was no longer the God who is, the great I AM (Exo. 3:14), the God who “is and who was and who is to come” (Rev. 1:4), but rather the great “I am becoming,” the God who evolves and who will be. God was no longer the divine *being* but the divine *becoming*. Theologians needed to be able to contrast the catholic doctrines of God and the Trinity and thus created the term *classical theism* to distinguish them from their own views. By tagging the catholic view as *classical* over and against *theism* signaled to the broader church and world that the classical view was outdated and unbiblical and the newer theism was superior. This narrative has become so popular in our own day that well-known conservative Evangelical and Confessional Protestant theologians have abandoned many aspects of the catholic doctrines of God and the Trinity and promoted the newer theism of personalism and social Trinitarianism all under a banner of exegetical fidelity to the Scriptures. Some have even claimed that the Reformers did not take the Reformation far enough and have called to reform the doctrine of God.

In recent years a bevy of theologians from across the theological spectrum have pushed back against these trends and sought to recover classical theism. But this retrieval is not simply the recovery of tradition for the sake of pining for the past. Rather, theologians and historians have returned *ad fontes* to see that the claims of Harnack and de Regnon are false—they have stripped away the encrusted layers of myth to get to the bedrock of primary sources to see that theologians like Augustine plied concepts such as simplicity and aseity, not because he allowed Athens to dictate terms to Jerusalem, but because he saw that Athens could clarify truths from Jerusalem. In other words, philosophy was a handmaiden, not a mistress, to scriptural truths. Augustine used the concept of simplicity to make sense of Philippians 2:5–11 in his *De Trinitate* to explain how the Son was fully human and yet in full possession of the Father’s essence. Alternatively stated, Augustine used the truths of general revelation and metaphysics to clarify the truths of special revelation. In other words, Augustine’s doctrine

of the Trinity is rigorously exegetical and not beholden to Aristotle's unmoved mover. But by the same token, those retrieving classical theism rightly point out that the theism of modernity and social Trinitarianism is not as purely biblical as its proponents would like us to think. Social Trinitarianism rests on a shaky foundation of bad historiography, the historical critical exegesis of Scriptures, and the philosophy of Hegel. Perhaps the theism of modernity is not all that biblical and should spur the question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the modern philosophy and the church? What agreement is there between heretics and Christians?" This is not to say that there is absolutely no truth in modern philosophy, but theologians should not assume that the patristics and medievals were the only ones to ply philosophical insights for the sake of theological formulation. Modern doctrines of God and the Trinity are arguably as much or more philosophical than classical views as well as less scripturally grounded, or in some cases, contrary to Scripture.

Classical theism is not simply a throwback to days gone by but is instead a rich exegetical, theological, and catholic phenomenon that beckons us. While it would be fitting to dispense with the adjective *classical* and simply refer to theism, enough theological water has flowed under the bridge of history to warrant the term so long as we understand that *classical* is a synonym for *catholic*, and that we have much to learn from our forebears. As C. S. Lewis (1898–1960) once encouraged us, we need to let the fresh breeze of the centuries past remind us of truths we have long forgotten. For every new book, we need to read three old ones. There are rich treasures in Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*, in Gregory of Nazianzus's *On God and Christ*, in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, and in Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. Classical theism is ultimately about seeking to listen to the pastors and teachers throughout the ages with which Christ has blessed the church (Eph. 4:11–12) as they exegete the Scriptures so that we can better know, love, and serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God who was, who is, and who is to come.

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Classical Theology: A Spiritual Exercise

By Matthew Barrett[1]

The contemplation of God is promised us as being the goal of all our actions and the everlasting perfection of all our joys. — Augustine

Abstract: *If theology is not only taught by God and of God but leads to God—as Francis Turretin said summarizing Thomas Aquinas—then theology is the contemplation of God, in part now but in full at the beatific vision. Theological theology begins and ends with David's desire to behold the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4), yet that telos requires the sanctification of the theologian's theology. Such a pilgrimage is an ascent into understanding itself, an understanding that participates in divine wisdom. However, classical theology insists that apart from the ladder of faith the theologian will not understand. As Anselm said, credo ut intelligam. Classical theology, therefore, is a spiritual exercise. As a spiritual exercise, contemplation produces consecration. And according to the apostle John the hope of partaking in the divine nature through the beatific vision should galvanize ecclesiastical sanctity in the present. On the basis of Paul's Trinitarian eschatology, the classical theologian is entrusted with the pastoral mission of consecrating the people of God by means of contemplation. That ecclesiastical mission requires a Thomistic (as opposed to Aristotelian) magnanimity that is accompanied by a self-forgetfulness before the face of God (coram Deo).*

Key Words: Contemplation, Consecration, Ascent, Beatific Vision, Anselm, Aquinas, Turretin, Classical theology

Ecclesiology in The Kingdom of Theology Proper

As he surveyed the landscape of theology in the last century, John Webster lamented modern theology's redefinition and relocation of God.[2] No longer considered *a se,* God was constituted by history, even changed by its course of events—a being in the process of becoming. Once God was redefined according to the contours of history, relocation followed: "God in himself," reported Webster, drifted "to the periphery of theological concerns."[3] Not without irony, theology

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[2] A modified version of this article was delivered as the plenary address at the ETS regional meeting at Hannibal-LaGrange University (2022).

[3] John Webster, *God Without Measure* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2016), 215.

lost its *theological* ethos.[4] Theology could no longer be trusted to itself, but to justify its relevance to history theology had to be postured for the sake of other disciplines—theology *and* public discourse, theology *and* politics, theology *and* social ethics, etc.[5] Theology as *theologia* was not taken seriously and as a result classical theism's pedigree of contemplation was not either. For contemplation—in part now, in full by the eschaton—moves beyond history's economy to gaze at the beauty of God in and of himself, a God who deserves to be enjoyed for his own sake.

> It is no exaggeration to claim that a good deal of modern theology has been reluctant to consider contemplation a proper end of theological intelligence. The marks of this reluctance are not difficult to find. It may be seen, for example, in the remarkable prestige enjoyed by literary-historical science in the study of Holy Scripture; or in presentations of Christian doctrine which are devoid of metaphysical ambition and treat dogma as ancillary to the science of Christian practice which is first theology. The assumption (sometimes explicitly articulated conviction) in both cases is that only the historical is the real, that intellect can extend itself no further than the economy of texts or moral practices. It is an impatient assumption, but one which has proved remarkably adept in shaping the purposes with which theological study is undertaken. Its elimination of the contemplative is an inhibition of theology's theological character.[6]

Webster may be describing the life (or death) of theology in the academy, but his lament is apropos for ecclesiology as well. A theologian who is honest will be transparent enough to express both lament and hope when considering the relationship between *theologia* and ecclesiology. Lament is understandable. What theologian can deny that the church is often indifferent, sometimes even hostile, to the expertise of the theologian? The reason for apathy and enmity: the people of God do not always consider the task of theology itself central to the life of the church. And theology is not considered central to the life of the church because theology is not considered practical. *Is theology relevant?* is often the first question detonated to terminate *theologia* in the presence of God's people.

Yet as long as the church—or the academy—measures its receptivity to

[4] See Webster's essay, "Theological Theology," in *T&T Clark Reader in John Webster*, ed. Michael Allen (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 21–42. Also consider his essay, "Biblical Reasoning," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 115–32.

[5] Webster, *God Without Measure*, 220.

[6] Webster, *God Without Measure*, 220.

theology on the basis of relevancy, theology will always be held in suspicion, at least the theology of classical Christianity. For classical theology believes that the transcendental components of the Christian faith should not be moved to the periphery; indeed, they are foundational to history. Thomas Aquinas is right to insist that theology is "*more* theoretical than practical, since it is mainly concerned with the divine things, which are, rather than with things men do." Theology "deals with human acts *only in so far* as they prepare men for that achieved knowledge of God on which their eternal bliss reposes."[7] And yet, even the mention of eternal bliss moves a theologian like Thomas to the conclusion that theology's theoretical nature bears the fruit of practical science. "Now in so far as sacred doctrine is a practical science, its aim is eternal happiness, and this is the final end governing the ends of all the practical sciences."[8] Reformed scholastics since have followed the lead of Thomas. In a Johannine vein, William Perkins writes, "*Theologie* is the science of living blessedly forever. Blessed life ariseth from the knowledge of God [Jn. 17:3]."[9]

In that light, classical theology defined its enterprise as the contemplation of God and then all things in relation to God.[10] That posture is fitting for classical theology which delineates the creature by means of *participation* in the Creator. Simple and *a se*, infinite and immense, God's existence is his essence, but those who have been made in his likeness are composite.[11] He, therefore, is the fountain of life—in him we live and move and have our being, as Paul said quoting the Greeks (Acts 17:28). In a participation paradigm, how then can theology be anything but theological? From creation to incarnation, the wondrous works of God in the economy—*oikonomia*—are not an end in themselves but a means to contemplate God in himself—the holy Trinity.[12] "God and creatures are incommensurable," clarifies Webster. "Theology proper precedes and governs

[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I.1.5. Hereafter *ST*.

[8] *ST* I.1.5.

[9] William Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, p. 11, col. 1, in *Works* (Cambridge, 1612–19), vol. I; quoted in Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:155. Peter van Mastricht gives the means to that end in his definition of theology: "Christian theology is nothing less than the doctrine of living for God through Christ, in other words, the doctrine that is according to godliness." Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2018), 1:98.

[10] E.g., Aquinas, *ST* II–II.180.2.

[11] As Thomas says, "the existence of God is his essence." *ST* I.13.11.

[12] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), especially *Orations* 38.

economy."[13]

Assuming Webster's privilege of theology proper is correct, this essay speaks to our present ecclesiastical moment in time as an opportunity for the theologian to consider how he or she should summon the church to the preeminence of *theologia* and its contemplation of God. David's words in Psalm 27:4 should not only define the task of theology but reposition the posture of the church today.[14] The king of Israel set his mind to many pious, even practical implementations of the Law of God (Ps. 19:7–14), yet David was consumed by one passion:

> One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:
>
> That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.
>
> To behold the beauty of the Lord.
>
> And to meditate in His Temple.

Gazing at the beauty of the Lord is the premier ambition of the theologian, but the theologian's task is incomplete if his heavenly gaze is for himself alone. David's one desire may be personal, but as the rest of the psalms indicate, the king expects his one petition to be on the lips of all God's people (e.g., consider a psalm of ascent, such as Psalm 132). The corporate nature of contemplation means the theologian bears pastoral responsibility for summoning the people of God to behold the beauty of the Lord, a spiritual exercise that will reach its culmination in the beatific vision itself.

The priority of contemplation may be foreign to contemporary ecclesiology, which is tempted to operate in isolation from *theologia*. However, ecclesiology does not and should not enjoy an independent existence in dogmatics; ecclesiology lives and moves and has its being only in so far as it depends upon and *participates* in theology proper. The church exists by the word of God, as exemplified from the call of Abraham to the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. The church is no ordinary assembly but has been chosen by God in Christ from eternity and born from above by his Word and Spirit. Created by God, the church is true to itself when she lives as if that same God is the fountain of her life, the same life she extends to the world. By fixing her gaze on the beauty of the Lord, the same Lord who assumed flesh for the sake of his bride's beautification, she extends

[13] Webster, *God Without Measure,* 8. And again, "The material order—God in himself, God's external work, created things—is irreversible, because created things are comprehensible only as effects of God's external operations, and those operations are in turn comprehensible only as they are seen to flow from God's perfect beatitude and simplicity" (215).

[14] I will explore this methodological concern more in my forthcoming *Systematic Theology* with Baker Academic.

the gospel to a world otherwise obsessed with staring at its navel. Ecclesiology detached from theology proper is narcissism, and narcissism is the beginning and the end of idolatry.

Yet the church's inception is not the only reason for optimism. As long as the church is our mother, we can rest assured that her husband is Christ, the same Christ who has promised to return with spoils of victory in the eschaton. The philosophy that serves as a handmaid to classical theology—namely, classical realism—is notable for its defense of final causality. To exist in a world without God as the First Cause is to exist in a world without purpose, without hope, without eschatology. Transferred to ecclesiology, the principle is full of import: the church will drink from the well of contemplation if the soul of the church is defined not only by its present but future *telos*, which is nothing less than doxology. The church exists and operates within God's economy as saints forming an embassy of praise—from redemption to restoration, from union to communion, from consecration to contemplation.

In light of that *telos*, the apostle John can end his first letter with a warning—little children, keep yourself from idols—because idolatry is a failure to keep a steady gaze. David longs to behold the beauty of the Lord because he understands that outside God's temple are many idols that threaten to interrupt and disrupt his theological vision, many lesser beauties that pretend to be equal substitutes for the beauty of the Infinite. Knowing how prone the church can be towards idolatrous distraction, Thomas Aquinas placed significant hope in the beatific vision. The beatific vision ushers the church into the fullness of divine happiness because at last the church's gaze will not be interrupted by a rivalry of lesser goods. God "promises us complete happiness [in heaven] . . . for then by a single, uninterrupted and continuous act our minds will be united with God. In the meantime, in so far as we fall short of that lasting unity, so far do we fall short of perfect bliss. All the same we can already have some share in it, and so much the greater as our activity grows more single-minded and less distracted."[15] Thomas was a spiritual theologian with no little insight into the "active life" and its many spiritual effects in the life of the church.[16] However, "the active life, which is occupied with many things, has less of the nature of happiness than the contemplative life, which revolves round one thing, the gazing at truth."[17]

[15] *ST* I–II.3.2.

[16] See especially Jean-Pierre Torell, *Spiritual Master,* volume 1 of *Saint Thomas Aquinas,* trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

[17] *ST* I–II.3.2. Space does not permit me to explore Thomas's extensive treatment of the contemplative life and active life (but see my forthcoming *Systematic Theology* with Baker Academic). Thomas does not limit contemplation to the intellect but includes the will. The intellect must be moved by

The theologian is responsible for this sacred, spiritual trust: to sustain the church's gaze so that it does not waver from contemplating the beauty of the Lord. In that light, the theologian bent on servicing the church with a *theological* theology will discover he is pressed with a pastoral responsibility to keep the church postured towards its bride—what Thomas called a "simple gaze." That sacred trust is holy. For contemplation is not only the *telos* of the church but the means to ecclesiastical sanctity, a point we will revisit. The theologian is called to be God's instrument of consecration in the church, never ceasing to refine the church's knowledge of God in Christ to prepare his church to see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Credo ut Intelligam: The Humility of Contemplation

The novice theologian could hear this call to be an instrument in God's hands for the sake of ecclesiastical consecration and contemplation, and run with zeal to be the gatekeeper, but neglect the Spirit's sanctification within his own theology. By consequence, the theologian fails to bring his theology to culmination because he has never become a shepherd of his own soul. The theologian pursues the wisdom of the intellect, the holiness of the will, and the good ordering of his affections when he first submits himself to the pastoral consolation and admonition of the Holy Spirit to be effective in the renewal of the church.[18]

To begin with, consider the *intellect*. Sanctification is often segregated to Christian living, but ectypal theology is a form of sanctification too, the Holy Spirit's progressive consecration of the theologian's contemplative ascent.[19] If true, then systematic theology may be distinguished from pastoral theology but never severed. For theology is nothing less than the renewal of the mind. Paul's imperative to be transformed by the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2) may be a stumbling block. Those with the keys to higher education should not give the

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the will, which means contemplation involves love itself. Thomas is persuaded the church fathers agree. "Gregory [the Great] makes the contemplative life consist in the love of God, since through loving him we are aflame to gaze on his beauty. . . . The love of God impels us to the vision of the first principle, who is God" (*ST* II–II.180.1). Therefore, when love has that which it loves (God), delight follows. Do the moral virtues factor into the contemplative life? Thomas's answer is twofold: virtues "do not have the essential part, because the goal of the contemplative life is the consideration of truth." Yet they "do have their place in the contemplative life as dispositions." Thomas calls virtue a motive cause in the will and motive causes "do not enter into the essence of a thing, though they prepare for it and complete it" (*ST* II–II.180.2).

[18] For all three (mind, will, affections), consult Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1.5.10.

[19] I make this same point in, "Who Says? Solving Doctrinal Controversy," *Modern Reformation* 31, no. 4 (2022): 42–51.

impression that the conclusion of one's theological degree—even the Doctor of Philosophy—is the eschaton, the complete purgation of theological imperfection and immaturity. As if the newly minted intellect has conquered the doctrinal terrain. That impression will lead fools to rush in, as if they can now speak to any and every doctrinal dominion and controversy. In truth, the doctorate is not so much a test of comprehensive knowledge of God (an academic mindset that betrays classical theism's commitment to the incomprehensibility of God), but a trial to determine whether the budding theologian has the theological tools to properly approach God in whatever doctrinal sphere he encounters. In other words, the achievement of a theological degree is the beginning, not the end, of the mind's theological sanctification, ensuring the theologian is facing the right direction as he begins the ancient pilgrimage of theological ascent. If the theologian can adjust to that mindset—the outlook of a pilgrimage (1 Pet. 2:1)—then and only then will he understand that thinking theologically is a path for wayfarers. Therefore, the path of the theologian must be paved by a progressive sanctity rather than an instantaneous glory.[20]

Some wayfarers at the bottom of this mountain may become discouraged at the elevation that awaits their ascent. What theologian's theology on paper lives up to the theology he knows is good, true, and beautiful in the minds of his theological forefathers? Yet despair in this case may be easily disguised pride. Not all but many theologians who have weathered the sanctifying process of their own theological mountains will admit they took a misguided path at some point along the way. A theologian as impeccable as Augustine, for example, wrote an entire book of revisions as he reflected on his theological life.[21] Augustine was unembarrassed because he understood that progression, as painful as it may be, is the only way to theological holiness.

The progressive sanctification of the theologian's theology, however, is impossible apart from *humility*. Humility is a virtue no theologian can afford to forfeit. Few exemplify such humility in their theological method like Anselm, the father of scholasticism during the High Middle Ages. Those who caricature scholasticism as a proud speculation have not met the theologian of Canterbury. As his *Proslogion* prepared to set sail to ride some of the tallest waves of theology proper, Anselm began with a prayer.

> I acknowledge, Lord, and I give thanks that You have created Your image in me, so that I may remember You, think of You, love You.

[20] Aquinas, *ST* II–II.180.2.

[21] Augustine, *Revisions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2010).

> But this image is so effaced and worn away by vice, so darkened by the smoke of sin, that it cannot do what it was made to do unless You renew it and reform it. I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that "unless I believe, I shall not understand" [Isa. 7:9].[22]

Not a few historians have observed the variegated ways some modern theologians presumed they could withhold belief until the intellect finished scrutinizing the received theology of the church.[23] By contrast, the scholastic theologian of the High Middle Ages was confident he could not understand unless God himself grants him *faith* to believe. *Credo ut intelligam*. As Anselm explains at the beginning of *On the Incarnation of the Word,* the theologian requires "spiritual wings through the solidity of faith" to contemplate with accuracy and fidelity doctrines like the Trinity. If novice theologians "foolishly try to ascend intellectually to those things that first need the ladder of faith," they will "sink into many kinds of errors by reason of the deficiency of their intellect." For Anselm, the failure of intellectual ascent is not unrelated to the absence of mature *fiducia,* or what Reformed scholastics called faithful apprehension (*apprehensio fiducialis*).[24] "For they evidently do not have the strength of faith who, since they cannot understand the things they believe, argue against the same faith's truth confirmed by the holy Fathers."[25] Appealing to Acts 15:9 and Psalm 19:8, Anselm insists God must cleanse the heart by faith and illumine the eyes first. The theologian must become a little child "humbly obeying the testimonies of God," acquiring wisdom by believing in the trustworthy testimony of the Lord (Ps. 19:7). For God hides his revelation from the wise, those who consider themselves clever, but he unveils

[22] Anselm, *Proslogion* 1, in *The Major Works,* ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[23] For the origins of this modern outlook, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009). To see how this outlook resulted in what Thomas Joseph White calls the "Modern God," see his *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 32–49. Also consult the critique of modern revisionism by Lewis Ayres, *The Legacy of Nicaea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 384–429; Stephen Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 1–32, 165–200.

[24] Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology,* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), s.v.

[25] Anselm worries that "they argue against the same faith's truth confirmed by the holy Fathers." *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1, in *The Major Works.*

his word to little ones (Matt. 11:25).[26]

Faith, for Anselm, produces obedience, and obedience to the voice of God in sacred Scripture is a necessary, even if preliminary step, in satisfying the theologian's hunger for understanding. "For it is a fact that the more powerfully sacred Scripture nourishes us with things that feed us by obedience, the more acutely we are drawn to things that satisfy us intellectually."[27] With intellectual satisfaction as the prize, the obedience of faith is a non-negotiable for Anselm, which leads him to issue this warning at the start of his *On the Incarnation of the Word:*

> And not only is the mind without faith and obedience to the commandments of God prevented from rising to understand higher things, but the mind's endowed understanding is also sometimes taken away, and faith itself subverted, when upright conscience is neglected. . . . Therefore, no one should rashly plunge into the complex things involved in questions about God unless the person first have a solid faith with the precious weight of character and wisdom, lest a persistent falsity ensnare the person who runs with careless levity through many little diverting sophisms.[28]

The scholasticism of Anselm embodies an Augustinian spirit, as exemplified when he inaugurates and concludes many of his discourses humble enough to acknowledge his weakness, knowing that such intellectual honesty could only lead him further up and further in. In a Platonic vein, Anselm is convinced theology is a type of *ascent*—requiring what he labels the "ladder of faith."[29] His theological posture, therefore, displays a perpetual reliance on the grace of God both for theology's inception and its culmination.

If theology involves ascent—the ladder of faith—then the theologian must not resist the instrumentality of a progressive sanctity in the acquisition of understanding and all the wisdom it promises. After contemplating the heights of divinity, Anselm's *Proslogion* finishes with this prayer:

> I pray, O God, that I may know You and love You, so that I may rejoice in You. And if I cannot do so fully in this life may I *progress gradually*

[26] Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.
[27] Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.
[28] Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.
[29] Many of the church fathers and medieval scholastics appealed to Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28. E.g., Gregory, *Homil.* In *Ezech.* II, hom. 2; PL 76, 953; referenced in Aquinas, *ST* II–II.180.7.

until it comes to fullness.[30]

To progress gradually is Anselm's grammar for the sanctification of the theological mind. Anselm's prayers reveal a posture in which the theologian takes to his knees as he begins and ends his task. Apart from such humility, the theologian will not grow in his knowledge of the Infinite, nor will his knowledge of the Infinite undergo purification. His thoughts will remain either shallow or corruptible, or both. Proverbs offers the antidote to theological hubris: the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge . . . and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (1:7; 9:10).

The young theologian gripped by the fear of the Lord may question whether he should think theologically out loud at all, joining the chorus of public discourse. Certainly, as Anselm warned, caution should be exercised whenever one dares to speak about the Incomprehensible, let alone on his behalf. However, paralysis may sound like humility when it is truly pride in the form of faintheartedness. It is one thing for a theologian to lack the skills of theological reasoning, but quite another for a theologian to lack the courage to put his hands to work. Crippled by an over realized eschatology, this theologian assumes he cannot think God's thoughts after him unless he can judge his own contribution perfect to begin with. He assumes, however unwitting his assumption may be, that his theology is not an ectype but the archetype itself.

Kelly Kapic, drawing on the insight of Thomas Aquinas, writes, "pride ignores God as the giver of one's mind and skills, while humility gratefully employs these gifts as an expression of worship and as a way to help others."[31] The theologian bound by the pride of paralysis may mask his cognitive inactivity with humility, but he refuses to employ the gifts God has given to him in service of the church. He thinks humility is antithetical to magnanimity, but such an assumption plays by the rules of Aristotle not Aquinas. "G.K. Chesterton compares Aristotle's magnanimous man 'who is great and knows that he is great' with Aquinas's view of the 'miracle of the more magnanimous man, who is great and knows that he is small.' "[32] The theologian who façades his faintheartedness with humility is just as contemptuous. In the words of Thomas, "A man clings too much to his own opinion whereby he thinks himself incompetent for those things

[30] "Let the knowledge of You grow in me here, and there [in heaven] be made complete; let Your love grow in me here and there be made complete, so that here my joy may be great in hope, and there be complete in reality." Anselm, *Proslogion* 26.

[31] Kelly Kapic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2022), 105.

[32] Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 105.

for which he is competent."[33]

Thomas does not deny that a theologian must be competent; fools rush in for a reason and they never look so foolish than when dabbling with uninformed thoughts about God. However, assuming competence is in place, the theologian who "clings too much to his own opinion" insults God's intelligence by his neglect of the gifts God has given to him for the sake of his church. God has given not only apostles, prophets, and evangelists, but shepherds and teachers, says the apostle Paul to the Ephesians. The reason is selfless: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine . . ." (Eph. 4:12–14).

In the mind of the apostle, theology becomes a spiritual exercise when the theologian sails past those thrashing waves of doctrinal deviation, leading God's people out of the storm and ultimately to peaceful waters of contemplation. The theologian who leaves the church at sea is no theologian in the end because he refuses to use his sense of compass to guide God's people back to concord, that is, to the unity of the faith and the blessedness of the *visio Dei*. Whether the theologian operates as an official pastor or not, the apostle expects every theologian to be *pastoral*. Otherwise, the theologian loses his prophetic credibility, incapable of delivering the knowledge of God to the people of God for the sake of their own safety and sanctity.

Contemplation and Consecration

A theologian who understands classical theology as a spiritual exercise is a theologian discontent with mere adherence to sound doctrine should the holiness of his life fail to match the sanctity of his theology. The novice theologian is often told to undergo rigor to ensure a knowledge of God. Here is a worthy calling. For anti-intellectualism is a gross incongruity with a God whose knowledge is without measure. However, that charge cannot be the last word, otherwise it fails to understand the nature of classical theology itself. As Gilles Emery has said, "trinitarian theology is a spiritual exercise."[34] Yet that same blessing must be said over the discipline of dogmatics as a whole. We cannot conclude by defining theology as *mere knowledge* of God, but a *contemplation* of God. For theology, as Turretin said paraphrasing Thomas, is not only taught by God and about God,

[33] *ST* II–II.133; quoted in Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 106.

[34] Gilles Emery, *The Trinity* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 20.

but theology *leads to* God—*theologia a Deo Docetur, Deum docet, et ad Deum ducit.*[35] The theologian has not dedicated himself to the mere acquisition of knowledge, but he has vowed to stand with David as he gazes at the beauty of the Lord. Apart from knowledge no one will see the face of Jesus Christ, yet that same knowledge is given for the distinct purpose of seeing God in the face of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn. 17:3).

Previously I said that the theologian serves the church best when he lifts the gaze of God's people to behold the beauty of the Lord. In 1 John 3 Jesus' beloved disciple says our simple gaze at the beauty of the Lord will reach its pinnacle moment in the beatific vision. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (3:2). For John, seeing God in the eschaton is inseparable from glorification, or at least indispensable to that end. If God is light, as John says in his opening chapter, then we become like him when we see him because all darkness dissipates in his presence.

One could object that the guarantee of future perfection in the beatific vision might create passivity in the present.[36] However, John commits to the opposite assumption: this future hope galvanizes holiness now. "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (3:3). The theologian fulfills his calling by spurring the church to purify itself now in preparation for that future day when she shall behold the beauty of the Lord and whatever darkness still clinging to her robe will scatter in the radiance of his purifying light.

However, the theologian betrays the church's hope in the beatific vision whenever he fails to exemplify the sanctified life to the bride Christ has washed with his own blood. John's warning at the start of his first letter is applicable: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 Jn. 1:5–6). The theologian who is not holy himself loses theological credibility to usher God's people into the presence of God's light when he still roams the streets of darkness. Without consecration how can he lead God's people to contemplation? Put otherwise, the theologian who is not set apart to the Lord lacks integrity when he claims to unveil the God of truth. However true his words may be, his

[35] Turretin, *Institutes*, 1.1.7 (he has in view *ST* I.1.7, though the phrase itself is a "medieval scholastic adage").

[36] As mentioned already, theology is more contemplative than theoretical or practical (i.e., the active life). The contemplative has priority; nevertheless, the active life may precede the contemplative. "In the order of generation the disposition precedes form, though absolutely speaking and by its nature the form is prior" (*ST* II–II.182.4).

life bears false witness. He takes God's name in vain. Consider the sober warning of Johannes Cocceius in his *Summa Theologiae*: "The person who speaks [of] God and divine matters [but does so] not from love of God and for God's glory is not able to speak of God truly, for he does not really know him and does not speak from God and in God."[37]

If God is the object of our simple gaze, then thinking theologically not only requires the Holy Spirit to awaken our hearts (a prerequisite to *true* theology), but it depends on an ongoing illumination of our minds. Plato believed illumination occurs when we leave behind the darkness of the cave and its shadows to walk into the radiance and reality of the sun, the Good.[38] Paul said something similar but with Christological eyes: "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. . . . For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). For all their differences, Plato and Paul alike operated with a realist metaphysic—including its participation paradigm—that allows the theologian to count the many ways the light of divinity is the basis for all the light we can see in this present world.

However, Plato thought the solution to darkness was mere recollection of the world of Being by means of education. By contrast, Paul said God himself must shine his light within the darkness of the heart—remembrance is misguided when regeneration is necessary. Otherwise, we will never desire to leave the cave and enter the light of his Son's life. For this reason, Psalms 36:9 should be interpreted through a Christological lens: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."

Classical theology is a spiritual exercise because God is the object of our simple gaze, but unless the God of classical theology opens the eyes of the blind first then theology will always be an exercise in Pelagianism. To that end, Thomas and Turretin alike said theology is taught *by* God. Theology is a spiritual exercise because the Holy Spirit must shed the light of the Son's grace into our hearts so that we become the recipients of the Father's benevolence. A robust knowledge of God in Christ is essential—to adapt the grammar of a Reformed scholastic like Franciscus Junius, divine truth is theology's formal cause, divine matters the material cause, and divine discourse the instrumental cause.[39] Yet

[37] As quoted in Kelly Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 46.

[38] For Plato's use of the cave allegory, see bk. 7 of his *Republic.*

[39] Franciscus Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2014),

without the sanctifying illumination of the Spirit the theologian risks severing knowledge from its divine source. The Holy Trinity must be theology's efficient cause—theology is not only *of* God and leads *to* God, but theology is taught *by* God.[40] In pastoral terms, the theologian who sits down to write a tough bit of theology *should* expect his mind to operate with greater clarity if he has petitioned the Spirit at the beginning and the end of his theological musing, much like Anselm. For what theologian can understand the things of God apart from the Spirit of God?

The theologian's dependence on the Spirit, however, is not a mere, momentary reliance on his presence but presupposes a liberation in the past with ongoing effects for the future. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul says a veil was draped over the face of Moses so that the Israelites "might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end." For Paul the veil of Moses is allegorical: "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away" (3:14). Christ is the turning point: "But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (3:16). How is the veil removed? A better question may be, *Who* removes the veil that lies over the heart? The Holy Spirit. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (3:17). Freedom to do what exactly? The Spirit liberates the blind from darkness so that they can behold the radiance of the Son, a most shocking revelation considering even Moses had to be hidden behind the rock as God's glory passed by. In the words of the apostle Paul, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (3:18).

If Paul's Trinitarian theology of eschatological liberation is applied to the mission of the theologian, then theology is a regenerative task that operates under the sanctifying power of the Spirit. For the sake of the church, the theologian ushers the body of Christ into the presence of Christ, and under the authority of the Holy Spirit says to unveiled faces, *behold*. Yet for Paul, beholding is not to be

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[40] Turretin, Junius, and Thomas's emphasis on God as efficient cause is not intended to eclipse the theologian himself. When theologians use the grammar of "principle" the place of the theologian surfaces. The mind of the theologian is the subjective cognitive principle. For example, John Webster writes, "the Holy Trinity is the ontological principle (*principium essendi*) of Christian theology; its external or objective cognitive principle (*principium cognoscendi externum*) is the Word of God presented through the embassy of the prophets and apostles; its internal or subjective cognitive principle (*principium cognoscendi internum*) is the redeemed intelligence of the saints." Webster, *The Domain of the Word* (London and New York: Bloomsbury TT Clark, 2012), 135.

severed from transformation itself. The Spirit must first remove the veil to behold the Lord, the object of their gaze. Returning to a Christological interpretation of Psalm 36:9, Paul might as well have said, in your light do we *become light*.[41] For not only Paul but Peter says that by means of the beatific vision we "become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). The task of the theologian, therefore, is to consecrate the people of God for *participation* by means of *contemplation*.

Classical Theology and Self-Forgetfulness

If the calling of classical theology grips the theologian's imagination, then a self-forgetfulness will show its presence. For as long as *theologia* is not only the starting point but the goal, then the classical theologian is galvanized—even in discouraging moments of theological trial—to serve the church until she sees God in the face of Christ by virtue of the ascending power of the Spirit. The classical theologian is not so concerned with himself so much as the task of theology *coram Deo*—before the face of God.

No doubt the eschaton will unveil many a theologian mad with joy because those entrusted to their care participate in the life of the holy Trinity. Yet that joy only comes to those theologians who humble themselves, forgetting themselves long enough to consecrate their theology to the way of the cross, embodying the suffering servant to God's covenant people. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your [the church's] servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

[41] To consider how the grammar of "light from light" is utilized in Trinitarian theology, see Andrew R. Hay, *God's Shining Forth: A Trinitarian Theology of Divine Light,* Princeton Theological Monograph (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017). Also consider the patristic usage with Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 157–241.

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The Ox's Exalted Doctrine of God: The Rich Inheritance of Aquinas

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Abstract: *Doctrinal Trinitarian drift in evangelicalism has increasingly become an issue of concern. The historical cycle of the church demonstrates a perennial need to retrieve her rich heritage. The process of retrieval arms the church with a better appreciation of the past—and with the theological tools and grammar developed in the past to wrestle with vital doctrines. This article aims to measure the faithfulness of Thomas Aquinas's use of the patristics with respect to the classical doctrine of the Trinity. The goal of this evaluation is to demonstrate that today's pastor-theologian must be conversant with historic orthodox Christianity. Furthermore, this article seeks to survey the development of Trinitarian grammar in the church as being done in faithfulness to generations past rather than unconnected, innovative thought. The councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon give the church effective fruitful language to combat abuses of Scripture and set forth a proper taxonomy for Trinitarian dialogue. However, they did not develop this language in a vacuum, nor did they view themselves as forerunners of novelty. This paper aims to demonstrate that Thomas Aquinas was no different; he saw himself as receiving the baton of pro-Nicene Trinitarianism from the church before him.*

Key Words: Aquinas, Patristics, Trinity, Augustine, Classical Theism

Introduction

It is common for theological disagreements to devolve into one party accusing the other of being unbiblical. That trend is especially notable in Trinitarian disputes (see the 2016 EFS debates, for example).[2] Some have argued that

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[2] Eternal Functional Subordination/Eternal Subordination of the Son/Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission is not a monolithic position. It essentially says that the obedience of the Son to the Father is not limited merely to the Incarnation, rather, it also extends to the Son's eternal relationship with the Father. Intrinsic to the eternal relationship between the Father and Son there is authority and submission. For relevant literature, see, e.g., Bruce 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); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 249–52; Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); D. Glenn Butner Jr., "Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (March 2015): 131–49; Idem., *The Son Who Learned Obedience* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018); James E. Dolezal, *All that is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Chal-*

classical theism is a grid superimposed on Scripture, ignoring its function as a guardrail. However, the rich heritage of orthodox Trinitarianism was not something the Fathers articulated in abstraction from Scripture; rather, it is a harmonization of the biblical text they cherished with their lives.[3]

Presenting Jesus as a subordinate or created deity, God without a body, or no Son at all—each is a repulsive thought to the Bible-believing Christian. What many evangelicals forget—or do not know—is the reason those thoughts are repulsive: They do not properly present the totality of Scripture. There is a reason why John 10:30 is not invalidated by John 14:28, why John 1 does not allow for a "created Son," and why John 3:16 is to be understood as teaching eternal generation. The reason these are normative conclusions in twenty-first century Christianity is because of past generations' fierce battles over the interpretation of Scripture. The Arians so over-emphasized the scriptural texts on Jesus' humanity as to damage their interpretation of those which speak of Him as consubstantial with the Father. The Sabellians so overemphasized God's oneness that they removed the simultaneity and distinction of persons in the Godhead. The Gnostics so overemphasized the deity of Jesus as to remove his true humanity. The rich Christian heritage that evangelicals have today resulted from such battles over how to properly harmonize all of Scripture.

The modern Christian church must recover and maintain the grammar of Trinitarian taxonomy so that we do not revive the errors that previous generations have already faced down.[4] So while lexical, syntactical, contextual exegesis and systematic harmonization remain the vital, foremost tasks for every student of Scripture, every responsible student also recognizes a subsequent and indispensable stage in the process of interpretation where they must employ a built-in self-check for their conclusions, whereby, they evaluate their conclusions against

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lenge of Classical Christian Theism (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 133–4; Ware and Starke, *One God in Three Persons*; Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012); Michael J. Ovey, *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility* (London: Latimer Trust, 2016).

[3] Historians have long recognized that the Fathers' focus in Trinitarian theology was Scripture: "To underpin that in sacred theology the literal sense of the Bible is fundamental, Thomas appeals again to Augustine" (Leo J. Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers in His Works* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2015], 112). As Gilles Emery explains, their conviction was to be guided "by the authority of the Holy Scriptures." "Trinitarian Theology as Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas," in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. M. Dauphinias, Barry David, and M. Levering (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 3 n10: *De Trinitate*, I.2.4; cf. XV.3.5.

[4] This is exactly the serious nature of the modern errors of EFS/ESS/ERAS.

the backdrop of the history of the faith. Many expositors today are missing this humble step in their exegetical method. They succumb to the fallacy of conflating their personal or private interpretation with divine meaning.

It is commonly held that the creeds and confessions—which undergird confessionalism—are opposed to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. This is an erroneous conclusion. A creed or confession is a norm for the faith, but one that is itself normed by Scripture. Scripture, conversely, is the norm not normed by anything outside itself. Proper, private interpretation falls between these two—it is built on the supreme authority of Scripture yet self-governed by historic orthodoxy as expressed in the creeds and confessions. For this reason, it should gravely concern the modern church if our doctrine of the Trinity were unrecognizable to—or, even worse, condemned by—historic orthodoxy.

But Much Increase Comes by the Strength of an Ox

So how should we incorporate historical theology into our private interpretation? One fundamental approach is to recognize doctrinal harmony, advancement, and agreement in the church. As an example, this article will appeal to one often deemed an enemy: Thomas Aquinas. This is no attempt to protestantize Thomas, but rather to demonstrate the vital contributions to historic Trinitarian doctrine made by one whom many Protestants might consider best absented from that stream.[5]

Instead of dismissing such influential theologians outright, Christians should be noted for their charity, fairness, and objectivity in assessing them. Herman Bavinck modeled that attitude well. In volume 2 of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Aquinas seems to be his dearest friend—Bavinck approvingly cites Thomas numerous times. Yet in volume 3 on soteriology, Aquinas is one of Bavinck's fiercest foes. Despite serious disagreements on certain other points, many Protestants have long recognized Aquinas's accuracy and invaluable contributions in theology proper. With the same intent, this article will survey how Nicene consensus was formed and summarize Aquinas's doctrine of the Trinity as an advancement of pro-Nicene orthodoxy, and finally demonstrate why the church should earnestly defend that doctrine today.

[5] Far too often, students are quick to commit the Genetic Fallacy when they come to Aquinas. They look to the man, or his body of doctrine, or even the Counter-Reformation at Trent (which appealed to Aquinas to build much of their doctrine of sacramentalism) and conclude that any theological claim from him must be invalid. Consequently, they never give his doctrine of the Trinity a fair assessment. Another mistake made from misplaced disapproval (and, quite frankly, chronological snobbery) is to commit the Composition Fallacy—that his error in certain areas invalidates his contributions in others.

Historical Grammar Development

Before engaging in the historical discussion, it is important to recognize the grammar that the early church fathers and subsequent generations applied in developing their understanding of God. We see the Fathers work with some basic categories. And while not every father held to these categories, it is important to identify each of them, so that we can better see their persistence into following generations and better understand the debates that led to their acceptance. This grammar of the early church included terms like *essence*, *persons*, *relations*, and *missions*. And while we will clarify the definition of each term, and not merely within its historical context, it is important to recognize the unavoidable presupposition of the pre-modern church: "St. Thomas maintains that one can know neither what God is (*quid*) nor how God is (*quomodo*); one can grasp only that God is (*quia est*), what God is not (*quid non est*), and how He is not (*quomodo non est*)."[6]

That astute summary puts the exegete and historical theologian in a proper place. Man cannot know God as He is, nor define Him however he sees fit. For example, the Fathers recognized that defining the persons of the Godhead cannot be done via experience, by looking at what we think constitutes personhood in man and then superimposing that back onto God—a practice fraught with pitfalls. Rather, defining the persons is best done by first understanding divine processions, which then prepares the student to consider and define relations.

Furthermore, the terms used for each of the distinct processions do not reflect mere philosophical conjecture but are taken verbatim from the pages of Scripture. The Father begets, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from both.[7] Historically the term *procession* has been used in two ways: generally, to define modes of origin (that is, generically to distinguish the processions), and more specifically in speaking about the Spirit.[8] Scripture gives language such as *generating* and *generation* to the Father and Son, and Aquinas adds, of the Spirit, "[b]ut this procession can be called spiration, since it is the

[6] Emery, "Trinitarian Theology as Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas," 22–3.

[7] John 1:14; 8:42; 15:26; Hebrews 1:5 (Psalm 2:7); Isaiah 48:16, et al.

[8] Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52. For more on the matter of *modes of origin* see: J. Warren Smith, "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), who writes, "Modes of God's being differs significantly from Sabellius' 'modes of God's self-revelation.' For the modalist, the persons are the way the one God reveals himself in history, but are not real and eternal distinctions within the Godhead. For the Cappadocians by contrast, the persons are real distinctions within God" (116).

procession of the Spirit."[9]

Broadly speaking, philosophers and theologians alike have viewed relations in two major categories: quantity and action.[10] God's relations cannot be defined by quantity, since that would necessitate either tritheism or posit greater and lesser in God (in which case, that which is greater is truly God, and that which is lesser would not be God). So quantity "is incompatible with the consubstantiality of the divine persons."[11] Hence the only distinct relations possible in God are those of action. In short, only action can entail a dual relation that is adequate to define divine relations.

Against a host of historical errors, Aquinas distinguished between two kinds of action: immanent and transitive. *Immanent* refers to God's action which remains *ad intra*, whereas God's *transitive* action explains God's work *ad extra*. So God's processions are immanent act, whereas God's missions in the economy of redemption are transitive act. Aquinas notes:

> Some have understood this procession in the sense of an effect proceeding from its cause; so Arius took it, saying that the Son proceeds from the Father as the first amongst his creatures, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as the creature of both. But then, neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit would be true God.[12]

Arius and Sabellius mistook procession to be an *ad extra* expression, when it is properly an immanent action.[13] Some protest this framework and its terms as pagan philosophy imposed on, rather than derived from, Scripture, but historians and theologians routinely deny this.[14] Heresies are fundamentally philosophical errors at heart, even if they are disguised under the noble banner of "biblicism."

Another important note is that relations of origin determine the order, but the order should not be confused with any idea of supremacy, authority, or priority. This confusion is a hallmark of the modern novelty that is EFS/ESS/ERAS.

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[9] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), I.27.4 *ad* 3. Hereafter, *ST*.

[10] Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. John H. McMahon (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), 90–122. Book V.

[11] Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 55.

[12] *ST* I.27.1.

[13] *ST* I.27.1.

[14] Everyone has a philosophy. See, Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Crossway, 2012). Emery helpfully said, "This doctrine has nothing in common with Gnostic philosophizing." *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58 n37: . . . St. Hilary (*De Trinitate* VI.9; SC, 488, 182–5) and Augustine (*De haeresibus* 11; CCSL 46, 295–6). Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, II.28.6.

As Aquinas notes: "The Father has no priority in relation to the Son: neither in duration, nor in nature, nor conceptually, nor in dignity . . . There is no priority whatsoever of one person over another in God."[15]

Aquinas and the Church Fathers

What sets Aquinas apart from many contemporary theologians is his willingness to have his contemplative theology evaluated by the historical norm. He regularly tells his readers that his aim is historical fidelity. Aquinas scholars commonly affirm, "St. Thomas presents his speculative Trinitarian doctrine as an extension or personal development of the teaching of the fathers, and of St. Augustine in particular."[16] Thus it is a rather simple matter of evaluation to see if Aquinas held true to his intention. Was he faithful, or did he deviate?

First and Second Centuries

Though the term *Trinity* is not used until Tertullian, we see interesting developments in Trinitarian language during the first few centuries of the church. What we find, primarily in the apologists, is a focus on unity in the Godhead and that "persons" were commonly referenced, though not with the specificity that would later be termed *relations of origin*.[17] The early church, especially the Greek fathers, was heavily influenced by Platonic philosophy.[18] This uniquely influenced how expressions of Trinitarianism developed.

As many new Christians were wrestling with different passages of Scripture, they quickly recognized the deity of the Father and the Son. This has been described as "binitarian" theology.[19] We see affirmations of the divinity of the Father and the Son clearly in the New Testament and recognized in the church's writings by Clement of Rome, Polycarp, and Ignatius.[20]

[15] Cited in Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 71 n95: *I Sent*. D.9, q.2, a.1; d. 12, q.1, a.1.

[16] Emery, "Trinitarian Theology as Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas," 1.

[17] Sometimes called *modes of origin*; not to be confused with modalism. See J. Warren Smith "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers," 116.

[18] Leo Elders, "The Greek Christian Authors and Aristotle," in *Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, ed. Larence P. Schrenk (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1994), 111–42.

[19] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 52–3.

[20] For a list of helpful resources on this period see: Thomas G. Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the *Imago Dei*: The Importance of Being Human," *Logos*, 6:15–34; interestingly related, see: Thomas G. Weinandy, *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries* (London: T. & T. Clark Publ., 2005); *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in Early Christian Fathers, ed. and trans. Cyril Richardson (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 149–60; St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin*

In the following generation of Christian theology, the desire to harmonize the biblical texts which speak of one God with those that refer to distinct persons as God necessitated greater precision of thought and expression. In his attempt, Justin Martyr built what has been termed "Logos theology."[21] Justin, recognizing two persons (at least) in Scripture who are God, articulates that reality as if the Father were the transcendent one in heaven and the Son were the immanent one on earth. This unfortunately leads to subordinationism, as it mirrors the Platonic framework.[22] That in turn has resulted in the broad-brush categorization of second-generation theologians as mere Greek philosophers. Yet we should hesitate to dismiss them as entirely pagan Platonic thinkers, since "Justin's Logos theology is not about Stoicism, Middle Platonism, or Platonic Hellenistic Judaism; rather it is about Jesus Christ."[23] Furthermore, it is important to note that the emphasis of Trinitarian theology in the second century was largely on economy.[24]

Third Century

The third phase of Trinitarian debate was against not pagan philosophy but other Christians. Two major errors arose from interpretive mistakes of the biblical data: modalism (Monarchianism, Sabellianism) and Gnosticism (addressed even in the New Testament). Three major figures arose in this debate to help correct these mishandlings of God's Word: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.

Irenaeus helped to identify the Gnostic fallacy of dividing God from the

Martyr and Irenaeus, trans. M. Dods, et al., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, First Series. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 315–567; Stephen M. Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 95–6.

[21] L. W. Barnard, "The Logos Theology of St Justin Martyr," *The Downside Review*, 89, no. 295 (1971): 132–41.

[22] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, 52–3. He writes, "There are a fairly consistent linkage and subordination of Jesus to God 'the Father' in these circles, evident even in the Christian texts from the latter decades of the 1st century that are commonly regarded as a very 'high' Christology, such as the Gospel of John and Revelation. This is why I referred to this Jesus-devotion as a 'binitarian' form of monotheism: there are two distinguishable figures (God and Jesus), but they are posited in a relation to each other that seems intended to avoid the ditheism of two gods."

[23] Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," 97. Hildebrand helpfully points to C. Baechle, "A Reappraisal of the Christology of St Justin Martyr" (PhD dissertation, Fordham University, Bronx, NY: 2009), for more detail.

[24] Theophilus of Antioch is a common example of such. Heavy Platonic influence is still very noticeable. For further research on this see: R. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 167.

Son and the Spirit. Drawing upon John 1, he refused to allow for a theology that divided the members of the Godhead or placed one in subordination to another.[25] Therefore, establishing the *co-existence* of the members of the Godhead was an important doctrine for Irenaeus. As he noted, "the Word, that is the Son, was always with the Father," and, "the Son, eternally co-existing with the Father . . . ."[26] This thinking obviously became a patter for articulating eternal generation in subsequent generations.

It has rightly been observed that "Clement [of Alexandria]'s problem, then, comes not from philosophy but from revelation, though he uses Middle Platonic philosophy to help answer the problem."[27] It may be that he was the first to apply metaphysics to the relations between the Father and Son to avoid the errors of modalism or Gnosticism. However, Clement seems subject to the pitfalls of subordinationism, which his predecessors and many of his contemporaries successfully avoided. Stephen M. Hildebrand explains, "Thus the Son is a metaphysical mediator, ontologically subordinate to the One as he brings the many into contact with it."[28]

Origen, like many others who imperfectly handled the biblical data, articulated that the Son is begotten of the Father's will.[29] His mistaken theory would become the driving philosophy behind Arius's claims. However, unlike Arius, Origen expressed the eternal existence of the Son without a beginning.[30] While Clement of Alexandria introduced some problematic interpretations of Scripture in the West, we see a clearer harmony (though still not as well refined as in later generations) of those same biblical texts in Tertullian.[31] In addition to

[25] See more on why Irenaeus was anti-subordinationism: D. Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: T&R Clark, 2010), 63–4.

[26] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 488, 406.

[27] Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," 102.

[28] Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," 102, also explains that not everyone agrees that Clement of Alexandria fell into too heavy a form of subordinationism as presented by R. Feulner, *Clemens von Alexandrien. Sein Leben Werk und philosophisch-theologisches Denken*, Bamberger theologische Studien, 31 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 164–67. I agree with Hilderbrand's assessment, but I believe the reason was largely due to Clement of Alexanderia's hermeneutical approach as much as his use of Middle Platonic philosophy.

[29] Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," 103.

[30] Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 314. 4.4.1. However, historians have recognized clear subordinationist sayings in Origen. For more sources on subordination in Origen see: Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," 104.

[31] It is also important to note that Tertullian and others saw themselves as standing in continuity with those who came before them. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "Tertullian and the beginnings of the doctrine of the Trinity," *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, eds. Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, and William Park Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 4:1–109.

being identified as the first theologian to use the term *Trinity*, he introduced an idea of *relations* between the persons of the Godhead (later developed more clearly and biblically by Augustine). Tertullian also introduced a guiding formula of "one substance in three persons" that would be developed later in Nicaea and Constantinople. He said they are three "not in condition [*statu*], but in degree [*gradu*], not in substance [*substantia*], but in form [*forma*], not in power [*potestate*], but in aspect [*specie*]; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power."[32]

Fourth Century

The fourth and fifth centuries saw an establishment of appropriate terminology for discussing God that has shaped theological formulation and grammar to this day.[33] The Trinity received its greatest focus during the fourth century—a time of significant world-historical events, plentiful enemies, strange political and theological alliances, and vital definitional development.[34] The major contributions of a few theologians stand out as Trinitarian grammar set the guardrails within which successive generations have functioned. It is important to remember,

> [T]he logic of Nicaea that seemed incontrovertible in 381 was not so obvious in 318. The language and logic of the grammar unfolded gradually in the theological imagination of Nicaea's supporters and critics alike. Therefore, the fourth-century doctrine of the Trinity must be seen as a work in progress and so its evolution needs to be traced out chronologically.[35]

The fires of Trinitarian controversy were stoked by disagreements over how to handle certain Christological texts. The notorious presbyter Arius infamously contended that "there was a time when the Son was not." His was an attempt to preserve the monotheism of texts such as Deuteronomy 6:4 (also Mark 12:29; John 17:3; Eph. 4:6; etc.). But to reconcile the oneness of God with other texts that

[32] Tertullian, *Against Prazeas*, trans. P. Holmes, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 598.

[33] As with their predecessors, it has been observed that these generations of theologians continued to be heavily Platonic. Elders, *Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 1.

[34] For a few resources that cover the history in more detail see Smith, "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers," 109–22; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Khaled Anatolios and Brian Daley, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Smith's was the most succinct treatment.

[35] Smith, "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers," 110.

spoke of Jesus' humanity—his real birth, his human emotions—Arius declared that the Son was a created being. He said, "[A]t the will of God, [he was] created before times and before ages, and gaining life and being from the Father."[36] While Arius did teach that the Son was created, he also taught that Jesus was unique, not a created being just like all other created beings. Arius used two primary texts to support his view for the Son's creaturehood: Proverbs 8:22–31 and Colossians 1:15.[37] He also highlighted texts that putatively show the Son to be lesser than the Father, such as John 14:28 and Mark 13:32.[38] Roman emperor Constantine wanted theological consensus to resolve these matters, which resulted in the famous Council of Nicaea, AD 325. Ultimately Arianism was weighed, ruled to be outside the bounds of orthodoxy, and condemned as heresy.

Athanasius

Athanasius's contribution is crucial to seeing how this debate developed. He is the natural starting point, since he was the assistant and deacon to Alexander of Alexandria at the First Council of Nicaea.[39] Athanasius eventually succeeded Alexander as bishop, all the while defending Trinitarianism against the vastly more popular Arianism, even when that doctrine was espoused by Constantine's son, Emperor Constantius II. That first council agreed upon the creed, "We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being." The key to the debate, which Athanasius stressed, was that Jesus is *homoousios* (of the same substance) with the Father, controverting Arius's claim that Jesus is merely *homoiousios* (of like substance) with the Father. Such an important distinction was made using one letter in a Greek philosophical term, yet the difference was unequivocal.

While Athanasius laid the groundwork in 325 at Nicaea, no full consensus was reached during his lifetime. In fact, Arianism and its ugly stepchild semi-Arianism were revived many times by men such as Aëtius and Eunomius after

[36] Arius, "*Letter to Alexander*," Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 4:458.

[37] It is interesting to point out that these were the same texts Origen used in order to highlight the unique status of Christ. However, Origen stopped short of claiming that Jesus was a created being.

[38] This trend is akin to EFS/ESS/ERAS proponents today, except to highlight the Father's "priority," "authority," or "superiority" over the Son.

[39] He served for 45 years. Of those, he spent 17 in exile on five different occasions, at the behest of four different emperors for his—at the time—controversial positions.

Athanasius's and Arius's deaths. It took the Cappadocian fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus), with their contributions in the First Council of Constantinople (381), to produce the final version of the creed that remains a monument of orthodox Trinitarianism—the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The contributions of these men, along with Athanasius beforehand and Augustine afterward, provide a unity for doctrinal definitions of the Trinity that remains, without a doubt, the standard of Trinitarian taxonomy by which all controversy is measured. Still, Arius's monster would not so readily die. Men such as Hilary of Poitiers and the Cappadocian fathers further developed Trinitarian orthodoxy from the pages of Scripture, assuming the mantle of Athanasius in defense of the biblical Trinity in the fourth century.

The Cappadocian Fathers

The Cappadocian fathers were Basil of Caesarea (329–379), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390). These men each wrote treatises on both the unity of the Godhead and the proper way to distinguish the divine persons. Their contributions to Trinitarian orthodoxy were no mere academic exercises but were deeply entrenched in, and concerned with, the preservation of the gospel. To preface a detailed look at their contributions with a summary, we see their harmony in three brief statements: Basil wrote, "The term *ousia* is common . . . while *hypostasis* is contemplated in the special property of Fatherhood, Sonship, or the power to sanctify."[40]

Gregory of Nazianzus explained, "The Godhead is one in three, and the three are one, in whom the Godhead is, or to speak more accurately, who are the Godhead."[41] Gregory of Nyssa similarly reasoned, "Our Lord is the maker of all things, that He is King of the universe, set above it not by an arbitrary act of capricious power, but ruling by virtue of a superior nature; and besides this, we will find that the one First Cause, as taught by us, is not divided by any unlikeness of substance into separate first causes, but one Godhead, one Cause, one Power over all things is believed in . . . ."[42]

[40] St Basil, *Letters, Volume 2* (186–368), in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Agnes Clare Way, with notes by Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), *Letter* 214.4. Hereafter *Letters, Volume 2*.

[41] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations* 39, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:355–56 (*Oration* 39.11). Hereafter *Oration*.

[42] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. trans. William Moore, Henry Austin Wilson, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 5:84.

Notably, this era lacked scholastic organization and was built almost entirely through polemical writings. As a result, it deals wonderfully with specific errors, but in others did not leave even a simple definitional framework. This period exhibits a strict terminology built upon the Nicene Creed that the church used to distinguish, yet harmonize, those texts in Scripture that speak of the oneness of God and those that reference three distinct, simultaneous, co-extensive, co-eternal, consubstantial persons who are all called *God*. That drove the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers to develop the necessary language for discussing the Trinity. The term *ousia* (along with *phusis,* meaning "nature") best encapsulates the divine unity: what is one in God. This was later referred to as God's substance, essence, nature, or being. In like manner, *prosopon* distinguishes the threeness of God, later referred to as person(s) or subsistence(s).

These two categories of how God is one in a certain respect and three in another were necessary for the church to maintain and articulate Scripture's testimony about God (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; Eph. 4:4–6; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4–5). Additionally, those terms helped keep aberrant views at bay; any view that misunderstood the category of essence, or person, or both, was examined and rejected. Still, the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*, or even the proper way to define the *hypostasis* of the Father, Son, and Spirit, do not appear in texts like Matthew 28:19 or Deuteronomy 6:4. We have inherited the proper taxonomy to describe the Trinity (essence and persons) from the early church, and for that we are greatly in its debt.

To harmonize such texts, allowing the exegetical data of each to remain and without removing or distorting other texts, is to engage in *theologia*. *Theologia* refers to the mysteries of God's nature as He is in Himself, sometimes called God's incommunicable attributes or nature. An example of *theologia* is how we define *ousia*. *Oikonomia*, in contrast, refers to the manner of revelation or how God has made Himself known.[43] We must be careful not to collapse these categories or to confuse them—and the Cappadocians provide superior examples in preserving that delicate balance and precision.

Basil of Caesarea

Basil's contribution of the categorical differences between essence (or nature) and persons cannot be overlooked. He thoroughly explains that natures are common,

[43] Basil is engaged in *theologia*, Lewis Ayres explains, "In discussing the 'Cappadocians,' much is often made of the distinction between θεολογία and οικονόμια. Some caution is required here. Basil generally uses θεολογία as a mode of insight into the nature of God that comes as a result of an ability to see beyond material reality, or beyond the material-sounding phraseology of some scriptural passages." *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 220.

while persons specify qualities of a nature. His concern is that the biblical text be delicately handled, to avoid its misuse. He explains this concern in his *Letters*, where he says, "It must well be understood that, as he who does not confess a community of substance falls into polytheism, so too he who does not grant the individuality of the Persons is carried away into Judaism."[44] Basil achieved this proper biblical balance in his clear theological grammar, which distinguished between the one *ousia* (essence/nature) and the three subnumerations (subsistences/persons) of God.[45]

Basil correctly appropriated the Greek technical terms that good and necessary consequence demanded to properly express what Scripture says to be true about God without requiring the diminution or manipulation of any biblical text.[46] Basil examined what was common among the persons and what was distinct. In his AD 377 letter to Amphilochius of Iconium, he wrote,

> The distinction between ὀύσία and ὑπόστασις is the same as that between general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man. Wherefore, in the case of the Godhead, we confess one essence or substance so as not to give a variant definition of existence, but we confess a particular hypostasis, in order that our conception of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be without confusion and clear.[47]

That sort of reasoning was an important feature of his letters and permeates Basil's writings. It is most famously expressed in his work *On the Holy Spirit*, which also showcases his habit of using a human to illustrate the difference between what is common and what is proper. "Essence, for instance, is a common noun, predicable of all things both animate and inanimate; while animal is more specific, being predicated of fewer subjects than the former . . . as it embraces both rational and irrational nature. Again, human is more specific than animal, and man than human, and than man the individual Peter, Paul, or John."[48] The

[44] See St Basil, *Letters*, *Volume 1* (1-185), in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P with notes by Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1977), 210. *Letter* 69.2. Hereafter *Letters, Volume 1*.

[45] Basil is quick to point out that *subnumerations* does not mean divisions of subordinate parties, which he says even the madmen would not dare say.

[46] On Basil's unique use of Greek philosophical language to advance Trinitarian orthodoxy see: Stephen Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 98–9.

[47] Basil, *Letter CCXXXVI*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:278.

[48] Basil, *On the Spirit*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace

essence of what makes a man a man brings to mind all the common qualities that men share. However, these qualities do not distinguish Peter from Paul or Mary; a qualifier is necessary to distinguish persons from one another who have the same nature. This, Basil called a *specific characterization*.[49] This specific characterization (also known as a *subsistence*) is a way to speak about a certain person who participates in human nature. Basil concludes:

> This, therefore, is our explanation. That which is spoken of in the specific sense is signified by the word "person" [hypóstasis]. For, because of the indefiniteness of the term, he who says "man" has introduced through our hearing some vague idea, so that, although the nature is manifested by the name, that which subsists in the nature and is specifically designated by the name is not indicated. On the other hand, he who says "Paul" has shown the subsistent nature of the object signified by the name. This, then, is the "person" [hypóstasis]. It is not the indefinite notion of "substance" [ousia], which creates no definite image because of the generality of its significance, but it is that which, through the specific qualities evident in it, restricts and defines in a certain object the general and indefinite, as is often done in many places in Scripture and especially in the story of Job.[50]

Many have recognized that Basil is using the general language of predicables as a way to distinguish terms handed down from Aristotle.[51]

Basil's categories become helpful to distinguish differences between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. This enables us to speak of the Father as "unbegotten," without making that a moniker of essence but rather an expression of his unique hypostasis. As Basil asserts, "God, who is over all things has His own mark of differentiation which characterizes His subsistence; and this is that He alone is Father; He alone has His hypostasis underived from any cause."[52]

The unique *relation* (although this term would not come until later) of the Son is that He is the begotten One; the unbegotten God's hypostatic Image and Word. Basil wrote:

(Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:26.

[49] Basil, *Letters, Volume 1*, 13:85. He calls this same principle "subnumeration" (Basil, *On the Spirit*, 8:26–27).

[50] Basil, *Letters*, *Volume 1*, 13:85–6.

[51] Basil *On the Spirit*, 8:26. See FN 1 in Column 2 for a good paraphrase of this observation.

[52] Basil, *Letters, Volume 1*, 80. Also, *Letter* 38.4.

> The Son, Who declares the Spirit proceeding from the Father through Himself and with Himself, shining forth alone and by only-begetting from the unbegotten light, so far as the peculiar notes are concerned, has nothing in common either with the Father or with the Holy Spirit. He alone is known by the stated signs.[53]

And the unique manner of speaking of the subsistence of the Spirit is that He ". . . proceeds. [The Spirit] has this note of its peculiar hypostatic nature, that it is known after the Son and together with the Son, and that it has its subsistence of the Father."[54]

To summarize, what characterizes Basil is his consistency to distinguish essence (*ousia*) as what is common, while person (*hypostasis*) specifies a relation, thereby allowing us to distinguish the generic essence of deity from the individual *hypostasis* or specific characterization of each of the persons of God. Basil's letters and polemics were written before the First Council of Constantinople in 381.[55] He would also die three years prior to that council, therefore leaving the battle against the various Eastern and Western subordinationist groups to be fought by the ecumenical orthodoxy of the two Gregories.[56] Some refer to this as the "pro-Nicene" consensus,[57] an ecumenical harmony that bridged the Greek-Latin divide and is best represented by Gregory of Nyssa and, later, Augustine of Hippo.

Gregory of Nyssa

In Gregory of Nyssa's letter *On Not Three Gods* he seeks to answer an objection Ablabius raised: "The argument which you state is something like this:—Peter, James, and John being in one human nature, are called three men: and there is no absurdity in describing those who are united in nature, if they are more than one, by the plural number derived from their nature."[58] In short, if God is three persons, then it seems fair to say there are three gods.

To combat this misunderstanding, Gregory appeals to the doctrine which would later be termed *inseparable operations* as a way to correct Ablabius's mistake—a method which would subsequently become standard when

[53] Basil, *Letters, Volume 1*, 80.

[54] Basil, *Letters, Volume 1*, 80.

[55] Charles Freeman, *A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans, and the Christian State* (Abrams Press, 2009), 91–104.

[56] M. Wiles, *Archetypal Hersey: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27–40.

[57] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 236.

[58] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods to Ablabius*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 5:331

defending Trinitarian monotheism. Gregory argues,

> In the case of men, those who share with one another in the same pursuits are enumerated and spoken of in the plural, while on the other hand the Deity is spoken of in the singular as one God and one Godhead . . . in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to the Creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. . . . Yet what does come to pass is not three things . . . so neither can we call those who exercise this Divine and superintending power and operation toward ourselves and all creation, conjointly and inseparably, by their mutual action, three Gods.[59]

While Gregory of Nyssa advances much of what Athanasius and Basil articulated, and while the other Fathers utilized like argumentation, Nyssa is most notable for his reliance on inseparable operations to defend Trinitarian monotheism.

Gregory of Nazianzus

The Cappadocians passionately and pastorally defended the Trinity. There is no clearer expression of this than Gregory of Nazianzus in his *Baptism Orations*, where he not only commissions the baptized to "share and defend all your life" but includes these profound truths:

> No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illuminated by the Splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When

[59] Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods to Ablabius*, 5:334–5. He further states, "If these Persons, then, are inseparate from each other, how great is the folly of these men who undertake to sunder this indivisibility by certain distinctions of time, and so are to divide the Inseparable as to assert confidently, 'The Father alone, through the Son alone, made all things'. . . ." 5:319. For more on inseparable operations see: Peter Sammons, "When Distinction Becomes Separation: The Doctrine of Inseparable Operation in the Contemporary Evangelical Church" *TMSJ* 33/1 (Spring 2022) 75–97; more importantly: Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

> I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.[60]

One of the points of Trinitarian doctrine that characterized all of the fourth-century fathers is the teaching of the deity of the Holy Spirit as a means to properly expound Nicene orthodoxy. All of the Cappadocians produced works on the Holy Spirit, but the best-rounded Trinitarian expression in that polemical age was Gregory's *Five Theological Orations*.

The Cappadocians were concerned with the lingering influence of Arianism and its refrain, "There was a time when the Son was not." Gregory masterfully responds, "If ever there was a time when the Father was not, then there was a time when the Son was not. If ever there was a time when the Son was not, then there was a time when the Spirit was not. If the One was from the beginning, then the Three were so too."[61]

Gregory also contributes to Trinitarian grammar by establishing the language of *processions*. His exegetical method in drawing from the Greek text of John 15:26 provided a theological synthesis that had been absent from many of his predecessors' work. For example, Gregory, employing procession language in Trinitarian taxonomy, wrote, "The Holy Ghost, which proceeds from the Father; Who, inasmuch as He proceeds from That Source, is no Creature; and inasmuch as He is not Begotten is no Son; and inasmuch as He is between the Unbegotten and the Begotten is God."[62] Here, the language Scripture employs is helpful in defining the different persons: Unbegotten, Begotten, Proceeding. Because the Spirit is not "begotten" but "proceeds from" the Father and Son, therefore the Son and the Spirit are not one and the same. Emery notes, regarding this language: " 'Procession' enables one to attach the economy, that is, the 'procession of creatures,' to its origin in the inner-Trinitarian-ness of the divine persons."[63]

In the *Third Theological Oration: On the Son*, Gregory contrasts the order in the Godhead between "anarchy" and "monarchy." He asserts, "It is, however, a Monarchy that is not limited to one Person."[64] This means that in the single

[60] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration on Holy Baptism* 41, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:375 (*Oration* 40.41).

[61] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations* 5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:318 (*Oration* 5.4).

[62] Nazianzus, *Oration* 5.8, 7:320.

[63] Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 40.

[64] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations* 3, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody,

monarchy there is no division of substance. Clearly grounding the definitions of the persons in biblical language, he explains, "This is what we mean by Father and Son and Holy Ghost. The Father the Begetter and Emitter; without passion, of course, and without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner. The Son is the Begotten, and the Holy Ghost is the Emission."[65] Defining the persons in this manner was a way to maintain a biblical tether, seeking to prevent definitions of Father, Son, and Spirit drawn—in error—from human experience.

Fifth Century

Trinitarian advancements of the fifth century find their locus in Augustine's work. Continuing this rich tradition, Augustine also furthered Pro-Nicene Trinitarianism against lingering Arianism. In *On the Trinity* he wrote, "Whatever . . . is spoken of God in respect to himself, is both spoken singly of each person, that is, of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and together of the Trinity itself, not plurally but in the singular."[66]

What we also find in Augustine is that more categorical definitions become normalized. Augustine helped set trajectories for classical theism with his focus on God's essence, in that God is simple, timeless, and immutable. In this respect, Augustine helped set a standard in hermeneutics that still guides and guards Christian theism today. This interpretive rule is that of accommodations: that things which are true of creatures are "accidents" in us while "inherent and necessary" in God.[67] For example, consider that God's love is categorically different from ours. God is love, so love is predicated of God by necessity, whereas creatures happen to have it to one degree or another, but it is not our essence. Furthermore, when it comes to such properties in creatures, they are different from one another, while in God they are one and the same divine essence. Augustine made the doctrine of divine simplicity a manner for defending Trinitarianism. It has been observed that "Augustine's contribution to this tradition is to reflect on how the paradox of distinction without division presents itself to thought

MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:301 (*Oration* 3.2).

[65] Nazianzus, *Oration* 3.2.

[66] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 3:92. 5.8.9.

[67] Richard Barcellos, *Trinity and Creation* (Eugene:Wipf and Stock, 2020), "A better, more technically precise word than "inherent" is "intrinsic," since nothing actually or really inheres in God" (13). See Bernard Wuellner, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2012), 61, where the entrance for "inherence" reads as follows: "existence in another being as in a subject of being or as a modification of another being. Accidents are said to inhere in substance"; and 64, where the entrance for "intrinsic" reads: "1. pertaining to the nature of a thing or person; constitutive. 2. contained or being within; internal. 3. inherent." I'm indebted to Richard Barcellos for pointing out this note to me.

when we consider what it means for the Father to generate a Son who shares all that the Father is within the divine simplicity."[68]

Augustine then applied this concept to the question concerning the terms *Father* and *Son*. God cannot be "Father" and "Son" accidentally. It is difficult to prove this as an essential feature, so Augustine suggested that the persons of Father, Son, and Spirit are differentiated by *relations*.[69] The Father is in relation to the Son with begetting/begotten language, and Augustine presented the Spirit's dual procession from both the Father and Son.[70] He argued that the Bible implicitly teaches this kind of Trinitarianism.[71]

Furthermore, Augustine's helpful articulation of *relations* as the proper way to define the Father, Son, and Spirit intra-Trinitarian relations led him to conclude,

> Wherefore let us hold this above all, that whatsoever is said of that most eminent and divine loftiness in respect to itself, is said in respect to substance, but that which is said in relation to anything, is not said in respect to substance, but relatively; and that the effect of the same substance in Father and Son and Holy Spirit is, that whatsoever is said of each in respect to themselves, is to be taken of them, not in the plural in sum, but in the singular.[72]

The language of relations in Augustine was prominently articulated in procession terminology.

Augustine further developed the *relations* by clarifying the aforementioned

[68] Lewis Ayres, "Augustine on The Trinity," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 123.

[69] It is interesting to note that Augustine considers, but ultimately rejects, the idea that all truth claims about God must be relational (Books V–VII). This is something the mutualistic theist, relational theist, or biblical personalism groups would do well to pay attention to.

[70] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 15.17.29. Furthermore, Augustine said, "For that which is begotten of the simple Good is simple as itself, and the same as itself. These two we call the Father and the Son; and both together with the Holy Spirit are one God . . . . And this Trinity is one God; and none the less simple because a Trinity." Augustine, *City of God*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:210. XI.10.

[71] Augustine uses the scriptural designations for the First and Second persons of the Godhead to explain how the distinction between persons and essence are implicit in these designations. There is a plurality of persons and yet one essence. He says, "And hence they are not therefore not one essence, because the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father, or because the Father is unbegotten, but the Son is begotten: since by these names only their *relative* attributes are expressed. But both together are one wisdom and one essence." Augustine, *On The Trinity*, 3:107. VII.3.

[72] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 3:91. V.8.9. Aquinas helpfully explained that these relations are incomprehensible to men, as we will see later.

question regarding procession: If the Son and Spirit both proceed—since procession can be used in a generic sense—from the Father, what differentiates the Son and the Spirit? R*elations*, especially dual procession, help distinguish the second and third persons of the Godhead. He explains, "Therefore He (the Father) so begat Him (the Son) as that the common Gift should proceed from Him also, and the Holy Spirit should be the Spirit of both. This distinction, then, of the inseparable Trinity is not to be merely accepted in passing, but to be carefully considered."[73]

While Augustine made many contributions, one of the more important relates to the question, Why was the Son sent and not the Father? Augustine's answer explains that missions are defined by processions.[74] He said,

> But if the Son is said to be sent by the Father on this account, that the one is the Father, and the other the Son, this does not in any manner hinder us from believing the Son to be equal, and consubstantial, and co-eternal with the Father, and yet to have been sent as Son by the Father. Not because the one is greater, the other less; but because the one is Father, the other Son; the one begetter, the other begotten; the one, He from whom He is who is sent; the other, He who is from Him who sends. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son.[75]

Here is evidenced both Augustine's hesitance and his precision. He would not allow the employment of any form of subordination language in describing the missions from the eternal processions. But it is common fare in modern culture to do precisely that—that is, read missions from the biblical text back onto the persons, or even worse, to read from the creation back onto the creator.[76]

Middle Ages

In the period from Augustine to Aquinas, Trinitarianism was guarded well. The ecumenical centralization of Christianity ensured that the boundaries of cardinal doctrines, such as the Trinity, were kept in check by the creeds until the Protestant Reformation. Those creeds continued to guide the magisterial Reformers and puritans as well; in fact, the Protestant confessions restate the early ecumenical creeds with only minor additions. Those additions largely sprung

[73] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 3:216. XV.19.29.

[74] Ayres, "Augustine on The Trinity," 126.

[75] Augustine, *On The Trinity*, 3:83. IV.20.27.

[76] This is precisely what EFS/ESS/ERAS advocates do when they define the Father/Son relation as authority/submission.

from Aquinas's contributions to subsequent generations' attempts to codify and define what Augustine had presented in his sermons.

How did the church determine what was important to stress in Trinitarian theology? I often ask my students the non-negotiables of a definition for the Trinity, and in large part—whether they realize it or not—their answers draw heavily from Thomas Aquinas's influence on Trinitarian theology. He helpfully distilled the many concepts found in the early fathers by saying, "Three truths must be known about the divinity: first the unity of the divine essence, secondly the Trinity of persons, and thirdly the effects wrought by the divinity."[77]

The rule of God's transcendence articulated in Scripture as God's incomprehensibility is often described in theology as God *ad intra* versus God *ad extra*, or the immanent versus economic Trinity. However, when discussing God's *ad intra* nature and the processions, action is essential to describe those intra-Trinitarian relations. Augustine famously used the concept of love to do so. But importantly, since the divine persons and inner relations are not dependent on anything in creation, it is inappropriate to collapse the economic work back onto the eternal Godhead to describe those persons and relations.[78]

The ancient errors all confused the *ad intra* work of God with his *ad extra* work, and in abrogating that delicate difference made God's eternal relations (or processions) like God's temporal actions in the world.[79] Aquinas termed these different actions *immanent* for those which remain internal, and *transitive* for the external reality outside the acting agent.[80] But the two, while distinct, are related, for the immanent action is the ground for the transitive action.[81]

Aquinas's distinctions regarding the three necessary affirmations of Trinitarianism are borrowed from the early church. The first two affirmations (unity of essence and trinity of persons) are evident, for example, in Basil and in Gregory of Nazianzus. Basil has been summarized saying, "The divinity is common, but the paternity and the filiation are properties (*idiomata*); and combining of the two elements, the common (*koinon*) and the proper (*idion*), brings about in us

[77] Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: B. Herder Books, 1947), 5.

[78] Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 40.

[79] "For this reason, the Trinitarian treatise begins precisely by showing that one ought not to conceive the procession of the divine persons like a divine action in the world, but like an immanent action brought about within God." Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 41. While Emery does not mention this, it is precisely the concern and criticism against the new heterodoxy of EFS/ERAS.

[80] Aquinas, *ST* I.27.1.

[81] Aquinas, *ST* I.32.1,*ad* 3.

the comprehension of the truth."[82] There the distinction between common and proper is observable. The common speaks to the essence of God, whereas the proper speaks to each person. More from Basil: "The substance (*ousia*) relates to the hypostasis (*hypostasis*) as the common (*koinon*) relates to the proper (*idion*)."[83] In like fashion, Gregory of Nazianzus said, "We use in an orthodox sense the terms one Essence and three Hypostases, the one to denote the nature of the Godhead, the other the properties of the Three."[84]

Basil famously expressed these affirmations using the imagery of light. He designated the Father as light unbegotten, the Son as light begotten, and the Spirit as light proceeding. There is one light, but the appropriate adjectives express the persons as distinguished from one another. We see therein the essential dual affirmations: the unity of the divine essence and the distinction of persons without a separation. The church continues to distinguish without separation. There is a reason these concepts are ordered, with common preceding proper, and why so many have taught the Trinity in a similar manner—besides its being a helpful way to avoid Tritheism.

The dissolution of that logical order underlies another EFS misstep: Proponents of that system err in beginning with our concept of fatherhood to shape their understanding of God the Father. They carry the same issue over into formulating how Father and Son relate, by leaning too heavily on our human experience as their starting point. Helpfully, Emery says, "We cannot grasp the person of the Father just by conceiving his typical characteristic or property: we think of the Father as a person who subsists in the divine being; that is as a person who is God. . . . Our knowledge of the property of the person presupposes and includes the knowledge of the divinity of the person."[85]

Aquinas

A few further observations will help set up a study of Aquinas's contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity. First, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential. Wawrykow notes, "What is true about the one God who is three, active in the world, must be

[82] Basil, *Against Eunomius*, II. 28. First found in Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 45. See also: Basil, Mark DelCogliano, and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011). The introduction has some great summary remarks regarding Basil on the issue.

[83] Basil, *Letters, volume 2*, 205. *Letter* 214.4.

[84] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations* 21, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:279 (*Oration* 21.35).

[85] Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 47.

affirmed to attain eternal life."[86] This is no mere pedantic, academic exercise but a matter of fidelity to God's self-revelation. Second, Scripture is the foundation. The church fathers are a source for articulating its doctrine accurately only insofar as they are faithful to the total text of Scripture. Even the consensus of the Fathers on a topic does not give an absolute guide or conclusion.[87]

Aquinas saw himself standing well within the stream of continuity and desired to be measured by it. Elders writes, "The numerous quotations from the Fathers in the works of Aquinas were meant to establish the doctrinal elaboration of a theme on the solid foundation of the authentic tradition of the Church . . . ."[88] Aquinas quoted Augustine over fifteen hundred times in the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* and over two thousand times in the *Summa Theologica*.[89] He obviously identified his teaching with that of Augustine. Thomas's reliance on the early church was precisely why the later reformed scholastics utilized him. He took the polemical work of the Cappadocians and the pastoral articulations found in Augustine and presented the same truth in a more detailed form, as is characteristic of the scholastics.

Aquinas maintained the early church's distinction between God *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Scholars have observed that he mirrors Augustine's articulation that processions determine "missions," summarizing his position as, "Acts of God *ad extra* are patterned on the inner activities of the Trinity."[90] Such proofs buttress the academic consensus that Aquinas is well in tune with the early church on the crucial points of classical theism. But it is important to notice that he did not blindly follow all that he found in the Christian tradition. He would come to augment or reject certain theological and philosophical commitments, and even methods, that the early church used. For instance, the early church fathers operated within a very Platonic metaphysic, yet with the discovery, reproduction, and study of Aristotle in the thirteenth century, scholastics in the Christian church began to reevaluate their metaphysical commitments. The great theological debate at the University of Paris between Platonism (via Augustine) and Aristotle's

[86] Joseph Wawrykow, "Franciscan and Dominican Trinitarian Theology (Thirteenth Century): Bonaventure and Aquinas," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 183. See references: *ST* I.32.1 *ad* 3; *ST* II–II.1.8, *ad* 3.

[87] Aquinas has a nuanced account of the authority of Scripture, Fathers of the Church, and philosophy, see: *ST* I.1.8, *ad* 2.

[88] Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 103.

[89] It has been observed that the scant references in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is due largely to the fact he is not speaking to Christians.

[90] Wawrykow, "Franciscan and Dominican Trinitarian Theology (Thirteenth Century): Bonaventure and Aquinas," 190.

realism was largely due to the fact that, as Elders explains, "Heretics, and especially the Arians, used the Aristotelian logic—although in a totally unjustified way—in order to attack the orthodox expression of the mysteries of the Trinity and Christ as a Divine Person, [and thus] increased the reserve of Christians with regard to Aristotle."[91]

Aquinas seemed ready to accept truths from both philosophical positions, looking for as many similarities between their commitments as possible.[92] His interest in Aristotle was toward helping him form a philosophy of man and creation,[93] since those are measurable by the senses. (An interesting contrasting paradigm is evident—between the early church leaning heavily toward Platonism for categories to explain intangibles, and Aquinas looking to Aristotle to understand the tangibles).[94]

Aquinas's contribution at this point was that of recognizing a potential issue in explaining immaterial substance as one for one.[95] That is to say, we should not treat our conception of God as if it were comprehensive or even exhaustive knowledge; how we think of something is not to be equated to how that thing actually exists. This line of thinking helpfully establishes a distinction between *ad intra* and *ad extra* knowledge of God. So while Plato did not embrace a proper epistemology, he was helpful toward distinguishing the immaterial from the material.

In defining the taxonomy of nature, Aquinas's legacy is evident through the concept of participation such as he expressed in *De Hebdomadibus*, where he uses the example of Socrates' participation in human nature.[96] Socrates is not the

[91] Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 20.

[92] Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 2. "Thomas wants to see a substantial agreement insofar as both acknowledge the existence of a superior principle from which spiritual and material things depend, and both accept a certain form of divine providence." See: Thomas Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis: Treatise on Separate Substances*, trans. Francis J. Lescoe (West Hartford, CN: Saint Joseph College, 1959). Aquinas believed there was some agreement between the philosophical commitments of Aristotle and Plato in that they agree 1) that the immaterial substances exist, 2) on the condition of their immaterial nature, 3) on the nature of providence, equating those separate immaterial substances as having caused the material world.

[93] That is not to say Aristotle had a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

[94] What is important to note is that Aquinas's access to Plato's works was pieced together via Aristotle, the early church fathers, and especially Augustine. As a result, he inaccurately attributes later developments to Platonic philosophy that was not original to Plato himself (Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 4). Aquinas nevertheless recognized that the "Reminiscence Theory" of Plato is outside the boundaries of Christian thought, since it would mean that something would exist independent of God.

[95] The student will find it useful to read Aquinas on the difference between univocal, equivocal, and analogical language here, see: *ST* I.13.5.

[96] Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the On the Hebdomads of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz, and

sine qua non of human nature but participates in it essentially, and in a higher order. In a way, a substances relate to their accidents. That gives us a better idea of how God relates in an accidental way (what we later call *Cambridge changes* or *Cambridge relations*): Man relates to God, as God is the efficient cause of our being. That helped distinguish the communicable from the incommunicable attributes in later Reformed scholasticism. For example, God communicates the attributes of love, mercy, or goodness in differing levels to his creatures.[97]

Another carryover from Aquinas into reformed scholasticism is the recognition that, with respect to the communicable attributes, man does not possess God's attributes in the way in which God does. In man these attributes are *potencies* of levels of goodness, love, or mercy, which may be expressed at various levels or be absent entirely. They move from potency to actuality.[98] In God, in contrast, every attribute is always pure act. God does not have potential love, mercy, or goodness that needs to be actualized.[99]

From here we begin to see how Aquinas understood and appropriated the Platonic concepts found in the early church to explain the metaphysic of God's essence. That is evident through Thomas's commitments to simplicity, pure actuality, immutability, and timelessness. For example in Question 3 of the *Summa Theologica,* we see him committed to the teaching that creatures are made of matter and form, as opposed to God, who is simple.[100] God is not made of essence and existence; they are one and the same in Him.[101] Immutability is equitable to

Edward A. Synan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 19.

[97]Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), Lesson 6 and *ST* I.44.1.

[98]See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two, Creation*, trans. James F. Anderson (New York: Hanover House, 1955). II.53. "Now, from the foregoing it is evident that in created intellectual substances there is composition of act and potentiality. For in whatever thing we find two, one of which is the complement of the other, the proportion of one of them to the other is as the proportion of potentiality to act; for nothing is completed except by its proper act."

[99]"[I]n the field of metaphysics Thomas developed the theory of transcendental concepts and demonstrated as the central thesis of metaphysics the real distinction, in all created beings, between their act of being (their existence) and their essence." Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 29.

[100]John Lamont, "Aquinas on Divine Simplicity," *The Monist*, (80/4): 521–38. Augustine, *The City of God*, "There is, accordingly, a good which is alone simple, and therefore alone unchangeable, and this is God." 2:210. XI.10.

[101]Augustine, "How much more therefore is this the case in that unchangeable and eternal substance, which is incomparably more simple than the human mind is? . . . But in God to be is the same as to be strong, or to be just, or to be wise, or whatever is said of that simple multiplicity, or manifold simplicity, whereby to signify His substance." *On the Trinity*, 3:100, VI.4.6. The attributes do not make up God, they are one and the same as the essence and thereby one and the same *ad intra* God Himself.

the divine name.[102] Augustine is responsible for connecting pure actuality and aseity to immutability such as few of his predecessors had done. He explained that if something changes, then that which causes the change in something else has independent life or actuality (or potency) outside of the thing changed.[103] All of the same themes are clearly present in Aquinas.[104]

Thomas Aquinas's contributions on the Trinity are many but are found predominantly in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.1–26 and *Summa Theologiae* I.27–43. Aquinas built upon Augustine's relational development of the hypostases, as well as the key doctrines of simplicity and immutability. Building on the "accidental" and "essential" qualities treated by Augustine, Aquinas helpfully deduced the doctrine of pure actuality, meaning God has no passive potency. He clarified that because God is act, he is active potency, which is the ability to do other things; but he does not have a potential that is passive and might be actualized. Because of the paradigms and vocabulary supplied to us through the concepts of simplicity—that God is not composed of parts—and pure actuality—that he has no passive potency—we can better articulate the reflexive relations between the three persons. That is, the Word eternally generated by God is a *hypostasis*,[105] which shares the essence of God but is nonetheless "relationally distinct." Note how this harkens back to Basil's observations.

For Aquinas, the relations *begetting*, *begotten*, and *proceeding*, are real and distinct "in" God. Drawing from Augustine and Basil, Aquinas said that the persons are distinct *per relationes* (as to their relations with one another) but not

[102] Augustine, "But there can be no accident of this kind in respect to God; and therefore He who is God is the only unchangeable substance or essence, to whom certainly Being itself, whence comes the name of essence, most especially and most truly belongs." *On the Trinity*, 3:88. V.2.3. One important clarification should be made here, while this is true for Augustine, Aquinas adds a deeper level of meaning through his doctrine of *ipsum esse subsistens*. As Gilson explains: "We come now to that divine attribute which St. Augustine so rightly emphasized but which no one before St. Thomas really grasped—the divine immutability. To say that God is immovable was, for St. Augustine, to have reached the ultimate hidden depths of the divine nature. For St. Thomas there is something still more ultimate, the very reason for this immutability. To change is to pass from potency to act: now God is pure act. He can, accordingly, in no way change." E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 102.

[103] Augustine, "Behold, the heaven and earth are; they proclaim that they were made, for they are changed and varied. Whereas whatsoever hath not been made, and yet hath being, hath nothing in it which was not there before . . . . They also proclaim that they made not themselves . . . . Thou, therefore, Lord didst make these things." *The Confessions of St Augustine*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Pilkington (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), XI, 4.6.

[104] Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 112. Cf., "*Deus movet per tempus*," a text repeatedly quoted (Augustine, *De Gen, ad litt.*, 8, 2).

[105] This is the notion Aquinas borrows from Aristotle, for what he would call a first substance.

different *per essentiam* (as to their *ousia* or essence).[106] So if the persons are not different from the essence (they are not something other than God) but they are distinct from one another, how does one avoid falling into modalism? If the Father (person) is identical to God (ousia), and the Son (person) is identical to God (ousia), how is the Father not also the Son?

To answer these issues, Aquinas, in *Summa Thelogica* Q.28 and 29, utilizes the medieval concept of sameness, *identitas*. For Aquinas there is a difference between *secundum rem* (sameness of thing) and *secundum rationem* (sameness of concept)—different kinds of "sameness" that are mutually exclusive from one another. God is one (*secundem rem*) in one respect (essence) and three (*secundum rationem*) in a different respect (person). This explanation helps avoid modalism and other Trinitarian issues because the persons are categorically distinguished from the essence.[107]

Aquinas raised the same question posed to Aristotle: "Is the road to Thebes the same as to Athens?" Thomas answers yes, in that they have the same properties, but they have those properties differently. For example, the route may be uphill one-way, and downhill the other, yet they are not two roads but one. So the persons of the Godhead have the same properties, but they have them distinctly, according to their mode of subsistence. The Father possesses the essence as Father, the Son as Son, and the Spirit as Spirit.

Conclusion

There is a well-documented, longstanding continuity of Trinitarian grammar among Christians dating back to the earliest centuries of the church, which has enabled each subsequent generation to both safeguard and further develop its biblical fidelity and precision, especially regarding its doctrines of God. What kind of Christian would throw away this rich heritage and try to reinvent their own concept of the Trinity?

The church today needs to retrieve her historic doctrines. It needs to embrace them more than intellectually but with a commitment that holds no quarter for pagan concepts of God creeping into her confession. We see how the Reformers and puritans combated these issues all throughout their ministries without

[106] Christopher Hughes, "[For Aquinas,] relations both constitute and distinguish the divine persons: insofar as relations are the divine essence (*secundum res*) [i.e. they're the same thing], they constitute those persons, and insofar as they are relations with converses, they distinguish those persons." Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 217.

[107] *ST* #27–43 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* #1–26. But Hughes seems to reject this; Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, 217–40.

an ounce of equivocation before the interlopers who were trying to pull down the guardrails of Trinitarian doctrine.

Martin Luther stands as a reminder of the importance of these issues and the need for commitment to these truths. Luther did not throw everything out at his conversion; rather, he maintained a commitment to truth regardless of what his theological and political friends or enemies believed. He never rejected the true doctrine of God merely because Roman Catholics affirmed the same doctrines and confessions. At a time when abandoning creeds was the swelling tide of the age, the Reformer refused to follow the current. Instead, he saw a vital place for creeds in the church. It has been said that regarding the Athanasian Creed, "Luther was disposed to regard it as 'the most important and glorious composition since the days of the apostle.' "[108] Thus it is natural to see that creed included along with the Apostles' and Nicene creeds in the Book of Concord. The modern-day church could learn much from its principal reformer.

It is readily observable that the Athanasian Creed embodies the most mature form of Nicene orthodoxy. While Athanasius did not write the creed,[109] it bears his name because it was an accurate and full-orbed articulation of Trinitarian orthodoxy flowing out of his battle with Arius. Many church traditions use it still. A portion of it reads, "Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith. Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being." These early Christian creeds are trustworthy guides. If a Christian pastor, scholar, or teacher cannot affirm the simple words of the orthodox Trinity, he should be wary to call the God of his own imaginings and expressions the one true God.

[108] Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom with Historical and Critical Notes: The History of Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919), 1:41. See note 1.

[109] For a long time it had been rumored that Athanasius authored the creed, and that he wrote it during one of his many exiles and presented it to Pope Julius I. The first critical review of the authorship has been attributed to Dutch reformed Theologian Gerardus Vossius in 1642. Michael O'Carroll, "Athanasian Creed," *Trinitas* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987); Frederick Norris, "Athanasian Creed," ed. Everett Ferguson, in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Second Edition (New York: Garland, 1997); see also Herbert Richardson and Jasper Hopkins, "On the Athanasian Creed," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 60/4 (October 1967): 483–4.

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Denying Divine Changelessness: A Taxonomy of Deviations and Denials of Divine Immutability[1]

Ronni Kurtz[2]

Abstract: *While the doctrine of divine immutability has enjoyed a relatively strong affirmation throughout theological antiquity, there have been Christian thinkers who saw fit to provide some tweaks, deviations, or even denials concerning God's changelessness. The following essay is a modest proposal for a possible taxonomy which seeks to group thinkers and movements based on their impulse of deviation or denial. This article does not attempt to address the deviations and denials, simply to categorize them. Therefore, this essay should not be read as constructive nor definitive: rather, this is a single possible taxonomy for the seemingly growing body of literature which alters the doctrine of God's inalterability.*

Key Words: Divine Immutability, Divine Attributes, Theology Proper, Process Theism, Doctrine of God.

Introduction

Denials and Deviations

A survey of recent theological literature surrounding divine immutability reveals the discussion of God's changelessness to be a mutable conversation about an immutable God. Denials of God's unchanging nature have compounded in the last century and now flow from several springs. Repudiations of immutability are not confined to one denomination, continent, or theological era. Rather, the cast whose pen writes of a mutable God seems to be increasingly diverse. From process theists to evangelicals, and many variations in between, modern remonstrances against immutability proliferate. One dissenter, Isaak August Dorner (1809–1884), put the reality this way: "The traditional axiomatic immutability of God is nowadays in dispute by a majority of contemporary thinkers from a variety of perspectives," which led Dorner to conclude that "there must be a renewed theological investigation of this question in order to prepare a more

[1] This essay is a substantial portion of Chapter Two of Ronni Kurtz, *No Shadow of Turning: Divine Immutability and the Economy of Redemption* (Mentor: Ross-Shire, UK, 2022). This content is being used with permission from Christian Focus and Christian Mentor.

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satisfactory doctrine of God."[3]

These deviations from a teaching of an unalterable God are not going unnoticed. Indeed, it would prove difficult to remain ignorant of the rising tide of literature against classical immutability, especially as the theological conversation pushes into the modern era. In his 1983 essay, Richard A. Muller points to the ingenuity of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling and says that under their tutelage, "the older ontology of immutable being was replaced by an idealist ontology of the gradual self-realization of the absolute idea, in short, an ontology of becoming or of the becoming of being."[4]

Muller's insightful point picks up on the trend in modern theology to move from the absolute to the unactualized. As we will see, a trade such as this stems from several sources, as the impulse to diminish the absoluteness of God's unchanging nature is invoked for different reasons. Brian Davies, working on the interconnectivity of God's perfections of simplicity and immutability, helpfully lists five such reasons theologians might be prone to deviate from a classic understanding of an unchanging essence in God: (1) if God lives and acts, then he changes; (2) if God loves, then God changes; (3) if God is immutable, then God is not free; (4) if God knows, then God is changeable; and (5) the Bible says that God changes.[5]

While the impulses to deny immutability are variegated, enough time has passed—and enough deviations published—to reveal theological patterns. One could use any number of several strategies to traverse the arguments *contra* classical immutability in hopes to provide a taxonomy of deviations and denials away from the doctrine. For instance, you could cover the pertinent material chronologically, examining the denials of immutability as they appear throughout history. You could opt to cover the literature via the lens of denominational affiliation, showing the denials by way of tribal affirmations and denials. Or one

[3] Isaak August Dorner, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, trans. Claude Welch and Robert T. Williams, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 81.

[4] Richard A. Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983), 22. Muller continues to demonstrate the impact of these theological architects, saying, "The impact of this alternative ontology upon theology was enormous, particularly in Germany. Theologians like Dorner, Thomasius, Biedermann, and Gess all concluded that change, becoming, could be predicated of God."

[5] Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 165. James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 9, puts the significance of this discussion in perspective when he claims, "Perhaps no question more clearly illuminates the conflict between the older teaching of classical Christian theism and the newer commitments of theistic mutualism."

could organize the arguments by theological position; this method would treat groups instead of individuals and look at entire segments, such as process theologians, open theists, or evangelicals. While each of these models are helpful, this essay instead seeks to explore the deviations and denials of divine immutability by categorizing them inductively. Patterns emerge as theologians work through the pages and authors denying the doctrine of divine immutability. Using these patterns, we can develop a taxonomy of denials and deviations to catalog why modern theologians are willing to ascribe movement to God.

While others may exist, there are five major "problems" leveraged at a classical articulation of divine immutability that become apparent in working through the literature. Moreover, it would not do justice to the breadth of theological literature to argue that deviations of divine immutability are monolithic. On the contrary, even within this taxonomy of denials, arguments are variegated. As pertaining to deviations and denials of divine immutability the following five categories will be our working taxonomy for the remainder of this essay:

(1) the problem of relations and soteriology
(2) the Incarnation
(3) creation and divine action
(4) volition and knowledge
(5) and divine freedom and contingency.

The remaining space of this essay works through each problem respectively, discussing key ideas, theologians, and groups who have contributed to and ascribed that change to God. Of course, an exhaustive treatment of each problem is impossible and is out of line with the *telos* of this project. Instead, each category focuses on a few representative examples. It should also be noted that when theologians deny immutability, they often do so on multiple fronts. So, when we treat representatives for each ascribed remonstrance, we will focus on an aspect of their denial while other aspects may remain.

The Problem of Relations and Soteriology

Of the problems ascribed to God above, the relational/soteriological dilemma is both the most important for this project and the most frequently used deviation from a classical approach to divine immutability. The former is true because this remonstrance against divine immutability shares the impulse of our thesis. These theologians worry that a Thomistic conception of changelessness renders God unable to save in the manner the biblical data seems to depict. The concern that drives their reasoning is soteriological in nature; and, in this way, these

theologians share the foundational conviction of this work, namely, that our theology of God's being influences and impacts our theology of God's redemption. This connection is why Richard Swinburne referred to the classical notion of God as a "lifeless thing," saying if God possessed "Fixed intentions 'from all eternity' he would be a very lifeless thing; not a person who reacts to men with sympathy or anger, pardon or chastening because he chooses too there and then."[6]

The latter reason for the importance of this complaint is true since the cast that employs this line of argumentation is not confined to one theological era, denomination, or tribe. On the contrary, asserting the seeming negative soteric effects of classical immutability found favor across the theological spectrum. Given the size of the pertinent literature, some delineation is needed; we will confine our survey to three theologians who represent both the strength of this argument and the diversity – Isaak August Dorner, Charles Hartshorne, and Bruce Ware.

Isaak August Dorner

No treatment of divine immutability would be complete without interaction with I. A. Dorner. Between 1856 and 1858, Dorner wrote a collection of three essays, published originally in *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, which have had a remarkable influence on the conversation of God's changelessness.[7] The ghost of his articulation of divine immutability outlived him through the pens of many theological children.[8] The most prominent of these theological children is Barth.

[6] Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 221. This is why Swinburne declares that God must have "continual interaction" with men such that God is "moved by men."

[7] One needs to only look at the explosion of secondary literature interacting with Dorner to witness his significant impact on the conversation. While this list is far from exhaustive, see: Robert Brown, "Schelling and Dorner on Divine Immutability," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 237–49; Stephen Duby, "Divine Immutability, Divine Action and the God-World Relation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19 (2017): 144–62; Matthias Gockel, "On the Way from Schleiermacher to Barth: A Critical Reappraisal of Isaak August Dorner's Essay on Divine Immutability," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000); 490–510; Piotr J. Malysz, "Hegel's Conception of God and Its Application by Isaak Dorner to the Problem of Divine Immutability," *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (2006): 81–8; Robert Sherman, "Isaak August Dorner on Divine Immutability A Missing Link Between Schleiermacher and Barth," *Journal of Religion* 7 (1997): 380–401; and Robert R. Williams, "I. A. Dorner: The Ethical Immutability of God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986): 721–38.

[8] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1957), II.1, 493. Richard Muller, *Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism*, 23 (cf. fn. 3), praising Dorner's essay in *God and the Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), says: "In all honesty, Dorner's essay in this volume (pp. 105–80) on the problem of divine immutability is a brilliant exposition and must be seen as a primary dogmatic source for all subsequent reflection (cf. Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg) on change in God."

Introducing his section on immutability, Barth nods to Dorner: "I. A. Dorner has made this clear in a way that is illuminating for the whole doctrine of God. . . . [T]hose who know the essay will recognize as they read this sub-section how much I owe to Dorner's inspiration."

The occasion for Dorner's three essays on immutability was a response to the growing popularity of kenotic Christology. In Robert William's fine introduction to Dorner's essays, he states: "Dorner's analysis of kenoticism reveals that it both fails to solve the christological problem and errs in simply rejecting divine immutability."[9] Dorner believed that an aspect of divine immutability must remain for there to be hope in God's consistent goodness and benevolence. Moreover, if we rid every shred of divine immutability, Dorner feared that the end result would inevitably be a pantheistic problem. However, Dorner found the Thomistic conception of immutability less than satisfying in its attempt to articulate God's real relations with his creatures. Dorner had a multifold thesis, but the most pertinent to this discussion follows:

> Exhibiting in a positive dogmatic way the necessary and true union of the immutability and vitality of God in a higher principle, which will contain at the same time the supreme norm for correctly determining the relation of the trans-historical life of God to his historical life, of God's transcendence to his immanence in the world.[10]

The tension in Dorner's thinking appears in that he aims to keep together both the "trans-historical" life and the "historical" life of God. In doing so, Dorner proposes that we can maintain the constancy of essence needed for divine benevolence while upholding a form of mutability that allows for reciprocal relations with God's creatures. Since Dorner argues that these features in God must not be thought of as rooted in God's essence, Dorner fits in our categorical movement of will and knowledge.[11] However, while Dorner would affirm mutability of knowledge and will, this is ultimately foundational to his relational understanding of mutability. Any articulation of immutability that presses for more absoluteness without these concessions, according to Dorner, is a "defect [in] the doctrine of God" that is "taken over from scholasticism."[12]

Ultimately, Dorner's three-part essay sought to root God's immutability

[9] Robert Williams, "Introduction," in Dorner, *Divine Immutability*, 19.

[10] Dorner, *Divine Immutability*, 131.

[11] The same can be said for the movement of creation/divine action, as Dorner stated: "The idea of *creation* also is certainly in general not compatible with a doctrine of God's simple, unmoving, rigid essence" (Dorner, *Divine Immutability*, 141, emphasis original).

[12] Dorner, *Divine Immutability*, 133.

in his ethical nature. After denying the immutability of God "in his relation to space and time" and "in his knowing and willing of the world and in his decree," Dorner then asks, "In what then does the center and the essence of divine vitality consist?" He continues: "We answer: in the same thing in which the center of his immutability also consists, namely, not in his being and life as such—for these categories, which in themselves are still physical, lead us forever to Deism or pantheism in restless interplay—but in the ethical."[13]

The move to ascribe ethical immutability to God saves Dorner from a rigid immutable essence found in the Thomistic conception of the doctrine while also saving him from the kenotic and pantheistic notion of a being who has no actuality apart from the creation. Avoiding these two theological pitfalls—both of which he saw as soteriological nightmares—was crucial for Dorner. Summarizing Dorner's position as a *via media* between rigid absoluteness and pantheistic dependence, Robert Williams stated:

> Dorner seeks a middle ground between these concepts. However, he does not engage in purely speculative metaphysical inquiry for its own sake; rather he contends that Christian theology has an important stake in this debate. For Christian faith makes soteriology central. The soteriological interest has two requirements for the doctrine of God: 1) some concept of divine mutability is necessary as instrumental to salvation, and 2) some concept of divine immutability is necessary as grounding the finality of salvation in God's goodness. God's ethical goodness is perfect and cannot change. Hence God must be conceived as immutable in some respects and as mutable in other respects.[14]

Dorner ascribed significant movement to God in his articulation of God's mutable vitality and immutable ethics. From his pen we see our first example of using the movement of relations/soteriology to deviate from and deny the classical understanding of immutability, yet it is far from the last.

Charles Hartshorne and Process Theism

Conversations on the doctrine of God took a decisive turn in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the rise of process theism. The consequences of process theism were severe, and theologians working after the rise of process literature will inevitably have to deal with the repercussions of this theological

[13] Dorner, *Divine Immutability*, 165.
[14] Williams, "I. A. Dorner," 721.

movement. As Bruce Ware stated, "any responsible assessment of the doctrine of God's changelessness must devote special attention to process theology's proposal, both for its own sake, and because of its pervasive impact on current discussions of the doctrine."[15] The process proposal has caused a number of theologians to reexamine their thinking regarding the doctrine of God, especially as it pertains to divine immutability.[16] Process theist Barry Whitney, writing of the process concern, says: "Process thinkers insist that the traditional Christian interpretation of the doctrine of divine immutability (as formulated by St. Thomas and others) cannot be reconciled with the Bible's revelation of divine love and care for the world."[17] While we could debate Whitney that the *telos* for all process theists was biblical fidelity since Hartshorne "develops his entire doctrine of God without reference to the biblical texts,"[18] nevertheless, divine immutability—along with most divine perfections—went under the critical microscope in process thought. Whitney followed up this claim, concluding,

> An immutable God, being eternally and fully complete in himself, would remain the same whether or not the world was created, whether or not there was an incarnation, whether or not we pray or suffer, and so on. How could such a God love us? How indeed could we love such a God?[19]

While a number of process theologians have come and gone, arguably none stood taller than Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000). Hartshorne, together with Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), provided the process movement with its metaphysical framework. The Hartshorne-Whitehead framework made use of two theological and philosophical categories that proved to be vital to the process understanding of God—a dipolar view of God and the theory of

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[15] Bruce Ware, "An Evangelical Reexamination of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984), 249.

[16] Writing on modern interactions between process theists and catholic theologians, Whitney states: "A number of contemporary Roman Catholic theologians are now in dialogue with the Whiteheadian-Hartshornean challenge." He then works through ten Roman Catholic theologians who have been, in some way, impacted and influenced by the process proposal. The list includes James Felt, Norris Clarke, Joseph Donceel, Piet Schoonenberg, Walter Stokes, William Hill, John Wright, Anthony Kelly, Martin D'Arcy, and Karl Rahner. See Barry L. Whitney, "Divine Immutability in Process Philosophy and Contemporary Thomism," *Horizons* 7 (1980): 52–9.

[17] Whitney, "Divine Immutability," 50.

[18] Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 172. However, as Richards points out, Hartshorne was convinced that his articulation of dipolar deity was more in tune with the biblical data than his classical counterparts.

[19] Whitney, "Divine Immutability," 50.

surrelativism.[20] Both of these philosophical tools shape Hartshorne's denial of classic immutability. Hartshorne found the concept of an unalterable God abhorrent and did not attempt to hide his distaste for the idea. In a 1967 essay he stated, "I regard the unqualified denial of divine change (in the form of increase of content) and the unqualified denial of relativity or dependence as catastrophic errors, and of course I am far from alone in this."[21] These "catastrophic errors" were so egregious to Hartshorne, that he said in the same essay: "If I were to accomplish nothing else than to bring about the definitive abandonment of the traditional notion of God's *pure* necessity, not simply for existence and essence but for all properties whatever, I would not have labored in vain."[22]

The dipolar depiction of deity in process theism gets at God being simultaneously absolute and relative. This, of course, is contrary to any articulation of the divine that would insist on a monopolar emphasis of absoluteness. Hartshorne defines "absoluteness" as the "independence of relationships" and states that God is metaphysically unique in the sense that he is the only being who can be described as "maximally absolute, and in another aspect no less strictly or maximally relative."[23] While this may ring as a contradiction in the ears of Hartshorne's hearers, he argues this is not the case based on an asymmetrical relationship between the absolute and relative. About this asymmetrical relationship he says, "The same reality may in one aspect be universally open to influence, and in another aspect universally closed to influence."[24] In short, God can have absolute properties such that it would be appropriate to ascribe immutability to them while also having properties that are open to influence. Hartshorne's major concern in his exposition of dipolar deity is to bring balance to the emphasis on the transcendence and immanence of God. He is motivated by what he sees as an unfair emphasis of the absolute essence in classical theism found in doctrines like pure actuality, aseity, and immutability.

As for the second philosophical category, surrelativism, Hartshorne's

[20]While both theologians were important to the development of the process framework, they certainly differed. See David Ray Griffin, "Hartshorne's differences from Whitehead," in *Two Process Philosophers*, ed. Lewis S. Ford (Tallahassee: American Academy of Religion, 1973), 35.

[21]Charles Hartshorne, "The Dipolar Conception of Deity," *The Review of Metaphysics* 21 (967): 273.

[22]Hartshorne, "The Dipolar Conception," 273.

[23]Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 31. Richards, *The Untamed God*, 191, helpfully summarizes Hartshorne's dipolar view, saying: "The concept of divine dipolarity has an important metaphysical function. It allows Hartshorne to attribute certain dualities or contrasts, such as abstract-concrete, necessary-contingent, absolute-relative, to God without contradiction."

[24]Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (London: Open Court, 1970), 233.

1948 publication, *The Divine Relativity*, is significant. In this work, Hartshorne describes what he means by God's relativity and ability to intake influence. Hartshorne writes, "my proposition is that the higher the being the more dependence of certain kinds will be appropriate for it."[25] To illustrate this point, Hartshorne calls his readers to play a "mental experiment" with him. This mental experiment called readers to consider a poem being read before a number of characters. These characters include: (1) a glass of water, (2) an ant, (3) a dog, (4) a human being who does not speak the language of the poem, (5) a human being who knows the language but is not sensitive to poetry, and finally (6) a person who is both sensitive to poetry and who speaks the language. About this cast of characters, Hartshorne says, "Now I submit that each member of this series is superior, in terms of the data, to its predecessors, and that each is more, not less, dependent upon or relative to the poem as such, including its meanings as well as its mere sounds."[26] His point, with this seemingly silly mental exercise, is to show that the cup of water is the most impassible and immutable object amongst the bunch, yet an outside observer to the situation would not ascribe worth on this basis to the glass of water. Instead, we would say that the final individual–the one who knows the language of the poem and is sensitive to poetry–is most worthy of praise for superiority in ability to be impacted.

For Hartshorne, this experiment is aimed at demonstrating the "metaphysical snobbery toward relativity" that classical theists display.[27] For it could only be with an abstract deity, and nothing else, that hardness toward being influenced would be a praiseworthy virtue. Instead, Hartshorne argues that God demonstrates his superiority in being constantly impacted by the happenings of those he has created and, in this way, demonstrates his immutability—he is immutably changing as he is constantly influenced by, and is the supreme recipient of, the actions and emotions of that which he created.

Bruce Ware and Evangelical Reexaminations

Our final representative of relational/soteriological movement is evangelical scholar Bruce Ware. In comparison to Dorner and Hartshorne, Ware is closer to articulating a classic understanding of divine immutability, as he would drastically break from Hartshorne's mutable essence as well as from Dorner's mutable knowledge and will.[28] Though closer to classical theism than Dorner and

[25] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 48.
[26] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 49.
[27] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 50.
[28] See Ware's critique of Charles Hartshorne and process theism in Bruce Ware, "An Exposition

Hartshorne, Ware still deviates from a classical definition of divine immutability on account of his ascribing change to God by virtue of relational movement, repentance, and change in emotions.[29]

An important feature of Ware's approach to the conversation is his understanding of what it means for a doctrine to be "evangelical." He explains his methodological approach: "theologizing, then, bases itself squarely upon God's self-revelation as given us in the Scriptures and proceeds or builds from this foundation alone."[30] Ware worries that classical theism has put too much emphasis on "speculative concepts" instead of the biblical data. He states:

> The modern criticism of classical theism here is in part valid, for indeed the tradition stemming from Augustine through the medieval scholastics and protestant orthodox did tend to take as primary a certain philosophic or speculative conception of the divine perfection which then regulated all its subsequent talk of God's relatedness to the world.[31]

However, Ware intends to set himself up as a mediating position as he claims that modernity is guilty of the inverse error—ascribing relativity to God such that it becomes the driving principle in the face of data that suggests independence of essence and being.[32] His claim is that neither position does justice to *all* the biblical material, as each overemphasizes either transcendence or immanence.

The method of the *via media* approach is made possible, for Ware, by affirming that there are proper ways to speak of God's immutability *and* proper ways to speak of his mutability. Ware declared that this indeed is the depiction of "revealed immutability," that "the incredible and humbling testimony of God's self-revelation is that God is *both* self-sufficient (i.e., transcendently

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and Critique of the Process Doctrines of Divine Mutability and Immutability," *Westminster Journal of Theology* 47 (1985):175–96. See also, Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 404, in which he "utterly rejects" the process project. Although, it could be argued that Ware's affirmation of an actual repentance in God could denote a change in volition and knowledge.

[29] In the end, I ultimately break from Ware's proposed tweaks to the doctrine of divine immutability. However, I do wish to express gratitude to him for his work on the subject. While I disagree in the end with his conclusions, his work treats Scripture with the utmost reverence, and it is obvious to me that he arrives at his conclusions in trying to do the most justice to the biblical data.

[30] Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 380. See also Ware's essay-length summary of his dissertation, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986): 431–46.

[31] Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 384.

[32] Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 387.

self-existent) *and* wholly loving (i.e., immanently self-relating)."[33]

Ware gives two ways regarding how it is proper to speak of God's immutability—ontological and ethical—while giving three ways that are proper to speak of God's mutability—relational, repentance, and emotions. Of the former two, Ware states: "God is immutable not only with regard to the fact of his eternal existence but also in the very content or make-up of his eternal essence, independent of the world."[34] Also, as it relates to his ethical immutability, Ware wrote: "The God of the Bible is also unchangeable in his unconditional promises and moral obligations to which he has freely pledged himself."[35]

After describing the "onto-ethical immutability" of God, Ware moved into what he called the "proper sense" in which we can speak of God's mutability. While he gave three examples of God's mutability, the most important of the three is relational mutability. Ware wrote:

> The Scriptures affirm one predominant sense of God's changeability under which specific manifestations of it are evident, and this may be called God's "relational mutability." From the creation of Adam and Eve to the consummation of history, God is involved in pursuing, establishing and developing relationships with those whom he has made. . . . That God changes in his relationship with others is abundantly clear from Scripture.[36]

Ware gives credit to both Dorner and Barth and cites Barth's conception of a "holy mutability of God"[37] such that God changes in "his attitudes, conduct, and relationships with humans" which allows for genuine reciprocal relationships.[38]

Ware goes on to describe two more ways in which we can "properly" speak of God's mutability—repentance and emotions, albeit with much less detail

[33] Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 406.

[34] Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 417. He defines ontological immutability, saying: "The God of the Bible is unchangeable in the supreme excellence of his intrinsic nature. This may be called God's "ontological immutability"—that is, the changelessness of God's eternal and self-sufficient being" (Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 434).

[35] Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 436. While Ware affirms, like Dorner, an ethical immutability in God, he nevertheless desires to separate his understanding of ethical immutability from Dorner's, saying: "The problem with Dorner's view, however, is that he bases the ethical consistency or faithfulness of God strictly on God's unchanging ethical nature (e.g., that God is always loving, holy, just) rather than on a more complete sense of the fullness and supreme excellence of God's immutable being" (Ware, "Evangelical Reexamination," 437).

[36] Ware, "Evangelical Reformulation," 438–9.

[37] Barth *Church Dogmatics*, II.1, 496.

[38] Ware, "Evangelical Reformulation," 440.

than his discussion of the relational model. Though Ware offered them as unique modes of talking about divine mutability, he said of repentance that "these passages refer fundamentally to God's relational mutability as discussed above."[39] Passibility, or Ware's third proper way to speak of God's mutability, is also related to his relational dynamic of change. Ware said, "The abundance of Scriptural evidence of God's expression of emotion and a more positive understanding of their nature lead to the conclusion that the true and living God is, among other things, a genuinely emotional being."[40] Ware correlated this to the relational dynamic by elaborating that while God is immutable in his essence, he has nevertheless chosen to relate with us, and his relational dynamism predicates his variability in terms of emotional experiences and change.

While Ware has the most sophisticated and robust study of divine immutability, he is not the only Evangelical theologian to deviate from a classical understanding of divine immutability. A quick look at Poythress' *The Mystery of the Trinity* will prove necessary to demonstrate this point. In the introduction, Poythress states six key problems his book seeks to address. The second in the list is, "How can God be immutable (not able to change) and act toward the world?"[41] In answering this question, Poythress—through his work—advises Christians to avoid two "suction pools" relating to both God's transcendence and immanence. The first suction pool, which is a danger in overemphasizing immanence, is "mutuality theology" or, as Poythress playfully calls it, "quicksand theology." The other suction pool, which is overemphasizing transcendence, is "monadic theology" or, as Poythress playfully calls it, "black hole theology."[42]

Taking time to note and appreciate that Poythress works with carefulness is important. He even gets close to affirming a classical understanding of immutability in multiple instances throughout the book. For example, Poythress writes, "God does not change. Indeed, he cannot change, because he is God and

[39] Ware, "Evangelical Reformulation," 443. After discussing the hermeneutical concept of anthropomorphism regarding the passages where God is depicted as repenting, Ware concludes, "In general it seems best to understand God's repentance as his changed mode of action and attitude in response to a changed human situation."

[40] Ware, "Evangelical Reformulation," 446.

[41] Vern Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2020), xxiv. Beyond the second question listed, others in Poythress' list have relevance for our discussions here. For example, Question 1 asks, "How can God be independent and yet have relations to the world and things in the world?" and Question 6 asks, "How can God's attributes be identical with God and also be distinguished from one another?" (Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, xxiii–xxv).

[42] Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 440–1; 475–6; 505.

he cannot be other than the God he is."[43] Or, elsewhere, Poythress writes, "It is not right, but misleading, to say that "God changes," even if the speaker's intentions are good. There are better and clearer ways of saying what we need to say in order to make the point that God is active in many ways in the world."[44]

However, after examining Aquinas, Turretin, and Charnock and looking at doctrines such as immutability, simplicity, and infinitude, Poythress asserts that classical theism does not, at this point, have the tools to avoid both suction pools. Indeed, Poythress goes as far as saying that "Classical Christian theism needs enhancement, not merely reiteration, in order to go forward."[45] Poythress' worry is that the classical articulation of divine immutability, while partially correct, relies on unnecessarily complex theological terminology and has a hard time doing justice to the real relations which the Scriptures seem to attribute to God in his covenant-making relationship with man.

While not residing within the walls of Evangelicalism, it is important to note another book which would not only agree with Poythress but states his conclusion with more emphasis. John C. Peckham's 2021 publication, *Divine Attributes*, focuses on the "nature and attributes of God" in search of "what we have biblical warrant to affirm with respect to such questions, in order to better understand the living God whom Christians worship and to whom Christians pray."[46] For Peckham, this includes examining questions such as "Does God Change? Does God have emotions? Does God know everything, including the future? Is God all-powerful?"[47]

Peckham makes several affirmations that align well with classical theism. For example, he affirms a strong Creator/creature distinction.[48] He also makes a similar methodological move as classical theists when it comes to the economic and immanent life of God; he writes that a proper theological interpretation of Scripture, "carefully attends to biblical depictions of God, seeking to affirm all that Scripture teaches about God without conceptually reducing God to the way he is portrayed in the economy."[49]

[43] Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 57.

[44] Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 585.

[45] Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 485.

[46] John C. Peckham, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 1.

[47] Peckham, *Divine Attributes*, 1.

[48] Peckham, *Divine Attributes*, 2.

[49] Peckham, *Divine Attributes*, 17. Peckham later gives a great analogy of collapsing God's essence to what is revealed in the economy. He writes: "At the same time we must be careful not to conceptually reduce God to the way he represents himself to humans in the economy of biblical revelation. It would be a mistake to take a letter I wrote to my nine-year-old son and assume on the basis that my

While Peckham affirms these aspects of classical theism, he eventually deviates from classical theism, and its account of divine immutability, due to what he says is his hope to allow Scripture to norm all theological articulation. He puts forward what he labels "covenantal theism."[50] In the end, his methodology leads him to deny the doctrine of pure actuality and to deviate from a classical understanding of divine immutability. In sum, he writes:

> The claim that God is pure act, then, runs directly counter to the way Scripture consistently depicts God. The situation relative to biblical warrant, then, is this. Abundant biblical data depicts God as undergoing changing emotions, but there appears to be no biblical warrant for pure aseity, strict immutability, strict impassibility, or the interpretive move of negating biblical depictions of changing divine emotions. In light of this and other data, I believe the view that God undergoes changing emotions is biblically warranted, and if God undergoes changing emotions, then God is neither strictly immutable nor strictly impassible.[51]

Outside of Bruce Ware, another well-known movement away from classical immutability within Evangelicalism is John Frame. We will deal with Frame's view later when dealing with methodology and language for God. However, he ought to be noted here as his concern is like those we have seen above. Frame is concerned that the classical articulation of divine immutability, while having some true things to say, does not do justice to all the biblical data concerning the life of God. For example, he is worried with the methodological move of chalking all instances of change depicted in Scripture to a mere anthropomorphism. He writes: "The historical process does change, and as an agent in history, God himself changes. On Monday, he wants something to happen, and on Tuesday, something else. He is grieved one day, pleased the next. In my view, *anthropomorphic* is too weak a description of these narratives."[52]

Frame can still hold to a measure of immutability while affirming the above quote by predicating two existences to God. He argues that God possesses an atemporal existence and a historical existence. Frame states that "neither form of existence contradicts the other. God's transcendence never compromises his

vocabulary is fourth-grade level. God is always greater than can be revealed to creatures" (Peckham, *Divine Attributes*, 35).

[50] Peckham, *Divine Attributes*, 37.

[51] Peckham, *Divine Attributes*, 62.

[52] John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013), 377.

immanence, nor do his control and authority compromise his covenant presence."[53]

While we will not treat his work at the same length as the others, it is important to note that another Evangelical, Scott Oliphant, finds Frame's argumentation here persuasive. Oliphant also worries that a classical understanding of anthropomorphism is simply too weak to do justice to the variegated biblical data. Moreover, he argues that Christology is the primary way Christian theologians should look to the perfections of God. Therefore, in presenting attributes considering God's condescension and his "covenantal properties," Oliphant writes: "When Scripture says that God changes his mind, or that he is moved, or angered by our behavior, we should see that as literal." He continues, "We should also see that the God who really changes his mind is the accommodated God, the *yarad-cum*-Emmanuel God who, while remaining the "I AM," nevertheless stoops to our level to interact, person-to-person, with us." He continues: "His change of mind does not affect his essential character, any more than Christ dying on the cross precluded him from being fully God. He remains fully and completely God, a God who is not like man that he should change his mind, and he remains fully and completely the God who, in covenant with us, changes his mind to accomplish his sovereign purposes."[54]

These three representatives—Dorner, Hartshorne, and Ware—exemplify modern deviations from the classical understanding of divine immutability with a relational/soteriological impulse. Though all three examples predicate change to God based on *more* than just relational dynamism, the soteriological impulse is strong behind all three lines of reasoning.

Now, we turn to the remaining four arguments which seek to ascribe movement to God. We treat three of the arguments with much more brevity than the first because, while the following three are important and prevalent, the first category proves most relevant to our thesis as we seek to articulate the inverse of their conclusions. While Dorner, Hartshorne, Ware, and many like them seek to deviate from or deny the classical understanding of divine immutability for fear that it impedes a robust soteriology, this project moves in the opposite direction

[53] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 377. Frame goes on to admit that his view of God's having two existences "bears a superficial resemblance" to modern process theology. He notes that process theology also recognizes two "poles" to God's existence—the primordial and consequent natures of God. However, using Charles Hartshorne, Frame makes significant differences between his view and process theology and ultimately determines that process theology is "deeply unscriptural" (Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 378).

[54] Scott Oliphant, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 124.

and aims to demonstrate the soteriological significance of absolute immutability. Yet, first, let us examine, in brief, four more alterations predicated to God.

The Problem of the Incarnation

With cosmic consequence, the Second Person of the Trinity took on flesh and dwelt amongst us. Two key texts depicting this event have been used by those wishing to describe movement in God via the Incarnation—John 1:14 and Philippians 2:6–11. In the former, John writes four words that caused theological marvel and mystery for millennia, "the Word became flesh."[55] In the latter text, Paul describes the Incarnation as Jesus' "emptying" himself as to be found in the form of a servant.

Both these texts in particular, and the divine mission of the Incarnation in general, have led some to conclude that God is alterable since it is hard to make sense of the Incarnation if he were not. The two primary lines of argumentation built on the foundation of these texts are kenoticism and Christological mutability.

Kenoticism and Christological Mutability

Kenotic Christology insists that the "emptying" described in Philippians 2 entails a literal detraction in the Godhead. Oliver Crisp, who helpfully delineates between two forms of Kenoticism—functional and ontological—defines the movement, saying, "the view, drawn from New Testament passages such as Philippians 2:7, that, in becoming incarnate, the second person of the Trinity somehow emptied himself of certain divine attributes in order to truly become human."[56] C. Stephen Evans helps readers understand what the kenotic theologians mean when they describe God "emptying" himself: the Son "in some way limited or temporarily divested himself of some of the properties thought to be divine prerogatives, and this act of self-emptying has become known as a 'kenosis'."[57]

While several theologians have espoused something like kenotic theology throughout the last two centuries, the view finds its origins in German theologian Gottfried Thomasius (1802–1875). His most important work, which launched

[55] Unless otherwise notated, all verses will be taken from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

[56] Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118. Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 355–421, also uses the distinction of functional and ontological when describing kenoticism.

[57] C. Stephen Evans, "Introduction," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

a small avalanche of subsequent volumes, was *Christi Person und Werk*.[58] In it, Thomasius described the event of the Incarnation, saying, "a divesting of the divine mode of being in favor of the humanly creaturely form of existence, and *eo ispo* a renunciation of the divine glory he had from the beginning with the Father."[59] This "divesting" of the divine mode renders immutability impossible as the Second Person of the Godhead changes in his shedding of divine properties. Thomasius assures readers that this is not a shedding of divinity as Christ still possesses the essential perfections that are necessary for God to be God. However, even if this was not a violation of divine simplicity, it would still violate divine immutability. Torrance, offering a varying interpretation of the pertinent passage, opines: "There is nothing here about any so-called metaphysical change in God the Son such as an emptying out of God the Son of any divine attributes or powers."[60]

Though kenoticism jeopardizes divine immutability, it is not alone in its ascribing change in God via the event of the Incarnation.[61] For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar contends that the Incarnation "shatters" a classical understanding of divine immutability. He writes:

> It implied coming through a narrow pass: not so to guard the immutability of God that in the pre-existent Logos who prepares himself to become man nothing real happens and on the other hand not to let this real happening degenerate into divine suffering . . . one has to say that P. Althaus is right: "On this realization, the old concept of the immutability of God is clearly shattered. Christology must take seriously that God himself really entered into suffering in the Son and therein is and remains completely God."[62]

[58] Gottfried Thomasius, "Christ's Person and Work," in *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth. Century German Theology*, ed. Claude Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[59] Thomasius, "Christ's Person and Work," 48. Cf. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 358.

[60] Thomas Torrance, *The Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 75.

[61] See, for example, Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River: St. Bede's Publications, 1985). Weinandy works through patristic, medieval, kenotic, and process literature in a survey of deviations from classical immutability and impassibility in the Incarnation.

[62] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Mysterium Paschale," in *Mysterium Salutis*, ed. J. Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedelm: Benziger, 1969), 151–2, cited in, Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability,* Second Edition (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 199. Dodds, however, correctly concludes: "When properly understood, the incarnation, far from denying the immutability of God, rather requires it. For if God changed in becoming human, he would no longer be truly God, and Jesus Christ would not be truly God and human" (Dodds, *The Unchanging of Love*, 200).

Like the relational/soteriological movement, those theologians who predicate movement to God by virtue of his Incarnation vary chronologically, geographically, and denominationally. However, what they share is a view that deviates from the great tradition's understanding of divine immutability.

Moltmann, Pannenberg, and the Theology of Hope

Theology is never done in a vacuum and therefore the cultural context in which theologizing takes place is important in considering any theologian's program. This is especially true for those theologians who studied and wrote under the umbrella of "the theology of hope." Coming off the heels of global war and confusion in the 1960s the theologians of hope constructed their volumes in an era where the horrors of the Third Reich and Hiroshima were still fresh in the mind of society. The cultural context of these few decades meant that the confusion which persisted because of national turmoil longed for architects of hope that could divert the gaze of society away from their current plight and toward a future glory. It would, of course, be disingenuous to conclude that the theologians of hope reached their conclusion by virtue of their cultural context alone. However, the theology of hope became an ever-important outlet of theology in this particular cultural moment.

Describing the theological confusion which persisted in the climate of the 1960s, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson write:

> In the middle of the confusion a book appeared from a virtually unknown young German theologian, which seemed too many to provide the needed new approach for theology in the latter half of the century. The book was *The Theology of Hope* written by a thirty-nine-year-old professor of systematic theology at Tübingen, West Germany – Jürgen Moltmann. In this work Moltmann called for a shift to eschatology, to the traditional doctrine of last things but reinterpreted and understood afresh, as the foundation for the theological task.[63]

The methodological move of resetting theology's foundation towards eschatology had significant christological implications. For, as Grenz and Olson note, the preeminent theme of the body of Moltmann's literature became, "hope for the future based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[64] For this reason,

[63] Stanley J. Grenz, Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 171.

[64] Grenz and Olson, *20th Century Theology*, 172.

even while we could point to a number of divergent paths in which Moltmann and Pannenberg break from a classical conception of divine immutability, we can rightly treat their view under "the problem of the incarnation."

The incarnate life of Jesus Christ was, for Moltmann, of supreme importance for articulating a doctrine of God. In fact, Moltmann so emphasized the economic aspects of God's *ad extra* life that he eventually affirmed Rahner's rule verbatim. Moltmann wrote, in affirmation of Rahner, "The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity."[65] By collapsing the economic and immanent Trinity, Moltmann's understanding of the divine life was captivated by observing the incarnate life of Jesus Christ as the primary mode of revelation and reason. Doing theology proper from the starting point of Christ's Incarnation was, for Moltmann, a way to not "speculate in heavenly riddles" and therefore, "Anyone who really talks of the Trinity talks of the cross of Jesus."[66]

This discussion of methodology is important in discussing Moltmann's doctrine of inalterability because it is in his methodological decisions that Moltmann separates himself from both the classical theists and the process theists. Contra classical theism, Moltmann is weary of philosophical speculation regarding the divine life. Yet, at the same time, Moltmann did not hold to a process view over God's relativism. Instead, Moltmann's approach to God's change was one of self-change. He writes: "God is not changeable as creatures are changeable. However, the conclusion should not be drawn from this that God is unchangeable in every respect, for this negative definition merely says that God is under no constraint from that which is not God."[67] According to Moltmann, God's freedom actively allows changes to himself, which is what happens in the case of the Incarnation and suffering of Christ. In the theology of hope, the glory of God is seen primarily through God's willingness to share in our suffering which means we will ultimately share in his eschatological resurrection.

Comparing Rahner and Moltmann's view of God's unchangeability, Susie Paulik Babka concludes:

> Especially in the Incarnation and Cross, as revealing God's personal

[65] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 207. Moltmann is quoting Rahner here; see Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 22. For more on Moltmann and Rahner's doctrine of divine immutability, see Susie Paulik Babka, " 'God is Faithful, He Cannot Deny Himself': Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltmann on Whether God is Immutable in Jesus Christ" (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2004).

[66] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 207.

[67] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 229.

> identity as willing in love to "become" for the sake of the other (Rahner) or to "suffer" for the sake of the other (Moltmann). Because Moltmann endorses Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, both believe that God's self-communication to what is finite, or not-God is a radical sharing of God's very being . . . they [both] move beyond traditional metaphysics of absolute divine immutability and impassibility.[68]

Wolfhart Pannenberg, while differing from Moltmann in some points, affirmed his colleagues' eschatologically minded ontology. Pannenberg argued, like Rahner and Moltmann, against dichotomizing the economic and immanent Trinity. Pannenberg stated that, in the Scriptures, "the divine name is not a formula for essence."[69] Rather, the divine name is "a pointer to experience of his working." Therefore, "the question of essence thus becomes that of the attributes that characterize God's working."[70] Just a few pages later, Pannenberg asserts, "the qualities that are ascribed to him rest on his relations to the world which correspond to the relations of creatures to him."[71]

Maybe the most important piece of methodological consideration for this project comes in Pannenberg's pages on the Trinity. In the Trinitarian section of his *Systematic Theology*, he bemoans the "one-sided" development of philosophical theism and writes that as early as Athanasius' work against the Arians we can see the regrettable detachment of the economic from the immanent. Pannenberg is worth quoting at length here as he directly relates this faulty practice to divine immutability:

> Understandable, too, is the fact that in the provisional outcome of this history of interpretation in the dogma of Nicea and Constantinople, the thought of the eternal and essential Trinity broke loose from its historical moorings and tended to be seen not only as the basis of all historical events but also as untouched by the course of history on account of the eternity and immutability of God, and therefore also inaccessible to all creaturely knowledge. If the Son and Spirit were known to be of the same substance as the eternal and unchangeable Father, then under the conditions of Hellenistic philosophical theology this Trinity had to be at an unreachable distance from all

[68] Babka, " 'God is Faithful,' " 357.

[69] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:360.

[70] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:360.

[71] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:364. See also, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology," in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, Volume 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1971), 119–83.

> finite, creaturely reality. The immanent Trinity became independent of the economic Trinity and increasingly ceased to have any function relative to the economy of salvation.[72]

Pannenberg continues and calls for revision of what he perceives to be a dangerous theological error:

> Today we see that differentiating the eternal Trinity from all temporal change makes trinitarian theology one-sided and detaches it from its biblical basis. This situation obviously calls for revision. But the related problems are greater than theology has thus far realized. Viewing the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity as one presupposes the development of a concept of God which can grasp in one not only the transcendence of the divine being and his immanence in the world but also the eternal self-identity of God and the debatability of his truth in the process of history, along with the decision made concerning it by the consummation of history.[73]

Like Moltmann, the justification for treating Pannenberg under "the problem of the incarnation" lies in his collapsing the immanent and economic Trinity. For, instead of language of divine immutability in the *ad intra*, Pannenberg preferred language of divine faithfulness in the *ad extra*. Since, for Pannenberg, the immanent and economic are identical, our theologizing of theology proper ought to arise out of an explicit examination of the economic activity of God, since this is what is available to us. Pannenberg makes this point explicit, saying, "whereas the predicate of immutability that derives from Greek philosophy implies timelessness, the truth of God's faithfulness expresses his constancy in the actual process of time and history, especially his holding fast to his saving will, to his covenant, to his promises, and also to the orders of his creation."[74]

As a final point showing the connection between the items treated in this section which are: (1) the theology of hope, (2) deviations from a classical articulation of immutability, and (3) the problem of the Incarnation, Pannenberg summarizes his understanding of divine changelessness in relation to the Incarnation saying:

> In distinction from the idea of immutability, that of God's faithfulness does not exclude historicity or the contingency of world occurrence, nor need the historicity and contingency of the divine

[72] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:332–3.
[73] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:333.
[74] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:437.

> action be in contradiction with God's eternity. If eternity and time coincide only in the eschatological consummation of history, then from the standpoint of the history of God that moves toward this consummation there is room for becoming in God himself, namely, in the relation of the immanent and the economic Trinity, and in this frame, it is possible to say of God that he himself became something that he previously was not when he became man in his Son.[75]

The Problem of Creation and Divine Action

As we will see, there is an inseparable connection between God's immutability and his eternality. This is the exact relationship that comes into question as God acts throughout history. Surely, some scholars insist, God's gracious involvement in the world—whether it be his creation *ex nihilo*, Incarnation, or simply his providential interfering in the lives of his people—calls into question any understanding of a non-successive life of God. Does it not suppose, for example, that there must have been a change in God as he moved from passivity to actuality in the creation of all things? This was the view of Thomas Torrance (1913–2007), who wrote:

> While God was always Father and was Father independently of what he has created, as Creator he acted in a way that he had not done before, in bringing about absolutely new events—this means that the creation of the world out of nothing is something *new even for God*. God was always Father, but he *became* Creator.[76]

Torrance applies the same logic to the divine action of the Incarnation and Pentecost. These movements, for Torrance, seem to indicate a Triune mover who acts and changes in time as each member of the Godhead moves in time and space. Ultimately, for Torrance, these three acts—creation, Incarnation, Pentecost—display the freedom of God. Furthermore, Torrance argues they "tell us that far from being a static or inertial Deity like some "unmoved mover," the mighty living God who reveals himself to us through his Son and in his Spirit is absolutely free to do what he had never done before, and free to be other than he was eternally."[77]

[75] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:438. Emphasis added.

[76] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 208.

[77] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 88. For a response to Torrance, and others like him, see Steven J. Duby, "Divine Action and the Meaning of Eternity" in *God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church* (Idaho: Davenant Institute, 2018), 87–104. In "Divine Immutability, Divine

R.T. Mullins also articulates an issue with a classical understanding of divine immutability by virtue of creation and divine action.[78] Mullins states that it is "utterly baffling" to him to conceive of a God who creates and does not undergo real change in a real relationship with the creation. Mullins uses the analogy of a builder to demonstrate his point: "It seems quite clear that the builder who decides to start building does in fact undergo change. It also seems that a God who is not creating and then creates does undergo a change. He is not standing in a causal relation to anything, and then he is standing in a causal relation to creation." Mullins continues: "Activity out of a capacity involves change and time, for it at least creates before and after in the life of an agent."[79] Ultimately, Mullins concludes: "The Christian God cannot be timeless, strongly immutable, and simple."[80]

Colin Gunton sees a similar issue and writes about the "tangled web" of a classical doctrine of God.[81] He writes: "there is a tendency to identify the divine attributes by a list of 'omni's' and negatives . . . and then paste on to them conceptions of divine action, especially that central to the Bible's account of what is called the economy of creation and redemption."[82] Later, he explicitly defines "divine action" as "personal and intentional acts designed to bring about some purpose or change in the world."[83] This definition leads him to insist that the presence of divine action means that we should be "against the necessity of constructing God's immutability in a Platonizing manner."[84] Gunton brings Barth to bear in his line of argumentation, who says:

> God is constantly one and the same. But . . . his consistency is not as it were mathematical. . . . The fact that he is one and the same does not mean that he is bound to be and say and do only one and the same thing, so that all the distinctions of his being, speaking and acting are only a semblance, only the various refractions of a beam of

Action and the God-World Relation," Duby deals with divine action as it relates to the doctrine of immutability and utilizes John of Damascus, Aquinas, and Johann Alsted and the "virtual distinction" to provide proper grammar in speaking about God's external and temporal acts.

[78] This is not Mullins' only difficulty with immutability; his work primarily deals with atemporality and only by derivation the doctrine of immutability. See, R.T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[79] Mullins, *End of the Timeless God*, 114.

[80] Mullins, *End of the Timeless God*, 126.

[81] Colin Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 22.

[82] Gunton, *Act and Being*, 22.

[83] Gunton, *Act and Being*, 77.

[84] Gunton, *Act and Being*, 57.

> light which are eternally the same. This was and is the way that every form of Platonism conceives God. It is impossible to overemphasize the fact that here . . . God is described as basically without life, word or act.[85]

We can see from the pens of Torrance, Mullins, Gunton, and Barth that substantial concern exists that a classical conception of divine immutability leaves little room to do justice for the divine movement of creation and divine action. Indeed, much of modernity would affirm that to impose a metaphysically absolute, changeless God on the textual data and experiential realities of apparent dynamic interaction is to promote a lifeless, immobile being.

The Problem of Volition and Knowledge

The fourth category of movement ascribed to God is movement of the will or knowledge. Though there are several variations of arguments that insist on the denial of God's immutability based on his apparent volitional alterations or advances in his knowledge, we will briefly look at two – open theism and the exegetical decision to interpret the "divine repentance" passages literally.

Open Theism and Intellectual Movement

Open theism is an appropriate place of examination in this sub-section treating the apparent movement of God's will and knowledge; however, one could argue that it would be just as pertinent to cover it in the relational/soteriological sub-section because open theists articulate God's self-limiting of his knowledge to his desire for a real relationship with his creatures. What is at stake in a God who immutably knows all things is the freedom of his people. Therefore, though he could control all things, he has nevertheless chosen to limit his own epistemic life to establish freedom. As Clark Pinnock states: "It holds that God could control the world if he wished to but that he has chosen not to do so for the sake of loving relationships." He continues: "Open theism does not believe that God is ontologically limited but that God voluntarily self-limits so that freely chosen loving relations might be possible."[86] This self-imposition is relationally aimed. Again, Pinnock is a useful example of this point, as he writes: "Had God not granted us significant freedom, including the freedom to disappoint him, we would not be creatures capable of entering into loving relationships with

[85] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* II.1, 496, cited from Gunton, *Act and Being*, 57.

[86] Clark Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics," *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology* 44 (2005): 237. Pinnock explicitly states the relational motivation: "The main emphasis of open theism is that God created the world for loving relations" (Pinnock, "Open Theism," 238).

him. Love, not freedom, is the central issue. Freedom was given to make loving relations possible."[87]

If God knew beforehand what creatures would do, they would not be free to do otherwise at the risk of God being incorrect in his knowing. Therefore, for the sake of creaturely freedom God welcomes self-imposed ignorance. Consequently, not only does God change, but he is also in constant change as he continually learns as his creatures act and live. In this way, the Creator/creature distinction is absolved as the Creator's knowledge mirrors creaturely knowledge in that epistemic advancement is relationally limited as we grow in knowledge with the happenings of time. For example, I only know what my Australian shepherd dog will do next as he does it. My knowledge is therefore relationally tied to the actions and progression of my dog. So too, says the open theist, it is with God and those he loves. An immutable God is an impossibility in the open model, which predicates significant movement of the mind.

Another popular open theist, Greg Boyd, points to the vast number of texts throughout scripture which seem to indicate an openness of mind by virtue of God intellectually relenting. Boyd writes: "Unfortunately for the classical interpretation, the text does not say, or remotely imply, that it looks like the Lord intended something then changed his mind." Boyd continues, "Rather, the Lord himself tells us in the plainest terms possible that he intended one thing and then changed his mind and did something else."[88]

One need not be an open theist, however, to ascribe mental change to God. We could point to a few theologians, especially in the last one hundred years, who would predicate mental movement in God. Jay Wesley Richards gives an example of how one might deny the concept of divine immutability, or at least alter it in substantial ways, by virtue of atemporality's relationship with changelessness. Richards writes:

> To this point, then, the argument is that God's knowledge relation can and does change, for the simple reason that, in order for God to know what is the case, he will have to know what is the case at a time. And what is the case at time t will usually differ from what is the case at time t +1. So, given God's omniscience, if John Brown is running at time t, and John Brown is not running at t + 1, then God will know John Brown is now running at t, but he will know John Brown is not

[87] Clark Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 45.

[88] Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 77.

> now running at t +1. So presumably, if God is omniscient, then his knowledge will change to account for changes in what is the case.[89]

While Richards' example is simply an intellectual hypothetical, William Lane Craig gives us an actual example of asserting this conception of atemporality and immutability when he says:

> We have seen that God's real relation to the temporal world gives us good grounds for concluding God to be temporal in view of the extrinsic change he undergoes through his changing relations with the world. But the existence of a temporal world also seems to entail intrinsic change in God in view of his knowledge of what is happening in the temporal world. For since what is happening in the world is in constant flux, so also must God's knowledge of what is happening be in constant flux.[90]

Whereas Craig would denounce the conclusion of open theism, the relationship between God and temporal items means that we are forced to predicate intellectual movement to God. What is more, as we will see, what often accompanies intellectual movements in God as he increases or decreases in knowledge is volitional movement as particular revelations entail a change in action for God.

The Volitional Movement of a Repenting God

A more comprehensive analysis of the passages that describe God as repenting or having volitional movement would prove to be a worthy project. However, given that theologians usher in these passages as justification for denying a classical conception of divine immutability, it is worth mentioning them here as well. The argument for this denial of immutability is straightforward—a plain reading of particular passage necessitates the conclusion that God changes at least as it pertains to his volitional action seen in his repentance. Genesis 6, for example, describes a God who examines the wickedness within humans, which leads to his regretting that he ever made them. A similar kind of regretful change is expressed in 1 Samuel 15 as God divulges that he regrets making Saul king.

Moreover, there are passages within the prophetic oracles that indicate a volitional dependency. Meaning, for threats or promises to be genuine, God's volitional decision making must be reactive to the obedience or disobedience of his people. For example, God says in Jeremiah 18:10, "and if it does evil in my

[89] Richards, *The Untamed God*, 202.

[90] William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 97.

sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it."[91]

Terrence E. Fretheim points out that there are "40 explicit references to divine repentance."[92] He defines repentance as "a metaphor whose roots are to be found in the dynamics of interpersonal human relationships." He continues: "Generally, the use of the word 'repentance' presupposes that one has said or done something to another and, finding that to be hurtful or inadequate or dissatisfactory in some way, seeks to reverse the effects through contrition, sorrow, regret, or some other form of 'turning'."[93] Fretheim correctly notes that biblical instances of God's "repentance" "is a metaphor." However, Fretheim argues that every metaphor contains "both a 'yes' and a 'no' (an 'is' and 'is not') with respect to God."[94] This understanding leads Fretheim to conclude that the "no" of the divine-repentance metaphor is that God does not repent like humans, i.e., from sin toward righteousness. Nevertheless, the "yes" of the metaphor demonstrates there is real volitional turning in God.[95]

The Problem of Divine Freedom and Contingency

The problem of divine freedom and contingency is related to the problem of creation and divine action. The mere existence of creation entails, so some argue, a problem for classical theists. Often, the problem of divine freedom is brought up as an issue pertaining to the doctrine of divine simplicity. However, the conversation necessarily bleeds into consideration of divine immutability as well. Simply put, the problem references the dilemma proponents of divine immutability and divine simplicity face regarding the choice between divine freedom and divine contingency in relationship to divine action and knowledge.

For example, if we affirm the apophatic predicate of simplicity and renounce composition in God, his actions are necessary given that his *ad extra* acts—such as creation—are necessary expressions of his simple essence, so the argument

[91] Unless otherwise noted, all passages will be taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

[92] Terrence E. Fretheim, "The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10 (1988): 47. For this point, I am indebted to Steve Duby and his article, " 'For I am God, not a Man,' Divine Repentance and the Creator-Creature Distinction" in *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12.2 (2018): 149–69.

[93] Fretheim, "The Repentance of God," 51.

[94] Fretheim, "The Repentance of God," 51.

[95] A similar strategy to divine repentance can be found in Ware, "An Evangelical Reexamination," 431–7; and Rob Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 194–6. For a response to Fretheim and those like him, see Duby, " 'For I Am God, Not a Man,' " 149–69.

goes. This follows from attributes such as God being called "Lord, Creator, Redeemer, and Refuge" since if these attributes are said to exist in a simple God, they must exist necessarily.[96] Therefore, in this model, God lacks freedom as he must create or he must redeem, etc.

Those who wish to deviate from or deny classical immutability by virtue of the problem of divine freedom might concede and affirm that the attributes of "creator" or "redeemer" exist within God necessarily by virtue of his divine simplicity. However, to give into this concession creates the alternative conundrum—that of contingency. If God creates necessarily, it will mean that there is not a possible world in which God could not have created or existed alone apart from creation.

We can find two modern expressions of this line of argumentation in the works of R.T. Mullins and Jay Wesley Richards. Mullins argues that divine simplicity should not be listed amongst the divine perfections as he thinks it is not "metaphysically compossible with who God is."[97] He argues this on the basis that "the Triune God is perfectly free, and freedom . . . is not compossible with pure act. One should recall that as pure act God has no unactualized potential. If God has any unactualized potential, he is not simple."[98]

Given his understanding of divine freedom, Mullins argues we should conclude that it is possible that God could have created an alternate universe from the actual one we inhabit. Asking if it so that God could possibly perform such an action, Mullins notes, "the answer seems to be 'yes,' if God is free." However, he continues: "If God did not create a different universe, he has unactualized potential. Divine simplicity should push one to say that God did create another universe. In fact, simplicity should push one to say that God created an infinite number of universes."[99] The answer, for Mullins, is to deviate from the doctrine of pure actuality, along with strong immutability and simplicity with it.

Elsewhere, Mullins argues that a classical Thomistic articulation of logical, non-real, relations simply does not solve the problem of divine freedom and contingency. Using the example of God's gracious act in the economy of redemption, he writes:

> Augustine and Lombard will quickly appeal to the doctrine of predestination at this point to avoid any change in God. God has, from

[96] These are the problem attributes put forward by R.T. Mullins in "Simply Impossible: A Case Against Divine Simplicity" *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013), 191.
[97] Mullins, "Simply Impossible," 194.
[98] Mullins, "Simply Impossible," 194.
[99] Mullins, "Simply Impossible," 195.

> eternity, decreed to love Peter, they will say, so God has undergone no change in his decree. Does this really solve anything? Not at all. God's eternal decree to bestow grace upon Peter is not identical to the actual manifestation of that grace upon Peter for Peter does not eternally exist. God cannot bestow grace on Peter or express his love toward Peter until the actual concrete particular that is Peter comes into existence. God can express all sorts of loving gestures toward Peter before Peter comes to exist (e.g. eternally decree to send the Son and temporally send the Son), but certain expressions of love simply cannot occur until Peter in fact exists. This involves God activating a potential that he did not previously actualize: bestowing grace on Peter. It also involves God coming to have an accidental property: the bestower of grace on Peter. God has undergone a change, and Augustine and Lombard have failed to rebut this difficulty. They might try to appeal to the denial of real relations again, but it seems difficult for any Christian to seriously maintain that God only stands in a relation of reason to creation in the economy of salvation.[100]

Jay Wesley Richards argues in a similar vein, asserting that pure actuality is a difficult doctrine to accommodate. Instead, he insists that Christian theologians ought to accept God's possessing potentiality to protect divine freedom. Dealing with the awkward tensions that simplicity and immutability have with divine freedom and contingency, he argues that the solution of either eternality or "Cambridge properties" are not sufficient. Ultimately, he proposes a form of "mutability" which might better do justice to divine freedom than a strict changelessness could account for. He writes:

> Even if from eternity God knows what he chooses to create, if God's choice to create is free in the libertarian sense, then he could have chosen differently. In that case, what God would have known from eternity as actually created would be different from what he actually has created. Therefore we should conclude that God is immutable in those respects relevant to his essential perfection and aseity but "mutable" with respect to certain contingent properties because of his freedom.[101]

[100] Mullins, *End of a Timeless God*, 125. He concludes, "The Christian God cannot be timeless, strongly immutable, and simple." He is also worried that a notion of divine simplicity runs the risk of a "modal collapse." We will not treat this argument here but interested readers can see Mullins' thought in *End of a Timeless God*, 137–43.

[101] Richards, *Untamed God*, 212. While it is not the aim of this essay to answer these deviations and

Conclusion

Even though the doctrine of divine immutability has enjoyed relatively unanimous affirmation throughout most of Christian antiquity, the last few centuries have brought about various waves of deviations and denials from a classical understanding of God's changelessness. These deviations and denials are variegated in both source and content, yet each of them predicates movement in God or presents a "problem" in one of five ways: relational/soteriological, incarnational, creation/divine action, knowledge/will, and divine freedom/contingency. This essay, along with the groupings and categories therein, is not meant to be a constructive work, nor an apologetic work. Instead, the goal of this essay is a modest one, to provide a possible working taxonomy for deviations and denials of divine immutability through some of church history. Of course, this taxonomy is not exhaustive, nor is it conclusive. Theologians could demonstrate a taxonomy of similar material using differing categories and figures, which could prove helpful. The material here is simply an attempt at providing a working taxonomy that might be used in theological dialogue and discourse concerning God's changelessness.

denials of divine immutability, readers interested in a counter perspective to Richards and Mullins research project should consult Steven J. Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation: Dogmatic Responses to Some Analytic Questions," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012), 115–42. Instead of deviating from immutability or simplicity, Duby makes use of the helpful scholastic categories of "absolute" and "relative" attributes (Duby, "Divine Simplicity," 126). Employing these categories allows Duby, and those in the classical tradition, to affirm divine simplicity, divine immutability, *actus purus,* God's freedom of indifference with respect to creation, and creation's contingency upon God.

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Staring at the Sun: The Theologian's Pursuit of Holiness and His Obligation to the Church

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Abstract: *This paper explicates Gregory's emphasis on spiritual contemplation and explores its implications on the theologian's relationship to the local church. Over and against an intellectualized vision of the theological task that would separate the topics of scholarly contribution and personal piety as unrelated areas of concern, this paper endorses, with Gregory, an integrated approach to the theological task. Identifying the theologian as occupying a space within the collection of gifts, which Christ gives to the church for her edification (cf., Eph 4:11–16), this paper argues that for a theologian to live up to his name, he must perform his task within and for the church, with a reverence and devotion that befits the assembly of the saints. This paper will provide theological and biblical rationale for this principle, as well as a contrasting case study in the person of Karl Barth (1886–1968).*

Key Words: Theological Methodology, Spiritual Consecration, Gregory of Nazianzus, Karl Barth, Ecclesiology

Introduction

> "Then: 'Blessèd ones, till by flame purified no soul may pass this point. Enter the fire and heed the singing from the other side.' "[2]

These are the words Dante Alighieri (AD 1264–1321) reports hearing toward the close of his *Purgatorio.* Having traveled through the nine circles of Hell and up the mountain of Purgatory, led by his guide, Virgil, Dante finds himself coming to the precipice of heaven. The climb up the mountain has been arduous but rewarding: he has experienced the painful and joyful process of sanctification, losing in succession the vices of pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, and gluttony. He desires to leave earth's mountain behind in his ascent to heavenly beatitude among the starry host, but before he can enter Paradise, he must walk through Purgatory's wall of fire, where the seventh and final vice, lust, will melt away. Before entering the realm of heaven, Dante must be made to be fit for heaven.

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[2] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno, The Purgatorio, The Paradiso,* trans. John Ciardi (New York, NY: New American Library, 2003), *Purgatorio,* Canto XXVII.10–12.

In his first theological oration, Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 325–390) writes at length on a very similar theme: *spiritual consecration*. He warns against treating theology as a trivial matter. Gregory insists that theology, contemplation of the things of God, is not fitting for those who are not devoted to Christ at the level of spiritual reverence. "Discussion of theology is not for everyone," he says, "but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and, *more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul.* For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun's brightness."[3] In other words, Gregory stresses caution. The truth of God is *not* something to be trifled with. This paper explicates Gregory's emphasis on spiritual contemplation and explores its implications on the theologian's relationship to the local church. Over and against an intellectualized vision of the theological task that would separate the topics of scholarly contribution and personal piety as unrelated areas of concern, this paper endorses, with Gregory, an integrated approach to the theological task. Identifying the theologian as occupying a space within the collection of gifts that Christ gives to the church for her edification (cf., Eph 4:11–16), this paper argues that for a theologian to live up to his name, he must perform his task within and for the church, with a reverence and devotion that befits the assembly of the saints. I will provide theological and biblical rationale for this principle, as well as a contrasting case study in the person of Karl Barth (1886–1968). While we might consider Barth's theological contribution (or lack thereof, depending on one's view of him) on the merits of his work alone, this paper will focus uniquely on the impact that Barth's tolerated habitual sin had on his theology.[4]

Consecration in Gregory's First Theological Oration

Gregory's *Oration* 27 is his introduction sermon on a series of polemic homilies

[3] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 27, §3 (Emphasis added). English translation cited: Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ* (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2002).

[4] Admittedly, there is a certain of level arbitrariness in choosing Barth as an example here. Other theologians could have certainly been examined in his stead, but I have chosen Barth for two simple reasons. First, his acclaim and influence on modern theology makes him conceptually accessible to a wide readership. Barth is famous (or infamous) in many theological circles, which makes the example of his life consequential far and wide. If the theological principle Gregory lays out in his *Oration* 27 applies to anyone, it *should* apply to Barth. As one of the most preeminent modern theologians, Barth is an excellent test case to compare the modern vision of theology with the ancient one as explicated by Gregory. Second, I have chosen Barth because his life and theology stands out to me, personally, as a cautionary tale that uniquely punctuates Gregory's thesis. This, I trust, will become clear below.

against the Eunomians.[5] As such, it is full of sharp and biting rhetorical remarks. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Gregory's tactic is to malign his opponents and overwhelm them with insults. A careful reading of this oration reveals a sincere exasperation on the part of Gregory: he is deeply concerned not only by the blasphemous conclusions the Eunomians reach in their theology proper, but also by the manner in which they reach their conclusions. In his estimation, their manner of theologizing bespeaks a flippancy in the theological task, which to Gregory is flabbergasting. The sharp rhetoric should therefore be read as a proverbial shock of ice-cold water: he desires for his opponents—and his audience—to be alert and wide awake at the high stakes involved in theology. In order for us to appreciate the importance of consecration in Gregory's theological methodology, we must get a broad outline of the sermon before us.

Gregory begins the sermon by accusing the Eunomians of prideful insincerity: according to Gregory, his opponents are "mere verbal tricksters."[6] His first objection, therefore, is not aimed directly at the content of their theological musings, but in their posture in the theological task. "But in fact they undermined every approach to true religion by their complete obsession with setting and solving conundrums."[7] Theology, for Gregory's opponents, was a mere game, and this was intolerable for him. " 'The great mystery' of our faith," he says, "is in danger of becoming a mere social accomplishment."[8] Gregory will go on in his oration to rhetorically ask, "Can it be that nothing else matters for you, but your tongue must always rule you, and you cannot hold back words that, once conceived, must be delivered?"[9] There is a kind of vain and unbecoming need to be the center of attention that is, according to Gregory, completely at odds with the proper and reverent approach to theology. Theological discussions should not be pursued as an effort to prop up oneself. This kind of vainglory is given no quarter by Gregory: "Well," he says, "there are plenty of other fields in which you can win fame. Direct your disease there, and you may do good."[10]

This is why Gregory goes so far as to say that "discussion of theology is not for everyone, I tell you, not for everyone—it is no such inexpensive or effortless pursuit."[11] Theology should not be pursued and taught with casual flippancy. It is

[5] Eunomianism was a fourth-century heresy, which denied the divinity of the Son, and taught that the Son was instead a created being.

[6] *Oration* 27, §1.

[7] *Oration* 27, §2.

[8] *Oration* 27, §2.

[9] *Oration* 27, §9.

[10] *Oration* 27, §9.

[11] *Oration* 27, §3.

rather for those "who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul."[12] Without this kind of purification, the kind of theological discussion Gregory has in mind here is akin to staring directly at the sun without prior adjustment: "For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun's brightness."[13] It is striking that Gregory goes out of his way to say that undergoing purification of body and soul is *more important* of a prerequisite for discussing theology in this way than the demonstration of sound footing in study. This should not be seen as a denigration of the importance of study, but as rather the elevation of virtue's importance in theology.

We should bear in mind that by "discussion of theology," Gregory does not mean to signify all questions and clarifications about God—as if to say, no one is fit to ask questions about God or think about God until having been tested and purified (indeed, the process of testing *positively requires* some kind of imperfect, raw discussion of God—working through difficult and uneducated questions of God is how one is educated to begin with). Gregory goes out of his way to clarify that he does *not* mean to prohibit all thoughts of God in this sweeping way.[14] By "discussion of theology," Gregory seems to have a kind of hubris instructive declaration in mind. These discussions need not be in a formal teaching setting to apply to what Gregory is talking about (though this may be the case), he simply means the kind of discussion that presumes to propagate ill-considered opinions about God as if they were true.

If this is the case, what *are* the appropriate circumstances for discussing theology? Gregory addresses this query by asking and answering three questions: *what is the right time, who should listen, and what aspects of theology should be discussed?* In answer to the first question, Gregory writes, "Whenever we are free from the mire and noise without, and our commanding faculty is not confused by illusory, wandering images, leading us, as it were, to mix fine script with ugly scrawling, or sweet-smelling scent with slime."[15] For Gregory, there is a kind of posture that is befitting for theological discussions, and it might

[12] *Oration* 27, §3.

[13] *Oration* 27, §3.

[14] "Yet I am not maintaining that we ought not to be mindful of God at all times—my adversaries, ever ready and quick to attack, need not pounce on me again. It is more important that we should remember God than that we should breathe: indeed, if one may say so, we should do nothing else besides . . . by this mindfulness [we will] be molded to purity. So it is not continual remembrance of God I seek to discourage, but continual discussion of theology." *Oration* 27, §4.

[15] *Oration* 27, §3.

be characterized as the antithesis of flippancy: Reverence. Other matters ("ugly scrawling") should be pushed aside, so that theology ("fine script") might be given one's fullest attention. This is made clear in his response to the second question. *Who should listen to discussions of theology?* Gregory answers, "Those for whom it is a serious undertaking, not just another subject like any other for entertaining small-talk, after the races, the theater, songs, food, and sex: for there are people who count chatter on theology and clever deployment of arguments as one of their amusements."[16] This is close to the heart of Gregory's critique in this oration as a whole: opinions on the theater and songs and food may be of no significant consequence, but this is not the case with opinions on God. It is not a common subject, and should therefore not be discussed as if it were. Theological discussions should be consecrated—they should be set aside and given reverent attention. This should not be taken as a kind of haughty high-brow disrespect for common people. Indeed, Gregory is coming from a place of deep care and respect to all listeners of theology; he is not trying to keep theological discussions only among the highly educated and elite, he is rather concerned with making sure that ordinary people are not misled by irreverent teachers, a point made clear by his answer to the third question. *What aspects of theology should be investigated, and to what limit?* Gregory answers, "Only aspects within our grasp, and only to the limit of the experience and capacity of our audience."[17]

Once this principle of making sure that the audience is appropriately accounted for in theological discussions is established, Gregory moves back to consider the internal condition of the theologian. "Once we have removed from our discussion all alien elements, and dispatched the great legion into the heard of swine to rush down into the abyss, the next step to take is to look at ourselves and to smooth the theologian in us, like a statue, into beauty."[18] The imagery here is striking: Gregory imagines the theologian as a slab of stone or marble that is sculpted into a beautiful statue by way of chiseling away sin and impurity. This is not a passive process for Gregory. He envisions intense self-scrutiny in the process of consecrating oneself for the sacred activity of theological contemplation. "What," he asks, "is this alarming disease, this appetite that can never be sated? Why do we keep our hands tied and our tongues armed?"[19] This—the condition of having one's "hands tied and tongue armed"—is a tragedy, for Gregory. It is not fitting for one to be free in theological musings apart from a virtuous life. For

[16] *Oration* 27, §3.
[17] *Oration* 27, §3.
[18] *Oration* 27, §7.
[19] *Oration* 27, §7.

Gregory, the work of theology is inextricably tied to acts of hospitality, "brotherly love, wifely affection, virginity, feeding the poor, singing psalms, night-long vigils, penitence," the mortification of the body with fasting, prayer (by which we "take up our abode with God"), the subordination of inferior elements (the nature of dust) to the better (the spirit), the meditation of death, the "mastery over our passions, mindful of the nobility of our second birth," the taming of "our swollen and inflamed tongues," and the resistance of "pride ... unreasonable grief ... crude pleasures ... dirty laughter ... undisciplined eyes ... greedy ears ... immoderate talk ... wondering thoughts" and "anything in ourselves which the Evil One can take over from us and use against us."[20]

For Gregory, the work of the theologian *is* the attendance to all these matters. There is a clear connection between faithful theological contemplations and faithful living. Gregory will accept no separation between the life of piety and the life of the mind for the theologian worthy of the name.

Theological Contemplation as Participation in the Divine Mind

It could be fair at this juncture to retort back to Gregory, "Says who?" After all, this kind of holistic insistence on marrying godly conduct and contemplation of God is by no means intuitive for those of us who live in the "malaise of modernity."[21] On this very concept, John Webster notes how the "philosophical instinct [of most modern institutions] leads us to assert that the rationality which scholarship requires is independent of character and conviction. What it requires is, rather, the unhindered exercise of innate capacities for the exercise of reason."[22] Webster goes on to say that

> one influential understanding of education works with an ideal of 'indifference,' in two senses. First, the teacher may not impose a way of life and the student may not expect to be encouraged to adopt any particular vision of the world. And second, therefore, education has done its job when the student has learned the skills of critical appraisal of the particular, of 'difference,' by reference to reason's universal norms.[23]

It is not unusual, in other words, for us to refrain from expecting piety from our

[20] *Oration* 27, §7.

[21] This phrase is famously coined by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[22] John Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, Ivor J. Davidson and Alden C. McCray, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 134.

[23] Webster, *Culture of Theology*, 135.

theologians, so long as they demonstrate that they have appropriate intellectual chops. Is Gregory correct, or are modern bifurcations of piety versus theology preferable for academic purposes? Essential for answering this question is the task of determining the nature of the theologian's subject matter. If theology is true to its name, God is the object of the theologian's contemplation, and his ubiquitous and holy presence rules out the possibility of thinking about him well without loving and fearing him (cf., Isa 6:1–5).

Reflecting on the nature of Psalm 14:1 ("The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.' "),[24] Christopher Holmes asks, "How do we avoid foolishness in favor of the great I AM? What kind of moral and spiritual program is necessary to speak of God as self-subsisting, as one for whom existence is not an attribute but a noun? How may we imitate the great I AM?" Holmes's answer is *not* strictly intellectual: "The reason the fool is mistaken as to God's existence is that his heart is cold and his soul callous. Lack of piety—that is the problem."[25] This is consistent with what David says about the fool's unbelief in Psalm 14:3, "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one." Holmes goes on to say, "The fool's problems are not only intellectual. They are also spiritual and moral. It is because he is wicked that he does not believe that God exists."[26]

By contrast, "those who are virtuous will not entertain improper notions about God's nature, as does the fool."[27] Holmes goes on to say, "Our journey in this life is (hopefully) toward purity. Without purity of heart, it is impossible to speak truthfully of God."[28] Why the impossibility? Because God is simple. His essence is identical with his existence, and his holiness is not therefore a part or aspect of him. Rather, he *is* holy. This is not merely a concept that one can accurately consider in the abstract because it is anything but an abstraction: holiness is what God *is*, and it cannot but burn away the dross of vice.

God's holiness, by virtue of what it is, *consumes*. In other words, to approach the holy one in any capacity (including intellectually) is to approach the one who is a Consuming Fire (Heb 12:29)—there is no approaching him without experiencing the heat of his holiness. Increasingly experiencing this heat is progressive sanctification: the believer is *holy-fied*. That which can be burnt up in the believer

[24] All Scripture quotations were taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

[25] Christopher R.J. Holmes, *A Theology of the Christian Life: Imitating and Participating in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 8.

[26] Holmes, *A Theology*, 8.

[27] Holmes, *A Theology*, 8.

[28] Holmes, *A Theology*, 8.

who approaches the presence of God. Virtue, for us, is the creaturely corollary to God's own holiness. "To be virtuous," says Holmes, "is to participate in God; to be virtuous is to trust in Christ—to appropriate Paul's confession, 'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20)—and thus be made virtuous in him through the Spirit."[29]

Of course, the chasm between the Creator and the creature, ontologically speaking, will never be traversed. Theologians will never cease to be creatures. They will enjoy the bliss of participation in the infinite God in an ever-increasing sense: *further up and further in*, without ever being swallowed up or annihilated by God, and also never exhausting God. The theologian is a finite creature, whose capacity for enjoyment with God will perpetually grow so as to enjoy more of him, but will never exhaust him—for the infinite cannot be circumscribed by the finite. This process of *holy-fication* will never end because God's holiness is ineffably infinite. Holmes is right to say that

> We who desire God will never be satiated. Because God is infinite, we shall never become bored with God or so resemble God that we cease to seek and hunger after him. Accordingly, the manner of God's existence has consequences all the way down, doctrinally speaking.[30]

Simply put, God's own nature does not give us the option of contemplating him rightly in a compartmentalized sense, wherein we consider him with accuracy intellectually but with cold hearts and impure hands that are distant from him. To the degree that we contemplate God rightly, we are participating in his divine mind—we are thinking God's thoughts after him—which is so holy that it cannot do anything but make that which is in its presence increasingly holy as well. "The Father and Son promise to come to us," notes Holmes,

> Their names—most especially their love—become ours through faith. What is common to them by nature is and will become common to us by grace. Grace . . . makes us virtuous. The virtues of God make us virtuous, spiritual. *What has primacy from the point of view of theology—God—has primacy from the point of view of devotion*.[31]

[29] Holmes, *A Theology*, 22.

[30] Holmes, *A Theology*, 24. Holmes will go on to say in another place, "We will never finish with God. A God who is all that he is—such a God is supremely worthy of an eternity of devotion. So great is his glory that the more we become worthy of him by taking up the cross of Christ, the more we sense God's extraordinary grandeur. We shall see, but only as creatures, creatures that are God, yes, but only by participation" (31).

[31] Holmes, *A Theology*, 26 (Emphasis added).

In other words, to know God is to participate in his self-knowledge, and this self-knowledge is holy. Our manner of knowing him, therefore, must be virtuous if it is in any way to be genuine.[32] It is therefore "impossible" to "speak truthfully and lovingly of the perfect God without our lives imitating and sharing in the divine nature."[33] This is why Webster notes that "the flourishing of the theological culture of Christian faith requires, among other things, the cultivation of persons: good theology demands good theologians."[34]

While this point is profound, it need not be overly complicated. Jesus makes this point plainly in John 15:14–15 when he connects "friendship with him" to "obedience." In a very real way, when Jesus responds to the pleading of those strangers on the last day, "I never knew you, depart from me" (Matt 7:21–23), it would be fair for us to summarize him as saying, "*You were not my friend*, depart from me." This does not mean that we must befriend Jesus *by* our acts of obedience, however, as if to say that Jesus befriends us *because* we obey him. We are not attracting him to us by our obedience. Holmes is right when he notes, "We do not call Jesus our friend, but he does, remarkably, call us his friends."[35] "In this is love," says the apostle John, "not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). But Holmes is also right to go on to say, "We are his friends, however, only if we obey, and to obey him is to love him and our neighbor in him."[36] Our loving obedience to Christ, in other words, bespeaks our friendship with Christ. There is no knowing God truly without being his friend, and there is no friendship with God where there is no virtue. Holmes, again,

> The divine virtues by which God directs us to himself enable us to speak of him. Virtue is the path that the doctrine must take. These virtues are not a secondary dimension to the doctrine of God but the means by which God moves us to himself in order that we may not speak falsely about him.[37]

In this way, Holmes is confirming—with further theological reasoning—what Gregory states as axiomatic: a flippant and impure manner of theologizing

[32] "Our participation in the God who is at once immanent to us and transcendent of us," says Holmes, "is explained by the soul's elevation into God's self-knowledge. We strive to know God in line with God's own knowledge of himself." Holmes, *A Theology*, 31–2.

[33] Holmes, *A Theology*, 44.

[34] Webster, *Culture of Theology*, 131.

[35] Holmes, *A Theology*, 97.

[36] Holmes, *A Theology*, 97.

[37] Holmes, *A Theology*, 127.

will end in error by necessity. Such theologizing cannot avoid error. The reason why this kind of theologizing so often leads to heresy (as in the case of the Eunomians) is that *it is itself heretical*. It is, specifically, heretical in a *Trinitarian* sense. This kind of theologizing, wherein the theologian talks about knowing God without loving him, detaches "the Word from the Spirit, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father."[38] "Just as the intellectual and affective are one in God," says Holmes, "may they be one in us."[39] In other words, to theologize in such a way that detaches intellectual contemplation of God from a pure (i.e., virtuous) love of God is to function as if the Holy Spirit (Love) is separable from the Son (Word) and Father. But the Trinity is undivided: to worship the "One God in Trinity and Trinity in unity" is a holistic pursuit.[40] Thus, Holmes concludes his work in this way:

> One cannot consider the sublime truths of God without being engaged by them. There is no room for objective detachment. God cannot be understood without being loved. . . . Description of God is a moral and spiritual undertaking. We make claims about God's nature, being, and manner of being. And yet we make them within the context of prayerful attentiveness to Jesus Christ and his fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. . . . There is no place for moral and spiritual laxity here.[41]

"Good theologians," notes Webster, "are those whose life and thought are caught up in the process of being slain and made alive by the gospel and of acquiring and exercising habits of mind and heart which take very seriously the gospel's provocation."[42]

If all this is true, we should expect to find a tight correlation in the Scriptures between godly living and sound doctrine. And this is precisely what we find, particularly in Paul's pastoral epistles. It is not for nothing that the qualifications for ecclesial leadership that Paul offers in these letters primarily involves one's living up to ethical standards (1 Tim 3:1–13; Tit 1:5–9). In his First Epistle to Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy of his charge to remain in Ephesus so that he might "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith" (1 Tim 1:3–4). This charge is simple

[38] Holmes, *A Theology*, 129
[39] Holmes, *A Theology*, 129.
[40] The Athanasian Creed.
[41] Holmes, *A Theology*, 156.
[42] Webster, *Culture of Theology*, 133.

enough, and it clearly has a doctrinal emphasis. However, Paul does not separate this charge from its aim, which is "love that issues from a *pure heart* and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5, emphasis added). He goes on to contrast "sound doctrine" not with *erroneous* doctrine, but with ungodly conduct (1 Tim 1:9–11). This interweaving between discussions of doctrine and conduct carries on throughout the entirety of this Epistle, and the image that emerges is clear: godly conduct coheres with sound doctrine, and ungodly conduct coheres with false teaching—to pursue sound doctrine *is* to pursue godliness, and vice versa.

Much of the same emphasis is on display in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy as well. The close of chapter two joins (a) charges to avoid sin and (b) erroneous doctrine in a single sweep, so that the distinction between one and the other almost requires the reader to separate what Paul joins together (2 Tim 2:22–26). This theme is also alive and well in Paul's Letter to Titus, whose instruction regarding virtuous living was famously contrasted with Cretan culture (cf., Tit 1:12–14). He will go to say explicitly that godly conduct *adorns* "the doctrine of God our Savior" (Tit 2:9).

A striking example of this principle at work in a negative way is found in Jude. While Jude initially planned to write to his audience to revel in "our common salvation," he was compelled to write an apologetic defense of the faith in light of erroneous teaching, which had "crept in unnoticed" (Jude 3–4). The exact content of this false doctrine is unclear (though we can at least surmise that the teaching trafficked in a kind of hyper-charismatic dependence on "dreams," per Jude 8). Regardless of the false teachings' *content,* Jude is explicit about its effects: the doctrine perverts "the grace of our God into sensuality" (Jude 4; cf., 5–7). The false teaching served as a pretense for sexual immorality, and thus the departure of godly conduct and the departure of godly living went, for Jude's audience, hand in hand. In these examples and others, we see that the New Testament corroborates Gregory's central insistence: theological contemplation and the commitment to hold to sound theology cannot be separated from the pursuit of holy living. To lose one is necessarily to lose the other.

The Theologian as a Gift to the Church

In considering the theologian's formation of virtue, there are several habits we could consider (i.e., meditation, fasting, solitude, prayer), but here I wish to consider the theologian in relationship to the corporate body of Christ. The reason is that local church involvement can serve as a concrete expression of the divergent visions of piety described above. The academic theologian who sharply distinguishes between his professional vocation and his life of holiness may or may

not faithfully participate in ecclesial body life; such participation is accidental to his vocation. This is not so for the theologian who embodies Gregory's vision of a consecrated life. So, in light of everything we have established above, what implications are left regarding the theologian's place in the local church? To the degree that obeying Christ and loving him involves a corporate and ecclesial dimension, the theologian *must* attend to his place in the church. After all, there is a reason why Gregory's reflections on theology and a consecrated life in *Oration* 27 were delivered in a *sermon*. There stood Gregory, the under-shepherd of Christ's flock, soberly warning against the treachery of following wolves.

In a very real sense, even asking the question of the theologian's place in the local church is a novelty that would have struck the earliest Christians as odd. The Christian life has an irreducibly corporate and communal shape. A Christian is one who is baptized by the Spirit into "one body" (1 Cor 12:5), delivered "from the domain of darkness," transferred into "the dominion of [God's] beloved Son" (Col 1:13), and a "living stone" who is, together with other Christians, being "built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:4–5). In fact, the majority of the New Testament is written with instructions, not to *individual Christians*, but to local churches and their leaders for corporate instruction. In other words, to be an actual recipient of the New Testament's teaching, one must be positioned in the church, alongside other believers. This is evident from the many "one another" commands (love, exhort, rebuke, bear the burdens of, show patience and longsuffering toward, teach, admonish, rejoice with, weep with, etc.). These commands, which constitute a *massive* portion of the Christian life, can *only be followed* in a corporate, communal sense.

To be a Christian is to be a member of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church. God is in the business of binding and loosening *in heaven*. But how does that which is bound and loosened in heaven become bound and loosened on earth? Who is responsible for declaring and legitimizing the new member's status in the Universal church? To whom does Christ hand his keys to the kingdom, to bind and loosen on earth that which is bound and loosened in heaven (Matt 16:18–19, 18:15–20)? Local churches.[43] The Universal church is made visible in

[43] For brevity's sake, we must assume a lot here about the nature of ecclesiology. While I am not providing an adequate and thorough defense of what I say here about the relationship between the local and Universal church, such defenses have been provided elsewhere. E.g., see, Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016) and Greg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). For more popular articulations of the ecclesiology endorsed here, see Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012); Dever and Jonathan Leeman,

local churches, and in *only* local churches (i.e., academic institutions cannot wield the keys to the kingdom). Her members are certainly present all over the planet, but one cannot *see* her until local churches gather. The concept of "church," in other words, remains phantasmal and ghostly until "incarnated" and materialized with bodies, bread, wine, water, and Word.

Again, the relevance all this has on the theologian's place in the local church may not be intuitive to many of us.[44] But this lack of intuition simply reveals how enmeshed the Cartesian ideal of contemplation has become in our institutional understanding of the theologian's task.[45] The story of how the academy and the church became disjointed is a colorful one that goes beyond the scope of this paper, but regardless of how we arrived at this current state of affairs, the fact remains that "the Christian scholar" does not immediately conjure up the idea of a churchman in the imaginations of evangelicals today.[46] But if what it means to be a "Christian" is necessarily oriented by ecclesiology, this must apply to the theologian, who dons himself to be a *teacher* of God for the *people* of God. He must understand himself as conducting his work within *this* context; what Webster describes as the "culture of theology." The church is

> a mountain, the foundation of the new order; a heavenly city; an assembly. It is place, structure, and society, but place, structure, and society transformed beyond mere tangible locality by the fact that at

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eds. *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Institutional Age* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015); Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group); and Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016).

[44] For example, Dānut Jemna and Dānut Mānāstireanu, argue that the bifurcation between academy and church-life is not necessarily a bad thing. The primary benefit they point to is the possibility of facilitating ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical and Orthodox traditions in Romania. See Jemna and Mānāstireanu, "When the Gap between Academic Theology and the Church Makes Possible the Orthodox-Evangelical Dialogue." *Religions*, (12)4, (2021): 274.

[45] This Enlightenment anthropology is far flatter and reductionistic than the classical and biblical model, which has been ably retrieved recently by Matthew LaPine, *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

[46] For more on the historical development of this separation between church and academy, see Gerald L. Hiestand, "Pastor-Scholar to Professor-Scholar: Exploring the Theological Disconnect Between the Academy and the Local Church" in *Westminster Journal of Theology* 70 (2008): 355–69; Gerald L. Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015); Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 69–93. Additionally, though not the topic of the work *per se*, this bifurcation is powerfully illustrated by Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson in their work, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992).

> its center is the living God, the judge, Jesus himself. The Christian community lives, acts, and suffers in *this* space—a space constituted by the personal rule and authoritative speech of Jesus.[47]

This makes the theologian, by definition, accountable not only to the Christian tradition, but the *living* Christian tradition manifested in the form of the local church. The theologian must think of himself as one of the gifts with which Christ has filled his church, as described by the Apostle Paul:

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and *teachers*, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ*, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Eph 4:11–14)

To the degree that theologians rightly conceptualize themselves as "teachers," Paul has informed them of their telos in no uncertain terms: they are given to the church by Christ himself *for building up his body*. Whatever genuine theological insights they have gained in their studies are gifts that God has given to them with the express purpose of distributing to the body. This work of building up the body of Christ, which is central to the very identity of the theologian, he cannot perform from a distance. Christ fills his church with the gift of leaders (including theologians) who bless the church, as it were, *from the inside*. The theologian who does *not* make it his central ambition to build up the church finds himself in a Samson-like position: having been given by Yahweh to Christ's Israel for her deliverance and protection and benefit, he selfishly pursues his own gratification, benefiting those he was assigned to only when it is convenient for him, when their needs overlap with his selfish pursuits (cf., Judg 13–16). But his (theological) strength does not exist for himself, and he should not behave as if it did.

This means that the typical way of conceptualizing theological transmission in terms of a superstructure that resembles an assembly line is erroneous. Such a vision of theological transmission may look something like this: at one end of the line are *textual critics and exegetes*, who lay foundational work from the text of Scripture itself. They are answerable to, and indebted to, no one but

[47] Webster, *Culture of Theology*, 56.

the text. The next figures on the assembly line are the *biblical theologians*, who work with the resources the exegetes provide to outline canonical theology, which develops progressively over the span of Scripture. Further down, past the biblical theologians are the *systematicians*—who systematize the findings of the biblical theologians in dogmatic fashion—*philosophical theologians*—who provide philosophical articulations of systematic teaching to resource Christian thought in the world—and *historical theologians*—who bring the testimony of church history to bear on a given theological topic. The *pastor-theologian* occupies a place on the far end of the assembly line. He plays the role of the generalist, distributing the best of all previous figures to the *members of the local church*. Such is a common conception of how these different figures relate to one another in the transmission of theology within the Christian community.[48]

[48] This particular picture is one that was delivered by Owen Strachan in an address to a group of PhD students at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in January, 2019, but its general sentiment can be seen elsewhere. Indeed, it seems to be assumed in the way disciplines are often sharply segregated from one another. Specialization, for all its value, tends to foster a myopia in this setting that prevents practitioners from recognizing an important, though oft forgotten reality: the dividing walls of disciplines are not fixed laws of nature but are erected by philosophies. In this landscape, the default approach to the OT, for example, assumes that fairness to the discipline requires consideration of other disciplines (e.g., NT studies or dogmatics) be relegated to the position of mere application; they *may not* function, methodologically, in the hermeneutic used to interpret the OT. E.g., Köstenberger and Patterson write, "unlike systematic theology, which tends to be abstract and topical in nature, biblical theology aims to understand a given passage of Scripture in its original setting." Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 698. They go on to say in a footnote (Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 698 n9, emphasis added), "We hasten to add that *once exegesis and biblical theology have done their work*, systematic theology certainly has a place." Likewise, D. A. Carson writes, "Biblical theology tends to seek out the rationality and communicative genius of each literary genre; systematic theology tends to integrate the diverse rationalities in its pursuit of a large-scale, worldview-forming synthesis. In this sense, systematic theology tends to be a culminating discipline; biblical theology, though it is a worthy end in itself, tends to be a bridge discipline." D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 103. This Carson says after explaining that both "systematic theology and biblical theology enjoy a common base of authority, *viz.* canonical Scripture" (Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 102). This is interesting precisely because the authoritative hermeneutical principle "canon" is a product of systematic theology, which would seem to undermine the sequential construction (first hermeneutics, then systematics). Kevin Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 63, makes this precise point: "In short, neither exegesis nor biblical theology is possible apart from explicitly theological presuppositions, assumptions about the nature and identity of God." "Systematic and Biblical Theology," 102. Carson, it should be noted, acknowledges the inevitability of what Vanhoozer says, though it is not clear from his description how self-consciously the reader should let his theology inform his hermeneutic: "Although in terms of authority status there needs to be an

Far more preferable to this conception of theological transmission is to think of all these roles as existing within a broad *ecosystem* of theologizing. And like any "ecosystem," it flourishes when there is a lot of cross-pollination. The relationships between these figures are not (or rather, *ought not be*) simply those of benefactor and beneficiary, as if the exegete stands to benefit the biblical theologian without the biblical theologian having anything significant to offer the exegete. The relationships are symbiotic. The philosophical theologian should look to the biblical theologian for resources. He should also *give* the biblical theologian resources. The exegete who labors over the textual variants in the Bible has a conception of *what the Bible is* (i.e., the inspired word of God) thanks to the systematician. At the same time, the systematician has textual findings with which to work in articulating dogma thanks to the exegete. This reciprocation works all the way up and all the way down. The pastor-theologian benefits the flock under his care with biblical wisdom. He is their shepherd. But he is also a sheep; an *under-shepherd* who stands with fellow sheep under the care of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ (Heb 13:20). And standing right *there*, under the care of his Good Shepherd, the under-shepherd is not only expected to resource his flock, but he is also expected to *be resourced* by them. He and his Spirit-filled congregation are to "one-another" each other. The lay church member needs the biblical theologian and the exegete. The biblical theologian and exegete also need the lay church member.

Therefore, while it may be appropriate to say that pastors are accountable to the findings of scholars who help to "define the edges" of sound exegesis and historical orthodoxy, such scholars cannot define those edges as untethered pontificators. Their work is not to build fences for sheep pins in an open field so that pastors might fill them with their church members; it is rather to identify the fences *from within the pin—as fellow sheep alongside fellow church members*. The responsibility of safeguarding the structural integrity of those fences is a responsibility bequeathed to the entire church. And it will take the entire church—scholar and Sunday school teacher alike—to fulfill this responsibility.

To put the matter frankly, the church's theological ecosystem does not *need* the exegetical work of a biblical scholar who is not under the submission of a local church pastor, or the dogmatic work of a systematician who is unconcerned with church history, or the biblical theologian who is not conscious

outward-tracing line from Scripture through exegesis towards biblical theology to systematic theology . . . in reality, various 'back loops' are generated, each discipline influencing the others, and few disciplines influencing the other more than does systematic theology, precisely because it is so worldview forming" ("Systematic and Biblical Theology," 102).

of the philosophical presuppositions turning the cogs in his methodology, etc. Such scholars cannot function properly in the theological ecosystem of the church. Untethered scholarship is unhealthy—not only for the scholars themselves but for the countless saints that untethered scholarship affects downstream. The theologian must pursue holiness in his theological task, and this pursuit is, in a very real way, a community project. He cannot theologize well without loving God, and he cannot love God well without becoming holy in his obedient pursuit of virtue, and he cannot become holy in his obedient pursuit of virtue in an isolated fashion, detached from the community of Christ's saints.

Karl Barth and the Theological Handicap of Tolerated Sin

As an illustrative example of the importance of virtuous consecration in the theological task, we may examine Karl Barth, with particular attention to his adulterous relationship with Charlotte von Kirschbaum (1899–1975), as a cautionary tale. If what we have learned from Gregory above holds up, we must insist that Barth's theological contemplation was handicapped by his long-term, high-handed unfaithfulness to his marriage vows in the sight of God. Gregory would insist that it is not possible for such blatant disobedience to have no impact on the fidelity of one's theological contemplations. So, with sober humility, in the spirit of Galatians 6:1 ("... keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted") we *must* insist on Barth's marital unfaithfulness entering into the equation when we assess his theology. This we must do even while we insist on eschewing the slightest hint of smug judgmentalism—after all, what do we have that we did not receive by grace (cf., 1 Cor 4:7)?

It is important to be explicit, however, about what we can and cannot say. On the one hand, we must resist the temptation to psychologize Barth from a distance in a reductionistic way. As if to say, "Barth's affair with von Kirschbaum effected his theology in such and such precise manner: because of his affair, he held *this* belief." To reason in such a way is to fall victim to the same modernistic rationalism we have been raging against in this paper, which treats theology as a merely intellectual exercise. If it were that easy to determine how erroneous beliefs are derived from sinful behavior, it would be possible to correct those beliefs purely in the abstract, regardless of behavior. The contaminating nature of sin is complex and mysterious. On the other hand, we are not consigned to absolute silence when considering Barth's vice in relation to his theology. This is because Barth himself was not silent in his private correspondence with von Kirschbaum about how he conceptualized their affair from a theological perspective.

In her article, "Karl Barth and Charlotte von Kirschbaum," Christiane Tietz

does a thorough job at summarizing the history of Barth's unfaithful relationship with von Kirschbaum.[49] What becomes clear from reading the account is that Barth and von Kirschbaum walked into their ungodly conduct with eyes wide open, and yet Barth repeatedly writes as if he were passively acted upon. For example, shortly after Barth meets von Kirschbaum and develops feelings for her, he chooses to write her informing her of his feelings ("... yes, out with it, it's no use, it is just so: because I as well am very fond of you, 'more than I can think' ").[50] We should think about the open-eyed intentionality required to take out stationary, write a letter, post it for delivery, and deliver it. Barth has to willfully make several active choices just to get this message into Kirschbaum's hands.

Yet according to Barth, he was under obligation to make this crucial step and write such a fateful letter: "...when in our conversation it again became *so* clear how perfectly and naturally we suit each other, the situation was so insincere to me that I *needed* to indicate what I saw."[51] Of course, he "*needed*" to do nothing of the kind, but this kind of self-acquittal of responsibility shows up all throughout his letters. He refers to his unfaithfulness to his wife, Nelly, not as unfaithfulness, but as an "incident."[52] And *after* striking up a frank correspondence with von Kirschbaum, wherein their feelings for one another are freely confessed, he hires her to work as his secretary and thereby holds the fire ever-closer to his chest (Prov 6:27).[53] As time progresses with von Kirschbaum living with Barth and his family, tensions in the home continually compounded. Nelly was thrust into a depression, and at one point even threatened Barth with an ultimatum: either von Kirschbaum moves out of the house or they pursue divorce.[54] Barth refused both alternatives, and effectively forced Nelly to remain in a loveless marriage, living in a home with an unfaithful husband and his mistress. He was convinced that he could not avoid a "certain *double* life."[55]

This euphemistic manner of conceptualizing his cruelty toward Nelly and disregard of divine law came with an explicitly theological dimension. Indeed, Barth readily admits that his actions impacted how dogmatic he allowed himself to be. "A strange consequence of our '*experience*' " says Barth, "will be that my

[49] Christiane Tietz, "Karl Barth and Charlotte von Kirschbaum." *Theology Today,* vol. 74(2), (2017): 86–111.

[50] Letter from Barth, quoted in Tietz, "Karl Barth," 93.

[51] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 93.

[52] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 94.

[53] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 96.

[54] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 100.

[55] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 97.

seminar this summer about the recent history of theology will turn out much more lenient, merciful, cautious than it would have been the case otherwise!"[56] In a telling paragraph, Tietz summarizes:

> Barth interprets his own situation theologically as standing in *tension* between "order" and that which "has come upon us unintentionally out of the mysterious-guilty depth of the human," between "the holiness of the command," and "that you [von Kirschbaum] and I (I don't know on which level) are together," between the right and the natural event. Barth also stands in the tension between "the shadow of guilt and suffering and renunciation" and a "*right* to each other which is difficult to outline" and which leads to joy. Barth is convinced: "it cannot just be the devil's work, it *must* have some meaning and a right to live, that we, no, I will only talk about me: that I love you and do not see any chance to stop this." Barth has the feeling that somehow God did this and speaks of "the *two* [Nelly and Charlotte] who are ordained to me."[57]

According to Barth, the pious option is to remain in the tension between the revealed commands of God's Word and the assumed ordination of God in his love for von Kirschbaum. It could not possibly be that God intends for him to deny his affections for a woman that is not his wife—even though this seems to be what the Scriptures clearly teach—and so he concludes that God has purposes to keep him in this tension: refusing to divorce his wife, and refusing to deprive himself of his relationship with von Kirschbaum. "Thus I stand before the eyes of God, *without being able to escape from him* in one or the other way."[58] *God,* according to Barth, has placed him in an impossible dilemma, wherein the closest thing to obedience, and the most pious option, is to stay in an adulterous relationship.

Even before we speculate about the impact this line of thinking may or may not have had on Barth's theology as a whole, we may look at this rationale itself as a prime example of sin's blinding effect. The misery of Barth's situation shows itself to be unnecessary from the hindsight vantage point of his own life. For example, after von Kirschbaum's health degenerates and she is forced to move out of their house, Barth's relationship with Nelly begins to flourish again, showing that the interpersonal conflict in his marriage was not fateful, but was rather, in part, a consequence of his infidelity. But even apart from these circumstan-

[56] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 108.
[57] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 108–9.
[58] Tietz, "Karl Barth," 110 (Emphasis added).

tial considerations, Barth's miserable "double life" was obviously unnecessary in light of any fair assessment of theology. For example, it is as clear a theological conclusion as any that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb 6:18). And yet, Barth's toleration of sin had a stupefying result that led him to imagine God did just this—God, Barth imagines, willed simultaneously for him to piously remain "faithful" (i.e., stay married to Nelly) while impiously remaining unfaithful (i.e., maintain in his adulterous relationship with Charlotte). What, save sin, could reduce the thinking of such a brilliant scholar to such pitiful inconsistency? Sin, evidently, kept Barth from seeing God aright (in this area of God's will, at the very least).

Apart from this, there are other ways Barth's theology may have been affected by his affair as well. Stephen J. Plant suggests that the affair "may have been one reason among several that led [Barth] to abandon the binary oppositions of dialectic theology."[59] The currency of such a theology was "either/or," "the choice for or against," notes Plant, and by 1933 (eight years after Barth and von Kirschbaum began to develop their relationship), "Barth told his colleagues that he would no longer participate in" the dialectical theology journal, *Zwischen den Zeiten* ("Between the Times").[60] Plant suggests that Barth was perhaps compelled to abandon his binary model of theologizing since such a model would leave him self-condemned.

Plant also considers the potential theological consequences of Barth's affair with particular interest to Barth's comments on men and women in *Church Dogmatics* III/4. There, Barth writes how

> sooner or later each man must discover that in regard to the command of God he is a failure, that measured by it we all belong to the category of fools, bunglers and impious who can only cling to the promise hidden in the command, but who certainly cannot congratulate themselves upon nor live in the strength of its fulfillment.[61]

On this passage from Barth's *Dogmatics*, Plant notes, "If Barth has his own situation at the back of his mind, how hard is he on himself? ... it is difficult to evade the impression, *pace* Romans 3:23, that in arguing that *each* person falls short of the standard of God's law Barth may very gently be letting off the hook one par-

[59] Stephen J. Plant, "When Karl met Lollo: the origins and consequences of Karl Barth's relationship with Charlotte von Kirschbaum." *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 72(2), (2019): 140.

[60] Plant, "When Karl met Lollo," 140.

[61] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), III/4, 144.

ticular person."[62] It would seem, in other words, that Barth may be downplaying the significance of disobedience—and therefore, downplaying the severity of *his own* disobedience—in the name of elevating the grace of God. Since *all men* are "fools, bunglers and impious," Barth, in regards to his affair, merely finds himself clinging, with every other man, "to the promise hidden in the command." To the degree that this summary is accurate, Barth would seem to advocate for a way of thinking that Paul explicitly prohibits: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" (Rom 6:1–2a). We might even be so bold as to say that Barth, at least on a private level, falls under Jude's condemnation of "perverting the grace of God into sensuality and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).[63]

We are not here critiquing certain elements of Barth's theology (i.e., his view of grace, or his non-binary and paradox-embracing method) based *solely* on how he used it (i.e., as a justification for his sin)—we do not *need* to do this, since his theology has been ably criticized long before the widespread discovery of his affair.[64] Our claim here is far more modest. We are insisting that Barth's high-handed and habitual sin hampered his theological vision because it *could not do otherwise* in light of the nature of theology (as described above), and we are observing one particular instance of a theological handicap, as made clear by his feeble attempt to justify his vice theologically. Was it that Barth's theology took on a more convincing light because of his sin (i.e., was it believable because it conveniently pampered his sinful appetites), or did his sinful actions compel him to harm his theology by forcing it to do the heavy lifting of justifying sin in a way that was never intended? Is his theology intrinsically deficient in that it justified his infidelity, or did it *become* deficient when he perverted it by employing it to

[62] Plant, "When Karl met Lollo," 143.

[63] In all of this, we are commenting on Barth's apparent perversion of God's *grace*. But the same logic may be pressed, albeit in an even more speculative manner, to other erroneous aspects of Barth's theology that would put him outside the Great Tradition (such as his vehement rejection of the classical doctrines of divine immutability and impassibility, or his insistence on grounding theology proper in Christology, rather than the other way around—which consequently led to his brand of "theistic personalism." On these theological novelties, see Tyler R. Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Is it the case that these revisions to classical theology made it more conceptually possible to ease his conscience? Again, answering such a question in the affirmative is bound to be hampered by the amount of speculation required to give the answer, which means it should not be a "load bearing" premise to argue for the legitimacy of Gregory's principle endorsed in this article. But such a conclusion is certainly consistent with the overall argument and that which *is* clear about Barth and his sin's impact on his theology.

[64] E.g., see David Gibson and Daniel Strange, eds. *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009).

justify his infidelity? It may be that we are asking which comes first: the chicken or the egg? In a sense, it does not really matter. The final result is that Barth's theology successfully—in his mind, at least—allowed for him to feign reluctant piety with obviously impious behavior.

Again, the point in all this is not to throw stones at Barth in a spirit of self-righteousness—Barth is not extraordinary in his capacity to sin. Nor are we saying that the only theological works that can be trusted are produced by those free from indwelling sin or sinful behaviors—for then we would necessarily deprive ourselves of any and every theological work that has ever been produced by the hands of fallen creatures (i.e., every theological work that has ever been produced). Rather, we are saying that making peace with habitual sin—the way Barth clearly did, or at least attempted to—cannot but compromise one's theological meditations. This is why Holmes can write, "I have come to appreciate the need to pursue teaching on God in a believing way. If our 'life and conduct' is unworthy, then our thinking will not be worthy of God; our sight will be compromised. . . . Doctrinal learning and progress is not possible without worthiness of life."[65] Barth tragically proves Holmes's point here.[66] He serves as a cautionary tale, and thus encourages us to resolve, along with Holmes, "Let us not embrace sin and thereby stifle learning and progress."[67] And this ties back into our discussion on ecclesiology above, as well. Can we consider Barth a responsibly stewarded "gift to the church" if any local church with even a vestige of ecclesiological health would have excommunicated him for his unrepentant sin? Is not the "exceptional theologian and faithless husband" a contradiction in terms?

Conclusion

To rightly theologize is to theologize as someone pursuing God with his whole being: one who increasingly knows and increasingly fears and increasingly loves his subject matter. This necessarily requires the sanctifying pursuit of virtue.

[65] Holmes, *A Theology*, 75.

[66] It is worth mentioning here that in this same work, Holmes himself interacts with Barth at length, even going so far as to have him as a major conversation partner in his chapter, "Virtue and the Christian Life" (*A Theology*, 125–43), without any mention of Barth's affair. This, in my estimation, may amount to the greatest weakness in Holmes's book. In a volume that stresses time and time again the importance of marrying virtuous living with theologian contemplation, Holmes leans on the theological contemplations of Barth, a figure who *clearly* contradicted this central insight in a blatant and high-handed manner. Holmes does not mention the discrepancy between his debt to Barth's contribution to the theme of virtue and Barth's own lack of virtue. This is a major oversight in an otherwise outstanding book.

[67] Holmes, *A Theology*, 75.

Such a pursuit is not a beneficial add-on for the theologian, it is material to his very vocation. The theologian is one who seeks to see God, and Christ has told us plainly that this benefit is reserved for the pure in heart (Matt 5:8). As Gregory has reminded us, this is because seeing the brightness of the sun requires some adjustment of vision: "For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun's brightness."[68] "Theology," notes Holmes, "is taken up by persons in various degrees of purity. The greater the degree of virtue, the better is the theology. Theology, as with the Christian life, is a fruit of 'spiritual sanctification.' If theology's goal is to become intimate with the one of whom it speaks, then it must seek the Spirit's mortification and vivification."[69] The theologian worthy of the name, then, must attend not only to his doctrine, but also to his life (1 Tim 4:16). Such a life will be irreducibly accountable to the local church and the communal habits that form the virtue of its individual members. Like Dante, he will be eager to forsake his vice on his upward ascent to heaven, steadily moving toward that day when he will say:

> I came back from those holiest waters new, remade, reborn, like a sun-wakened tree that spreads new foliage to the Spring dew in sweetest freshness, healed of Winter's scars; perfect, pure, and ready for the Stars.[70]

[68] *Oration* 27, §3.
[69] Holmes, *A Theology*, 136.
[70] Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto XXXIII.142–46.

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Hosea, Figuration, and Impassibility: A Passioned Prophet and the Yahweh Without Passions

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***Abstract*:** *Herein I explore the relationship between biblical figuration and the classical doctrine of impassibility. Is a passible prophet able to serve as a genuine figure for the impassible God? In particular, are Hosea's passions to be read up into the nature of the God whom he is figuring to Israel? I argue that while biblical figuration, as exemplified in the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, serves as a true revelation of God, not all aspects of the figure are to be mapped onto God's being. Hosea's figuration of God must be read alongside the biblical canon's diverse-yet-consistent proclamation of the nature of God. When read in this manner, Hosea's own passions are no barrier to continuing to proclaim, with the broader Christian tradition, that our Triune God is indeed impassible.*

Key Words: Impassibility, Hosea, Figuration, Doctrine of God, Classical theism, Analogy

Introduction

Can a passioned man figure the God who is without passions? Or, to put it another way, is the passible able to be used as a sign-act, a living illustration, for the impassible Yahweh? As one approaches the prophetic narrative of Hosea and Gomer, these kinds of questions surface amidst a situation in Israel that is about to erupt. Continual covenant-breaking and rampant injustice have brought Yahweh's typological nation on the brink of expulsion from the land promised to them and their progeny, and Yahweh's word has come, time and time again, through his prophets to proclaim both judgment and coming redemption. As the reader immerses him or herself into this emotionally charged narrative, believing that this prophetic text is a revelation of the nature of Yahweh and his redemptive plan, confusion may arise as he or she wrestles with the language of the God who passionately pursues a harlot-bride, even to the point of exposing her harlotry through driving her to death in the wilderness. If Yahweh is unable to be acted upon by Israel, then why this provocative and passionate language? Can the prophet Hosea, who is passioned in every sense of the word, serve as a figure of Yahweh who, throughout the Scriptures, has revealed himself to be otherwise?

It is my thesis that Hosea's marital sign-act with Gomer, a living picture of

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Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel, is to be taken in a figural manner that is not intended to be read as a literalistic description of God *ad intra*. The passions of the prophet are not to be read up into the ontological being of the Triune God. With this being the case, however, one must not see Hosea's figuration as being unable to reveal anything about the persons and works of his covenant Lord. Rather, Yahweh, in eternal wisdom, chose a passioned prophet to figure his works of redemption among sinful peoples. Thus, Hosea's figuration, while it is not to be read or interpreted in literalistic fashion, is an accommodated, yet quite real, revelation of Yahweh. This relationship between biblical figuration and divine impassibility, while it has not yet been explored by modern scholarship, possesses a wealth of riches for biblical readers. Classical theology is best done when reading with the grain of the Scriptures, acknowledging the varied means in which our God has chosen to reveal himself, including, for the purposes of this paper, biblical figuration. Before walking through this textual opening into the Book of the Twelve, however, it is necessary to explain briefly what is meant by the classical understanding of divine impassibility. If one is to rightly understand what Hosea's figuration is and is not doing vis-à-vis Yahweh's nature *ad intra*, one's hermeneutic must be built upon the proper dogmatic foundation.

Impassibility Classically Understood

Divine impassibility has been a foundation of classical Christian theism since the beginnings of the Church. As the biblical canon was breathed out by the divine author, penned by human authors, and spread throughout the known world, Christian pastors and theologians have wrestled with questions of divine emotions and God's temporal dealings with his creation. While some, as of late, have sought to dismiss divine impassibility due to claims that early theologians simply Hellenized Yahweh,[2] distorting the God actually presented in the Hebrew Bible, there remain an abundance of reasons to continue affirming divine impassibility as it has been classically understood, though one will not arrive at those reasons by mere word studies or a counting of texts.[3] Such ventures would leave the theologian wanting, hence why many theologians and biblical interpreters have felt the need to leave this classical doctrine behind. The task then that lies ahead is a thoughtful and thorough treatment of biblical texts (keeping their unified relationship within the canonical witness in mind) and their philosoph-

[2] Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1961), 227–8.

[3] Samuel Renihan, *God Without Passions: A Primer* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2015), 21.

ical or metaphysical implications. Rather than distracting from or distorting the biblical witness, a sturdy metaphysical foundation for who God is will only serve to guide the biblical theologian towards a more faithful and confessional interpretation of passages that, like Hosea's figuration of Yahweh, might cause theological confusion to those who stand on looser ground.

While divine impassibility has been defined in a variety of ways, a rather recent definition given by one who denies the doctrine shall ironically serve as an initial foray into this discussion on the classical understanding of divine impassibility. R.T. Mullins defines the doctrine this way, "God is impassible in that it is metaphysically impossible for God (i) to suffer; (ii) to be moved by, influenced by, or acted upon by anything external to God; (iii) to have an emotion that is inconsistent with perfect rationality, moral goodness, and happiness."[4] Or, to put it in more confessional and etymological terms, divine impassibility simply means that God is without passions. Now, this language of God not possessing passions must be clarified, for it can be a temptation to unhelpfully understand this in a rather cold and stoic sense. Passions speak to a change in the subject as the consequence of an agent's action upon it. To experience passions, one must possess a principle of receptivity, or passive potency, whereby a new actuality is brought forth.[5] The second point of Mullins's definition speaks to this reality in God. If God is impassible, he is unable to be moved by, influenced by, or acted upon by any part of his creation. In this case, the language of moving, influencing, and acting all demand some sort of change in God. This serves to highlight how divine impassibility is wedded to the other classical attributes of God. If God is immutable, or unable to change, then that necessitates that he is likewise unable to possess passions within himself, for passions, as defined, require the potential for change.

This language of passions also brings with it questions regarding divine emotions. Does God being without passions entail that God is without emotion in any sense of the word?[6] Emotion within the divine, for the purposes of the argument, can be defined as the immutable beatitudes of God, or the unchanging characteristics of divine blessedness that are analogically revealed to his

[4] R.T. Mullins, "The Problem of Arbitrary Creation for Impassibility" *Open Theology* 6 (2020): 394.

[5] James E. Dolezal, "Strong Impassibility," in *Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering*, edited by Robert J. Matz and A. Chadwick Thornhill (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 15–6.

[6] Ryan Mullins makes an insightful comment when he notes that the modern impassibility debate is complicated by the lack of an agreed upon definition for emotions and passions. R.T. Mullins, "Why Can't the Impassible God Suffer? Analytic Reflections on Divine Blessedness." *TheoLogica* 2:1 (2018): 13.

creation. This reality of analogical revelation, or God revealing his being in a manner that can be understood using creational analogs, is paramount before positing the relationship between passions and emotions within God. Such language provides a knowable referent of resemblance, though that resemblance is not to be understood as a one-to-one correlation with the *ad intra* nature of God. Regarding analogy, Thomas Aquinas used words such as "likeness" and "unlikeness" to speak to this referential relationship between Creator and creature that analogical language in Scripture seeks to capture.[7] Similarly, though not addressing divine emotions in particular, Herman Bavinck helpfully notes that, "On the other hand, it must not be overlooked that we have no knowledge of God other than from his revelation in the creaturely world. Since on earth we walk by faith and not by sight, we have only analogous and proportional knowledge of God."[8] Thus, when the reader comes across language of divine emotion in Scripture, he or she is not to think of that language in relation to our own experience with emotion, as a literalistic description of the divine life of God in himself. God's ways are not our ways, and, as will be shown, the language of emotions within God are not a one-to-one reflection of our emotional life and his. This being true, however, does not mean that such language is unable to reveal God truly to us. Analogical language is, nonetheless, used by both authors, divine and human, to communicate something that is genuinely true of God.[9] When the Scriptures speak of God's love, that language is not a mirage. James Dolezal puts it well when he states that,

> Denying passions of God by no means entails that he is without love, joy, mercy, jealousy, and so forth, but only that these virtues are not in him as the result of the determinative action of a causal agent. . . . Such virtues (love, mercy, compassion, and justice) are not passions in God because they are not states of being into which God is moved on account of some causal action befalling him. In God no process of undergoing actualizes his virtues.[10]

One could say that divine impassibility means that God, unlike creatures,

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[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Dominican Fathers Edition of the Leonine Text (London: Burns and Oates, 1924), 1.29.

[8] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. trans. by John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2:130

[9] Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 59. See also, James E. Dolezal, *All That is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 20.

[10] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 17, 27.

possesses emotions as perfections rather than as changeable passions, hence why the language of immutable beatitudes, as given in the definition above, describes well what classical theists have argued for centuries. For example, the maxim that God is love, when conceived in continuity with the rest of biblical revelation on God's attributes, could entail divine impassibility, for there is no potential in God for development in that love. God's love is not a virtue, state, or an uncontrollable passion that waxes or wanes in reaction to his dealings with his creation.[11] Rather, God simply is love, and he is so impassibly.[12] Or, to put it in the thoughtful words of Thomas Weinandy, "God is impassible precisely because he is supremely passionate and cannot become more passionate. God simply loves himself and all things in himself in the one act which he himself is."[13]

Thus, the confessional language of God being without passions is not intended to indicate that God is without emotions in any sense of the word, for the two, passions and emotions, are not to be, and historically have not been, understood as equivalent terms.[14] Rather, God being without passions is intended to communicate that God is *actus purus*, or pure act, and as such he possesses no lack in his own emotional life, so to speak.[15] His love will never need to be aroused or fanned into flame by his creatures, and neither will it ever dwindle into a faint ember. God simply is his love. He can never be acted upon in such a way that would cause him to experience passions, or emotional changes of state, as creatures do. Thus, this distinction between Creator and creature, as well as an understanding of how analogical language is operating in the Scriptures, both serve to bring clarity to the classical understanding of the doctrine of divine impassibility.

Impassibility Canonically Understood

Any discussion of divine impassibility would be woefully incomplete if left merely in the realm of the philosophical, for, while philosophy is a great handmaiden to theology proper, it cannot serve as the lone and authoritative grounding for any

[11] This is what I believe Anselm to be doing in the *Prosologion* when he argues that "mercy" is not *in* God. He is not denying affections within God, rather, he is seeking to demonstrate how God, in himself, is not a reactionary being. Anselm of Canterbury, *Prosologion*, in *The Major Works*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91–3.

[12] Gerald Bray, *The Attributes of God: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 42.

[13] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 127.

[14] Mark Sheridan, *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 32.

[15] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 126.

argument regarding the nature of God. Great attention must be made to see this doctrine as arising from God's particular self-revelation in the biblical canon, for it is the Scriptures that serve as the magisterial authority for any doctrine of God. These authoritative Scriptures testify to the impassibility of God in a divinely-breathed, canonical unity. While the biblical canon is diverse, and often uses language that can cause one to pause and question what is being revealed about God's nature, the reader can be assured that even the diverse and varied language of Scripture is speaking in a theologically cohesive fashion. Before setting out on this brief sojourn through the unified, yet diverse, biblical canon, a brief note needs to be made regarding the term impassibility. The word impassibility, or something akin to it, is never explicitly used in the Scriptures regarding God. While some have used this absence as a justification for denying the doctrine, the absence of a word ought not be a stumbling block. This doctrine will be shown to be a necessary, and one might say explicit, implication from clear biblical texts regarding other attributes such as God's aseity and immutability. Divine impassibility is a logical entailment from how God has clearly revealed himself across the canon.

From the beginning of Genesis, we are shown a God who creates freely without need of anything in creation. He simply creates out of the fullness of who he is in himself as the simple and *a se* God. This can be seen even in the reality of judgment early within the Genesis narratives. The condemnation of Adam and Eve, as well as the worldwide judgment of Noah's generation, both serve to reveal real truths about the Triune Creator. He can judge freely and impartially because he is not a God who is dependent upon creatures. Righteous judgment does not lead to a loss, or an introduction of passions, within him, for what humanity experiences as wrath is not something *new* within God. God's wrath is simply the way in which a sinful humanity encounters the impassible and perfect love, justice, and holiness of God.[16] Rightly understanding how the language of judgment is working within the early Genesis narratives is crucial for the present discussion, for the rest of the biblical canon's language regarding judgment and divine emotion, as will be seen in Hosea, flow from how God has revealed himself in the early pages of Scripture. By introducing language and imagery that will be used later, these first judgment narratives act as an intentionally patterned theological and interpretive grid for how the rest of Scripture will progressively

[16] Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2015), 203–4. Augustine insightfully remarks how the language of emotion, using anger as an example, speaks to the creature's relationship with God rather than any substantive change or modification to God's nature.

expound upon both God's wrath and mercy in relation to humanity.

It is similarly within these early narratives, particularly in Noah's flood saga, where biblical readers are introduced to the language of God repenting or changing his mind. Moses writes in Genesis 6:6 that, "the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved."[17] The phrasing of "regret" and "deep grief" can, and often has, caused much confusion in relation to what this communicates about God himself. Yet, as shown in the previous discussion vis-à-vis analogical language, this text is not to be taken as a literalistic description of God *ad intra*. To quote Dolezal, "In order to make known to us the truth of his unbounded being, God condescends to refract and repackage that truth into approachable structures of finitude. This accommodation is properly located in the order of divine revelation and providence among creatures, and not in the being of God himself."[18] Humanity in the time of Noah is experiencing God truly. They are not encountering an illusion or a lie. Rather, God is breathing out this revelation in a manner that comports within a finite frame of reference. What we see as divine regret, or grief, is simply the immutable, impassible, perfectly constant love of God providentially expressed in situations where his creation has greatly profaned his name.

This reality, while it will gain diverse expression, remains unchanged as God continues to reveal himself across the biblical canon to his covenant people. This language of divine repentance, regret, and grief will continue to be used by the authors of Scripture, divine and human, to reveal the incomprehensible God in ways that are lovingly knowable for those whom he has set his love upon. When moving across the canon, it is vital to place these tough texts alongside those that speak clearly to who God is. For instance, throughout the Prophets, both Former and Latter, we are given this same language regarding divine emotion and repentance, and one's understanding of these texts must flow from the book that was to ground Israel's theological life, the Pentateuch. As noted briefly before, these early narratives of judgment and mercy serve as the intentionally patterned theological and interpretive grid from which to understand other similar texts throughout the Scriptures. In the judgments of both Adam and Noah's generation we are given figures of latter judgments to come, as well as similar expressions of God's mercy towards the undeserving.

As an example of this latter reappropriation of a previously revealed framework, the Latter Prophets take up the language of divine regret, repentance, and

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all verses will be taken from the *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version*. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2009).

[18] Dolezal, "Strong Impassibility," 33.

grief that has been used throughout the canon thus far. Pertinent to the discussion at hand, the prophet Hosea speaks to a change of heart within Yahweh in 11:8–9. After several declarations of coming divine judgment for an adulterous Israel, Yahweh says that he has changed his mind. His compassion has been stirred, and Israel will not see the full fury of his wrath. Now, it is important to note that this supposed "change of heart" comes not from repentance on Israel's part. There is little in the text prior to Yahweh's declaration in 11:8–9 that would make it seem as if the people have had a change of heart themselves. In fact, Yahweh, through the prophet, says the opposite just one verse prior in 11:7: "My people are bent on turning from me. Though they call to him on high, he will not exalt them at all." Israel's unrepentance serves to put Yahweh's declaration in proper perspective.

Rather than genuinely repenting of prior promises of judgment and being acted upon by Israel to relent, God is simply acting against Israel's sin in a manner consistent with his impassible nature and immutable will. God's mind-change is the way in which a sinful Israel experiences the true and genuine long-suffering of their God. While a prolonging of the coming exile would appear, to finite creatures, as a change, it is rather an expression of God's patience as one who cannot be acted upon or moved by Israel. Thus, what is being attested to in 11:8–9 is Yahweh's impassible nature, grounded upon the theological foundations laid down in the Pentateuch and analogically revealed using states that Israel would understand. Israel has done nothing to warrant this compassionate declaration. They have not acted upon him in any way that would force goodness or mercy to flow from his hand.[19] Instead, through this use of anthropopathic language, or the attribution of human emotion to the Divine, Yahweh is communicating to Israel that he is the God of yesterday, today, and forever. He is the God who is slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and perfectly and persistently compassionate towards an obstinate people. His affections towards Israel are no mere illusion.[20] This anthropopathic language in Hosea, though it is not to be seen as a literalistic description of Yahweh *ad intra*, is intended by the writer of Scripture, human and divine, to truly reveal the impassible nature of God.

Throughout the New Testament, the testimony to God's impassibility goes unamended. Its necessary entailment can most naturally be seen in James's words in the canonical book bearing his name. In James 1:17–8, James writes, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. By his own choice, he gave us birth

[19] Dolezal, "Strong Impassibility," 30–1.

[20] Jerry Hwang, *Hosea*, ZECOT, ed. Daniel Block (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 276.

by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." James is not being innovative with his dogmatics. He is simply imbibing the theology proper put forth throughout the Old Testament. The Father, as well as the other divine persons, do not change as shadows, shifting and morphing with the times. Instead, the immutable God chooses to bestow gifts as he deems fit. Now, how does this necessarily entail impassibility? Well, if God cannot be acted upon by his creatures, if they are unable to cause passions to be roused up within him, then that means that the gifts that he gives are out of his freedom and nature. They have not been forced from his hand by means of some skilled persuasion on the part of his creatures. This is precisely James's point. By God's choice, his free and uncaused choice, he chooses to give a new birth through the Word that he has sent into the world. James's writing, as well as the whole of the New Testament canon, stands in theological solidarity with those brothers God used throughout Israel's history to pen divine revelation.

The canon of Scripture, from beginning to end, magnifies this impassible God who sovereignly rules over all things by the counsel of his unchangeable will. He simply is his perfections. He always reveals himself in creation in a manner wholly consistent with his nature, and further reveals himself to us throughout the Scriptures in ways that are analogically fitting for finite creatures. He is the God who is without passions and cannot be acted upon by those whom he has created. It is this canonically unified vision of God that Hosea writes in continuity with under God's inspiration. Though the prophet testifies in quite provocative fashion, this figuring of God, in the marital union between himself and Gomer, will further prove to highlight the way in which God, the divine author, has graciously condescended to reveal his impassible nature to his children.

Biblical Figuration and Divine Impassibility

Biblical figuration, though a topic of more recent conversation in biblical-theological studies, is not a modern innovation. Its conceptual roots go deep into the past, one might say into the ordering of time itself.[21] But, before walking through how biblical figuration is being used in Hosea 1–3 to speak about God, it is paramount that this concept be defined. In essence, biblical figuration speaks to how God, the divine author, has ordered, or patterned, redemptive

[21] Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016). Herein, Radner gives his argument for the way in which Scripture speaks to the figural ordering of time. Even time itself is intended by God, the divine author, to testify to himself and his plan of redemption in Christ Jesus.

history to testify to and reveal his nature and works in both the Scriptures and the world that he has made. To put it another way, there is a providential ordering to redemptive history, as testified in Scripture, that uses temporal persons, events, and institutions as figures, or living illustrations, for the plan of the Triune God to redeem an elect people, and the entire cosmos, through the Son by the Spirit.[22] When defined in this way, figuration can be seen as the other side of the typological coin. For an example of this, one only needs to look back to the preceding discussion regarding the way in which the early judgment narratives in Genesis serve as intentional patterns, or one might say a figural framework, for how latter revelation will expound upon that same language and imagery. God intentionally ordained redemptive history, in this case the temporal judgments of Adam and Noah, in order to establish a figural pattern for other judgments seen through the rest of Scripture, which all coalesce in that final judgment on Yahweh's day where the rebellious will be eternally exiled from God's new creation. One will have great trouble understanding latter biblical revelation if one does not see how the language and imagery that those latter authors use is intentionally fitting, under the inspiration of the divine author, within a framework established at the literal beginning of time. It is this intentional patterning within the Scriptures, this consistent re-using of biblical texts and patterns,[23] that testifies to how God has so ordered redemptive history to witness to who he is and how he will redeem the cosmos from sin and death.

It is this reality for which biblical figuration seeks to do justice. The divine author has constructed redemptive time and space and carried the biblical writers along in such a way that they would faithfully and infallibly testify to this work of God, though in their own diverse and unique ways. Thus, the divine author is placing the words and meaning of a particular author, Hosea for example, into the broader witness of the entire biblical canon, which is the sufficient revelation of who God is and how he, in time and space, is bringing about the redemption of all things in the Son by the Spirit. To quote Christopher Seitz, "Figural reading is then historical reading seeking to comprehend the

[22] Don C. Collett, *Figural Reading and the Old Testament: Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 17. See also, R.R. Reno, "Biblical Theology and Theological Exegesis," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry, vol. 5: Scripture and Hermeneutics Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 396. Christopher Seitz, "History, Figural History, and Providence in the Dual Witness of Prophet and Apostle," in *Go Figure! Figuration in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Stanley D. Walters (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 4.

[23] Karen Strand Winslow, "Treasures Both Old and New: Figuration in Biblical Interpretation," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45.1 (2010): 213.

work of God in Christ, in the apostolic witness, and the Holy Spirit's ongoing word to the Church, conveyed now through this legacy of Prophet and Apostle, Old and New Testament, the two-testament canon of Christian Scripture."[24]

The Revelatory Purpose of Biblical Figuration in Hosea 1–3

As stated, it is my thesis that the figuration seen in Hosea 1–3 is not intended by the authors of the biblical text to serve as a literalistic description of the Triune God *ad intra*. The passions on display in the marital sign-act of Hosea and Gomer are not to be understood as a description of the presence of literal passions within God himself. While this marriage is figural, meaning that God's covenantal relationship with Israel is being figured by a marital relationship between Hosea and Gomer, this figuring is to be understood in continuity with both the rest of Hosea's book and the biblical canon. This requires delicate handling, yet it will be shown that Hosea's sign-act reveals God, and his covenantally redemptive work, in a manner consistent with the whole of divine revelation vis-à-vis divine impassibility.

Before speaking to the relationship between figuration and impassibility in Hosea 1–3, however, one must have an understanding of what exactly this marriage is figurally doing, broadly speaking, in the narrative and life of Israel. Hosea's words are prophetically falling upon a context where Israel is on the cusp of being vomited out of God's land due to her covenantal rebellion, to use Deuteronomic language, and sent into exile in a foreign land. It is into this tumult that God providentially brings the prophet into a marriage with Gomer, who is described throughout the narrative as one caught up in harlotry.[25] Hosea is explicitly commanded by Yahweh to, "Go and marry a woman of promiscuity." So, he obeys Yahweh, marries Gomer, and she conceives three children, all of whom are given names that serve to highlight Israel's covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Even Hosea and Gomer's children are being figurally used to testify to what Yahweh is presently doing in the life of Israel in both judgment and redemption.[26] To quote commentator Jerry Hwang, "The sign-acts of the prophet's family are a microcosm of the historical drama of judgment and salvation in

[24] Seitz, "Figural History," 6.

[25] To say that this is a matter of modern debate would be an understatement. Recent Hosea scholarship has sought to address the issue of Gomer's whoredom through the lens of sexism and injustice. Many feminist interpreters, for example, have argued that the description of Gomer could simply be a lie on Hosea's part to continue his manipulation and patriarchal oppression over her. This paper assumes that the biblical text is neither oppressive nor sexist in its presentation of Gomer.

[26] Bo H. Lim and Daniel Castelo, *Hosea*, THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 60.

which Israel would readily participate for the next few hundred years."[27]

The narrative continues with Yahweh's declaration that, by some quite provocative means, he will thwart his bride's adultery and bring judgment upon her for what she has done. All the paths to her other lovers will be blocked with thorns and thistles, she will be led into the desert wilderness, her idolatry will be exposed for all to see, and she will die of thirst in that exilic land. These statements from Yahweh certainly raise the eyebrows of the reader, possibly provoking questions as to what they communicate about the God who gives them. Passionate would be a fit descriptor of what is put on display in Yahweh's speech in Hosea 2, though the implications of that vis-à-vis figuration and impassibility will be discussed in due time. As quickly as Yahweh pronounces judgment, however, he also issues the promise of forgiveness and reconciliation. There is a soon-coming day where Gomer, and the Israel she figures, will be brought back into covenant with her husband, and she will be his in faithfulness, righteousness, love, justice, and compassion. This marital narrative then finishes with Yahweh calling for Hosea to show love towards his adulterous wife, buying her back from those who had taken her, and declaring that the days will get far grimmer before light shines again upon the Israel of God.

Figurally, the text is clear about who and what the characters are meant to symbolize. Hosea and Gomer's marriage is a sign-act for Yahweh's covenantal relationship with Israel, now on the brink of collapse as Israel continues to spiral into idolatrous depravity. Yet, this figuration goes even deeper than the historical context surrounding Israel's covenantal life. Through Hosea's eventual forgiveness of, and reconciliation with, Gomer, the text is figuring the work of the Triune God in the better covenant to come. A day is coming when Yahweh's bride will be brought back from exile, and his goodness will shine upon her. This promise that Hosea and Gomer figurally testify to something far greater than the mere return of national Israel from temporal exile. Yahweh is ordering Hosea and Gomer's marital life in such a way as to reveal a coming day of spiritual return from exile, a greater exodus if you will, in which the reconciled bride of God, the true Israel, will be resurrected in order to live beneath the shade of Yahweh's peaceful, splendorous tree.[28] Thus, this rocky marriage between a prophet and an adulteress is a means of God's providential revealing of who he is as the perfectly compassionate redeemer, and how he has planned from eternity past to bring his chosen bride from death to life. This beautiful and stunning

[27] Hwang, *Hosea*, 91–2.

[28] Hwang, *Hosea*, 324. Hwang remarks how Hosea's use of language ought to cause the reader's mind to recall the garden of Eden.

figural revelation, however, is nothing particularly new within the biblical canon. This marriage is simply another patterned image in a line of other patterns that are all weaved together by God into an awe-inspiring tapestry of revelation and redemption. From Scripture's beginning, humanity is presented with the need for another Adam, a better husband, who will rescue his bride from the depths of sin and death that humanity has been plunged into through the transgression of our Edenic parents. Through Hosea's figuration, readers are given yet another revelatory fabric in that grand tapestry.

Biblical Figuration and Its Implications for Divine Impassibility

While this theologically rich and provocative figuration in Hosea could lead one into an abundance of biblical conversations, the matter at hand is the issue of what figuration reveals about the doctrine of God, and particularly divine impassibility. While it is evident in the narrative that Hosea is figuring Yahweh, how far does this figuration take the theological reader? With a brief summation of Hosea's introductory figural narrative in view, one can see how the prophet's *verbum* in Hosea 1–3 serve as a reflection of how the marriage between Hosea and Gomer is purposefully and providentially acting as a *signa*, or a sign, of both who Yahweh is as well as the nature of his planned pursuit of an adulterous bride, namely Israel. Thus, the *signa* of Hosea's marriage is providentially ordered to reveal the *res*, or one could use the medieval language of "thingness," of Yahweh and his redemptive plan. So, if this figuration, as has been argued, is not intended to be a one-to-one, literalistic description of Yahweh *ad intra*, then how, exactly, does figuration operate to reveal Yahweh in an accommodated, yet genuinely true, fashion? Or, to ask another question, exactly what manner of "thingness" is being revealed about Yahweh through the covenantal marriage of Hosea and Gomer?

It is worth noting as these questions begin to be answered that biblical figuration does not demand that biblical persons, events, or institutions possess a literalistic correlation with that which they are figuring. For example, David, as a royal king of Israel, is providentially figuring the royal kingship of the coming messianic king, the Son of God himself, though not every aspect of David's life and rule can be faithfully figured upon the person and work of our Lord Jesus. For instance, one should not import David's peccability onto the Son, for while David, as mere man, was incapable of being unable to sin, the Christ, as both God and man, is unable to sin in any way. Similarly, the naturally fallen aspects of David's kingly rule, i.e. instances where he abuses his power and authority, cannot be attributed to the kingly rule of the Christ, for he is one who will eternally rule with

a perfectly loving authority over all those who are citizens in his eschatological kingdom. This is but one example of how biblical figuration reveals truly but not literalistically. Every descriptor of a figural person, event, or institution is not intended to be mapped onto that which he, she, or it is providentially testifying to. Namely, for the purposes of this particular argument, the creaturely components of a figure are not to be read up into the very nature of that one who is, by nature, not a creature. It is in this vein of thought, then, that one can better grasp how figuration is being used by Hosea to reveal Yahweh truly though not literalistically.

What, then, is being genuinely revealed about Yahweh in this prophetic narrative through the figural marriage of Hosea to Gomer? As noted, while that which is inherently creaturely ought not to be interpreted up into the divine nature, that which is communicable, so to speak, is certainly being made manifest. This is where the very intention of figural language is of great service to the interpreter. Figuration is meant to cause the reader to look at a particular person, event, or institution with a broad, canonical lens. The reader is being led by the author's hand, both human and divine, to think about various figures with all of the biblical canon in view, asking questions of how any particular figure has been used and re-used across the biblical landscape. Thus, as one approaches this figural language in Hosea 1–3, he or she is to think broadly about how marital language is used of Yahweh elsewhere in the Scriptures, and, with this broad lens held up to the eye of the reader, one should be able to quickly notice how much of the language used throughout Hosea 1-3 is reminiscent of that used in a passage such as Exodus 34:6–7.

Just as he did at Sinai, Yahweh, through Hosea's figural marriage, promises to take this adulterous people to be his bride in faithfulness. Unlike his covenant spouse, he will be faithful in his love towards her. It is telling that both passages involve an adulterous spouse. Israel whored herself to the golden calf at Sinai, akin to how the Israel of Hosea's day whored herself to the calves at Dan and Bethel. Yet, amid this covenant infidelity, Yahweh remains the same. He responds with both judgment and promise, being both holy and merciful. He does not respond, either on that typological mountain or here in Hosea, as one engulfed with passions. He responds according to his eternal nature and his divine decree, not being forced or manipulated into any action that he had not otherwise predetermined from before time's foundations.

It is precisely this theological continuity that is being figurally testified to through Hosea's marriage with Gomer. Hosea's Yahweh is the same Yahweh that brought the typological nation of Israel into covenant with him at Sinai. His

nature is unchanged, even in the midst of his covenant-bride's rebellion and idolatrous promiscuity. One could make the argument that a passible Yahweh is precisely not what is being figurally communicated in this text, for it would be quite difficult, if not impossible, for a passible and passioned bride-groom to respond with a perfectly immutable love towards his adulterous wife. A passible bride-groom can be acted upon by his bride, with his love and faithfulness being affected by her adulterous actions, forcing him into decisions he may not have made otherwise. This is where it is important to keep in mind that divine impassibility is integrally connected to the other classical attributes of God. If Yahweh can be acted upon by Israel and manipulated into changing his mind, then he is, by definition, mutable. He can change based on the circumstances he has chosen to enter into, and that is, again, precisely not what is being revealed through Hosea and Gomer's marriage. Yahweh is not being forced from outside himself or manipulated into casting his bride into the exilic wilderness. The covenant curses promised in the Pentateuch and soon to be brought upon Yahweh's figural bride in Hosea are not the reaction of a passioned bridegroom. They are the just action of an impassible, unmanipulated Yahweh.

Now, one could respond to this canonically-influenced approach to Hosea's figuration of Yahweh by holding up Yahweh's own speech in 2:1–13 as a counter-argument. Does the passionate language attributed to Yahweh in this passage tear any holes in the argument that has been made thus far vis-à-vis figuration and impassibility? Firstly, it can be honestly affirmed that much of the language used throughout Yahweh's speech is jarring. The imagery of Yahweh stripping this woman naked, exposing her to the watching world, and forcing her to run off into the desert to die of thirst is not to be taken lightly. This is not a text that one can gloss over or try to hide under the proverbial bed in order to present a faithful theological reading of Hosea. While detractors would see the language of this text as clear evidence for passions within Yahweh himself,[29] of his being moved to a state of conflicted anguish within himself, biblical figuration serves to provide an honest, and canonically faithful, understanding of what is being communicated by Yahweh and his prophet.

When one approaches this text with the understanding that this woman is being used figurally to represent Israel, then the language used throughout the speech begins to gain some resolution. These are not enraged acts being done upon a literal woman. They are Yahweh's figural declarations of what will soon happen upon the rebellious nation whom this woman is representing. They serve

[29] David J.A. Clines, "Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation", in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998, JSOTSup* 292 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 297–8.

as a literary picture of death in Israel's life, if the nation does not repent of her adultery. Just as language of Yahweh changing his mind throughout Scripture, and even later in Hosea, is not to be read up into the Triune nature *ad intra*, so, too, this language in Hosea 2 is not to be understood literalistically as an expression of sexualized rage from Yahweh towards this woman or the Israel whom she represents.[30] Figural language does not require a one-to-one, literalistic correlation between *verba* and *signa*. Israel must not be literally stripped naked and marched throughout the wilderness in order for these words to ring true to what they are intended by the author to convey. Instead, this figural language is communicating within the broader framework, established since Genesis, of exile as divine judgment. While there is no need to minimize the provocative nature of the imagery that is used, interpreting this imagery literalistically, similar to that of divine repentance, misses the theological and figural purpose of this speech.

Thus, as the reader gazes upon Hosea's words, a revelation of God himself, he or she must not do as so many in the prophet's own day did, fashioning a deity after their own, passible image. The ancient world was full of gods and mythological figures who were mere heavenly copies of mankind. Yahweh, however, is neither creature nor copy. His actions in time and space are not rash or passioned responses. They are the consistent application of his immutable beatitudes in the world that he has made. This holds true, even for the inbreaking of his covenantal curses upon his bride, Israel. One could argue that a central message of Hosea, and of the prophets more broadly, is that Yahweh is utterly unlike the idols that Israel has formed for themselves. While the Baals and other pagan deities must be convinced to act for the good of their followers, Yahweh is unchanging and unforced goodness within himself. The graces, blessings, and gifts that mankind receives are not the result of pulling at Yahweh's proverbial heartstrings. Rather, the varying gifts that fill the earth are the result of Yahweh's impassible nature. As Gomer mistook the blessings around her as coming from the hands of her lovers, so Israel, and all humanity, worshipped and gave thanks to mere creatures rather than the Creator. It is into this idolatrous context that the prophet, and the divine author himself, comes to a sinful people, whether it be Israel or the present-day Church, declaring that the Triune Yahweh is the God who is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving sins, and maintaining that love for a thousand generations. And this is true precisely because Yahweh is the God who is impassible.

[30] Contra Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), xvii. Weems argues that this text justifies sexual violence against women.

Book Reviews

Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 352 pp. Hardcover. $38.64.

Theologians have wrestled long with the question of how to hold together the inseparable operations of the persons in the Trinity, while retaining their appropriate works and missions. Inseparable operations refers to the idea that all three divine persons work simultaneously in every operation of God, retaining the unity of the Godhead even when stressing the appropriate works of the persons reflecting their eternal order of subsistence. A tension can exist in our minds between focusing one divine person and keeping in view his inseparable relations to the other two along the way. In modern theology, the question is often whether unity or Triunity should take pride of place in Trinitarian theology. However, the inseparable operations, used properly, can help us better understand how and why God works the way that he does without prioritizing either unity or Triunity at the expense of the other. Adonis Vidu argues persuasively that the doctrine of inseparable operations is essential to Trinitarian theology, since eternal generation and eternal spiration reflect the unity of the divine essence as subsisting in the divine persons, resulting in Trinitarian agency in every act of God. This book is profound, useful, and timely, especially in relation to shifting conceptions of personhood found in many modern versions of social Trinitarian theology. Though not an easy read and not for beginners in the subject, Vidu profoundly advances modern discussions of the Trinity by retrieving its classic expressions, especially via Thomas Aquinas, engaging extensively with modern exegesis and many doctrinal loci.

Vidu explores the inseparable operations of the divine persons by setting the context for the question and leading readers through case studies in relation to particular biblical teachings. The first three chapters establish the doctrine from Scripture, showing that all three divine persons work in every divine act without erasing the personal subsistences or relations of origin in God. The author moves from this starting point into the development and rejection of the doctrine, with a positive case for it against various strands of social Trinitarianism. After laying this foundation, chapters 4–9 apply inseparable operations to creation, incarnation, Christology more broadly, atonement, ascension and Pentecost, and the Spirit indwelling both Christ and believers as love. The issues treated are well-chosen since Vidu tackles some of the most challenging Trinitarian questions head on. For instance, the fact that the Son became man and not the Father or the Spirit, and yet all three persons act simultaneously in incarnation. He applies this

equally to his defense of divine impassibility in relation to Christ's suffering and death on the cross. A common thread running through the volume is a recurring and relatively complicated set of illustrations for inseparable operations from magnetism. Some readers will find this helpful, while others will view it as hard to follow, resulting in more complications than the illustrations are worth. In the end, the author successfully defends and clarifies a vital component of classic Trinitarian theology, displaying thorough interaction with Scripture and wise use of Aquinas' profound insights on the Trinity.

Several helpful features of this work stand out. First, Vidu's biblical theology of the inseparable actions of the divine persons begins with the Old Testament. Many treatments of the Trinity omit this vital building block for its mature New Testament formulations. However, even though this is the case, his OT material is somewhat truncated, excluding traditional appeals in Christian history to Proverbs 8:21-31 and the Angel of the Lord as the preincarnate Christ (8–9). It is important to remember that while we should read the OT on its own terms in its proper contexts, we must also read the OT in light of the NT (e.g., Lk. 24; 2 Cor. 3). Without reading too much into OT texts regarding the Trinity, the divine authorship of Scripture carries the idea that God always knew where the story was going. Hints at a plurality of persons early in Scripture give rise to stressing the Lord, the Servant, and the Spirit in the Servant Songs of Isaiah, and the Angel of the Lord being the Lord and being sent by the Lord in Zechariah 1-2. It is not merely that the NT is compatible with the OT teaching about God, which Vidu shows clearly, but that God anticipated the NT revelation about himself gradually, clearly, and purposefully in the OT. Vidu makes a good beginning in this direction, while short changing the exegetical developments in this area present in Christian history. The OT building blocks of the Trinity remain an underdeveloped theme in modern Trinitarian theology, though they were a major theme in early church, medieval, and early modern theology. It is best to assume that Christian theologians throughout the ages were on to something, and it is unwise to restrict one's reading of the doctrine of God in the OT to modern exegetical methods and historical investigation alone. While we must not follow historical Christian exegesis slavishly, neither should we dismiss its core principles so readily in modern Trinitarian theology.

Other high points in the book include the relation of nature and will, and the way in which the missions of the Son and the Spirit reflect the eternal processions in God. Vidu repeatedly notes that while early Trinitarian theologians attached will to nature (e.g., 81), many modern social Trinitarians tend to connect will and person. This meant that theologians taught that Christ had two wills because he

had two natures, one divine and one human. There is one divine will exercised from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit (142). Yet under modern thought, attaching will to person often leads to three willing subjects in God and various social Trinitarian constructs (such as Moltmann's), some of which include subordination among the persons. The alternative to subordination in this connection is Tritheism, in which three distinct willing subjects all occupy the category of God. Vidu's critical insights here shed great light on the differences between theologians of the present and the past on this point. Likewise, he illustrates that while the economic Trinity is not the immanent Trinity, the missions reveal the processions. That is, what God does in time reveals who he is in eternity, without conflating who God is with what God does. Picking up Aquinas' idea that missions are an external effect showing an eternal procession, he uses this concept to explain the relationship of Christ's two natures in one person. Christ's humanity, as the instrument of his divine nature, reveals the eternal procession of the Son (215). While the entire Godhead works in every work of Christ, some things are peculiar to his human nature, and they reflect his distinct procession within the Godhead. These are deep waters to tread in Trinitarian theology, but the author's reflections fruitfully push readers in the right direction by retrieving classical Trinitarian ideas, giving an alternative to modern discussions.

At least one other point is worth mentioning. Vidu's assertion that the atonement is not merely legal but ontologically transformative through union with Christ by the Spirit in his deified humanity will prove controversial (246). The question is whether "deification" is the right way to describe the elevation of Christ's humanity and ours above our natural state through grace. He notes later that Roman Catholic theology teaches "elevation of the soul into communion with the whole Trinity," Protestant theology teaches union with Christ, and Eastern theology teaches deification. Yet all three maintain "a presence of the divine persons that transcends the effects of God's actions" (281). In other words, there is more to our salvation than giving a tidy list of benefits from Christ. Our communion with the Triune God is ineffable, incomprehensible, and mystical on some level, regardless of how people from differing traditions describe it. As a Western Protestant theologian, language like "deification" or "theosis" still seems somewhat improper, due to its risk of gross misunderstanding and blurring the Creator/creature distinction (which Vidu does not do). Yet even WLC 39 notes that Christ became man to "advance our human nature." It is important to note that "mystical union" with Christ, as the ground of communion with Christ in his benefits, entails true communion with the Triune God in a way that is experiential and not merely dogmatic. Theology is about knowing God, and believers

know more of God than they can express through doctrine alone.

This book is one of the best recent contributions to Trinitarian theology that this author has read. Reestablishing personhood in the Trinity as relation of origin rather than independent personal action and willing seems increasingly to be the need of the hour. Vidu provides readers with the historical, conceptual, and exegetical tools to cut through the heart of much confusion in the so-called Trinitarian renaissance today, especially related to thorny questions like eternal subordination and social Trinitarian theology. This book will serve serious-minded students interested in Trinitarian theology, especially among professors and ministers who want a deeper grasp of the doctrine than what they might find in entry level texts.

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Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 464 pp. Cloth. $55.

The past several years have witnessed a renaissance in what is often called classical theism. Works in this vein have exposited the attributes of God or been devoted to one attribute in particular.[1] To date, however, the retrieval of the traditional doctrine of God has largely been focused on God understood generally, or God in his triune being,[2] rather than the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit in particular.

In *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism*, Steven J. Duby brings the traditional doctrine of God to bear on Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible. The impetus for this project is that in the past two centuries or more, scholars have "cast doubt on whether a 'more traditional' doctrine of God can fit with an exegetically driven Christology" (xiv). Against such doubts, Duby contends that the God of the Bible

[1] Some notable examples include Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (London New Delhi New York Sydney: T&T Clark, 2016, repr. 2018); James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017); Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019); and Michael J. Dodds, *The One Creator God in Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020).

[2] See, e.g., Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016); Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021); and Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

and the God of classical theism are not "two different Gods. In fact, I intend to argue that the revelation of God in Christ and Holy Scripture implies and is illumined by the theological claims of the catholic fathers" (xiii). For the purposes of this book, Duby defines classical theism as "an account of the triune God holding that he is simple, immutable, impassible, and eternal" (xiii).

In chapter 1 Duby begins by acknowledging some modern criticisms of both classical theism and "the use of 'Greek' philosophical concepts in scriptural exegesis" (xv). He identifies "three recurring themes" or concerns that are evident in these criticisms: "(1) a concern to set forth the Son's relationship to the Father and Spirit, (2) a concern to preserve the unity of the person of Christ, and (3) a concern to honor the authenticity of Christ's human life and suffering" (22).

The rest of the book discusses the major facets of Christology with an eye toward demonstrating that biblical Christology and classical theism are mutually supportive rather than contradictory. Chapter 2 addresses the Son's eternal relation to the Father; chapter 3 the Son's election and mission; chapter 4 the Son's relationship to his human nature; chapter 5 the Son's dependence on the Holy Spirit in his earthly ministry; chapter 6 the Son's obedience to the Father; and chapter 7 the Son's suffering (xv). For each facet of Christology discussed, Duby first surveys relevant passages of Scripture to establish a sense of what the biblical witness on the subject is. After noting particular questions about the classical theistic account of God which these passages can raise, he then addresses these questions by drawing on patristic, medieval, and Reformed orthodox sources.

One topic that will likely be of special interest to Protestant readers is Duby's treatment of the controversy between Lutherans and the Reformed over what is known as the *extra Calvinisticum*. This term refers to "the teaching that Christ according to his divinity is not enclosed within his humanity but rather subsists *extra carnem*, beyond his finite flesh" (166). From this teaching follows the practical implication (commonly held by the Reformed) that Christ, because he is finite in his humanity and seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, is not corporally present in the Eucharist, yet he is omnipresent in his divinity and therefore spiritually present in the Eucharist. Lutherans, on the other hand, contend that "divine attributes like omnipresence are shared by Christ's humanity" (168). By extension, Lutherans maintain that Christ is corporeally (or "substantially," in the term's technical sense) present in the Eucharist.

As indicated above, these differing views of the Eucharist stem from competing approaches to Christology and more specifically the *communicatio idiomatum*—understood as "the communication or sharing of the properties of the two natures in the one person of Christ" (166). In Lutheran Christology there

are three "genera or kinds of christological communication that follow on the hypostatic union of the two natures." The first is the "*genus idiomaticum*, wherein the essential properties of each nature are really communicated to or belong to the one person of Christ, the divine properties being communicated to Christ on account of his deity and the human properties being communicated to Christ on account of his humanity." On this principle we can rightly say, for example, that God was capable of dying, for while the Son in his divinity could not die, the Son in his humanity could and did die. The second kind of christological communication is the "*genus apotelesmaticum*, wherein the economic offices and works (*apotelesmata*) of Christ belong to the person of Christ on account of both his deity and his humanity because Christ always acts by both natures together to accomplish his works" (167). Hence we can say that God suffered and shed his blood for the sins of humanity because the Son, in his humanity, did these things. The Reformed affirm both of these kinds of christological communication.

Disagreement arises concerning the third kind of communication posited in Lutheran Christology, the "*genus majestaticum*, wherein the majesty or glory and excellence of the divine nature is communicated to the human nature on account of the hypostatic union, so that Christ's humanity has an excellence and power that surpasses that of ordinary humanity" (167). In upholding these three kinds of christological communication, Lutherans maintain that the Reformed "[have] Nestorian tendencies in their Christology," in that they "allow only a 'verbal' (rather than 'real') communication of essential properties in the person of Christ, as though the divine attributes were only spoken of the man Jesus and did not belong to him in reality." This is why, for example, Lutherans say that "within the *genus majestaticum* divine attributes like omnipresence are shared by Christ's humanity," with the caveat that "omnipresence is not transferred to Christ's humanity in the abstract or on its own." The Reformed, for their part, respond that "despite Lutheran arguments to the contrary...the sharing [of divine attributes by Jesus's human nature] would pertain to the human nature as such or in the abstract, thus suggesting a Eutychian confusion of Christ's two natures" (168).

Duby expresses a desire to be "fair" to the Lutheran scholastics and is careful to note that "the Lutheran writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not claim that the divinity of Christ was affected by his human properties or experiences" (177). Even so, he goes on to observe, "The Lutheran claim is that the *human nature itself* (as long as it is not taken to be *by itself*) is ubiquitous and omnipotent. . . . Their approach raises serious questions about whether Christ's finite human nature can be both ubiquitous and circumscribed, omnipotent and

finite in power" (178, emphasis original). In short, although Duby is not out to "defend Reformed Christology simply because it bears the descriptor 'Reformed' " (176–7), he does raise some concerns about Lutheran Christology. His discussion of the topic comprises only a small percentage of the book, but it is a highlight because of its concise treatment of an issue that continues to divide Lutherans and the Reformed.

More broadly, throughout the book Duby does an excellent job of attending to both the biblical text and relevant theological treatments, older and newer. In so doing he effectively demonstrates that classical theism is not a byproduct of disregarding the biblical witness, but rather a result of reading Scripture rightly. Much of Duby's scholarly output to date has sought to defend this basic point in various ways, and *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism* is a welcome contribution to this worthwhile task.

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Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 316 pp. $34.99.

Hans Boersma (PhD, University of Utrecht) serves as the St. Benedict Servants of Christ Chair in Ascetical Theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Regent College and Trinity Western University. Throughout his career, he has written extensively on the topic of sacramental ontology, publishing *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (2009), *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (2011), and *Sacramental Preaching: Sermons on the Hidden Presence of Christ* (2016).

In *Scripture as Real Presence,* Boersma aims to demonstrate that the early church read the Bible sacramentally. His thesis is "that the church fathers were deeply invested in reading the Old Testament Scriptures as a sacrament, whose historical basis or surface level participates in the mystery of the New Testament reality of the Christ event" (xiii). But his goal is deeper. He not only wants to convince his readers that the church fathers read the Scriptures sacramentally, but that they should too.

When he speaks of sacrament, Boersma is arguing for the idea that the Bible (along with those ecclesial activities which are more traditionally known as sacraments) do not simply point to the reality of Jesus, but that they actually

"render Christ present" (2) to those who participate in them. The church fathers approached the Scriptures with this understanding because they held the metaphysical and ontological assumption that there is a close connection between visible and invisible realities. In fact, they saw all of creation as sacramental, though they recognized a distinction between "general sacramentality" and the "sacraments of the church" (1–4). As they read the Scriptures, they sought and experienced the invisible but no less real presence of Christ.

Boersma identifies the reason that his own contemporaries do not read the Scriptures with the sacramental eyes of the church fathers. The metaphysical commitments that have dominated biblical and theological discourse since Spinoza and Hobbes have hamstrung moderns with a preoccupation for the surface meaning and historical data surrounding the text which distracts them from encountering the presence of Christ through the text. Moderns are so focused on the letter of Scripture that they have forgotten that they are meant to ascend from the letter to the Spirit. Boersma uses the example of the church fathers to call the modern church and academy to ascend from their preoccupation with the letter to an enjoyment of the Spirit: Christ, the *res* of Scripture.

The first chapter is dedicated to demonstrating the different metaphysical commitments which governed the interpretive methods of the Fathers and that govern most interpreters today. Moderns frequently accuse the Fathers of ignoring the letter of Scripture with an unhinged allegorical method of interpretation. But, according to Boersma, the Fathers did not discount the historical reality of the things presented in Scripture. Instead, their metaphysics freed them to look beyond the historical to invisible. He argues that the modern approach to Scripture which prioritizes the visible over the invisible in the approach to reading the Bible simply reflects the modern metaphysical commitments that are rooted in the Enlightenment.

Once he has established the philosophical foundation for exegesis in the early church, he demonstrates in each of the successive chapters how the Fathers interpreted different types of texts in light of their sacramental ontology. He provides examples of "what it means for biblical reading to be sacramental in character" (xiii). Most of the chapters deal with the hermeneutics of multiple fathers to demonstrate that the sacramental approach was broadly appropriated and not isolated to a few.

The Scripture texts that he has selected for each of the chapters cover the gamut of genres, from the creation account to the Beatitudes. Each chapter is named to reflect the genre and setting of the text in question (e.g. the chapter on Origen and Chrysostom's interpretation of the theophany in Genesis 18 is

called “Hospitable Reading”). After surveying the hermeneutics of the Fathers throughout various genres of Scripture, he concludes the book with a continued call to theological *ressourcement*.

Boersma clearly succeeds in demonstrating his thesis, leaving no doubt that the church fathers examined in the book read the Scriptures sacramentally. Each chapter serves to prove the sacramental reading of the early church fathers while also demonstrating that they did not discount the historical basis of the text, but instead looked through it to the mystery of Christ revealed in the New Testament.

The chapters are tied into the overall argument of the book and the framework presented in the first chapter, but each chapter could also stand on its own, and each chapter is strong and provides an excellent survey of early church's exegetical approaches to different types of Scripture. A couple of these chapters are especially important for moderns to grasp the difference between modern approaches to Scripture and the interpretive framework of the Fathers. First, the chapter on the sacramental exegesis of the Song of Solomon demonstrates how the early church gladly saw Christ in analogies that most modern interpreters are uncomfortable with. The second important chapter is the chapter on beatific reading because it demonstrates the beatific vision of the early church interpreters in their approach to Scripture. It was not a science for them, but a search for God's beautiful presence. But they believed strongly that the search for God ought to be undertaken by those who are increasing in virtue. It is not merely a scientific parsing of Scripture, but an all of life submission to the revelation of God's presence and demands.

Through this book, Boersma calls his readers to emulate this sacramental approach of the church fathers. Yet, he does not expect us to follow their interpretative conclusions wholesale. At times, he fairly criticizes the church fathers for their poor interpretations. He rightly critiques Gregory of Nyssa's view that God's creation of Adam and Eve with gendered bodies anticipated the fall (34), and he rightly calls out Origen's neglect of history in his exegesis of Joshua 11 (126–7). Skeptical readers will find it reassuring that they are not being called to emulate every interpretive idiosyncrasy of the Fathers but instead to follow their overall interpretive framework with an appropriate level of care.

In response to the call to follow the overall interpretive method of the Fathers, some will argue that there was no *singular* overall interpretive method that can be attributed to the Fathers. They are correct, to a point. Much has been made of the differences of the Antiochene and the Alexandrian interpretive approaches. While Boersma focuses most heavily on the Alexandrian interpreters, especially

Origen, he shows in the chapter on "Hospitable Reading," in which he compares Origen and Chrysostom's approaches to the theophany of Genesis 18, that the real presence of God in the text was foundational to their hermeneutic. Origen is primarily concerned with vertical hospitality (i.e., how Abraham welcomed God's presence) whereas Chrysostom is concerned primarily with horizontal hospitality (i.e., how Christians should welcome those around them). But both had as their starting point the presence of God. Here at least, Origen and Chrysostom approached Scripture with the same metaphysical commitments. They nuanced their interpretations differently, but their foundational assumption was the same. While this chapter represents the only comparison of an Alexandrian interpreter and an Antiochene interpreter, similar comparisons are woven throughout the book, demonstrating that there is flexibility in emphasis and nuance even within the Alexandrian interpretive framework. Despite these differences between Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches and especially within the Alexandrian school itself, he is right to point out that there is more continuity than discontinuity in the interpretive presuppositions and conclusions of the Fathers (277–8).

Finally, he helpfully addresses the accusation that allegorical and christological readings of the Old Testament are arbitrary. He says that those in the early church who were most opposed to allegorical readings never accused allegorical interpreters of arbitrariness. He argues that they did not see christological interpretations as arbitrary because they understood that the Bible belongs to the church. It is only since the academy has claimed interpretive authority over the Bible that christological interpretations are accused of being arbitrary (82–3).

Scripture as Real Presence is a solid contribution to the growing call to reclaim the benefits of the exegetical approaches of the early church, to reject the metaphysical assumptions of modern exegetical approaches, and to return to pre-critical exegesis.

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Fred Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 221 pp. Paperback. $23.00.

The doctrine of the Trinity increasingly (and thankfully) continues to gain momentum in recent theological discussions. Christianity has always, in one way or another, centered on the Bible, the Triune God, and the incarnate Christ as

the central feature of the gospel. Tending to focus most of its attention on the benefits of salvation rather than the God of salvation, evangelical theology in the past hundred years has sometimes eclipsed the rich Trinitarian heritage of the church. Yet neglecting the God of the gospel runs the risk of losing the gospel itself, which is eternal life in fellowship with God through Christ. Fred Sanders here gives readers a road map, tracing ways in which the Trinity and the gospel are intertwined, prioritizing God himself over his works in saving sinners. Without answering many pressing questions about the so-called *ordo salutis* or the nature of the benefits of redemption in detail, the author wonderfully gives us hermeneutical keys by which we can learn to unlock the parts (e.g., 198–200). As such, this book lays a solid foundation for the Trinity and soteriology by giving readers schooled in Trinitarian theology the necessary tools to make vital connections between our salvation and the God of salvation.

This work is a collection of Sanders's previously published essays on Trinity and soteriology. However, rather than being a mere collection of essays on a common topic, the author has worked the material into a coherent book in its own right. The focal point revolves around how the gospel of God reveals the God of the gospel and vice versa. With characteristic wit, Sanders makes statements like, "Let us not be conceptually stingy with this doctrine. God loves a cheerful giver" (95). In doing so, he is arguing for a broader view of eternal divine processions standing behind the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit as the primary means of understanding the "length" of Scripture's message as a whole.

In order, the chapters cover how the Trinity should norm soteriology, the Trinity and the scope of God's economy, the Trinity and the atonement, the Trinity and three models for ecclesiology, the Trinity and the Christian life, salvation in light of the Son's eternal generation (stressing our adoption), salvation and the Spirit's procession (highlighting the Spirit as gift), gospel ministry and theological education, modern Trinitarian developments from Hegel onward, and evaluations of retrieval and Trinitarian theology. Taken together, these chapters aim more towards patterns of thinking about the Trinity and soteriology than a detailed examination of soteriology in light of the Trinity.

While this volume is denser than most of Sanders's other works on the Trinity, it is full of valuable insights. At least a few chapters stood out to this reader, illustrating the point. First, chapter 8, on Trinitarian theology in gospel ministry and theological education, the author stresses the Trinity as "the doctrine of doctrines" on which everything else is based (134). Both with respect to ministry and education, this means that praise should set the tone for Trinitarian theology. Sanders argues as well that the Trinity should serve as a unifying factor between

the various theological disciplines at theological schools, bringing them together rather than cordoning them off from each other (151). Doing so is what makes every branch of theological study distinctively Christian, better unifying our approach to theological education. Focusing on Trinitarian theology through praise and adoration of the Triune God potentially sets both ministry and theological education on a sounder footing than they often experience. This chapter is clear, readable, and gripping, being full of vital insights offering great benefits to today's church.

Chapter 9 insightfully roots the modern "trinitarian renaissance" in nineteenth century Hegelianism rather than with more recent thinkers. Pulling Hegel's idea that God is actualized in world history, Sanders shows how this paved the way for modern authors like Moltmann (and others) on God's entering into the experience of human suffering (160). This move is striking in that it shows that modern versions of social Trinitarianism did not arise from thin air. With characteristic clarity, Sanders thus helps readers wade through the often thorny modern era more easily.

The final chapter (ch. 10), interestingly, questions how much the Trinity has actually been revived in recent theology by arguing that the Trinity always remained central in conservative churches. This valuable insight illustrates that modern narratives of Trinitarian eclipse and renewal are not always as clear cut as they seem. In the preceding chapter, Sanders cited authors like Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, and Methodist and Episcopal authors to illustrate this point (178–9), adding Francis Turretin here (191). Sanders's assessment, however, is at once on target and slightly overstated. Theologians like the present reviewer, coming from the Reformed tradition, have often experienced a notable lack in robust uses of the Trinity in their traditions in modern history. While Hodge, for instance, adamantly asserted the vital importance of the Trinity to Christian faith and life, he did not carry this out clearly or explicitly throughout his system with anything approaching models like John of Damascus, Anselm, Aquinas, Bonaventure, or even Turretin.

While retaining the basics of Trinitarian doctrine, many readers still get the heavy sense that something went missing by and large from the Enlightenment onward. This is not true equally in all cases, since authors like W.G.T. Shedd remained steeped in classical categories like processions, missions, relations of origin, and appropriations. Yet others like Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and to some extent Bavinck, either toned down such classical Trinitarian ideas, or repudiated them explicitly. The Trinity may have always remained central in conservative Christian thought across denominational lines on some level, but many of us have

still walked away with the distinct impression that Trinitarian theology generally achieved less depth and reached less widely in conservative post-Enlightenment theology than it had before. While Sanders rightly illustrates the way in which the Lord always preserved the core of the gospel in Trinitarian terms, modern conservative Christians still feel the weight of what is missing when they begin digesting classic Christian sources. Nevertheless, Sanders rightly cautions, "There is something built into the modern epoch that tends in the direction of a readiness to subject the past to limitless critique" (190). In the end, we should not overstate the revival of the doctrine in recent years, but neither must we undermine it.

One weakness of the book is that the author does not make much explicit appeal to Scripture. Exceptions exist, such as the numerous allusions to various texts on page 90 (e.g., 105, 111–5). Keeping in mind that the first chapter argues that we must look for "big picture" patterns in Scripture rather than piecemeal citations of texts to arrive at a biblical Trinitarian theology, it would nevertheless be useful to give readers clearer handles in biblical texts to help guide them through this process. Broad principles are more effective with persistent concrete illustrations.

Generally, this work is more difficult to process and digest than Sanders's other excellent works on the Trinity. Due partly to his heavy interaction with modern trends in Trinitarian theology, this volume assumes more background knowledge than the author's other volumes on the subject. Without detracting from its usefulness, this means that *Fountain of Salvation* serves better as an intermediate rather than a beginning text on the Trinity. Nevertheless, Sanders never disappoints. He provides readers with key ideas showing the interplay of Trinity and soteriology in ways that should help readers grow in understanding both the gospel and the God of the gospel.

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Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 423 pp. Paperback. $34.99.

What does one get when one combines a natural scientist, trained in biochemistry and biophysics from Oxford, with a Cambridge trained philosopher-theologian and an Anglican priest? One gets Andrew Davison, an author as interesting as he

sounds. Predicting the next research topic from this Cambridge lecturer is not easy. Will he write on AI technology or the sacraments? Biological mutualism or the possibility of living on another planet? Theological tradition or ecological niche construction? Perhaps aliens? Maybe pastoral insights on carrying for dying parishioners? With Davison, any of those topics, or a combination thereof, would be a good guess. For this reason, a book that endeavors to lay out the relationship between God and *everything else*—a single book that attempts to thoroughly define and describe a Christian metaphysic—might seem like too broad of a project for most, but not for Andrew Davison, who sets out to do just this in his 2019 book, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*. Situated toward the Catholic-side of Anglicanism and the UK-side of conservativism, Davison writes with a wit and clarity that makes *Participation in God* both informative and delightful.[1]

Davison does not leave the reader in doubt as to the central claim of the book. His introductory sentence is clear enough: "Approaching the world in terms of sharing and receiving should be the bedrock of a Christian understanding of reality, and of Christian doctrine" (1). This claim is as broad as it is strong. Does Davison truly mean sharing and receiving (or "participating") should be the bedrock of how the Christian understands *all* of reality and doctrine? Yes, he does. To argue his case, Davison neatly divides his book up into four sections: participation and causation, the language of participation and language as participation, participation and the theological story, and participation and the shape of human life.

Davison does most of the metaphysical heavy lifting in this book in the first five chapters. Unabashedly dependent on Thomas Aquinas, Davison primarily interacts with Aristotle's four causes as they were appropriated theologically by Aquinas. In the first chapter, he extrapolates on God as creation's efficient cause—that which *brings about* all things. By doing so, Davison sets up the relationship between God and creation nicely for further development. According to Davison, "the core idea of participation is that things are what they are by participation in God: they are what they are because they receive it from God" (22). Importantly, this reception of being is one of "radical asymmetry" (29). We should not imagine a kind of pantheism or mutualism by identifying God as the efficient cause of creation, for "the creature is constituted by its relation to God, but God is not constituted by relation to creatures" (29). This is made clearer in subsequent chapters, where God is *explicitly* ruled out as specifically one of creation's four causes; namely, its material cause. Insisting on this much,

[1] Thanks to Timothy Gatewood for this helpful illustration.

with Aquinas, preserves God's aseity, even while it punctuates creation's radical dependence. How then can one affirm *creatio ex nihilo?* If God is not creation's material cause in the sense that creation is not made out of God, how can we say that creation is from God? Davison answers this question with Aquinas's exemplarism. God, says Davison (and Aquinas), is creation's formal cause. To insist on this much is, of course, to acknowledge Christianity's endlessly interesting relationship to Platonism. "The story of Christian participatory theology is, to a significant degree," says Davison, "the story of its encounter with Plato and the Platonic heritage. . . . From a Christian perspective, it has been not only a reception, but also a purification and perfection of this Platonic outlook within the matrix of Biblically informed doctrine" (92). From here, it is only natural for Davison to conclude this first section of *Participation* with a chapter on God as creation's final cause. Not only is all creation from and through the Trinity, it is also *to* the Trinity (cf., Rom. 11:36). Davison explores the topic of teleology here, demonstrating how all creaturely being is constituted by a God-ward dimension as a metaphysical necessity. This is true for all creation, but it is particularly true of humanity and man's desire. "All reaching out towards any good that we desire or strive for," according to Davison, "is a reaching out for God, and the expression of a desire for a greater participation in his, ultimate, good" (118).

The second section of this work is the shortest, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in profundity. Here, Davison dives headlong into the concept of *analogia entis* (the analogy of being). Some modern expressions of theology stress creation's likeness to God to the neglect of acknowledging his transcendence (leading, at best, to projecting mutualistic conceptions onto God as if he were a "being among beings," or worse, to a kind of process theology wherein God is constituted by creation), while other modern expressions of theology stress God's transcendence from creation to the neglect of acknowledging its likeness unto him (resulting often in a Kantian-like skepticism toward any true knowledge of God). Davison, however, identifies a thorough understanding of analogy as the best way of avoiding both of these unfortunate ditches. The reason "*analogy* features so prominently in participatory theology," is that "analogy is likeness in the face of yet-greater unlikeness, or against the backdrop of yet greater unlikeness" (147).

Having thoroughly treated participation as a broad metaphysical category, Davison begins to narrow his lens and sharpen his focus on participation in theological perspective. Naturally enough, Davison begins with Christology, the archetypal case of man's participation with God in the history of redemption. Here, Davison advocates for a classical conception of Christology, arguing con-

vincingly that to rightly accept the Christology of Chalcedon is to depend on a participatory metaphysic (206). Although the incongruity between such a view and any form of kenotic Christology is clear enough without explicit mention, Davison (in a jubilant moment for me) makes it explicit anyway: “In contrast [to a kenotic approach to Christology], a participatory account of the revelation of God in Christ would say that neither the incarnation nor the passion of Christ humiliates God; rather, they demonstrate God’s eternal humility” (214).

Davison continues to show how a participatory metaphysic informs and impacts all kinds of theological debates (further reinforcing his strong claim mentioned in his introduction about participation grounding *all* Christian doctrine) in chapter nine, when he addresses God’s real relations to his creatures and the ever-divisive topic of creaturely freedom. Is God exhaustively sovereign or do his creatures exercise a real freedom? Yes, answers Davison, like so many others. Except Davison marshals his participatory metaphysic in the service of offering this “yes” answer in a way that is particularly fresh: “The central point here is that God’s action does not stand alongside my free involvement, as if the two were in competition, or as if they were part of the same way” (228). According to Davison, creatures exercise real freedom, but that freedom is *creaturely*, which means it is what it is, irreducibly, *from* God. “God acts in all action because God gives creatures their being,” says Davison (228). Having addressed this controversial topic of creaturely action from within a participatory framework, Davison repeats this approach with another controversial topic: the problem of evil. Unsurprisingly, Davison follows the Augustinian account, considering evil a privation (or “failure of participation”). This approach invariably harkens the reader back to God as creation’s final cause: since “God calls each creature to an active fulfilment of its destiny by being the thing he has made it to be,” and since all things are made to be from and through and to God, “evil is the failure of a person – or thing, culture, or whatever – to live up to the likeness it is called to bear” (239).

At this point, Davison goes on to discuss what is one of the more interesting topics of an already very interesting book: soteriology’s participatory dimensions. It is apparent that Davison wishes to approach the topic in a spirit of true catholicity, insisting that “fidelity to the tradition here [on the topic of redemption] is seen to consist more in insisting on a plurality of approaches than on adherence to one position, or even a few” (263). While it is refreshing to see Davison acknowledge the diversity of perspectives throughout the tradition, he nevertheless stresses that a participatory metaphysic (and an accompanying participatory soteriology) does exclude at least one major category among theories of redemption. This is the “forensic” approach, which is, according to Davison,

"at root anti-participatory" and is "a latecomer in Christian history" (264). He goes on to suggest that this model *can* harmonize with a participatory approach, so long as the forensic emphasis does not so "dominate that the aspect of 'being treated as' rests only on the choice of God, and not on a grounding in the incarnate human life, death, and Resurrection of Christ" (264). Thus, after frightening all his Reformed readers by calling the "forensic" model a historical "latecomer," he puts their minds somewhat at ease when he clarifies that "soteriology is only non-participatory in one extreme form: as a shrill deviation not simply from patristic and mediaeval traditions, but even from magisterial Reformation ones, cut loose from the broader tapestry of theological history and tradition" (265). For Davison, a participatory view of reality and doctrine requires that we view the telos of redemption as humanity's restoration to, and participation with, God in Christ, which is something that Reformed Christians can most certainly affirm.

Reverend Davison shows his true pastoral colors in his concluding section of *Participation with God*, wherein he lays out how a participatory view of reality takes shape practically in the human life. Fittingly, Davison develops this section along the shape of the transcendentals of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. In his chapter on Truth, Davison works out how a participatory framework impacts one's view of human knowledge and reason. What this view implies is that true growth in knowledge is growth in participation with God and *his* knowledge. Since God gratuitously grants being to his creatures, there is a sense in which all knowledge gained by the creature is given by God. In a quote from Aquinas that is sure to confuse not a few Van Tilians—in which Aquinas insists that "all cognitive beings also know God implicitly in any object of knowledge"—Davison summarizes, "From a participatory point of view, then, reason is not without an element of revelation" (318). Davison takes very much the same approach he has taken in this chapter with Truth's transcendental partners, Beauty and Goodness.

In his chapter on Beauty, Davison shows how a participatory metaphysic necessitates a realist view of beauty, such that it "occupies a privileged place of participation: that shining forth from God that gives and constitutes the created world" (326). Created beauty, in this perspective, participates in divine Beauty, displaying God as creation's efficient and formal cause, and awakening desire and love within the creature, harkening creation *back* to him as its final cause. Similarly, when it comes to Goodness, Davison can say that "Christian ethics is not about coercion, calculus, or cold duty; it is about love: loving good things in the right way, to the right degree, and in the right order" (348). This repetition of "right" and the insistence on "rightness" is one realization of Davison's

participatory outlook: there is a *right* way to love the good in things because all things were made by a good God for a good purpose. They are what they are by participation, which means loving them in a rightly ordered way is both possible and ethically necessary. "Since all things come forth from God," says Davison, "– and indeed, they come forth from God intrinsically related to each other – there is a non-arbitrary sense of what makes for more, or less, conducive relations and interactions" (352). Importantly, this means that the commonly understood contrast between virtue ethics and divine command theory is an unhelpful false choice dependent on a misunderstanding. If a participatory account of reality is true, then the divine commands God gives in Scripture work along the grain of the cosmos. Both "the nature of the creature and the disclosure of God offered by revelation are participations in God, and therefore consonant" (356).

I have virtually nothing overtly negative to say about this book. So, rather than criticizing it, I shall state and elaborate on two praises of Davison's work, and then offer a few lingering questions that he has left me with. First, it should not go unnoticed that *Participation in God* is extraordinarily clear and comprehensive. Davison is able to navigate the waters between oversimplification on the one hand, and myopic tedium on the other. This means that interested readers who approach the work with very specific questions – like, say, Aquinas's account of the *analogia entis,* with his use of *modus* principle – will not be disappointed. On the other hand, the reader who could not have imagined to even ask such a specific question, and instead simply wishes to know what Davison means by saying that creation *participates* in God, will also not be disappointed.

One particularly enjoyable feature of Davison's work in this respect is the inclusion of "Further Notes" at the end of every chapter. These are extended explorations of thoughts arisen from the chapter's main body, but were nevertheless not crucial enough to the argument of the chapter to include there. In typical British poise and politeness, Davison truly loves his neighbor-readers by offering them further contemplations without presuming to push it upon them. The net result of Davison's ability to paint a big picture that is nevertheless finely detailed and textured is that the reader walks away with a clear understanding of Davison's broad metaphysical proposal, having also learned quite a bit of surprising and specific information.

Another strength of this book is that it is appropriately modest. Notwithstanding how ambitious of a project this book is by nature, Davison is not concerned with getting overly bogged down with specific theological and philosophical disputes. This is not to say that Davison is unafraid of staking a position. Indeed, this book as a whole is nothing if not a massive renunciation of any

metaphysic that espouses univocity of being or a thoroughgoing nominalism. But Davison makes his case not by describing how nominalism wrecks theology and philosophy (as helpful as such works can be), but rather by drawing out the explanatory power that comes with a participatory outlook. In doing so, Davison nobly attempts to be as theologically inclusive as possible. This book is not a case for "Andrew Davison's theology at every point," but rather a case for participation's centrality in Christian metaphysics and doctrine. Such an approach explains why, for example, Davison does not necessarily pick a single view of redemption and justification to the exclusion of others, but instead describes how different views are each conducive to a participatory outlook.

On this note, however, I do have some lingering questions. Without at all detracting from the modesty I just praised Davison for, I do find myself wondering what exactly Davison means when he says that a "forensic" account of redemption is a historical "latecomer." Does he mean that the "forensic" account of a particular variety, namely the shrill and one-dimensional kind he described that essentially detaches the restorative elements from redemption and turns it into a kind of arbitrary legal fiction, is a historical latecomer? If so, I would affirm and agree with Davison's comment. But if Davison means to say that all "forensic" accounts are historical "latecomers," but some (namely, those that avoid the detachment just mentioned) are nevertheless conducive to a participatory outlook (which *seems* to be what Davison is saying, 264–5), I would want to press him.

Relatedly, Davison does commendable work when he clears up some common Protestant misunderstandings regarding the Council of Trent and a Roman Catholic view of justification. Davison shows how Trent "stressed that the righteousness that God gives to those he redeems is both something real in them and also distinct from God's own righteousness: it is not God's righteousness substituting for their own. On the other hand, they also stress that this righteousness is entirely from God, as its source and exemplar" (290). Thus, Davison shows, Trent's conception of justification is, like the Protestant conception, one that views salvation as a gift by God, not simply a wage to earn by sheer grit, as is sometimes crudely depicted by some Protestants. And, fair enough. What this shows is that a Roman Catholic as well as a Protestant conception of justification is conducive in some way to a participatory metaphysic and theology. What this does *not* show, however, is whether a Roman Catholic or Protestant conception of justification is *right*. Yes, Protestants and Roman Catholics both agree that we have a real righteousness that comes from God and truly does belong to us—even within the Protestant tradition, there is an affirmation of the divine infusion of

righteous habits. The question is, does the real righteousness that results from this infusion of righteous habits *justify* the believer before God, or are believers justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ *alone* (with the personal righteousness of the believer being a working out in this life the fruit of sanctification that grows from the believer's union with Christ the Righteous)? Notwithstanding the helpful clarity Davison offers regarding the often-misunderstood teaching of Trent, I find myself wondering if he believes there is a lot less daylight between Rome and Protestant Christianity than there actually is.

In sum, I highly recommend this book. The strength in *Participation in God* for students is that Davison offers an impressively broad curation of resources in the figures he interacts with. This book is a kind of field-consolidator for all those interested in Christian metaphysics. On this note, while Davison avoids marrying himself to any particular terminology, anyone remotely interested in conversations surrounding Classical Christian Theism, Christian Platonism, or the Great Tradition will be greatly helped by this book. Further, I would also recommend this work as a surprisingly fresh source of worshipful contemplation. While Davison does not pretend to write *Participation in God* as a "devotional" resource, properly speaking, it is nevertheless incredibly fruitful for Christian piety. This is the case for one simple reason: the participatory outlook Davison proposes here cannot but fill the conscientious reader with a profound sense of *gratitude*. We creatures are what we are *by divine gift*. We live and move and have our being in the triune God. Not only is this outlook true, it is also good and beautiful, and it rightly concludes with praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is one God, world without end. Amen.

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Richard of St. Victor, *Richard of Saint-Victor, On the Trinity: Prologue and Six Books*, ed. Jean Ribaillier, trans. Aage Rydstrøm-Poulsen. Brepolis Library of Christian Sources, vol 4. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2021. 301 pp. English and Latin Edition. $70.00.

Richard of St. Victor has been a vital voice in classical Trinitarian theology. Influencing later authors including Aquinas, and likely John Calvin, this book marks the first attempt to render his work in English. This review has two focal points: Richard's teaching on the Trinity and the quality of the translated

text. Contending that Richard is a vital voice in the history of Trinitarian doctrine, and that the translation is highly useful though imperfect, this reviewer believes that this dual-language version of *De Trinitate* contributes to the church's continued reflection on and devotion to the Triune God. In particular, theological students, ministers, and those practicing their Latin will find much material to help them along in a relatively short space.

Richard's argument appears in six books, moving from modes of being in general, to divine simplicity and the divine attributes, from plurality in God to Trinity specifically, to defining personhood, into distinguishing personal properties, and finally to identifying the divine persons by their proper names. On the surface, this follows earlier models for doing Trinitarian theology, most notably with copious allusions to the Athanasian Creed and mimicking authors like Augustine. However, since Richard's arguments are not easy to grasp, the material below sketches and evaluates one book at a time, highlighting his contributions to Trinitarian thinking.

Richard appears to follow what became a standard scholastic model for treating the doctrine of God, moving from God's existence (*an sit Deus*), to what kind of God he is (*quails sit Deus*), to who he is (*quis sit Deus*). For this reason, books 1–2 treat divine being in general and divine qualities or attributes, respectively. Both sections provide ample arguments both for divine oneness and simplicity as necessary presuppositions for understanding God's attributes and triunity. Particularly, book 2 both assumes and proves simplicity by illustrating how and why all divine perfections imply one another. This is a moving and effective means of defending a doctrine that has become so controverted in recent theology, giving modern readers ample food for thought on the importance of divine simplicity. Setting the stage for treating the divine persons, Richard argued that there are three kinds of being: that which exists from itself and is eternal, that which does not exist from itself and is created, and that which does not exist from itself yet is still eternal. Through the last category, he made room for the eternal generation of the Son and the Spirit. In contrast to some other medieval authors, most notably Anselm, he excludes self-existence from the Son and the Spirit while still affirming their eternality and equality by generation and procession.

Turning to the plurality of persons in God, book three follows a four-stage argument. First, whether there is plurality in God and whether this amounts to three persons. Second, in what way it is fitting to have one substance with three persons. Third, whether one person is from himself and whether the others proceed from him. Fourth, whether their proper modes of procession differ. Richard sought to provide grounds for these things through reason rather than from the

Fathers or from Scripture explicitly (120), seeking to deepen understanding of what the church must believe. Along the way, Richard drew from his treatment of the divine attributes to show that things like fullness of goodness, felicity, glory, etc. mandated a plurality of divine persons, love tying together every applied attribute (e.g., 122–5). Putting books 1–3 together, he argued from unity, to plurality, to threeness (beginning in bk. 3, ch. 11, 134). Lover and beloved requires mutual love (*condilectionis*) to constitute the highest and divine form of love (ch. 19, 144). Condilection is necessary for perfection in divine love alone, which transcends human love. This point about lover, loved, and *condilectus* is simultaneously the most challenging aspect of Richard's work and his most distinctive contribution to ongoing discussions of the Trinity.

Book four builds on plurality in God, pulling towards the Trinity by defining personhood. In books 4–5, Richard explains why the Holy Spirit directed the church to use the term "person," which he preferred over "substistence." While "animal" applied to all sensible substances, "person" applied only to rational substances, which is one sole and singular substance (166). This approximately echoed Boethius's famous definition of person as an individual substance of a rational nature, with some terminological differences. Under the *intelligenitia* of substance is the *subintelligentia* of properties common to all animals, and *subintelligentia* of man are properties common to all human beings, and under the name person "*subintelligetur*" certain properties fitting to one only and designated by a proper name.

His categories of intelligence and subintelligence thus lead from one general category of substance, to animal, to man, to person, each subintelligent category being more precise and narrower than the last. The question of personhood, then, sought to relate specific categories in relation to general ones. Translating intelligence and subintelligence is admittedly difficult here, and the translator opted for "substance" and "property" (167). While losing the tight logical connections of the Latin text, this conveys the general meaning well enough. Perhaps chapter 16 is the source of John Calvin's later restriction of eternal generation to the Son's personhood to the exclusion of communication of essence, since Richard argued that it is proper for divine substance to have its being from itself, but proper for divine persons to originate from another person (178). If so, then this diverged from the standard medieval (and Reformed) model of viewing eternal generation as communication of the divine essence through personal subsistence. However, Richard later assigned self-existence to the Father alone as an incommunicable property of his personal existence, which would make Calvin uneasy (bk. 4, ch. 4, 208). Richard ultimately defined person in God as incommunicable existence, or

incommunicable property, reflecting the origin of the person (ch. 18). Chapters 20 and following modify Boethius's famous definition of personhood as an individual substance of a rational nature by shifting towards person as individual existence of a rational substance, marked by a singular incommunicable property. Richard's concern was to define personhood in a way that could apply to all persons, whether divine, angelic, or human (ch. 25). In his mind, "existence" indicated a relationship to a broader category of being (*sistere*).

Reintegrating the theme of divine love, book 5 examines the personal properties of the divine persons, stressing what makes them distinct persons via incommunicable existence. Chapters 11–12 particularly illustrate his method of arguing where he presses the idea that there must be a (third) person in the divinity who is from the other two and from whom no other person proceeds (225–6). Failing to maintain one person whose existence is of none, one person proceeding from him immediately, and a third proceeding from both immediately and mediately, would result in an infinite number of persons in God, which none admit. Such arguments draw from the three modes of being Richard established in book 1. One significant fact pervading this book is that the *filioque* was integral to Richard's thinking. The Spirit's distinct personal existence is definable only by his immediate and mediate procession from two other persons, since the Son's procession is only immediate. Moreover, the Spirit is a distinct divine existence in that no other proceeds from him. If no other person proceeded from the Son, and if the Spirit's procession was immediate from the Father and not also mediate through the Son, then it would be impossible to distinguish the Spirit's personal existence from the Son's. Thus, the *filioque* is essential to the Spirit's distinct personal existence. Chapters 13–14 argue along the same lines by highlighting the Son's procession in the middle of the other two persons, both proceeding from another with another proceeding from him. The notable point is that without the *filioque*, Richard believed that it was impossible to produce a coherent Trinitarian theology (226). Chapters 17–19 argue along the same lines, from Father, to Spirit, then to Son, using the categories of the fullness of gratuitous love, owed love, and gratuitous and owed love together. Again, the Son came last in the discussion because he is the middle person, who proceeds from one and from whom one proceeds. The latter chapters of this book filter such assertions through divine love once again.

Only after establishing plurality and two kinds of processions in God, resulting in three incommunicable existences, does Richard assign the proper names of Father, Son, and Spirit to the persons in book 6. Chapter one sets the tone for assessing the Son as Image and Word and the name of the Holy Spirit by

looking at man as God's image. Even though man is more unlike God than like him, Richard argued (like Augustine) that we can still learn something about God from man as his image (248). Once again, the *filioque* was central to distinguishing the personal properties of the Son and the Spirit (chs. 8–9). Through a complex yet compact series of arguments, Richard explained names assigned to the Son and the Spirit. For example, in chapter 10, he argued that the Spirit is called Holy both because he perfects the love between Father and Son in God himself (*condilectus*), and by likeness in man because he is the source of all created holiness (262). This illustrates how he could explain the Trinity by reflection in man as God's image, while showing that God remains unlike human beings even while they are like him. Chapter 11 interestingly adds that the only reason why the Son can be called Image while the Spirit cannot is that the Son produces another person with the Father, while the Spirit only receives, making the *filioque* essential to the Trinity (264). Books 3–6 continually allude to the language of the Athanasian Creed as well, seeking to promote better understanding of the catholic faith.

Some observations are in order about Richard's distinct definition of personhood since it modified Boethius and passed into later Christian thinking. Richard is known for defining personhood in the Trinity in terms of incommunicable properties of existences (see bk. 4, chs. 16–18). As he built ideas in this direction, book 2 chapter 12 illustrates the complexity and clarity marking his arguments. Beginning with human beings, he argued that all being has substance, substantiality, and subsistence. Substance defines what a thing is, but it becomes being only through substantiality. Substantiality describes what all things in a class have in common communicably, but subsistence marks individuals alone and is incommunicable. Thus, human beings substantially share humanity as a species, but a particular human being, whom he calls Daniel, posseses incommunicable properties, "Danielity" in this case. Yet divine substantiality is identical with the divine substance which is one and simple. This distinction is why divinity is incommunicable to humanity (98–9). The missing step here is that personhood, or subsistence, in God is an incommunicable property in which the one divine substance subsists substantially in three persons. Later illustrating the difference between divine and human persons, he concludes that in God there is plurality of persons in unity of substance, while in humanity there is plurality of substance in unity of person (bk. 3, ch. 9, 130–2). While complex, this line of reasoning illustrates a great difference between pre-modern and modern views of personhood, which often muddle modern treatments of the Trinity. Post-Enlightenment, personhood became an individual willing subject,

or self-consciousness. Pre-Enlightenment personhood, however, related individual instances of a general category to subsistences within a species. If the divine essence is one and indivisible, then the result is that the three persons in God must have a single will and every divine attribute in common. Only their incommunicable qualities distinguish them. It is no surprise in this light that many post-Enlightenment constructions of the Trinity posit various forms of social Trinitarianism, resulting in things like three wills in God, eternal subordination among the persons, or collapsing God's incommunicable being into the processes of human history. We are simply working with different definitions of subsistence/personhood, often without being aware of the fact. Instead of understanding personhood in God and humanity in exactly the same way, Richard concluded that we should know the differences between them in light of divine unity and simplicity (132). Stated theologically, personhood in God and humanity are analogical rather than univocal terms, each requiring their own definition (bk. 4, chs. 21–22). Working through such issues could bring greater clarity in much modern Trinitarian theology.

Sometimes Richard's speculative reasoning that the perfect and highest love necessitates three divine persons creates tensions in Trinitarian thinking. For example, he argued that coeternal persons seem to rest in God's immutable will for self-communication (128). This seems to contradict the scholastic tradition more broadly, in which divine works *ad intra* are not acts of the divine will but necessitated by the divine nature (which Richard still affirms in bk. 3, ch. 11, 134). Moreover, Richard sometimes sounds like the divine persons have equal yet multiple wills rather than a single divine will (Bk. 3, ch. 15, 140). The Father wills to communicate his love, the Son wills to receive the Father's love, and the Spirit is the love between them (*condilectus*). His intricate arguments along such lines will likely tax even those most familiar with classical Trinitarian thought. Potentially, his line of reasoning could simultaneously divide the divine will without disunifying the persons and reduce the divine persons to acts of will rather than essence. Implying that the Spirit is the love between two willing subjects (lover and loved) may also lead to depersonalizing the Spirit or making him an object rather than an actor in the divine will. As a counter point, however, readers should note that Richard appealed persistently to the immutability of the divine attributes, pressing even *ad intra* acts of the divine will back into God's eternal unchangeable nature. Remember that Richard's purpose was, assuming credal Trinitarian theology, to provide philosophical reasons explaining what the church believed rather than establishing the doctrine from Scripture and the church fathers. By his own admission, this kind of reasoning was liable to

breakdown without calling Trinitarian doctrine itself into question.

Placing the Latin text alongside the translation is a great benefit in this volume. For those looking to practice their Latin, Richard's Latin is not very difficult. His sentences are short, and his ideas crisp and clear. As with any English translation, the translated text does not always fully capture the original, especially in terms of word plays and parallelisms (e.g., *si in huismodi studio studiosas mentas potero…adiuvare* becomes "help the eager minds," 62–3). Sometimes translations are ideological without losing substance, such as translating *iterum* as "here on earth" (52–3, 62–3; etc.). The context, however, could also demand "in the meantime," reflecting better Richard's stress on faith leading to hope and hope to love. Other times the English translation loses the precision and beauty of the Latin text. For example, the English text reads, "So, you ascend into the first heaven by yourself, into the second by means of virtues, and into the third in your mind" (55). Yet, the original states more literally that "therefore [the mind] ascends to the first heaven *actualiter*, to the second *virtualiter*, and to the third *intellectualiter* (54). Mental contemplation is in view in all three cases, and not merely in the third, as the English translation leads readers to believe. The idea is that we move from our actual existence, by the virtues, to mental contemplation of God. Nuanced differences between apprehension and comprehension also drop out of translation, since the author translates both terms as knowledge and understanding (e.g., 59, 65, comprehension missing entirely on 77). This lack of nuance is most significant when the author translates *comprehenditur* in relation to God's immensity, not being comprehended by space, as not being "understood" (90–1, 96–7). Yet God's relation to space is in view rather than our understanding of God's magnitude. The translator also fails to translate *omnipotens* consistently at points (e.g., 78–9), losing the precision and progression of Richard's argument to an extent. Likewise, he renders *sapientia*, *scientia*, and *prudentia*, as "wisdom," "knowledge," and "intelligence" (80–1), which loses the fact that Richard encompassed science and prudence under wisdom. These became key theological terms in which "intelligence" ordinarily preceded these other categories as habits of knowing, science, and prudence could highlight the intellectual and practical sides of wisdom. In another case, translating *condilectionis* as "third person" is simply irresponsible and loses Richard's argument entirely about the Spirit as shared love between Father and Son (144–5). While it is true that this is the "third person" of the Trinity, losing condilection in the translation makes Richard's argument unintelligible. Latin readers should also be aware of spelling variations in the manuscript, such as *cotidianis* in place of *quotidianis* (60). Readers with a working knowledge of Latin may find this to be an ideal text, since the English

translation is generally sound, while the Latin admits different renderings at times.

Richard has much to offer modern discussions of the Trinity. His definition of personhood and his application of divine love to the Trinity continue to generate fruitful reflection. Moreover, he made understanding even the mystery of redemption less important for eternal life than knowing the Trinity (60). Without sidelining how God saves sinners in Christ, it is important for the church to recognize that redemption is always a means to an end. The end of salvation is knowing the Triune God, which is eternal life. In a time when the church has often displaced the Trinity with the doctrine of salvation, Richard reminds us of the correct order of things. Redemption is vital, and without it we cannot know God. Yet it is possible to get redemption right generally while losing sight of why God redeems us. While not for everyone, this book is a useful advanced text in Trinitarian theology that will stretch serious readers beyond commonplace ideas about the Trinity.

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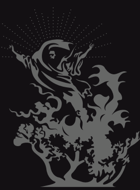

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