"This Old Rule Should Be Remembered": Three Historical Arguments for Inseparable Operations

By Jacob S. Trotter[1]

Abstract: *Recent evangelical scholarship has emphasized the importance of inseparable operations, summarized in the phrase opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt ("the external works of the Trinity are indivisible"). To support this trend, this article will categorize three historical arguments for inseparable operations for use in systematic theology today. Additionally, presenting these historical arguments will show that inseparable operations is historically undeniable, biblically grounded, and theologically necessary.*

Introduction

Augustine claimed that Christianity holds the doctrine of inseparable operations (ISO) "against all heretical perverseness."[2] By the time of the Reformation, Melanchthon referred to it as an "old rule" which "should be remembered."[3] In the period of Reformed Orthodoxy, Goodwin likewise refers to ISO as a settled "rule."[4] With such an apparent historical pedigree, it should not be surprising that several evangelicals have recently taught and defended this doctrine.[5]

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[2] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, *First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb and James Innes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 7:132. Muller offers a succinct definition of ISO: "The ad extra (or external) works of the Trinity are undivided." Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 246.

[3] Philip Melanchthon, *Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes 1555*, ed. and trans., Clyde L. Manschreck (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 16.

[4] Thomas Goodwin, "An Exposition of the Epistle to the Ephesians—Sermon XXX" in *Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2021), 1:461.

[5] See Kyle Claunch, "What God Hath Done Together: Defending the Historic Doctrine of the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity." *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56/4 (2013): 781–800; Tyler R. Wittman, "On the Unity of the Trinity's External Works: Archaeology and Grammar." *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 20.3 (July 2018): 359–380; Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021); Torey J.S Teer, "Inseparable Operations of the Trinity: Outdated Relic or Valuable Tool?" *Southeastern Theological Review*, 12.1 (Spring 2021): 37–59; Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 287–315; Peter Sammons, "When Distinction Becomes Separation: The Doctrine of Inseparable Operations." *The*

This article will join the effort to defend ISO by categorizing and explaining three common historical arguments used to explain the doctrine.[6] These arguments from various corners of church history will demonstrate that ISO is historically undeniable, biblically grounded, and theologically necessary. While a chronological treatment of the historical sources would be beneficial, this article will arrange them topically to demonstrate the core features of the three common arguments and how they might be used for systematic theology today.[7]

Argument I: Unity of Essence

The first common argument for ISO can be called the "unity of essence" argument. This argument states that the divine persons work inseparably because they are undivided in their essence. Claunch summarizes, "Divine essential unity ("God is one" – Deut 6:4) and, consequently, perichoretic co-inherence ("I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" – John 14:11) necessitate the axiom *opera trinitatis indivisa sunt* (the works of the Trinity are undivided)."[8] Simply put, ISO is a necessary result of monotheism. Historical examples of this argument are legion.

Gregory of Nyssa provides a foundational iteration of the unity of essence argument in his letter *On Not Three Gods.* This work by Gregory argues toward the essential unity of the three divine persons from their undivided work. Radde-

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Master's Seminary Journal 33.1 (Spring 2022): 75–97; R.B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 106–125; D. Glenn Butner Jr., *Trinitarian Dogmatics: Exploring the Grammar of the Christian Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 175–197.

[6] Portions of this article are modified from Jacob S. Trotter, "'Against All Heretical Perverseness': The Doctrine of Inseparable Operations Considered Historically and Exegetically" (MDiv Thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2022).

[7] The method of this article is not to trace the development of ISO historically or in any particular period, but to show how certain arguments for the doctrine from the past can be synthesized and categorized for use in the present. If the task of the systematic theologian in using church history is to "penetrate historically-determined forms of doctrinal statement . . . to discern their doctrinal intention" then "present that intention, even when it demands the use of new and different terms, to the church of the present day," this article focuses on the latter without excluding the former. In short, this is an attempt to use historical theology in the service of systematic theology. Richard A. Muller, "The Role of Church History in the Study of Systematic Theology" in *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, eds. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 95.

[8] Kyle David Claunch "The Son and the Spirit: The Promise of Spirit Christology in Traditional Trinitarian and Christological Perspective" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 137–8. On a popular level, Barrett offers the succinct axiom, "The three persons are undivided in their *external* works because they are undivided in their *internal* nature." Barrett, *Simply Trinity*, 291.

Gallwitz explains from Gregory's writing that the unity of divine works is what negates the idea that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three separate instances of a divine nature.[9] This influential letter by Gregory deals carefully with the language used to speak of the Trinity's nature.[10]

In objection to Gregory's formulation of the Trinity, some say, "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 of the name derived from their nature."[11] Why is it that Peter, James, and John have the same human nature and are three humans, yet the Father, Son, and Spirit have the same nature but are not three Gods?[12]

Part of Gregory's answer to this objection is that "the word 'Godhead' is not significant of nature but of operation."[13] He argues this because the word *theotés* ("Godhead") refers, in some sense, to the act of "beholding" and should be understood as an act of the Father, Son, and Spirit.[14] From this undivided action, he reasons back to an undivided power and an undivided nature. As we will see below, the unity of essence argument for ISO will eventually argue *to* ISO *from* the unity of the divine essence, whereas here Gregory argues *to* the unity of the divine essence *from* ISO.[15]

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[9] He explains that Gregory's "principal claim . . . is that it is the unity of activity—as opposed to the unity of nature—that defeats the idea that the three hypostases are three gods." Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Three Gods Problem: Activity and Etymology in *To Ablabius*" in *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 199.

[10] Ayres notes, "Gregory's Trinitarian theology is best approached by focusing on the ways in which he makes a particular contribution to the emergence of a pro-Nicene 'grammar' of divinity through developing a complex account of divine power." Lewis Ayres, "On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology as Seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*." *Modern Theology* 18.4 (October 2002), 446.

[11] Gregory of Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods,'" in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 5:331.

[12] So Ayres, "Gregory's opponents are alleging that the relationship between substance and person deployed by the Cappadocians is susceptible to the logic that applies in the case of three people." Ayres, "On Not Three People," 447.

[13] Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods,'" 5:334.

[14] Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods,'" 5:334.

[15] Ayres, "On Not Three People," 452. He writes elsewhere, "Father, Son, and Spirit all seem to be engaged in *some* activity of seeing and contemplating. Thus, says Gregory, if the activities of the three are the same, then the power which gave rise to them is the same and the ineffable divine nature in which that power is inherent must also be one." Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 355. Emphasis original.

Emery likewise expounds Nyssa, "In creation and salvation, the effects produced by the three divine persons show the unity of their activity and uncover, at the root of their activity, the unity of

While the breadth and depth of this letter cannot be exhausted here, one clear point must be made: Gregory affirms ISO as an argument for the undivided nature of the three persons.[16] Against the original objection, he explains that the action of the three divine persons is fundamentally different than the action of three human persons. Three men working together may display harmony or cooperation at best.[17] This is not the case with the three divine persons. Plantinga writes, "Not so with God. In a strong statement of the *opera ad extra indivisa* principle, Gregory simultaneously links divine missions with persons and unifies his Trinity theory."[18] Gregory's own words are abundantly clear:

> But 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. For this reason the name derived from the operation is not divided with regard to the number of those who fulfil it, because the action of each concerning anything is not separate and peculiar, but whatever comes to pass, in reference either to the acts of His providence for us, or to the government and constitution of the universe, comes to pass by the action of the Three, yet what does come to pass is not three things.[19]

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their power (*dunamis*). . . . A number of patristic texts explain or express the consubstantiality of the divine persons by their unity of activity and of power. The common nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is often described as a unity of operation and of power: asserting the unity of operation is a way of confessing the one essence of the three persons. This teaching is a leading component of Christian Trinitarian monotheism." Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 93.

[16] White summarizes, "Nyssa's point is that there is only one divine essence, only one deity, and it is not multiplied by the real distinctions of the persons. Rather, within the life of the Trinity, each of the persons possesses the fullness of the divine essence together with the others, albeit according to his own mode." Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 149. For a terse explanation of Gregory's argument, see Robert Letham, *The Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 25–6.

[17] Plantinga notes, "the crucial difference is that in God, as opposed to humanity, there is complete unity of work. Men work separately, sometimes even at cross-purposes." Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. "Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity," *The Thomist*, 50.3 (July 1986), 336.

[18] Plantinga, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity," 336.

[19] Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods,'" 5:334.

This is a clear, early statement of ISO. This is no small fact considering the significance of Gregory's letter.[20] In any case, other examples of the unity of essence argument are readily available in pro-Nicene thought. Augustine offers another clear example of the unity of essence argument.[21] He states, "As the Father and the Son are inseparable, so also the works of the Father and of the Son are inseparable."[22] He cites John 10:30 to support this claim then continues, "Because the Father and Son are not two Gods, but one God, the Word and He whose the Word is, One and the Only One . . . Therefore, not only of the Father and Son, but also of the Holy Spirit; as there is equality and inseparability of persons, so also the works are inseparable."[23] This argument, summarized here by Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, is the most well-established of the three listed in this article.[24]

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[20] Radde-Gallwitz calls it, "one of the most widely cited works of patristic Trinitarian theology." Radde-Gallwitz, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Three Gods Problem: Activity and Etymology in *To Ablabius*," 199.

[21] Letham writes, "Perhaps the most dominant theme in Augustine's discussion of the Trinity is its indivisibility and, as a corollary, the inseparable operations." Letham, *The Holy Spirit*, 36.

[22] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7:132. Claunch's summary of Augustine on this point is excellent. He writes that Augustine's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 1:24 "shows that the power by which God acts in the world is to be predicated of the one substance, which is common to all three persons; this substance is the basis of their eternal ontological unity. Hence, when any person of the Trinity acts in the economy of salvation, he acts by the one power which is common to all three persons." Kyle Claunch, "What God Hath Done Together," 790. See also his whole discussion beginning on 789.

[23] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7:132–3.

[24] Teer provides an overview of pro-Nicene writers and concludes, "the fourth century Eastern and Western fathers spoke with one voice concerning the Trinity: the Godhead, though personally differentiated, is inseparable. Both in nature and in operation." Teer, "Inseparable Operations of the Trinity: Outdated Relic or Valuable Tool?" 38–43. See also Michel René Barnes, "One Nature, One Power: Consensus Doctrine in Pro-Nicene Polemic" in *Studia Patristica* Vol. 29, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven Peeters, 1997), 205–23, Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 280–1, and D. Blair Smith, "Trinitarian Relations in the Fourth Century." *Reformed Faith & Piety*, 2:1 (2017), 49.

Two more early examples of the unity of essence argument can be found in Hilary of Poitiers and Basil of Caesarea. Hilary states of the Father and Son, "the unity of Their nature is such, that the several action of Each implies the conjoint action of Both." Again, on John 14:11, he adds of the Son, "His power belonged to His nature, and His Working was the exercise of that power; in the exercise of that power, then, they might recognize in Him the unity with the Father's nature." Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 9:171–2 and 173.

Likewise, Basil of Caesarea first says that the only way we can know anything about the divine nature is through divine operations. Second, he states negatively, "Suppose we observe the operations of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Ghost, to be different from one another, we shall then conjecture, from the diversity of the operations, that the operating natures are also different." Finally, he states positively, "we perceive the operation of Father, Son and Holy Ghost to be one and the same, in no respect showing difference or variation; from this identity of operation we necessarily infer the

While the unity of essence argument is well documented among pro-Nicene theologians, significantly less research is available on the Reformers and the Reformed Orthodox.[25] However, one instance of this argument during the era of the Reformation is found in the writings of Beza. On the statement "The works of the Trinity are inseparable," he writes, "We do by no means separate from the Father, neither from the Son nor yet the Holy Ghost either in the creation or in the government of all things, nor yet in any thing which appertaineth to the substance of God."[26] Beza's contemporary Vermigli likewise states, "There are three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, consubstantial, equal, of the same essence, and just as they are of the same nature, so they also have one will and operation."[27] Musculus agrees that the working and power of God are equally common to the three persons.[28]

Following these Reformers, the Reformed Orthodox are remarkably consistent on this point. Perkins writes, "The works of God are all those which He does out of Himself—that is, out of His divine essence." Because the works are out of

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unity of the nature." Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Blomfield Jackson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 8:231.

[25] While notable exceptions exist, Muller writes "The trinitarian thought of the Reformers and their orthodox successors has, in fact, received comparatively little treatment . . . The same problem appears in the case of the trinitarian theology of the seventeenth century writers." Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics (PRRD)*, *The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4:24.

[26] I am grateful for Mitchell Wygant for pointing me to this reference: Theodore de Beza, *A briefe and pithie summe of the Christian faith, made in forme of a confession, with confutation of all such superstitious errours, as are contrary thereunto*, trans. Robert Fyll (London: Richard Serll, dwelling in Flete lane, at the synge of the halfe Eagle and the Key, 1565), II.4. Cf. Theodore Beza, *Confession de la foy chrestienne* (J. du Pan, 1563), 13.

Like many others, Beza's understanding of divine simplicity likely informs his understanding of ISO. Beza's chatechism states, "God's essence is most single, infinite, and unable to be parted: therefore these three persons are not separated one from another, but only distinguished." Theodore Beza, *A booke of Christian Questions and answers. Wherein are set foorth the cheef points of the Christian religion*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: William How for Abraham Veale, dwelling in Paules Church yarde at the sign of the Lambe, 1572), 4.

[27] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Life, Letters, and Sermons*, The Peter Martyr Library, Vol. 5, trans. and ed. John Patrick Donnelly (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999), 200. Cf. *Epistolae duae, ad ecclesias Polonicas, Iesu Christi* (Tiguri: Froschauer, 1561), 12.

Muller comments, "Vermigli recognizes as a fundamental presupposition of his argument that the actions of the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct only *ad intra* and that all acts *ad extra* have as their cause or author the One God: the entire Godhead acts as one in all works or relations that 'go out' from the Godhead." Muller, *PRRD*, 4:256.

[28] He states that "essence, nature, godhead, majesty, working, will, power, honor and continuance forever, is common to them all, all coessential, all coeternal." Wolfgang Musculus, *Common places of Christian religion, gathered by Wolfgang Musculus, for the use of such as desire the knowledge of godly truth*, trans. John Man (London: Imprinted by Henry Bynneman, 1578), 13. Cf. Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci communes in usus sacrae Theologiae canditatorum parti* (Hernagiana, 1560), 9.

his essence, he explains, they are "common to the Trinity."[29] Likewise, Manton affirms, "they are one in essence, therefore, one in will, and one in operation; and what the Father doth, the Son doth, because of the unity of essence." Manton's use of "therefore" and "because" expose his reasoning here—the unity of the divine essence necessitates ISO.[30] Witsius and Brakel offer clear affirmations of the unity of essence argument as well.[31]

Goodwin states most clearly, "As things are in being, so in working; which axiom holds in God himself as well as in his creatures. Hence, that as all three persons have in common but one essence, so one equal hand in works."[32] When Goodwin affirms, "As things are in being, so in working," he is referencing the axiom *agere sequitur esse*.[33] In context, Goodwin uses this axiom as the first of four assertions to explain ISO.[34]

Without stating this axiom, Owen emphatically affirms the unity of essence argument. He writes, "the several persons are undivided in their operations, acting all by the same will, the same wisdom, the same power. Every person, therefore, is the author of every work of God because each person is God, and the divine nature is the same undivided principle of all divine operations; and this ariseth from the unity of the persons in the same essence."[35] This is "absolutely

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[29]William Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, in *The Works of William Perkins*, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Greg A. Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018), 6:23.

[30]Thomas Manton, "Several Sermons Upon Titus ii.11–14" in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), 16:243.

[31]Herman Witsius says, "As God is one, so the power and operation of all Persons are one and undivided." Herman Witsius, *Dissertations on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Donald Fraser (Escondido, CA: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1993), 121. Cf. Herman Witsius, *Exercitationes sacrae in symbolum quod apostolorum dicitur et in orationem dominicam*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: J. Wolters, 1697), 76.

Brakel writes, "Since God is one in essence, and the three Persons are the one God, their will and power are one and the same. All God's extrinsic works are common to the three Persons, being the work of a triune God." Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 1:267.

[32]Shortly after this, he adds, "when the essence is but one, the operation must needs be one and the same." Thomas Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, in *Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2021), 7:530.

[33]Muller says this is "an axiom of traditional metaphysics and physics, indicating the basic truth that a thing must exist in order to engage in its proper operations or activities and also, by extension, indicating that the being of a thing determines how it operates or acts." Muller, *Dictionary*, 19–20.

[34]Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, 7:530.

[35]John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 3:93. Wittman writes, "Owen's construal of trinitarian agency is obviously traditional when put in its proper context and in light of potential influences like Aquinas. His continuity with Augustine and the tradition after him necessitates that we understand this tradition, the doctrine of inseparable operations, and Reformed Orthodoxy more generally in order to understand the Puritan divine." Tyler R. Wittman, "The End of the Incarnation: John Owen, Trinitarian Agency and

necessary," he says, "because of their union in nature."[36] Owen and Goodwin argue a necessary connection between the unity of the divine nature and the unity of divine works.

If these statements were not clear enough, Owen says elsewhere, "every divine work, and every part of every divine work, is the work of God, that is, of the whole Trinity, inseparably and undividedly."[37] This statement by Owen disallows any interpretation of ISO which distributes the labor of external divine works. Each person performs not only "every work" but "every part" of every divine work.[38] However, the fact that each divine person performs "every part of every divine work" does not remove the distinctions between the persons. This is where Goodwin's second assertion must not be missed.

Distinct Modes of Operation

Just as Goodwin affirms the necessary connection between a unified essence and a unified act because of the axiom *agere sequitur esse*, he affirms that each person's mode of existence (*modus essendi*) is reflected in their mode of operation (*modus operandi*) for the same reason. He writes,

> Yet although they be but one essence, yet they are three distinct subsistencies or personalities, and still that axiom holds, that the operation of each follows the distinction of their existences [*agree sequitur esse*], and bears resembleance of them; and look what order or distinction they have in subsisting, they have in operation to accompany it; but the distinction of their personality (if abstractedly considered from the essence) being but *modus essendi*, therefore in like manner the distinction of their operation and concurrence is but *modus operandi*, a distinct manner of concurring.[39]

Christology" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 15.3 (July 2013), 300.

Likewise, Trueman affirms the fundamental nature of the unity of essence argument in Owen: "Fundamental to Owen's doctrine of God is the traditional idea that all acts of God are acts of the whole God. This is an obvious implication of belief in the consubstantiality of the three persons of the Godhead." Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 118.

[36] Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:198.

[37] Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:93.

[38] Turretin makes a similar point: "The external works are undivided and equally common to the single persons (both on the part of the principle and on the part of the accomplishment)." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:281–2. Cf. Francisco Turrettino, *Institutio Theologiae elencticae* (Leiden/Utrecht: Fredericum Haring/Ernestum Voskuyl, 1696), 310.

[39] Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, 7:530.

Just as their *modus essendi* (mode of existence) in no way divides the divine essence, their *modus operandi* (mode of operation) in no way divides their work. Instead, the former is reflected in the latter.

Goodwin's argument is that the distinction between the persons is still present in ISO because their mode of existence is present in their undivided acts *ad extra*. Emery summarizes this point, "There is therefore a single power and one action of the whole Trinity, within which each person acts according to what distinctly characterizes him—that is to say, in the relative mode that is proper to him. Each person acts *in virtue of the common nature and according to the mode of his personal property*."[40] As an example, when Jesus says the Son does not act "of Himself," he is saying the one who *is* from the Father (mode of existence) also *acts* from the Father (mode of operation) (John 5:19).[41] To borrow Owen's language, the Father performs every part of every external divine work as the Father, the Son performs every part of every divine work as the Son, and the Spirit performs every part of every divine work as the Spirit.

Just as the unity of essence argument is widely affirmed, so is this necessary distinction.[42] When explaining how the divine persons may be distinguished, Ursinus affirms both ISO and distinct modes of operation. Speaking of the Trinity's works *ad extra*, he writes, "These works are indeed wrought by the common will and power of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but yet the same order is preserved among the persons of the Godhead, in working, which there is as it respects their existence."[43] This same affirmation is found throughout the Re-

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[40] Emery, *The Trinity*, 164. Emphasis original. Emery explains elsewhere, "Each person is characterized therefore by a relative mode of existence (the content of the 'proper mode of existence' lies in the personal relation). *This distinct mode does not disappear in the action of the persons*; it remains present and qualifies intrinsically this act. The distinct mode of acting bears the same noteworthiness and the same profundity as does the mode of existing…the three persons are distinct under the aspect of the *mode* of being of the divine essence in them and, consequently, under the aspect of the *mode* of acting corresponding to the mode of being…Each person exists and acts in accordance with his relation to the other persons." Gilles Emery, *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 135–6. Emphasis added. See also White's second proposition for understanding appropriations, White, *The Trinity*, 526.

[41] Many theologians reference John 5:19 to make this point, as will be discussed below. See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:281–2; Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, 6:24. Cf. Turrettino, *Institutio Theologiae elencticae*, 310.

[42] Wittman's claim is hardly objectionable that ISO "remains vulnerable to easy distortion when separated from the second clause of its more extended form: the order and distinction of the persons being preserved (*servato ordine et discrimine personarum*)." Tyler R. Wittman, "On the Unity," 359.

[43] Zacharius Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Willard (Philipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1852), 137. Cf. Zacharias Ursinus, *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae Ecclesiarum a Paptu Romano reformatarum* (Typis Jacobi Lasché, 1602), 137

formed tradition.

With his typical clarity, Turretin summarizes both ISO and distinct modes of operation: "For although the external works are undivided and equally common to the single persons (both on the part of the principle and on the part of the accomplishment), yet they are distinguished by order and by terms. For the order of operating follows the order of subsisting [*ordo operandi sequitur ordinem subsistendi*]."[44] Johann Heidegger likewise affirms that the mode of subsistence is reflected in the mode of operation, "This mode of working outwardly (*ad extra*) follows the mode of working inwardly (*ad intra*) [*Qui modus operandi ad extra modum operandi ad intra sequitur*]."[45] Many other examples of this distinction are readily available.[46]

Argument II: Multiple Attribution

The second common argument for ISO can be called the multiple attribution

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[44] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:281–2. Cf. Turrettino, *Institutio Theologiae elencticae*, 310.

[45] Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *The Concise Marrow of Theology*, Vol. 4, *Classical Reformed Theology*, trans. Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 31. Cf. Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Medulla medullae theologiae Christianae* (Tiguri: typis Henrici Bodmeri, 1697), 30.

[46] See Vermigli, "We preach, teach, and write just what we believe: there are three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, consubstantial, equal, of the same essence, and just as they are of the same nature, so they also have one will and operation, which however *we want to be understood as preserving the properties of the persons*." Vermigli, *Life, Letters, and Sermons*, 200. Emphasis added. Cf. *Epistolae duae, ad ecclesias Polonicas, Iesu Christi* (Tiguri: Froschauer, 1561), 12.

Owen, "but on those divine works which outwardly are of God there is an especial impression of the order of the operation of each person, with respect unto their natural and necessary subsistence, as also with regard unto their internal characteristical properties, whereby. We are distinctly taught to know them and adore them." Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:93.

Mastricht, "In the mode of operating, which imitates the manner of subsisting and order of, insofar as, outside himself, the Father works from himself, through the Son and Holy Spirit; the Son from the Father, through the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son, through himself. In this the operative force indeed is only one, common to the three, but the order of operation, and also its terminus, is diverse." Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, Vol. 2, *Faith in the Triune God*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 505. Cf. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 2nd ed. (apud Gerardum Muntendam, 1698), 1:238.

Ames, after affirming ISO, writes, "The distinct manner of working in each person working according to the particular form [ratio] of his subsistence." William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 93. Cf. William Ames, *Medulla theologica* (Amsterdam: Apud J. Janssonium, 1634), 24.

Brakel states that Scripture makes a distinction between the persons, "in manner of existence, as the Father is of Himself, the Son is of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son," and also "in the manner of operation, as the Father works of Himself, the Son is engaged on behalf of His Father, and the Holy Spirit on behalf of both." Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:146–7.

argument. Many theologians argue that the attribution of one divine work to multiple divine persons implies ISO or can only be explained by ISO. While Scripture does not attribute every divine work to each person separately, it happens frequently enough to substantiate this argument. The act of creation is commonly used to make this point.[47]

Augustine famously states, "the Father made the world, the Son made the world, the Holy Ghost made the world. If three Gods, then three worlds; if one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, then one world was made by the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Ghost."[48] Perkins applies this same logic in his exposition of the Apostles Creed. When he comes to the line, "God the Father, creator of heaven and earth," he notes "it may seem strange to some that the work of creation is ascribed to the first person in [the] Trinity, the Father, whereas in the Scripture it is common to them all three equally."[49] He gives biblical evidence that both the Son (John 1:3; Heb 1:2) and the Spirit (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13) also created. Although he is answering a different question, Perkins relies on the multiple attribution argument from creation to do so.[50]

Vermigli and Goodwin each demonstrate that the resurrection is equally attributed to the Father (Eph 1:20), Son (John 2:19; 5:21, 28–29; 6:40; 10:17–18; 11:25), and Spirit (Rom 8:11).[51] Vermigli also teaches that, while the Son alone became incarnate, the divine act of incarnating has as its efficient cause the Father (Gal 4:4), Son (Phil 2:7), and Spirit (Matt 1:18).[52] Manton makes a similar argument by noting that Scripture sometimes teaches that Christ gave himself

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[47] See Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, Vol. 3, *The Works of God and the Fall of Man*, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 110–1; Cf. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 2ⁿᵈ ed. (apud Gerardum Muntendam, 1698), 1:314; Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:267–8; Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:93.

[48] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7:135.

[49] William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed* in *The Works of William Perkins*, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Greg A. Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 5:42.

[50] He assumes ISO and even explicitly affirms it throughout his argument here. Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed*, 5:42–3.

[51] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Philosophical Works*, The Peter Martyr Library, Vol. 4, trans. and ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1996), 105 and Goodwin, "An Exposition," 1:461. Cf. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Melachim, Id Est, Regnum Libri Duo posteriors* (Tiguri: Froschauer, 1566), fol. v228.

[52] He concludes, "We see therefore, that it appeareth sufficientlie by the holie scriptures, that Christ was both the efficient cause, and the effect." Vermigli, Pietro Martire, *The common places of the most famous and renowmed diuine Doctor Peter Martyr diuided into foure principall parts*, trans. Anthonie Marten (London: In Pater noster Rovve at the costs and charges of Henrie Denham, Thomas Chard, VVilliam Broome, and Andrew Maunsell, 1583), 600. Cf. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci communes* (Londinium: Kyngstoni, 1576), 456.

(Gal 1:4; Titus 2:14) and other times it teaches that he was given by the Father (John 3:16).[53] Ames lists seven works that are attributed to different divine persons at different points in Scripture.[54]

Each of these arguments—from creation, resurrection, incarnation, or otherwise—show that ISO arises naturally from the biblical text. These writers each form their doctrine in a way that accounts for all the appropriate biblical data. Sometimes they use the multiple attribution argument to argue for ISO. Other times they appeal to the unity of essence argument to explain the fact that divine works are attributed to different persons throughout Scripture. In any case, this method of reasoning has been used far and wide to explain trinitarian activity *ad extra*. However, this argument in no way ignores the reality that Scripture attributes particular works to particular persons for particular reasons.

Appropriations

A necessary corollary to ISO generally and the multiple attributions argument specifically is the practice of divine appropriations. In the context of ISO, the practice of appropriations refers to ascribing inseparable divine works to separate divine persons ("separate" rhetorically, not essentially). The purpose of appropriating divine works to particular persons is to reveal something unique about the persons.[55] Aquinas, who advanced the doctrine of appropriations, clarifies that things essential to the Trinity "are not appropriated to the persons as if they exclusively belonged to them; but in order to make the persons manifest."[56] Just as the *modus essendi* is preserved within the Trinity's undivided acts,

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[53] His explanation for this fact is that the Father and Son "are one in essence, therefore, one in will, and one in operation; and what the Father doth, the Son doth, because of the unity of essence." Manton, "Several Sermons," 16:243.

[54] He lists election (Matt 24:31; 1 Pet 1:2), creation (Gen 1:1; John 1:3), "governing of created things" (Heb 1:3; Zech 4:6), working miracles (Acts 2:4; 4:10), "bestowal of spiritual life," ecclesiastical gifts (1 Cor 12:11; Eph 4:8, 11), and the future resurrection (John 6:5; Rom 8:11) as examples of divine acts that are ascribed to multiple divine persons. Coupled with Ames' explicit affirmation of ISO (p. 93), his view that these works are each accomplished equally by the persons in undeniable. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 89–90. Cf. William Ames, *Medulla theologica* (Amsterdam: Apud J. Janssonium, 1634), 18–9.

[55] Emery, "The goal of appropriation is to make better manifest the divine persons, in their distinct properties, to the mind of believers." Emery, *The Trinity*, 165.

[56] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Prima Pars, 1–49*, trans. Laurence Shapecote (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2012), I, q.39, a.7.

White elaborates, "The doctrine of appropriation refers to the practice of ascribing essential names or actions of God to particular persons of the Trinity, even though the three persons all possess the essential attributes, and even though all three persons are active in one undivided action."

so also those acts are variously ascribed to persons in order to reveal their *modus operandi*.

Therefore Perkins, after affirming in the clearest possible terms that creation is an undivided act of the three persons, can explain why it is still particularly ascribed to the Father. He writes, "And this is the reason why the work of creation is ascribed here unto the Father, because He alone creates after a peculiar manner—namely, by the Son and by the Holy Ghost."[57] Likewise, Brakel writes, "each of these extrinsic works is attributed to individual Persons according to their relationship which each Person has to the particular work. Consequently, creation is attributed to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit."[58] Thus, although the work of creation is an inseparable, trinitarian act, it may be attributed to the Father to teach his place in the order of subsistence— the one from whom proceed the Son and Spirit.[59]

Yet, it is not the case that the ascription of divine acts to individual persons is artificial. White explains that, rather than reflecting "our manner of knowing and our subjective spiritual intuitions," appropriations "help us to see something real regarding the very mystery of the inner life of God. This is the case because they have an objective basis in the relations existing within the mystery of the Triune God himself."[60] The practice of appropriation reflects the real personal distinctions within the Trinity by speaking of the divine persons the way Scripture speaks of them.[61]

In summary, Scripture regularly attributes single divine works to multiple divine persons. According to the multiple attribution argument for ISO, the best explanation of this—in light of the rest of Scripture—is to conclude that each per-

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White, *The Trinity*, 520.

[57] Perkins, "An Exposition of the Creed," 5:43.

[58] Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:267. Mastricht elaborates on this point, "We must beware that we do not speak of them as partial and joint causes, because in all three the working power is one, and much more that we do not speak of them as subordinate causes from the fact that economically, creation is throughout the Scripture attributed in particular to the Father; for this prerogative, as it were, is attributed to the Father not with respect to the power of creating, which is the same for all, but with respect to the order of creating, in which the first operation concerning the creatures is attributed to the first person." See Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical*, 3:110–1; Cf. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 2nd ed. (apud Gerardum Muntendam, 1698), 1:314.

[59] Beeke and Jones demonstrate appropriations in the trinitarian theology of Goodwin and Owen as well. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 91–93.

[60] White is summarizing Aquinas here. White, *The Trinity*, 522–3.

[61] Ayres writes, "Appropriation is, for pro-Nicenes, an important habit of Christian speech because it is central to Scriptures own speech about the divine persons." Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 297.

son performs the single divine act. Yet, because of appropriations, single divine acts are often attributed to separate divine persons in order to teach something unique about that person—without excluding the other persons from the act.[62]

Argument III: Explicit Statement

A third popular argument for ISO may be called an argument from explicit statement. This argument arises from the fact that John 5:17–19 is commonly understood as explicitly affirming ISO. Indeed, this is the *locus classicus* of the doctrine.[63] While many of the authors represented here reference this passage or comment on it in passing, they do not all offer a full treatment of these verses. John Gill, on the other hand, affirms ISO and provides a verse-by-verse exposition of John 5:17–19. So his commentary on these verses serves as a fitting illustration of this argument.[64]

In this scene from John's Gospel, Jesus heals a paralytic on the Sabbath (John 5:8), incurring persecution from the Jews (v. 16). In response to their abuse, Jesus responds, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (v. 17). Gill takes this statement in two halves to explain ISO. On the first half of the verse, "My Father is working until now," Gill establishes that the "working" of the Father is concerned with providence and governing of the universe.[65] Therefore, the Father always works on the Sabbath and has done so since the creation of the universe. This would have been an uncontroversial statement to the Jewish objectors.On the second half of the verse, "and I Myself am working," Gill argues that the Son includes himself in the governing and providential works of the Father. He writes, "[The Son works] in conjunction with [the Father], as

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[62] Jamieson and Wittman, "Whenever Scripture mentions only one or two divine persons, understand that all three are equally present and active, undertaking the same actions in ways that imply their relations to one another." Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 117.

[63] Vidu writes, "This verse is perhaps the most invoked textual ground for the doctrine of inseparable operations, being routinely deployed in patristic Trinitarian apologetics." As we will see, the frequent appeal to this verse extends far beyond the Fathers. Vidu, *The Same God*, 50.

[64] Gill is also an appropriate exemplar of the argument from explicit statement because of his theological method regarding the Trinity. Muller writes that Gill "stands out as a defender of the doctrine of the Trinity as 'a doctrine of pure revelation' to the setting aside of all but biblical argumentation and patristic usage." Muller, *PRRD*, 4:140.

His emphasis on biblical argumentation should not, however, be seen as an aversion to extra-biblical language in doctrinal formulation. Godet provides an excellent summary of Gill's rationale for using extra-biblical language. Steven Tshombe Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 209–10.

[65] John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, Vol. 5, *Matthew to Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 642.

a co-efficient cause in the works of providence, in the governing of the world, in upholding all things in it, in bearing up the pillars of the earth, in holding things together, and sustaining all creatures."[66] Those works which the Father does every Sabbath, the Son also does.

This logically absolves Christ of illegally working on the Sabbath because his work of healing the paralytic (v. 8) was also a work of the Father. Gill paraphrases Christ, "I do but what my Father does, and therefore, as he is not to be blamed for his works on that day, as none will say he is, no more am I."[67] To indict the Son would be to indict the Father, because they do the same works. Noteworthy for ISO is Gill's decision to call Christ a "co-efficient cause" of divine works. He consistently favors this terminology when speaking of the Son's place in divine works.[68] This use of causal language by Gill rules out any possibility of making the Son a secondary or instrumental cause.[69] It also denies the subordination of one divine person to another in divine works—functionally or otherwise.[70]

In John 5:18, John records the Jews' reaction to Christ's statement in verse 17. He writes, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." This verse lists only one reason for the Jews' indictment that Christ was making himself equal to God: Christ's claim of God as his own Father. However, Gill believes there are two reasons. Gill writes that both Christ's claim of God as Father and his claim to do the same works as the Father were equal affirmations of equality with God. He

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[66] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:642. Gill does offer a secondary interpretation of this passage that the Son is simply acting in "imitation" of the Father. However, his exposition of verse 19 undermines that interpretation of verse 17.

[67] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:642.

[68] On John 1:3, for instance, Gill writes, "The Word, or Son of God, is the efficient cause of all these, not a bare instrument of the formation of them; for the preposition *by* does not always denote an instrument, but sometimes an efficient, as in [1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1], and so here, though not to the exclusion of the Father, and the Spirit: *and without him was not anything made that was made*; in which may be observed the conjunct operation of the Word, or Son, with the Father, and Spirit, in creation." Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:593–4. See also Gill on Colossians 1:16, *Gill's Commentary*, Vol. 6, *Romans to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 508 and John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Fort Smith, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer 1987), 260. Turretin makes a similar argument, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:287–8.

[69] Gill's use of "co-efficient cause" safeguards against the contemporary notion that the Son is the submissive agent of the Father in creation as seen in Bruce A. Ware, "Unity and Distinction of the Trinitarian Persons" in *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Applications*, ed. Keith S. Whitfield (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 34–6.

[70] As Sammons notes, "One key to properly communicating Trinitarian divine action is to articulate that there is no subordinate agency." Sammons, "When Distinction Becomes Separation," 81.

writes, "this [the Jews] gathered from his calling him my Father, and assuming a co-operation with him in his divine works: making himself to be equal with God; to be of the same nature, and have the same perfections, and *do the same works*."[71] This reaffirms the interpretation of verse 17 which understands Christ's words as an explicit statement that he does the very same works as the Father.

Gill correctly understands that a claim to do the identical works of the Father is a claim to be the same nature as the Father, just as Gregory of Nyssa before him. Gill himself notes on John 5:18, "by ascribing the same operations to himself, as to the Father, they rightly understood him, that he asserted his equality with him." [72] This line of reasoning continues in verse 19, allowing Gill to make even stronger affirmations of ISO. To defend himself against the accusations of the Jews, Jesus responds, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (5:19). Gill again addresses the two halves of Christ's statement.

On "the Son can do nothing of himself," Gill writes,

> He neither does, nor will, nor can do any thing alone or separate from his Father, or in which he is not concerned; nor any thing without his knowledge and consent, or contrary to his will: he does every thing in conjunction with him; with the same power, having the same will, being the same nature, and equal to each other: for these words do not design weakness in the Son, or want of power in him to do any thing of himself; that is, by his own power: for he has by his own word spoken all things out of nothing . . . but they express his perfection, that he does nothing, and can do nothing of himself, in opposition to his Father, and in contradiction to his will . . . the Son cannot do so, being of the same nature with God, and therefore never acts separate from him, or contrary to him, but always co-operates and acts with him.[73]

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[71] Note that Gill affirms the unity of essence argument here. Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:642. Emphasis added.

[72] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:642.

[73] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:643. There is some diversity on this point. Gill interprets this clause to simply deny the possibility of the Son working separately from the Father. Others interpret this phrase to also teach the Son's mode of operation, as one who works not from himself but from the Father. In either case, this clause supports ISO. For those who interpret this clause to teach the Son's mode of operation see Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7:133, Perkins, "A Golden Chain," 6:24, Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, 7:530, and Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:281–2.

In this paragraph, Gill once again affirms the fact that the Father and Son work inseparably because they are the same nature. Their indivisible nature, will, and power necessitates indivisible acts. In Gill's theology, it is impossible that the Son would work separately from the Father unless they had separate natures. As an illustration of his point, he references the act of creation—a divine work consistently used to teach ISO throughout his works.

On Genesis 1:1 he comments, "There is no doubt to be made, that all the three Persons of the Godhead were concerned in the creation of all things."[74] As noted above, he makes the same argument in John 1:1–2.[75] Additionally, on Psalm 33:6 he affirms, "Now though the creation of the heaven is attributed to the Word, and the host of them to the Spirit, yet we are not to suppose that one Person took one part, and another Person another part of the creation; but they were all, Father, Word, and Spirit, jointly concerned in the whole."[76] This consistent application of ISO as a hermeneutical guardrail runs through his commentaries.

After saying, "the Son can do nothing of Himself," Jesus adds, "unless it is something He sees the Father doing." Gill clarifies, "Not that he sees the Father actually do a work, and then he does one after him . . . as if upon observing one done, he did the like."[77] Here Gill explicitly denies that the Son works temporally subsequent to the Father. Augustine interprets this phrase likewise, "He meant us to understand that the Father doeth, not some works which the Son may see, and the Son does other works after He has seen the Father doing; but that both the Father and Son do the *very same works*."[78] This again emphasizes that each individual divine work is performed simultaneously by both the Father and the Son. Instead of communicating a temporal gap between the actions of the Father and Son, the metaphor of "seeing" teaches that the Son works *as Son*. Gill states that the Son "being brought up with [the Father], and lying in his bosom, was privy to the whole plan of his works, and saw in his nature and infinite mind . . . all that he was doing, or would do, and so did the same."[79] This again teaches

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[74] John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, Vol. 1, *Genesis to Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 2.

[75] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:593–4.

[76] John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, Vol. 3, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 31.

[77] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:643.

[78] Augustine, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, Vol. 10, *Lectures and Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John Vol. 1*, ed. Marcus Dods, trans. John Gibb (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), 257. Emphasis added. See also Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:198.

[79] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:643. While Gill does not use the language of "receptive mode," Jamieson and Wittman are certainly correct in writing, "God is spirit, not body, and so has no eyes; applied to God, 'seeing' can only be a metaphor. This metaphor conveys that the Son does divine deeds *in a receptive mode*." Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 232. For a survey of interpretations on

the essential unity of the Father and Son "since there was nothing in the Father's mind but was known to the Son, seen, and observed, and acted up to by him."[80]

Gill then concludes his comments on verse 19 by focusing on the words "for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." By saying, "whatever," Jesus is making a statement of quantity. Gill writes, "The Son does the self-same works as the Father does."[81] This interpretation of "whatever" forbids any understanding of this passage that makes the Son's work simply imitation of or subsequent to the Father's work. Jesus is claiming to do every single work that the Father does, but he does not stop there.

The Son claims to do the exact same works as the Father "in like manner." Whereas the previous clause taught that the Son does the same *quantity* of works as the Father, this phrase teaches that he does the same *quality* of works as the Father. Gill explains, "he does these things in like manner, with the same power, and by the same authority, his Father does, and which proves him to be equal with him."[82] With these words, Gill affirms that the Son does *all* that the Father does (the self-same works) and that he does them *in the same way* (with the same power/authority).

Charnock interprets this phrase in the same way. On Christ's words "in like manner," translated from *homoiós* ("likewise"), he writes,

> In the creation of heaven, earth, sea, and the preservation of all creatures, the Son works with the same will, wisdom, virtue, power, as the Father works: not as two may concur in an action in a different manner, as an agent and an instrument, a carpenter and his tools, but in the same manner of operation, *homoiós*, which we translate likeness, which doth not express so well the emphasis of the word. There is no diversity of action between us; what the Father doth, that I do by the same power, with the same easiness in every respect; the same creative, productive, conservative power in both of us; and that not in one work that is done, *ad extra*, but in all, in whatsoever the Father doth. In the same manner, not by delegated, but natural and essential power, by one undivided operation and manner of

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this point, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 230–50.

[80] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:643.

[81] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:643. Hilary argues similarly from Christ's words here, saying that it is "impossible that there should be any actions of His that are different from, or outside, the actions of the Father." He continues, "Thus the same things that the Father does are all done by the Son." Hilary of Poitiers, "On the Trinity," 9:125.

[82] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:643.

working.[83]

In summary, Gill teaches three aspects of ISO in John 5:17–19. First, from verse 17, he teaches that the Son is the co-efficient cause of every divine work, and, therefore, not a subordinate or partial cause of divine works. Second, from verse 18, he affirms that the Son's doing the same works as the Father proves the unity of their nature. Third, in verse 19, he reaffirms that the Son does every single divine work in the same way as the Father, that is, by the same singular power and authority. Much more ought to be said concerning ISO and John 5. Yet, any investigation into the sources listed below will provide ample evidence that this passage is frequently and correctly used to explain ISO.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to draw three observations. First, ISO is historically undeniable.[84] It is used in the early church to dispel heresy, both in the East and West. It is taught in influential theological works, such as Lombard's *Sentences* (see the chart below), Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, and Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology*. It is inherent in the Westminster Confession of Faith (2.3) and explicit in the lectures of Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism.[85] First- and second-generation Reformers affirmed it, and the Reformed Orthodox defended it. Augustine states, "The catholic faith, confirmed by the Spirit of God in His saints, has this against all heretical perverseness, that the works of the Father and of the Son are inseparable."[86] Far from being controversial, the affirmation of this doctrine has been a mainstay of trinitarian orthodoxy for centuries.

Second, ISO is biblically grounded. Speaking of the Reformed and Reformed Orthodox, Muller writes, "a doctrinal point is considered established when it rests either on the explicit statements of Scripture or on conclusions capable of being drawn from explicit statements of Scripture, often by the collation and comparison of texts."[87] The argument from explicit statement is an example of

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[83] Stephen Charnock, *A Discourse on the Existence and Attributes of God*, in *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (repr. 1864: Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 2:164. For Augustine's interpretation of this line, see Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 240.

[84] Vidu notes "no large-scale exposition and discussion of this rule has so far been attempted." The impetuous reader may take this statement to mean that the doctrine received no serious considerations before Vidu's helpful book. However, the reality is that ISO permeates the trinitarian thought of previous generations. Vidu, *The Same God*, xiii.

[85] See A.A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004), 84 and Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 37–8.

[86] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7:132

[87] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:301. See also Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theo-*

the latter, the argument from multiple attributions is an example of the former, and the unity of essence argument is a mix of the two. ISO is not an artificial construct applied to Scripture, it is both explicitly taught in Scripture and deduced by good and necessary consequence. To claim that this doctrine has no biblical basis would be to ignore a mountain of exegetical arguments from all corners of the Church.

Third, ISO is theologically necessary. This point is true simply because ISO is explicitly taught in Scripture. However, ISO is also necessary because, as Emery says, "To reject this rule would be to destroy the Trinitarian faith."[88] While Emery's claim may seem dramatic, it can be proven very simply. To begin, Barnes provides a syllogism to explain a central piece of Gregory of Nyssa's theology:

> The Father and Son have the same power.
> Whatever has the same power has the same nature.
> Ergo, The Father and Son have the same nature.[89]

The opposite is also true:

> The Father and Son do not have the same power.
> Whatever does not have the same power does not have the same nature.
> Ergo, The Father and Son do not have the same nature.

To separate the works of the divine persons is to separate the will, power, and, therefore, nature of the persons. That is to say, the Trinity becomes irreparably splintered. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms, "In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of *one substance, power, and eternity*" (2.3). This reality demonstrates the severity of the topic.[90]

Thus, all believers should approach this doctrine with great care. Thankfully, a wealth of resources has been provided by our spiritual forebears on this topic (see chart below). While none of them categorized their arguments into the headings provided in this article, they all used these arguments in various ways. In the end, we would do well to agree with Melanchthon: "this old rule should be remembered."[91]

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logical Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10–11.

[88] Emery, *The Trinity*, 94.

[89] Barnes, "One Nature," 219.

[90] Ayres argues that it is a central principle of pro-Nicene theology. Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 236.

[91] Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, 16.

Historical Examples of Various Arguments for ISO[92]

	Explicit Statement	Unity of Essence	Multiple Attribution
Athanasius[93]	X	X	
Hilary[94]	X	X	X
Gregory of Nyssa[95]		X	X
Basil of Caesarea[96]	X	X	X
Ambrose[97]	X	X	X
Chrysostom[98]	X	X	
Augustine[99]	X	X	X
Cyril[100]	X	X	
Lombard[101]		X	
Aquinas[102]	X	X	
Beza[103]		X	
Vermigli[104]		X	X
Musculus[105]	X		X
Ursinus[106]	X	X	X
Perkins[107]	X	X	X
Ames[108]	X	X	X
Diodati[109]	X		
Goodwin[110]	X	X	X
Owen[111]	X	X	X
Poole[112]	X		
Manton[113]	X	X	X
Turretin[114]	X	X	
Charnock[115]	X	X	
Mastricht[116]		X	
Brakel[117]		X	
Witsius[118]		X	X
Gill[119]	X	X	X

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[92]Three notes on this chart are important. First, it is not extensive. A blank space here does not indicate that a theologian never affirmed that argument, it is just not represented here. Second, for the explicit statement argument, I included sources that reference John 5:17–19 for a prooftext as well as those who expound the passage. Third, the three arguments listed here are rarely made in isolation. So, most of the sources listed will contain two or more of the arguments.

[93]Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against the Arians," in *NPNF, Second Series*, eds. Philip Schaff and

Henry Wace, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 4:359.

[94] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 9:125 and 171–2.

[95] Gregory of Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods,' " 5:333–4.

[96] Basil of Caesarea, "The Book of Saint Basil on the Spirit," 8:13–4 and 231.

[97] Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 10:132, 267, and 270.

[98] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 14:135.

[99] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 7:132–3.

[100] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John: Volume 1*, Ancient Christian Texts, trans. David R. Maxwell, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 143–4.

[101] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book 1, *The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), 77. It should be noted that, rather than defending or explaining it, ISO is simply inherent in Lombard's reasoning.

[102] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part 1, eds. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980), 299–301.

[103] Theodore de Beza, *A briefe and pithie summe of the Christian faith, made in forme of a confession, with confutation of all such superstitious errours, as are contrary thereunto*, II.4.

[104] Vermigli, *Life, Letters, and Sermons*, 200 and Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Philosophical Works*, 105.

[105] Musculus, *Common places of Christian religion, gathered by Wolfgang Musculus, for the use of such as desire the knowledge of godly truth*, 13.

[106] Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 133–7.

[107] Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, 6:23–24 and Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed*, 5:42–3.

[108] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 89–90, 93.

[109] Giovani Diodati, *Pious Annotations upon the Holy Bible: Expounding difficult places thereof Learnedly, and Plainly: With other things of great importance*, (London: Printed by T.B. for Nicholas Fussell: and are to be sold at the Green Dragon, in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1643), 67.

[110] Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, 7:530 and Goodwin, "An Exposition," 1:461.

[111] Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:93, 198.

[112] Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 285, Broadway, 1852), 303.

[113] Manton, "Several Sermons," 16:243.

[114] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:281–2.

[115] Charnock, *A Discourse on the Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:164.

[116] Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical*, 2:505 and Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical*, 3:110–1.

[117] Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:267.

[118] Witsius, *Dissertations on the Apostles' Creed*, 121–4.

[119] Gill, *Matthew to Acts*, 5:642–3.